

Meditation Movements—*Kriyas*, Quakes, and Shakes

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One Meditation

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Welcome to this monthly meditation email and thanks for being here! Please consider passing this on to others who might find it helpful. Subjects range from modern to ancient, Western to Eastern, and scientific to spiritual. I began meditating in 1962 and have a couple of graduate degrees in religions and another in literature. I celebrate what you experience and study: I'd like to share with you what I've learned about similarities in many different practices. If you miss an issue, please check your spam/junk email folder and mark me as a safe sender. Previous months are in "Meditation" at richardjewell.org. – Richard

Meditation Movements—*Kriyas*, Quakes, and Shakes

After nine years of meditating, I occasionally began experiencing what Hindu yoga calls a *kriya* and Chinese qigong a *zifa gong*. Both mean “spontaneous movement.” A *kriya* in meditation usually is a brief, unexpected twitch or tremble, something like a normal shiver or sneeze. I can stop it, but it clears me. Once I saw my wife’s head jerk subtly and asked, “What was that?” She said it was her body returning to a “default setting.” Others give similar explanations.

The National Institutes of Health at NIH.gov offers a scientific review of *kriyas* and similar movements in “Characterizing a Common Class of Spontaneous Movements” (Begin et al., *International Journal of Therapeutic Massage & Bodywork*). “*Kriyas*,” state the authors, are in “a broad class of spontaneous movements [that] are health promoting and beneficial.” The muscular actions, they say, “arise in a wide variety of [physical] therapies...and spiritual practices.” The authors note a number of physical therapeutic situations in which they occur. They also say the movements have happened in religious practices throughout the world and time. They offer as special examples the early American Quakers and Shakers.

Quaking and Shaking

The Quakers and their splinter group, the Shakers, came to America to escape persecution in 1600s England. They officially were known as the Society of Friends. They founded Philadelphia, became the namesake of Quaker Oats, and in church services experienced what Scott Martin calls “The Power” (“‘The Power,’ Quaking, and the Rediscovery of Primitive Quakerism,” friendsjournal.org). This power of the Spirit was “very...important...to early Quakers,” Martin explains, “surrounding them or flowing through their bodies,...often associated with...involuntary physical or mental phenomena.” They “quaked, vocalized, or fell

unconscious to the floor, while other Friends saw brilliant light, had visions, experienced healing, or felt a force emanating from them....”

However, as Martin notes, in the 1700s the Quakers gradually shifted to more quiet worship. In England, a splinter group, the Shakers, carried on with their spontaneous trembling, shaking, and crying out. However, they gradually disappeared. Now Quakers worship by sitting quietly in deep silence, sometimes speaking if moved to do so. But other churches of varying sizes still do practice ecstatic, spontaneous-movement worship.

How can you meditate with spontaneous movement?

In 1600s England, an early Quaker writer, Isaac Penington—mystic, political resister, and son of London’s Mayor—was jailed six times for his beliefs. He spoke of the “Power” that Martin mentions. Penington called it an inner state that may lead to spontaneous movements. He suggested a person start with their “seed” of soul or awareness. Then, he said, “sink down to the seed...in the heart, and let that grow in thee...and breathe in thee, and act in thee, and thou shalt find...sweet experience... (“Some Directions to the Panting Soul,” 1661, worldprayers.org).

An 1848 Shaker dance song, “Simple Gifts,” describes this sinking “down to the seed”:

‘Tis the gift to be simple, ‘tis the gift to be free,
‘Tis the gift to come down where you ought to be,
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,
‘T’will be in the valley of love and delight.

When true simplicity is gained
To bow and to bend we shan’t be ashamed,
To turn, turn will be our delight,
‘Till by turning, turning we come round right.

—*Joseph Brackett*

Authors Begin et al. note that with “spontaneous movements...[t]he first experiences are memorable because the person is quite surprised by the unusual feeling of moving spontaneously....” This happens, they say, whether short or long, and in physical therapy or meditation. The *zifa gongs* of Chinese qigong are among those that last longer, like the spontaneous movements of British and early-American Quakers and Shakers. Your body will move in whatever way its energy expresses itself. I’ve allowed such longer movements, at times, in meditation.

After a spontaneous movement, I experience a pause, a silence, a brief void. Sometimes a muscle relaxes. Perhaps a worry dissolves. Or I may slide more deeply into awareness itself. But the aftermath of each is like sun and clean air after a rain.

Peace, Strength, Joy

Richard Jewell

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Last month: *"The 'Goddess' of Judaism and Christianity"*

See "Meditation" in richardjewell.org.

Next month: *"Suffering: Is Meditation Cure or Cause?"*

Meditation has two major definitions: *(1) Science says it is a conscious calming of the body and mind. (2) Experienced practitioners often define it as aware attention for the purpose of inner growth. Using these two meanings, the word "meditation" covers most major spiritual practices—including, says the Mayo Clinic mindfulness. All such outer forms are linked by having in common similar purposes and scientific results. – One Meditation #1, Jan. 2025*

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