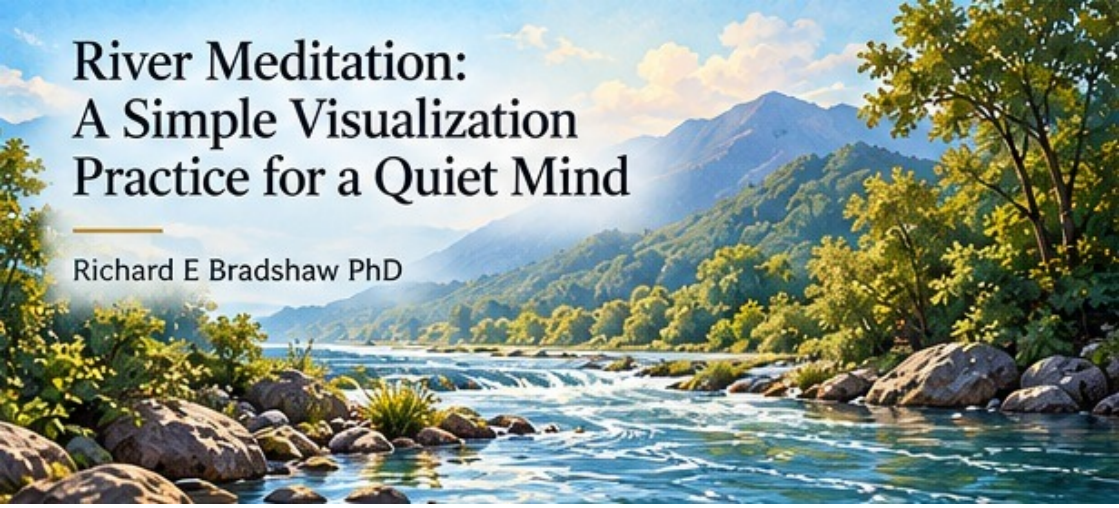

River Meditation: A Simple Visualization Practice for a Quiet Mind

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Visualization is a form of creative concentration that helps you practice focused awareness, the first stage of meditation.

The initial stages of meditation require little more than quieting the mind and allowing reality to flow into your awareness. Quieting the mind comes through focus. Think of focus as the tool you use to distribute your attention, and thus your energy. You are an energy being, and the act of attention focuses your energy like a laser, energizing whatever you focus on.

When you focus on a thought, you give it energy, giving it more power within your brain and mind. Most of your thoughts are repetitious and cyclical. As each thought comes around and catches your attention, the awareness you place on it re-energizes it, which is where it gets the energy to keep returning. The more attention and emotional power you put on a thought, the more energized its neural pathway becomes. Let thoughts come and go without fixing your attention on them, and they use up the energy stored in their pathways and stop returning. Instead of a constant stream of thoughts, the mind grows quiet, and in time, reality flows in.

You might think of the brain and mind as having both transmitting and receiving capabilities, like a radio transceiver. Any time your mind is filled

with thought or emotion, it is transmitting that energy outward. When the mind is quiet, it is not transmitting, and can act as a receiver instead. It is then that pure consciousness floods in, a state characterized by bliss and instantaneous insight.

Sounds simple, doesn't it? All you have to do is focus. The problem is that training your focus away from your thought patterns is difficult at first — you're trying to break a lifelong habit of being entertained by the mental monologue running constantly in your mind, a conversation that's about you, and therefore compellingly interesting, especially when emotions are attached.

There are many meditational techniques for taking your attention away from the mind and letting it slowly dissipate its energy. Some of the more common are concentrating on the third eye, counting your breaths, or focusing on an object such as a mandala. These techniques can lead to deep states of meditation, but they require sustained concentration for long periods, which is difficult for a beginner.

The answer might come in the form of visualization. Visualization is easy, fun, and a very potent method of re-focusing your attention and energy. It doesn't try to take your attention away from the cyclical thought patterns in your mind; it simply replaces that monologue with a focused, creative image — a process that occupies your mind rather than fighting it. That's what makes it much easier for beginners.

There are various forms of visualization meditation. When using visualization to quiet the mind, it helps to choose something calm and quiet to picture. One of my favorites, both entertaining and powerful, is the River Meditation, a technique I often use and recommend to my students. Here's a short description of it.

Close your eyes and picture yourself sitting on the banks of a beautiful,

tree-lined river, watching the water flow by a few feet below. The surface is slightly agitated by the wind, sometimes gentle, sometimes rough, pushing it downstream. As you sit there, you watch ripples form and disappear, yet you don't become attached to any one ripple; each comes into existence and goes out of existence in a natural process of little concern to you. You're simply aware of them as they pass.

Now picture this river as a stream of pure, conscious energy, forever buffeted by the winds of thought and emotion arising out of the human condition. Each thought and emotion is like a wind creating a ripple in that stream of consciousness, a ripple that comes into being and then passes on, just like the ripples in the tree-lined river. Just as you don't become attached to any one ripple as it passes by, let each thought-ripple and emotion-ripple in your mental stream pass by undisturbed. Stay observant but unattached. Simply, quietly sit on the riverbank of your mind in perfect equilibrium, allowing the river passing through you perfect freedom to come and go without hindrance from your attention.

If you find yourself attracted to a thought, an outside sound, or an event as it passes through your mind, gently disengage and let it go. If that attraction starts a chain of other thoughts and emotions, calm yourself and gently refocus back to a state of detachment. It takes a little time to train your focus, but if you practice every day, even for a few minutes, success will come quickly.

In time, without the energizing stimulus of your attention, the river in your mind will grow quiet, and you'll see with greater clarity into the depths of the river, and into the depths of your own being. This state of quiet clarity is a state of meditation, and meditation is a doorway to infinity. Open it with a sense of adventure, for it holds wonders and adventures beyond your wildest imaginings.

For further insights into the self, self-actualization, and meditation, see

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