

Meditation During a Guided MDMA Experience

Though I have had a regular and irregular meditation practice since the early 70s and have participated in numerous 1 – 6 week sits over this period, my experience in, and relationship to, the practice of meditation can best be described as tortured. Despite thousands of hours of meditation, I remain almost as distractible as when I first started sitting 35 years ago. Allergies, fidgetiness, breathing difficulties, inflexibility, physical tension, ADD, PTSD, Dysthymia and more, have usually left me incapable of even finding my breath, much less focusing on it during meditation. More often than not, I've endured entire 45 minute sits without even noticing my breath (or the object of my contemplation) for more than a few seconds. For me, my greatest 'accomplishment' in mediation happened just a few years ago when I finally developed the capacity to attend to my breath for several seconds in succession.

Peaceful, satisfying, contemplative, deep; these are not adjectives one would use to describe my meditation practice.

Through it all, I've persisted. Though often giving up for months, and on some occasions even years, at a stretch, I invariably came back to my practice, believing as I did that meditation was my only hope for finding a semblance of peace and tranquility. A happy marriage, wonderful children and an increasingly successful professional life allowed me to grow personally and professionally but did little to alleviate the profound sadness, anxiety, and underlying panic that pervaded my existence. Simply put, I felt (and continue to feel) myself unworthy of love and forgiveness and I felt myself unworthy to be alive.

Thankfully, something in me led me to persist so I returned inexorably to my Zafu and tried, again and again, to find a glimmer of happiness or, at least a moment of quiet, through meditation. I returned, that is, until about 2 – 3 years ago when I decided that there are certain people whose nervous systems, psychological makeup, and personal histories conspire to make meditation impossible and that, being one of those people, I was torturing myself by trying to do something I was constitutionally incapable of doing. So with sadness but also with an acceptance that meditation was a path unavailable to me, I gave up my practice and did not sit for at least 2 years.

And then I did a guided/therapeutic MDMA session during which I went off by myself for two separate 15 minute sits to determine whether my mediation would be any different in this state.

No, I did not find nirvana nor even discover that my meditation was transformed. Indeed, in some ways sitting was even more difficult in this condition because the ever present physical pain that I encounter when sitting was almost unbearable in this state. But these two sits, though short, yielded insights sufficient to reawaken my desire to restart my practice and will, most likely, make my sits more tolerable and "productive".

One distinguishing feature of my MDMA experience is that it made emotions like love, acceptance, appreciation, and tolerance far more prominent. While “under the influence”, I simply wasn’t resisting life the way I normally do. I found more “space” around my emotions by which I mean to say that I wasn’t as overwhelmed by my negative emotions and was, therefore, able to accept, and even embrace, the considerable pain and sadness of my life. It also became apparent that my practice, though immensely frustrating - and almost loathsome - to me for 30+ years, was exactly the practice I needed. Much to my surprise, I learned that my distractibility notwithstanding, I’ve actually been meditating “correctly” all these years because what’s been coming up is the truth of MY life.

It became apparent that the problem is not that I am distractible and sad but, rather, that I have resisted this truth with every fiber of my being. I’ve wanted it to be different. I’ve wanted to be able to focus and to either stop my pain or learn to accept it. At the very least, I’ve wanted meditation to be a place into which I could go to escape from my pain and sadness. But the truth of MY life is that meditation brings my distractibility to the fore. My truth, my path, is one of frustration, antziness and distractibility. THIS IS MY LIFE. Since it’s not going away, I realized that I must bring loving kindness - Metta - to myself, to my practice and to my life, rather than yearning for a life and a practice of bliss and harmony that I fantasize about.

It’s now been 6 days since I had this recognition and, while my meditation is as physically painful as ever, I’ve been somewhat less distractible during these most recent sits. I’ve also been considerably more accepting of the fact that my distractibility and discomfort – the things that always come up for me – are the very experiences that are supposed to come up for me. I don’t know how long it will last but, as of now, I find myself accepting that the pain, frustration and anxiety that arise during my practice are not signs of inadequate mindfulness but, rather, an attention to the truth of my existence. These feelings are, apparently, my path; perhaps not the path I’d have wished for but the one that lies before me and the one that I can now accept and embrace, if only slightly, as a result of sitting while under the influence of MDMA.

Anonymous