

# **Cultivating Three Ethical Relationships through Meditation**

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The purpose of this article is to show how three ethical relationships can be cultivated through meditation. The three ethical relationships are to oneself, to the earthly environment, and to others. The practice of meditation in three forms contributes to each of these relationships. My contention in part one is that nondiscursive meditation contributes to the awareness of ethical responsibilities and duties to oneself. In part two I will argue that semidiscursive meditation leads to an ethical conception of the world together with responsibilities and duties to the earth's environment. Part three will deal with an extension and cultivation of the worldview gained by discursive meditation into ethical ideals and rules necessary for interpersonal relationships. The exemplification for each part will be taken from my courses in business ethics. The students were third-year business majors, mostly of nonChristian background. My purpose in the business ethics courses was not to impose my own system of values on the students but rather to assist each participant to understand the set of values that each holds by the very fact of being human. My hope in sharing these ideas and definitions from the ethics classroom is that they may be helpful to business people everywhere.

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The purpose of this article is to show how three ethical relationships can be cultivated through meditation. The three ethical relationships are to oneself, to the earthly environment, and to others.

All three of these relationships are fraught with ethical problems. What profit does the average business person make when the whole world is gained at the cost of fatigue, brownout, or even burnout? The ethical problem here is the attention and care the person has for him or her self. Second, business activity is related to the earth, from which minerals are derived, changed, or employed in manufacturing or service related industries. We do not have to be reminded of the many critics of the ethical practices of business people in regard to the earth environment. Third, business people have to

cultivate ethical relationships both to others inside their firm and to outsiders, for example, their customers and clients, government officials, and even competitors.

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The exemplification for each part will be taken from my courses in business ethics. The students were third-year business majors, mostly of non-Christian background. My purpose in the business ethics courses was not to impose my own system of values on the students but rather to assist each participant to understand the set of values that each holds by the very fact of being human. In order to bridge the culture gap that existed between myself (from the U.S.A.) and my Japanese students, I decided to begin with meditation, a practice with which my students were already familiar. I feel that the ideas I am sharing here are applicable to ethical and business situations beyond the classroom.

### **1. Part One: The Cultivation of an Ethical Relationship to Oneself through Nondiscursive Meditation**

The reader may already be acquainted with different forms of nondiscursive meditation such as Zen, Yoga, Transcendental Meditation, and Taichichuan, or others employed in the martial arts. Nondiscursive meditation has five characteristics. First, the participant is led by a master who gives a series of directions that guides the individual through his/her world of the present. Second, logical thought is positively discouraged; if feelings and affects arise, they are merely accepted as they are with no attempt to analyze or explain them. Third, the individual is merely told to "observe"; no attempt is made to evaluate the experience. Fourth, the individual is led to become aware of his/her internal and external environment. The fifth and most important characteristic is that the body itself participates in the meditation as the locus of insight and experience. Therefore, nondiscursive meditation is a powerful device to teach people how to stop the world and take stock of themselves. The focus of nondiscursive meditation is on the self and the environment, but it does not remain there. The discovery of the self leads to the discovery of the *other* in mutual relationships, to be preserved and cultivated by an ethical code. I believe strongly that business ethics is *relationally* oriented: it begins with the self, which gradually reaches out to the natural environment, and eventually includes dealings in the social and business world.

Let me offer an example of nondiscursive meditation from my business ethics class. This was a brief, ten-minute period of non-discursive meditation. The students were told to sit quietly in their places. They were instructed to focus their

attention on their environment with no attempt to rationalize it. For instance, they were to listen to the sounds they could hear, or focus their attention on events they could see through the classroom window. Luckily, it was a pleasant sunny day with a few clouds in the sky. An afternoon breeze was gently blowing through the foliage. Voices of people were also audible. Occasionally, a car roared by on the road outside or a jet airplane passed overhead. Then students were directed to close their eyes and pay attention to their inner sensations, for instance, in their hands, legs, and throughout their inner self.

After the ten minutes were over, the students were given a chance to reflect individually on their first experience of nondiscursive meditation. Each student was asked to write an evaluation, a brief report about the meditation session. Afterwards, the class of approximately fifty students was divided into small groups. Each student was to read his/her evaluation in the small group. Each group had the task of making a single summary of each of the evaluations. The students were allowed to veto any personal information they did not want included in the report. They were also allowed to add comments or questions that arose during the course of the small-group discussion. After about twenty minutes of this activity, one member of each group was asked to read the summary to the whole class.

The reflection period was interesting from both a process and content viewpoint. Process refers to *how* the reflection period was carried out, for example, the reports were composed in an atmosphere of intense silence. During the sharing, each group was deeply interested in how each member reacted to the initial and very strange experience of nondiscursive meditation.

The content of the reports was also instructive. The participants were third-year business majors in an intensive international program. They were loaded down with classes and social and other activities. They appreciated the sharing of the reflection period because it gave them a bit of freedom to talk with their friends. They found the period of nondiscursive meditation to be very refreshing: as one student remarked, "a chance to recuperate from the day." They learned the importance of just sitting quietly: "Feeling the silence was just like taking a nap." They paid attention to things that usually go unnoticed: "I heard the voice of my body." They felt they were a part of something bigger: "Voices are evidence that people are alive." They felt a suspension of time: "The experience seemed to go so fast."

There are several ethical issues that are gained through nondiscursive meditation. First is the opening of a whole interior and exterior world that exists for the individual, but is very rarely noticed. Second is the discovery of a peaceful self in a pause, away from a busy schedule of academic and other activities. Here a person finds respite and recuperation while attending to the inner and outer environment. Third, the respite from the daily rat race affords the chance to get a new perspective on a troubling issue. Fourth is the understanding of self. In

general, self-understanding is indispensable to any ethical issue or encounter in life. Therefore, it is our most reliable guide for making possible a life lived fully and well (Goldberg 1995, 21). Unethical persons, on the other hand, are unwilling to self-examine because their internal world and its undiscovered self are more terrifying than the social world they share with others (Goldberg 1995, 34).

The practice of nondiscursive meditation is not a one-shot affair; it must be introduced and practiced systematically. Nondiscursive meditation is also effective if conducted outside the classroom in a natural setting with a wide panorama, on a rolling lawn or on top of a hill.

## 2. **Part Two: The Cultivation of an Ethical Relationship to the World through Semidiscursive Meditation**

Semidiscursive meditation has the following four characteristics. First, in common with nondiscursive meditation, the master guides the participant. Discursive meditation, as we shall see later, is usually practiced by the individual either alone without a master or together with a group. Second, there is a limited use of logical, especially imaginative and artistic, thinking. Whereas in nondiscursive meditation the individual is led through it in a natural setting, and then asked to comment on what the individual felt, in semidiscursive meditation the individual is asked to draw what was seen. Now, when an artist begins to draw, he or she is struck by one element and emphasizes it; other elements of the scene are excluded. The choice depends on the values that the artist holds, and a basic value selection is at work here. The participant in a semidiscursive meditation also makes a choice of what or what not to depict in his/her sketch. Some persons may choose to depict a natural setting with trees, foliage, grass, and perhaps a lake or pond; others may choose to draw a scene with buildings, streets, vehicles, and other objects made by humans. At any rate, a basic choice is made here, and the artistic values are not distinguished from the ethical values. They occur together.

Thirdly, in contrast and in addition to the artistic process, semidiscursive meditation seeks to educate the ethical judgment. The participant is asked to use his/her imagination to draw a sketch. Then an ideal standard is introduced and the product of the participant is compared to an ideal. Here the master points out the ethical values that have crept into the sketch that the participant has drawn. The ethical values are differentiated from the artistic values. When comparing the product with the ideal standard, some elements of the standard are dropped, others are adopted. In this way the personal norms and values appearing in the artistic products are transformed into ethical values.

Fourth, the individual then begins to form judgements not around personal norms, but around norms derived from objective standards - what I call *ethical* values. These values are more systematically organized, as will be shown later, into an ethical *vision* through discursive meditation. To summarize, semidiscursive

meditation consists of four steps: seeing, sketching, comparing, and transforming. All these steps are carried out within the scope of a relationship to and appreciation for the natural environment of the world.

The following is an example of semidiscursive meditation that followed after several sessions of nondiscursive meditation. The students were gathered on the roof of the university building and allowed to view the city for about fifteen minutes. As in previous meditations, I gave very few directions, just allowing the students to observe and listen. During this time, a few of them closed their eyes in order to listen either to their inner reactions or to the sounds from the environment. In effect, they were engaging in a nondiscursive meditation, as I had directed previously. Now they were doing this spontaneously, without my direction. They were all seated on chairs in a relaxed position. After about fifteen minutes, I distributed some art paper and asked each one to draw a picture of the world as they observed it.

A selection process was in evidence here. Some chose to depict the natural elements of the environment, while others ignored these and chose to emphasize the buildings, roads, or TV towers of their large city. I made no attempt to direct the artistic process at this point. I merely allowed the students to codify their basic impressions of the environment. As an art master, I left the responsibility for depicting the world to each individual participant.

Afterwards, the students were given a ten-minute period of silence so they could reflect on and write an explanation of their pictures. Then I introduced the standard. For this purpose many ideal pictures of the world are available: a globe, a map, or some beautiful pictures of different nature scenes. Slides and photographs are extremely beautiful and useful for this purpose. With the intention of introducing an ideal picture from the Bible, I began to read slowly a long passage from the Book of Daniel 3, 52-88. I chose this passage because it indirectly depicts the Judeo-Christian picture of the universe. The three students in the Book of Daniel were engaged in chanting a hymn of thanksgiving in a definite situation - while they were saved from burning up in a fiery furnace. My university students had already depicted their picture of the world from their lookout on the roof of the school. They were now struggling to understand the point of my reading.

After finishing, I asked if anyone was able to see the ideal picture drawn in the Biblical passage. Since the answer was negative, I asked the students to repeat the passage again, taking turns in the reading. Then I attempted to draw the picture from the Bible on the blackboard in my own crude and simple way. The students were then asked to prepare a written report comparing the pictures they had drawn with the picture in the Bible. The dispersed elements of each picture had to be organized by the individual into a coherent, meaningful whole. Each student had to reconcile his or her personal view of the world with an ideal picture of the world in the Bible. As a result of their efforts to understand the ideal, the students

became able to recognize and compare their worldview with that of an ideal. The students began to develop their own worldview. The Bible was one ideal out of many, but it helped the students to learn the important task beyond art, that of comparing their product with an ideal.

Through semidiscursive meditation the students gained an awareness of the connection between ethics and a worldview. First of all, the picture in the Bible illustrated the beauty and peace of the natural world. The students remarked that their pictures of civilization - buildings, streets, telephone posts, and TV towers - represented the pressure and stress of modern life. The Biblical picture depicted a more peaceful world. Some students expressed the trust, hope, and optimism they had discovered in the ideal; they felt refreshed after comparing the two. Those who depicted natural scenes remarked that the smog and haze over the real environment was caused by human beings. There was evidence of care for nature in the ideal picture. Contemporary civilization has gradually destroyed nature and we are responsible for it. Many saw the world through the lens of how there was order and peace in the Biblical scene and disorder, warfare, and chaos throughout the human world. The students realized that if they were to establish the peace of the Biblical environment in their own lives, they would have to take some time daily to think about ethical issues. The most important lesson that the students learned was to compare and systematize - to redescribe the reality that they saw and experienced. The natural world had now become a source and norm of values. In fact, the students had discovered a new foundation for personal values through their experience of the world during their sessions of semidiscursive meditation. This foundation was described by Berry (1990, 105) as our experience of the universe. He wrote:

Such a foundation for values should supply in our times what was supplied in medieval times by the doctrine of natural law. This becomes especially urgent since we no longer accept the earlier doctrine of the fixed nature of things, which in former times determined the natural goodness or evil of things or actions. Obviously, we cannot simply transpose values from the medieval to the modern period. We need to discover the values indicated by reality itself as we experience it.

The period of reflection and small-group discussion witnessed another important change in the judgment of the students. They were now expressing their opinions not in terms of personal values, but in terms of norms and standards. They were not fully aware of the important transformation that had occurred, a transformation that begins through semidiscursive meditation and then is amplified through discursive meditation.

### **3. Part Three: The Cultivation of Ethical Interpersonal Relationships through Discursive Meditation**

By way of contrast to nondiscursive meditation and semidiscursive meditation, discursive meditation encourages the full use of logical thinking, all the powers of the intellect, and the total engagement of the affects. Discursive meditation is more content-oriented than nondiscursive and semidiscursive meditation. That is to say, discursive meditation is compatible with textual materials used in ordinary business ethics classes as we know them. In fact, by an introduction through the meditation experiences, principles of business ethics are more easily understood by the students. Discursive meditation, as used for teaching business ethics, has the following effects. First, the awareness of the individual is greatly broadened to appreciate the *possibilities* of ethical behavior by meditating on models and ideals of ethical conduct. Nondiscursive meditation and semidiscursive meditation deal with *what* and *where* I am; discursive meditation deals with what I can *become*. Second, the individual sees the necessity of cultivating a code of ethical conduct in order to achieve the ideal. This does not mean that the ethical person who meditates is perfect, but that he/she struggles daily to maintain norms of ethical conduct. Thirdly, the participant feels the need to cultivate an ethical vision through daily meditation. Cultivation of an ethical vision takes place in three ways: first, one strives to increase one's knowledge of ethical issues; second, one cultivates discernment between ethical and pseudoethical modes of conduct; thirdly, one holds open and frank discussion of ethical issues with others.

I would like to describe three examples of discursive meditation. In order to confirm the students in their picture of the universe as designed for the betterment of humanity, I introduced a number of meditations on the ethical rules of the Old Testament. My purpose was to show how Biblical norms work for the betterment of all concerned. I wanted to provide models of how Biblical laws operate to promote the welfare of three classes of Old Testament outcasts. So I explained the commodity laws that were aimed to help the orphans, widows, and foreigners, three classes of outcasts from Biblical society. In Leviticus 19, 9 or Deuteronomy 24, 19, the law commands farmers to reap the grain in the field only once. What was left over was allowed to be picked up by orphans, widows, and foreigners. The same law applied to the grape harvest (Deuteronomy 24, 21): the harvesters were allowed to pick the grapes only once, the remainder was for the poor and the outcasts. Olives were harvested by shaking the tree. According to Deuteronomy 24, 21, the Israelites were allowed to shake the tree only once, and what remained on the tree was for the widows, orphans, and the poor. These were the welfare laws of the Old Testament.

After the meditation, we had a rather interesting class discussion. Since the norms were introduced in terms of "commodity laws", the students of business were, first of all, acquainted with the terminology. Secondly, they began to realize that the world trade problems we have today with grain (wheat, corn, rye, and so on in the U.S., and rice in Japan), the difficulty Europe has in exporting wine to Japan, and oil in the Mideast, are not new but perennial human problems. Wars have been fought over them in the past and are being fought over them even today. Third, they felt the biblical system of support for the poor and outcasts was much

better than trying to gouge taxes out of small businesses. At any rate, they realized that norms and rules were necessary in order to provide for the whole human community, both the rich and poor. The students' vision was widened here to realize that the unfortunate had to be provided for.

Next, I wanted to show how ethical rules are exemplified in the lives of significant individuals. Besides a comparison of one's behavior to a code of rules, one can in discursive meditation use models as the basis of evaluating one's behavior. There are many ways of presenting models of ethical conduct. I chose the very brief example of a short romance from the Old Testament Book of Ruth. This was the story of a number of persons in crisis. The aged Naomi had lost her husband and two sons. Now she was left without means of livelihood and posterity. Out of loyalty and love for Naomi, her daughter-in-law Ruth became an outcast and exile in a foreign land. Boaz, meanwhile, was rich and well-to-do, but without posterity. Though unable to predict the outcome of their decisions, each of these people was faithful to a set of norms handed down previously in the Bible. The result of the operation of Biblical laws on ethics was the welfare of all the parties involved. Upon their marriage, Boaz and Ruth begot a son, who was immediately adopted and nourished by Naomi. Ruth found acceptance among a people who were not her own; Naomi found a means of livelihood; Boaz achieved a position of social recognition in the community.

Rather than read the text myself with the students listening, I decided to ask the students to take turns reading the text while the rest of us listened. Since the story was not long, we finished in about thirty minutes. The students were very touched by the outcome of the romance. Here were persons of their own age involved in problems that were near to the students: seeking to find a means of livelihood and setting up a family. Culturally, the story of Ruth in its delicate and complex social relationships was not far from the current condition of Japanese society. Gift giving, for example, is a very sensitive issue in Japan. What is the gift, for whom is it intended, and why? What social and moral obligations will result from accepting it? When Boaz loaded Ruth down with a bag of grain, who was the real object of the gift? It took time for the students to realize that the gift was not intended for Ruth, but for Naomi. It was a pledge that Boaz would fulfill his social obligation to the family of Naomi's deceased husband. For the students, this romance was a strong illustration of how ethical norms work out in practice, because the outcome of the operation of ethical norms is never predictable, especially during the initial crisis.

My third example of discursive meditation was designed to show how traditional norms and values apply to the contemporary business world. With an understanding of Biblical law, how it operated, and its outcome in the lives of the participants, it was possible to turn to the contemporary scene. I attempted to show how articles in contemporary business ethics were connected with the Bible and the themes we had been discussing during the semester. I chose two themes

that are much discussed in present-day journals on business ethics, namely, the problem of evil and corporate responsibility.

First, I wanted to educate the judgment of the students by tracing the origin of evil. This would help them to discern between pseudo and genuine ethical modes of conduct. I used both traditional passages from the Bible and contemporary sources among the latter, an article from *Time* (June 10, 1991, pp. 38-43) entitled "Evil". It was possible to show how the origin of evil in the Bible still held consequences for contemporary society. Class time was occupied in small group reading and discussion. Discursive meditation time was held together with the reflection period at the end of the class. The effect was a realization that the Bible and contemporary journal articles had some connection. In fact, knowledge of the Bible was even helpful in understanding the contemporary international scene.

Two articles that fill the need of the average Japanese student of business ethics are "The Parable of the Sadhu" (McCoy 1989) and "Ethical Imperatives and Corporate Leadership" (Goodpaster 1989). Mc Coy's article underlines the ethical conflicts that arise between the group and the individual. Japanese students need some awareness of the difficulties of ethical dilemmas that occur in their own society, especially in the contemporary business world, because the individual is constantly under pressure to conform to group norms, even though they may be unethical. Goodpaster describes the common ethical challenge faced by both the individual and the business organization. The article helps to show Japanese students, many of them future business managers, how to set up and sustain ethical programs in a corporation.

The purpose of this article was to show how three vital relationships in business could be cultivated through meditation. In part one I showed that nondiscursive meditation was helpful in establishing an ethical relationship to oneself. Part two dealt with setting up an ethical relationship to the world through semidiscursive meditation. Part three dealt with the ethics of interpersonal relationships with others through discursive meditation. My hope in sharing these ideas and definitions from the ethics classroom is that they may be helpful to business people everywhere.

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