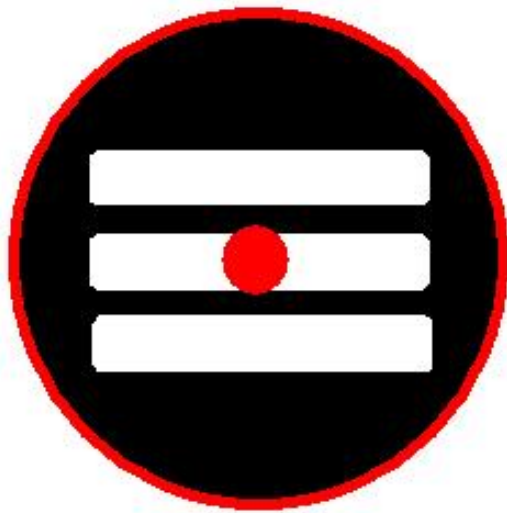


# Beyond Zen - Movement, Meditation and 'Just Sitting'



Peter Wilberg

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‘Meditation’, as understood through The Awareness Principle, means simply giving *time-space* to a type of wholly non-active or ‘quiescent’ awareness - one not reliant on bodily movement or action. Most Westerners however, can only feel a sense of meditative inner stillness through movement in space.

Sitting still, they can no longer feel their body as a whole, let alone sense the space of awareness, around it – but instead begin to get lost in thought and their heads. Put in other terms, they cannot sustain a ‘proprioceptive’ awareness of their own body without sensations of physical movement - without ‘kinaesthetic’ awareness.

That is why they need to be constantly ‘on the move’ - whether through any type of physical activity involving movement of the body, or by literally moving from place to place - for example by travelling or engaging in pursuits such as walking, jogging, swimming etc.

That is also why a notable guru of the nineteen sixties and seventies felt forced to come up with the idea of so-called ‘dynamic meditation’ – effectively no form of meditation at all but a mere means of emotional catharsis through spontaneous movement.

Kinaesthetic awareness – dependent on movement – does indeed awaken proprioceptive awareness. Yet in Western culture it is, for most people, the *only* way they know of awakening or sustaining proprioceptive awareness of their bodies.

In Eastern and aboriginal cultures the reverse has been traditionally the case – movement and *kinaesthetic* awareness are grounded in motionless stillness and *proprioceptive* awareness of one’s body.

As in the practice of Tai Chi and different forms of Asian dance and martial art, Eastern cultures value forms of bodily movement or ‘kinesis’ which arise out of a sense of motionless stillness, letting their movements be guided by this motionless stillness.

Thus the most truly advanced martial artist is precisely one who does not actively move their body at all, but rather lets it *be moved* – moved by a ‘proprioceptive’ awareness that embraces not only their body but their sense of the entire space around their body. It is because the kinaesthetic awareness of the martial artist is *already* so highly trained that all they require to guide their physical movements is a meditative, motionless proprioceptive awareness.

Sitting meditation on the other hand, teaches people how to ‘move’ in a different way – to move from one location or ‘place’ to another *in themselves* - not with their physical body but *within* their inwardly felt body. Strictly speaking this is not movement at all but *awareness* – awareness of the many different sensations and feelings and thoughts that are presencing or *occurring* in different regions or locations of their body. It is awareness too, of the relation of these sensations or feelings, whether subtle or intense, to the thoughts they are having and to the things or people they are connected with in their world.

The principle aim of sitting meditation is to learn how to be physically still whilst still sustaining awareness of our body as a whole and the space around it - sustaining both proprioceptive and spatial awareness.

This proprioceptive awareness is what sitting meditation and the Zen practice of ‘just sitting’ was implicitly designed to cultivate.

Yet the problems faced by students of Zen-style sitting meditation – physical restlessness, mental boredom or drifting off, were not understood and responded to with this understanding or aim in mind – the aim of cultivating awareness of our bodies and the space around them. Instead they were left to struggle with sensations of restlessness, strain, boredom or fatigue leading them to mentally dissociate from their bodies rather than become more aware of them, to get lost in thought or even fall asleep during meditation – hence the Master’s ‘awakening’ stick. There was no instruction to students to fully *affirm* all bodily sensations in awareness – thus coming to recognise that the very

*awareness* of a bodily sensation is not itself anything bodily but is essentially *bodiless* and *sensation-free*.

The *awareness* of a distracting thought or mental state is not itself anything mental or any activity of mind - 'mindfulness' - but is instead something essentially *thought- and mind-free*. Lacking this understanding and experience of pure awareness, Zen students were left to rely on their minds to distract or dissociate themselves from their bodies - or to simply stay awake. This however only compounded the challenge of attaining a state of pure, mind- and thought-free awareness.

What they required was 'The Awareness Principle' – the recognition that just as the awareness of our bodies and of bodily sensations is not itself anything bodily, so is the pure awareness of our minds and thoughts not itself anything mental but a thought and mind-free awareness.

The *Zen practice* of sitting meditation aimed at transcending both mind and body and attaining a state called emptiness or *mu* - 'no mind. No body.' Yet this practice did not recognise that the pure *awareness* of mind and body is – *in principle* - something innately transcendent or free of body and mind.

Without this recognition, 'success' in meditation came to be identified more and more with 'one-pointedness' – the *concentration* of awareness on a single inner or outer focal point (for example the centre of a *mandala*). It is precisely this practice of 'one-pointedness' however, that *misses the point* - which is that a state of pure mind- and body-free awareness is, in contrast to ordinary consciousness, precisely an awareness *not* focussed or concentrated on a single, localised point. Instead it is an all-round 'field' awareness embracing the entirety of space – not least the space around our bodies, around our physical sensations and around our thoughts themselves.

It is from the *formless all-round space of pure awareness* that all elements of our bodily and mental experiencing, inner and outer, form themselves.

To concentrate ‘single-pointedly’ on any one of these elements is to miss the central aim of meditation, which is to cultivate a proprioceptive *awareness* of our bodies – and even our thoughts themselves - from the space surrounding them.

The term ‘sacred space’ is both true and misleading. For a sacred space or a holy place such as a temple or cathedral, is in essence any place which helps us – either through its vast inner or outer dimensions and/or through its association with God or the divine – to experience space as such *as* sacred and holy - *as* the divine and *as* the God inside which we dwell. The most basic thing that happens when people enter a sacred space such as a large cathedral for example is that they gain a sense of its vaulting spaciousness, and at the same time, by virtue of knowing the cathedral as a holy place or ‘house of God’ - associate this spaciousness with that holiness and with God.

When people come together in temples, churches or mosques they are first of all aware of being together in a common space which is recognised as sacred or holy in some way. In that way, they knowingly or unknowingly come to an experience of space itself as divine – that which embraces all things and beings. *Going* to a holy place involves movement in space. Yet *being there* means motionlessly abiding in that place, thus coming to experiencing its space – and thereby space itself – as holy.

Again, movement or *kinesis* – activity or change of place – can be a way of awakening or sustaining proprioceptive awareness, or it can be a way of avoiding it. Yet the question whether, at any given moment, awareness is better sustained through movement or non-movement, can itself only be decided by first of all *not-moving* – by abiding in a motionless stillness.

Mountains and trees do not move from place to place, go to church, go for walks or go on pilgrimages. Mountains will not come to Mohammed. Trees do not have eyes to see. Yet they are the true ‘Zen masters’ and *yogis* of nature. For not having eyes to perceive space or limbs by which to move from place to place, they are masters at motionlessly sensing the space, light and air around them. Indeed their proprioceptive sense of their own

bodies comes from sensing their spatiality. The tree's trunk rises towards the heights of the sky. Its roots plumb the depths of the earth. Its branches spread and its leaves and flowers open themselves to the vaulting curvature of the heavens above – absorbing the light and air of space not through any eyes or noses, but through their *entire surface*.

To be 'conscious' is to be aware of things occurring – abiding or moving - 'in' the space around them. To be *aware* of things however, is not the same as to *be* that very awareness. To *be* awareness means to *be* the space, inner and outer, in which things occur, and not just be aware of things occurring in that space. For pure awareness, in our space-time reality, *is* space. Being *space*, we do not need to engage in activity or movement to experience *time*. For space is *time-space*. The vaulting expanse of space *is* the spacious expanse of time itself – a time-space that embraces all actions and places - past, present and future - without any need for movement from one place to another 'in' space or one moment to another 'in' time.

## **Practicing Sitting as Meditation**

Sitting meditation is essentially the experience of sitting – anywhere and anytime - *as* meditation. This involves 4 simple steps:

- 1. Sitting with your eyes open, but not looking at anything.**
- 2. Sustaining awareness of your sensed body surface as a whole.**
- 3. Feeling your body surface as 'all eye' – enabling you to sense the entire space within and all around your body.**
- 4. Letting all that you are aware of within your body in the form of sensations or feelings and all that comes to mind in the form of thoughts and images dissipate into the space around your body.**