



Time out for the mind

Paintings and
a reflection on meditation

Henriette Müller

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Preface:

Creating art and looking at art is an utterly non-intellectual thing for me and, just like meditation, time out for the rational mind. The paintings in the first part of this book extend an invitation to immerse yourself in color and forms.

In the second part I try to explain how to meditate and press the pause button thus exiting from the merry-go-round of our thoughts. Still remarkably relevant quotes by Tibetan meditation masters of past centuries support this essay.

In the notes you will find bibliographical references and hints in case you are inclined to explore further.

Cobalt turquoise 2 – from the series *Meditation*, 2020
Oil on canvas, 97 x 113 cm



16.02.21 – from the series *Meditation*
Watercolor, 42 x 42 cm



16.10.18 - from the series *Meditation*
Watercolor, 42 x 42 cm



18.11.18 - from the series *Dance*
Watercolor, 42 x 42 cm



Why meditate and what does meditation have to do with art?

Maybe you found this book because like me, you discovered a spiritual vein at some point? Or you just wanted to look at the paintings and are asking yourself now if you have made a mistake because you don't care in the slightest about spirituality or religion? I would be glad if I succeeded in writing this essay for everyone. This isn't about religion, but about meditation as one of many aids for one's alert and relaxed path through this beautiful, sad, intense, boring and demanding life with all its challenges.

Meditation would be easy if we did not complicate things all the time. Sit down, look inward, press the pause button, and let your thoughts get off the merry-go-round.

Yesterday I yet again spent two hours with a dozen ladies and gentlemen from a phone company's call center, was forced to listen to dull music, was repeatedly cut off and had to restate my matter. In the end, I was put through to a gentleman with a sonorous voice ('No, I'm not the contact for troublemakers') who assured me that tomorrow everything would work again. Which naturally it didn't.

It's all well and good to meditate in private but what happens if we are confronted with 'real' life? My call center is still a comparatively civilized place of miscommunication. As a test for advanced equanimity I would recommend attempting to delete an old Amazon account where the login details are no longer working, or maybe unmuting the news on television every now and then?

Enough cynicism, after all I want to talk here about a path through the chaos to more serenity. Shantideva (685–763) recommends wearing shoes instead of trying to cover the whole world with a protective layer of leather.

Initially I had beginner's luck when I started to meditate: Although this happened more than twenty years ago I remember every detail. I sat cross-legged on an ornately carved wooden stool and waited with others in a holiday village in the middle of Germany for a Buddhist talk. Suddenly my perception shifted as if a switch had been flipped. For a few minutes everything was fresh, vividly clear and utterly peaceful.

At the same event I heard my first talk by Kyabje¹ Dzogchen Rinpoche, Jigme Losel Wangpo². The Tibetan word Dzogchen (*rdzogs chen*) means 'great perfection': Ultimately, everything is well. We are perfect as we are and in this perfection we are connected with everything (we just might not know it yet).³

Dzogchen Rinpoche back then presented his projects at the Dzogchen Monastery in South India, mentioning that help was welcome. I immediately felt more addressed by him than by other exponents of Tibetan Buddhism, Zen masters, Yoga teachers and so on, whom I had met on my spiritual search so far. One year later I travelled to the Dzogchen Monastery. It was my first time in India and I straightaway enjoyed the genial chaos. After a long drive up into the mountains over bumpy roads I had arrived in a totally different world, 'Tibet in India', so to speak.

In my youth I lived in Zambia and Zimbabwe for some time and still remembered vividly how difficult it had been for months afterwards to deal with the

Acknowledgements:

Many thanks to Angelika Schlunck and Morag Quirk for their helpful input, to Matthieu Ricard for his beautiful translations from the Tibetan and to Kyabje Dzogchen Rinpoche for all the trouble he took with me over the years.

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Notes:

I decided to use American English for the text because almost all of the books from which I took the quotes were written with American spelling. Tibetan words are rendered in transliteration used in other books and in Wylie transliteration in brackets.

1. I have decided not to use the somewhat awkward cardinal's title 'Your Eminence', but the Tibetan title *kyabje* (*skyabs rje*).
2. For information about Kyabje Dzogchen Rinpoche's biography and activities, please go to the website of Dzogchen Monastery in South India (www.dzogchen.org.in) or to branches of the charity Shenpen, for example in Australia (www.shenpenaustralia.org)
3. Dzogchen as a meditation method existed before the 1st Dzogchen Rinpoche, Pema Rigdzin, who lived in Tibet from 1625 to 1697. He and the six Dzogchen Rinpoches after him received their names because they embodied Dzogchen so convincingly. In the system of Tibetan Buddhism, Dzogchen is at the same time one of the six main monasteries of the oldest school in Tibetan Buddhism, the Nyingma school, which developed from the eighth century onwards when Buddhism was brought to Tibet from India. Kyabje Dzogchen Rinpoche, the 7th Dzogchen Rinpoche, is head of Dzogchen monastery.
4. Ernst-Gerard Güse: "Emil Schumacher. Das Erlebnis des Unbekannten", Hatje Cantz Verlag 2012, page 478, translation from German into English: Henriette Müller