

A summer holiday that could change your life:

International retreats in Acem Meditation summer 2006



The two main retreats next summer (the regular summer retreat and the deepening retreat described on pages 2-3) will take place at the Acem International Retreat Centre at Halvorsbøle near Oslo, Norway. The tranquil beauty of Lake Randsfjord and the soothing peace and solitude of the Norwegian forests provide an ideal setting for deep meditations. In the evenings, the bright Scandinavian summer nights create an atmosphere that stimulates inspiring conversations.

Gradually, deep layers of mental stress and muscular tension release their grasp, and give way to a relaxed and receptive frame of mind. Previously undetected emotions and life issues are brought to the surface. You learn to improve your skill in meditation, which will give you increased energy and improved general well-being in the months ahead. New paths open in your daily life.

You practice long meditations in your own private room, so that you

can easily change position, practice yoga or lie down when you need to rest or sleep. In the afternoons, you may take part in group meditations lasting up to one hour.

Well-trained instructors with years of experience lead the guidance groups. In the evenings there is a programme of, discussions, talks and lectures. These examine technical and existential issues relating to meditation practice, informed by the psychology of meditation as developed by Acem.

Basic instruction in Acem Yoga stimulates the meditative processes. A lacto-vegetarian diet provides an improved bodily basis for long meditations.

In all of the international summer retreats in Acem Meditation, the basic course language is English, with simultaneous translation and guidance groups conducted in Scandinavian, German, Dutch, Spanish and Mandarin as the need may be.

More on pages 2&3

International Weekend Retreat with Dr. Are Holen

Friday 19 - Sunday 21 May 2006

Fawley Court, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, England

This retreat offers an opportunity to achieve a deeper understanding of Acem Meditation through the experience of longer meditations, guidance groups and evening talks. In addition, meeting and discussing with other meditators provides new perspectives on the meditative process.

The retreat will be led by Acem's founder Dr. Are Holen, in cooperation with Acem instructors from the UK and Scandinavia.

The retreat is open to anyone who has learned Acem Meditation. If you are interested in learning Acem Meditation during the retreat, contact Acem.

Retreat fee: £165 including full board (lactovegetarian diet) and accommodation in a single room (full-time students £130). £220 ensuite accommodation. Reduced fee before March 1.
For information and registration, see http://acem.com/england/retreat_fawley.html or contact Acem International.



International Summer Retreat of Acem Meditation 2006

with Dr. Are Holen, founder of Acem and head of Acem International
Saturday, July 15 – Sunday, July 23

Acem Retreat Centre Halvorsbøle, Oslo, Norway

At a regular retreat such as this, you are likely to meet both first-time participants and people who have made it their habit to spend a week at an Acem retreat every summer. You may come simply to recharge your batteries, or to seek wide-reaching changes in your life.

If you have not yet learnt Acem Meditation, this retreat provides an excellent opportunity to learn the technique.

One aim of the retreat is to help you master the three-hour level (level 2) of long meditations.

The retreat also includes a wide range of social activities, such as excursions, dreiva (a form of rhythmic dance developed in Acem), and entertainment.

Are Holen MD, PhD, Psychiatrist,

will lead the retreat. Dr. Holen founded Acem in 1966 and is the head of the international organization. He is a recognized expert on meditation and an inspiring lecturer. He is also a world-renowned stress researcher. He teaches at the Faculty of Medicine, Norwegian University of Science and Technology.



Retreat fee for non-Scandinavian participants

Registration and payment before May 1: EUR 495 (30 % off the regular fee)
Registration and payment after May 1: EUR 595 (15 % off the regular fee)

The fee includes full board (lacto-vegetarian diet) and ensuite accommodation in a single room. Extra fee for learning Acem Meditation at the retreat: EUR 50.

For information and registration, see <http://www.acem.com/scandinavia/retreat2006.html> or contact Acem International.

Post-retreat tour of Norway

Sunday July 23 – Tuesday July 25, 2006

After the retreat, you may participate in a three-day guided tour of the majestic mountains and fascinating fjords, deep forests and imposing glaciers, old stave churches and traditional farmhouses of Norway. One of our destinations, the Geiranger fjord, is frequently referred to as “the most beautiful place in the world”, and has often featured in international travel magazines and National Geographic.

Starting from Acem’s retreat centre at Halvorsbøle, we travel by car over the mountains to Western Norway. We then take a ferry across the world’s longest and deepest fjord, Sognefjorden, to visit the glacier museum at Fjærland.



Fjærland in Fjærlandsfjorden, a branch of Sognefjorden

The next day, we may be able to see continental Europe’s largest glacier, Jostedalbreen, before we travel on to Geiranger. We enter the spectacular fjord by ferry, and then drive up to Dalsnibba, 1475 metres above sea level, with a stunning view of the dramatic scenery below.

On the third day, we drive through the fertile farmland of Eastern Norway, reaching Oslo in the late afternoon.

By driving in private cars, with Acem instructors as our guides, and staying over night in camping huts, we are able to travel inexpensively in a country

otherwise known for its high prices. The cost of the whole tour is EUR 250, including travel and accommodation, but not food. Deadline for registration and payment: June 1.

International Deepening Retreat of Acem Meditation

Sunday, July 23 – Sunday, July 30

Acem Retreat Centre Halvorsbøle, Oslo, Norway



International Retreat 2005 at Halvorsbøle

A deepening retreat is suitable for regular meditators who have already gained sufficient experience from week-long Acem retreats and who are strongly interested in further exploring the meditative process

through long meditations of six hours or more every day. The programme includes instruction in advanced meditation practice, in-depth guidance focusing on the life issues that are actualised during medita-

tion, evening seminars, physical exercise (yoga, walking and/or swimming), and stimulating conversations with other participants.

Meditators who have practised Acem Meditation regularly for at least three months leading up to the start of the retreat may participate. Experience of at least one three-hour long meditation during the last year is required, as well as previous participation in at least one week-long Acem retreat.

Retreat fee for non-Scandinavian participants:
Registration and payment before May 1: EUR 465 (30 % off the regular fee)
Registration and payment after May 1: EUR 565 (15 % off the regular fee)
The fee includes full board (lacto-vegetarian diet) and ensuite accommodation in a single room.

For information and registration, see http://www.acem.com/scandinavia/deepening_2006.html or contact Acem International.

Winter and Summer Retreats of Acem Meditation in Germany 2006

Sunday, February 12 - Sunday, February 19 and Sunday, August 6 – Sunday, August 13
Germerode, close to Eschwege, west of Kassel

Both retreats are open to all German-speaking Acem meditators. The programme includes long meditations of up to four hours, guidance groups, evening talks, basic yoga instruction, and walks in the beautiful German countryside.

For more information, see <http://www.acem.com/germany/weitergehend.html>.

Participants of the Summer Retreat 2005 in Germerode



Halvor Eifring

Metathoughts

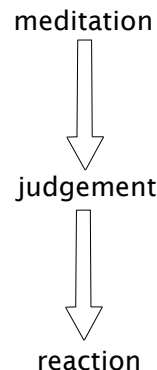
- reflections of self-images in meditation



When our meditation is filled with critical thoughts about how we meditate, it is easy to believe that the solution lies in 'pulling ourselves together'. In reality the solution lies in accepting the situation as it is. Negative self-critical thoughts are an expression of low self-images. Meditation liberates us from their stifling influence.

Judgemental thoughts are a part of meditation. Sometimes they are positive: "This is going well!"; "This is what good meditation is like!"; "There I really achieved something!" But more often they are negative: "I am not doing this right." "I have too many thoughts and they are too intrusive." "Nothing happens in my meditation." "The meditation sound is too weak and unclear." Typically, judge-

ments such as these completely colour our mind:



We believe them and act accordingly. In Acem's psychology of meditation they are called metathoughts.

Distorted experience – wrong meditation

When we have metathoughts, we typically experience our meditation in a distorted way, and this influences the way we act. Negative judgements that we make are directed at our meditation performance, and we react by modifying the way we meditate: When we experience negative metathoughts we always assume

that they represent the truth. It is typical of metathoughts that we believe what they say.

We often react by trying to modify the way we meditate. We try to 'pull ourselves together'. For example we may repeat the sound more forcefully in an attempt to prevent the sound from disappearing and to prevent the mind becoming overwhelmed by thoughts. Or we may strain to make the sound clearer to prevent it becoming vague and unclear. Or we try to remove ourselves from

It is typical of metathoughts that we believe what they say

thoughts and feelings that we think should not be a part of meditation – restlessness, sleep, pain, sadness, anger, anxiety, superficial thoughts, trivial thoughts, making plans, or daydreams. In all these cases, our reaction involves some degree of active concentration. The open attitude becomes constricted: we meditate incorrectly.

In reality, metathoughts do not represent the truth in our meditation. Judgemental thoughts are rather a part of the stream of thoughts: part of the mental discharge that results from correct meditation. As such, judgemental thoughts should be allowed to come and go as they will, like all other thoughts. When we treat them as truths, we set them aside from other thoughts and attribute to them a validity they do not deserve. Instead of letting them pass by, we react to them.

Trying to avoid painful self-images

Metathoughts represent an actualisation of inner self-images that influence us not only in meditation, but in daily life as well. Like the metathoughts of meditation, the self-images of daily life can be

positive and associated with feelings of pride: "I feel great!" "I really did this well!" But often they are critical and associated with feelings of embarrassment or shame: "I am not succeeding!" "I am hopeless and stupid!" "What would other people think if they saw me now?"

Negative self-images create problems. They are deeply rooted in

The judgemental thoughts of meditation are an expression of the same self-images that influence us in daily life

our psychology and have been with us since early childhood. They are painful and can be paralyzing. Often they control far too much of our behaviour. We spend a great

deal of energy trying to avoid situations that may reinforce our low self-images, be it going up to the speaker's lectern, taking an exam, talking to our superior, realizing our ambitions, committing ourselves to a long-term relationship, or caring for others. But when we avoid such situations, we also lose the opportunity to face challenges that we would have done well in meeting, whether in education, career, love and friendship, or family and commitments.

Judgemental thoughts experienced during meditation are an expression

In contrast to daily life, meditation generally gives us a clear signal that something is not right

of the same self-images that influence our daily life. Our attempts to correct our meditation reflect our daily life, when we try to avoid feeling the

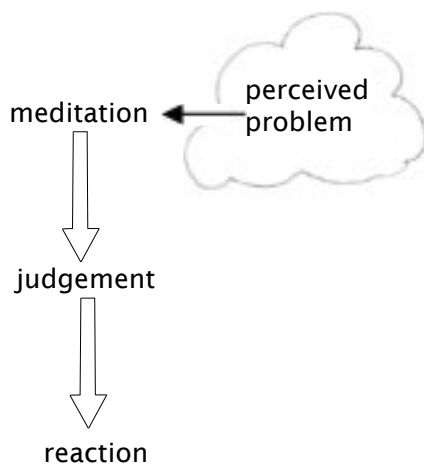
painful core of these self-images. Because we believe that these critical judgements are due to our incorrect meditation we delude ourselves into thinking that we can avoid them by 'pulling ourselves together'.

In contrast to daily life, meditation generally gives us a clear signal when something is not right. Our attempts to correct our meditation do not lead us to a freer mental attitude, but constrict us. When the

free mental attitude is constricted, the relaxation response and the immediate effects of meditation fail to appear. We get stuck in a pattern where we feel that something is wrong, but our attempts to correct the situation only intensify the problem. We are caught in a vicious circle. The result is often restlessness and frustration.

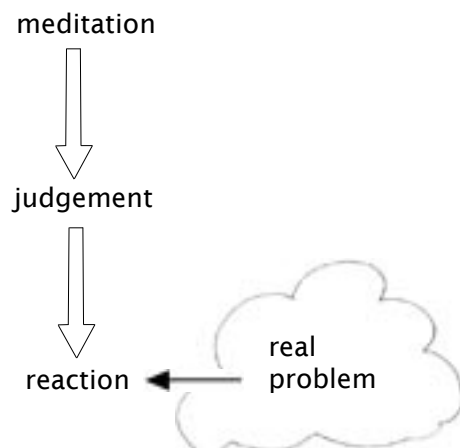
Breaking the vicious circle – out of the blindness

In order to make further progress, the way we experience the situation must change. Initially we think the problem lies in the way we meditate, that our judgements are correct, and that our attempts to adjust our meditation are a reasonable response to our situation:



The reality is different. Critical judgemental thoughts are not due to wrong meditation: on the contrary, they are the result of our meditating correctly. They do not represent an accurate assessment of the situation, but are an expression of limiting self-images. Meditating with a free attitude has enabled previously suppressed self-images to approach the surface of our awareness. This allows us to relate to them in a new way, so that we may be released from their paralyzing grasp.

Thus, the problem does not lie in the way we meditate, but in the way we respond to judgemental thoughts: that is, we were responding with concentration instead of with a free mental attitude:



For the solution, we must cease to 'pull ourselves together', we must refrain from using force to make the sound clearer or stronger, and we must allow the thoughts and feelings that exert such a pressure on us to express themselves, instead of suppressing them. In short, accept the situation as it is, instead of wasting energy in attempting to change it.

Once we become aware of the source of the problem, the solution is surprisingly simple. Only our blindness stands in the way. We are caught in one way of experiencing the situation: it does not occur to us to see things in a different way. Discussing our meditation with an experienced meditation guide can help us to see the situation with new eyes.

By accepting the situation as it is, we release feelings that are influenced by our low self-images.

Critical judgemental thoughts are not due to wrong meditation: on the contrary, they are the result of our meditating correctly

This can be painful. But it can also feel like a release, because we become freer. When the feelings are allowed to express themselves, we notice how much energy has been consumed in keeping them away. The low self-images do not necessarily disappear, but they do not affect us to the

same degree as before. Our basic self-image becomes more secure and stable. We achieve a greater degree of self-acceptance and inner strength.

Vibeke Videm

Acem's psychology of meditation

The psychological understanding of meditation in Acem has been developed over many years since the organisation was founded in 1966. Acem's psychology of meditation is based on the experience of hundreds of meditators with Acem Meditation, as well as insights gained from discussing meditation in meditation guidance, observing people in communication groups and following closely the development of meditators over many years.



Modes of understanding acquired from different schools of psychology have continuously been tested against the experience of meditation and insights gained in meditation guidance.

It was clear from the beginning that Acem Meditation provided relaxation and could facilitate personal insight and growth. Acem's psychology of meditation has a pragmatic goal: to enable meditators to get the most out of their meditation. It also draws from various schools of mainstream psychology, including psychoanalysis, cognitive psychology and behaviourism.

Pluralism in psychology

Psychology differs from the pure natural sciences in important respects. In recent years, great progress has been made in understanding how electrical signals pass through the nervous system, and which areas of the brain and central nervous system are important

in awareness, pain and pleasure, learning, memory, emotions and perception.

Nevertheless, it is still impossible to fully understand consciousness, memory, drives, emotions and the like on a purely biological level. In attempting to understand such phenomena, different explanations

have been proposed, each of which draws on our experience of systematic observation and insights gained through psychotherapy. The different schools variously emphasise the importance of inheritance and the environment, punishment and reward, different conceptions of the self, or the extent to which the unconscious influences our experience and behaviour.

There are no obvious answers to

such questions. One cannot devise experiments or undertake controlled research studies to conclusively prove a single, correct understanding of the human mind. On the contrary, human psychology can be perceived fruitfully from different perspectives: it can be described and understood in different ways. This does not imply that the different models of the mind are mutually exclusive. Rather, they may be regarded as complementary views representing the enormous richness and complexity of the psychology of human beings.

Confirmed by experience

We are faced with the same difficulty when we apply psychological theories to explain how meditation works. Models that disregard the existence of unconscious levels of mind are very difficult to reconcile with the experience gained from working with Acem Meditation.

Human psychology can be perceived fruitfully from different perspectives: it can be described and understood in different ways

However, different schools of psychology can contribute in a variety of ways to the understanding of the processes that meditation facilitates.

This is why one encounters elements from behaviourism, cognitive psychology, developmental psychology, the psychology of perception, psychoanalysis and self psychology in Acem's psychology of meditation. The modes of understanding acquired from these sources have continuously been tested against the experience of meditation and insights gained in meditation guidance. Aspects of these theories that have proven consistent with the experience of Acem Meditation and have facilitated understanding of the meditation process have been incorporated into Acem's psychology of meditation: models that have not have been discarded. Thus, meditation psychology in Acem has undergone continuous development. Long-time participants in Acem's activities will have noticed that Acem's understanding of different phenomena in meditation has been continuously developed and clarified.

Explanatory models that lack an empirical basis may easily alienate meditators from their meditation practice instead of facilitating a fruitful process

The free mental attitude

Most other forms of meditation are taught within a framework that emphasises philosophy, ideology, religion or unusual experiences. At an early stage, work with Acem Meditation revealed that explanatory models that lack an empirical basis

may easily alienate meditators from their meditation practice instead of facilitating a fruitful process.

Acem Meditation is based on a few simple but fundamental principles. One of the most fundamental is that of the free mental attitude. In meditation, we continuously work to create a freer and more unconstrained inner mental climate. Using the repetition of the meditation sound as a neutral aid, we create a kind of free-zone in the mind that allows all kinds of thoughts, feelings, memories, or other forms of spontaneous mental activity to pass freely, without holding on to or rejecting anything that comes into our awareness. This initiates a relaxation response in our body and mind. By following this principle, we gradually become more able to recognise how previously unconscious tendencies begin to constrain our freedom of mind.

Seeing the light

If we begin to define specific experiences or certain mental states in our meditation as having special religious, philosophical or psychological importance or meaning, we will tend to strive to achieve or produce these experiences. Likewise, we may reject other experiences as being uninteresting or unimportant. In doing so, we depart from the principle of the free mental attitude. The story goes of the Acem meditator who, after having meditated several hours during a winter retreat, suddenly saw a yellow glowing and pulsating light, and thought that he was having a very deep and metaphysically highly important experience. It turned out that the light he saw came from a road service truck just outside his window.

Different schools of psychology can contribute in a variety of ways to the understanding of the processes that meditation facilitates

Acem's psychology of meditation has made it possible to teach meditation within a common framework, in which people from different cultures can benefit from the method. There has been an increased interest in Acem Meditation in very different countries, including India, Taiwan, China, the Gambia and many European countries. People from very different cultures, based on different perspectives of life and different social conventions, may approach the method of Acem Meditation in a variety of ways. Experience has taught us that cultural differences have to be taken into account when we teach Acem Meditation. Nevertheless, as long as the method is practiced according to the fundamental principles, it works. No matter what culture you come from, basic principles of Acem Meditation and the fundamental insights of Acem's psychology of meditation apply, irrespective of ideology, religion, or political beliefs.

Questions for discussion

1. What are the effects of repeating the meditation sound with a free mental attitude?
2. What does it mean to say that Acem's psychology of meditation has a pragmatic goal rather than an ideological or metaphysical?
3. What consequences may follow if the framework for understanding a meditation method is not primarily based on experience?



Join Acem Travels for an unforgettable Tour of China, Hong Kong and Taiwan
Friday 31 March - Monday 17 April 2006.

More information at www.acem.com.

For last-minute registration, contact acem.travels@acem.com or call +47-911 86535.

Acem International Training in Interpersonal Communication

Saturday 30 April – Sunday 8 May, 2005

at Acem International Retreat Centre, Halvorsbøle, Oslo, Norway

In an open, reflective environment, the course provides opportunities to enhance:

- empathy and sensitivity
- interpersonal social skills
- leadership qualities
- ability to handle conflicts
- understanding of group-dynamics
- self-insight

Communication courses of this kind have been developed in Scandinavia since 1970 by medical doctors and psychologists with an interest in Acem Meditation and self-understanding. The training is now also available to English-speaking participants.

The communication course is a personal growth experience, the benefits of which will be felt in one's professional and private life. Each communication group has 6-9 participants and 1-2 leaders. The open and reflective atmosphere of the group provides an ideal setting for the exploration of your own personality and the way you interact with others.

No knowledge of meditation is required to participate in the communication course.



Leaders include

Are Holen, MD, PhD, Psychiatrist, Dean of Education, Faculty of Medicine, Norwegian University of Science and Technology

Maria S. Gjems-Onstad, Psychotherapist

Halvor Eifring, PhD, Professor of Chinese, University of Oslo

Turid Berg-Nielsen, PhD, Associate Professor of Clinical Psychology, Norwegian University of Science and Technology

Eva Skaar, Artist

Carl Henrik Grøndahl, Artistic Director, Radio Drama, Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation

Tor Hersoug, PhD, Director of Economic Research, The Confederation of Norwegian Business and Industry

Ole Gjems-Onstad, Dr Juris, Professor of Fiscal Law, Norwegian School of Management

Course fee for non-Scandinavian participants
Registration and payment before March 15: EUR 695; after March 15: EUR 795. This includes full board (lacto-vegetarian diet) and accommodation in a single room.

Registration

Write to acem@acem.com or contact Acem by post or telephone (see bottom of page) and ask for registration form. Registrations close on 31 March, 2005.

Typical daily programme

0815–0915 Breakfast

0915–1200 Communication groups

1215–1300 Lunch

1315–1615 Work tasks, walk, self-evaluation

1615–1745 Communication groups

1800–1930 Dinner

1930–2115 Self-activated groups

2130– Social gathering

Diary and daily report

Ca. 2300 Good night

ACEM
School of Meditation

is a non-profit organisation which helps people develop existentially by means of a mindful, reflective process known as Acem Meditation.

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Folke Gravklev, Eirik Jensen, Cathrine Pedersen (transl.)

Check acem.com for future meditation events