

# Acem Meditation eNews

no. 3 2008 - text version (Online version: [www.acem.com](http://www.acem.com))

Five times a year, Acem Meditation eNews gives you an update on activities, publications and developments in Acem International School of Meditation. The eNews also brings articles on meditation for Acem meditators and others with an interest in meditation.

## Content:

- *An empty mind*  
*Will meditation help us attain that state?*
- *An extraordinary course*
- *Why meditate when you're in your twenties?*
- *International Acem Meditation Retreat in Taiwan 2009*
- *Courses in collaboration with Acem*
- *Tibet tour 2009 cancelled*

## An empty mind

### Will meditation help us attain that state?

by Torbjørn Hobbel, initiator in Acem Meditation



Everyone who meditates – whether with Acem Meditation or another technique – has to deal with thoughts. People who have tried unsuccessfully to meditate often say, "It was too difficult. I was unable to get rid of my thoughts." This article offers

some reflections on thoughts in meditation from an Acem perspective and compares them with Buddhist views of meditation. The manner in which thoughts are dealt with during meditation – and the understanding of their importance – makes Acem Meditation different from most other meditation methods.

Some time ago, I read a Buddhist magazine published in the US. Three famous Buddhist teachers from the East and West responded to questions from readers. One question went like this:

I have been a Buddhist for more than twenty years and I've done a lot of meditation practice. But I have never experienced any real peace or absence of thoughts in my meditation, at least for more than brief moments here and there.

The questioner felt somewhat disillusioned – no real progress despite the wonderful teachings and all the good practice. A sadness surfaced in the form of a natural doubt: What is the point of it all?

### The problem of thoughts

Everyone who seriously practises any meditation technique has to deal with the problem of thoughts, probably with an underlying expectation of achieving complete peace of mind. Bearing in mind that this is a common challenge for all meditators, let us briefly look at the answers given by the three Buddhist masters from the perspective of Acem's psychology of meditation.

Two of the teachers try their best to reassure the meditating Buddhist. They emphasise the importance of continuing to meditate, even if beneficial effects aren't always apparent. Benefits will definitely become manifest, they say – at the moment of death, if not before. The problem is that it takes a very long time to achieve what they call deprogramming of the mind. So their message is: Do not give up! They don't really go into the problem of thoughts in meditation, and they seem to share the questioner's underlying assumption that one day the thoughts will miraculously be gone.

The third teacher – a woman from the West – writes that the practice of meditation always has an

effect, but not always what we anticipate. According to her, it is unrealistic to expect to experience emptiness of mind, and she advises the meditator not to hold on to the thoughts, but let them go by returning to the meditation practice: "As to not experiencing the absence of thoughts: None of us do. Just let them come and go, like the scenery from a train window."

This answer has much in common with how one deals with thoughts in Acem Meditation. Acem's psychology of meditation refers to thoughts as spontaneous activity, which highlights a very important characteristic of thoughts in Acem Meditation: that the thoughts come spontaneously, without any act of will on the meditator's part.

### **The thoughts are not the problem**

In their different ways, all of the teachers' answers are helpful, but from an Acem perspective they all overlook important aspects of the question.

A significant difference between Acem Meditation and other techniques is that in Acem Meditation, we let thoughts come and go as they will. When we become aware that we are thinking, we go gently back to repeating the meditation sound. Without effort or concentration, the sound is brought into the centre of our awareness. It is important for beginners in Acem Meditation to understand that correct technique does not involve struggling against thoughts, but rather the opposite – allowing them greater space and freedom. One should repeat the meditation sound while also accepting the presence of thoughts. This is what we refer to in Acem Meditation as a free mental attitude.

It may take a little while to establish such an attitude, and the problem may recur over and over again at deeper levels of the meditation process. Considering how difficult this aspect of meditation is, practitioners are entitled to ask another question: Why is it so important to allow thoughts to come and go freely, and not to regard them as disturbances?

### **The importance of thoughts**

In Acem Meditation, thoughts are not just something we have to live with. On the contrary, they play a very important role and are an integral

part of the meditation process from both a short- and a long-term perspective. We meditate when we repeat the meditation sound, and we also meditate when we are lost in thought, in what is called spontaneous concentration. Understanding this intellectually helps us not only to meditate with better results, but also to recognise a fundamental aspect of human psychology.

Among other things, the spontaneous activity of the mind expresses residues from the recent or distant past. The thoughts are parts of an inner rearrangement that takes place during Acem Meditation. They represent underlying currents in our consciousness that surface when the mind is more open and receptive.

This is why Acem encourages meditators not merely to resign themselves to reluctantly accepting thoughts in the hope that one day they will suddenly go away. On the contrary, they should be welcomed with understanding and sympathy along with the gentle repetition of the meditation sound. Allowing the mind to flow freely during meditation makes it easier to release psychological residues and the deeply rooted tensions associated with them.

In a sense, then, the question of how to attain an empty mind is the wrong question. The real challenge – for beginners and experienced practitioners of Acem Meditation alike – is how to deal with spontaneous mental activity during meditation. Finding an answer to this may help us to grow beyond our personal limitations and live a richer life.



## An extraordinary course

“The communication course is the most extraordinary course I’ve ever done!” says 44-year-old Dutch lawyer Edwin Mac Gillavry, who lives with his wife, Inge, in Leiden, Netherlands, and attended Acem’s interpersonal communication training in May 2008.

“The course was very intensive. I know no other course that runs for eight days from early morning till late at night. But the most important difference was that this course was not about instructors telling us a lot of theory about communication. Rather, it was a course in which I, together with my fellow group members, was helped to discover the ways I communicate. We had to figure it out for ourselves. Just being told by others how you communicate won’t change anything. You have to see it on your own. And that is exactly what we did in the communication course. I received feedback on how I acted, and I gained insights into what triggers me and what is at the root of my patterns of behaviour. It was like seeing myself reflected in a mirror – just what I needed.”

Edwin found the communication course useful both at work and in his personal relationships. In his experience, the way you communicate is shaped by your development as a person. Experiences from the past, whether in private life, education or the workplace, determine who you are and how you

communicate, including how you react to others and how you perceive certain situations. In the communication course, therefore, it is important to talk about both your past and present. Insight into the past sometimes throws essential light on the way you communicate now. “I talked about lots of issues in my life, big and small. The most important thing was to talk, to interact, to start discussions, to make yourself and the group reflect.”

Edwin compares the communication group to a family. During the week of the course you can learn a lot from the other group members. At times things ran smoothly, while at other times Edwin felt more edgy. There was an intensity in the group which helped bring to the surface impulses and behaviour patterns that would have taken a long time to become manifest in daily life. This, Edwin finds, provided a good opportunity for learning.

“It’s always hard to open up just by yourself. It is essential for the group process that all the group members try to be open about their worries, frustrations and reactions. Only if you feel secure in the group will you be able to get the maximum out of the course. Sharing with the rest of the group is vital.”

Will he go again? “Definitely! I still have much to learn.”

*Acem Training in Interpersonal Communication  
2009: See [www.acem.com](http://www.acem.com)*



## Why meditate when you're in your twenties?

This article is by Elisabeth Heimdal (23) and Stian Wærsted (21), who are both about to become instructors in Acem and who live in Acem's commune for young people in Copenhagen. The article is based on their personal experiences as well as interviews with four fellow meditators.

### Who am I?

In our twenties, many of us wrestle with questions like "Who am I?" and "What kind of life do I want?" The answers affect some of our most important choices: what to study, what career to follow, whom to choose as friends and partners, and how to live our lives.

Young practitioners often find Acem Meditation helpful when it comes to reflecting on their identities. Swedish Jessica Strandell lives in Copenhagen, where she studies at the School of Architecture. About practising Acem Meditation, she says: "It gives me peace, energy and self-understanding." Nan Na Hvass studies at the Danish Design School and says: "Meditation makes me feel good, it is healthy for me, I get to work with unfinished things in my subconscious, and it works against stress." Bjarke Madsen is a student at Copenhagen Business School. Both his body

and his mind tell him to meditate, and he usually finds meditation very enjoyable. In particular, long meditations make it possible to reflect on things that he doesn't usually get time to think about: "Where am I in my life?" and "Where am I headed?"

### Meditation and studies

Higher education gives many people in their twenties a unique opportunity to go deeply into a subject we have chosen ourselves, based, hopefully, on our personal interests. Every day we are challenged by new material to learn and new ideas to understand. Additionally, many students also hold down part-time jobs. 21-year-old Andreas Hetland, who studies economics at the University of Copenhagen and also works part-time, says: "Meditation gives me more energy. It takes away some of the tiredness in the afternoon, and helps me to get more out of my day. This is always a good thing. It is especially good in busy periods, for example when exams are closing up".

Some of us choose a more direct route into professional life, spending several hours a day at the workplace, often in jobs which involve physical labour. But whether our jobs or studies are physically or mentally challenging, or both at the same time, we all need relaxation and recreation. Acem Meditation seems good at providing these. Sitting down to meditate after a long day releases new reserves of energy. Some days it is difficult to

find the time, but perhaps these are the days when we actually need to meditate most?

Meditating can also stimulate our creative sides. One of Bjarke's hobbies is playing the guitar and writing songs. To him, meditation is an effective tool in the creative process. On the one hand, he feels it makes him more creative, and on the other it helps him to be less of a perfectionist about his song-writing. More of his ideas and impulses get through the net, which he finds satisfying.

### **Get more out of life?**

As well as stimulating creativity and releasing energy, Acem Meditation makes us more relaxed about accepting ourselves and others. Bjarke finds that meditating helps him to understand other people and their behaviour and reactions.

This openness enables us to handle the challenges of everyday life more effectively and

make better use of our own resources. Through meditation, we become more present in our own lives and in the lives of others.

On another level, meditating regularly and participating in meditation retreats puts us in touch with some of the most basic sides of ourselves. This can be useful when we are trying to find out what we want with our lives. At meditation retreats, there is time and space to discuss these things with others of the same age – differently from how we tend to talk to each other in everyday life.

After some years practising Acem Meditation, plus a couple of retreats, Bjarke has no doubts about the deeper effects of meditation. But he thinks the expression "personal growth", which is often used in Acem's leaflets and posters and on the website, is probably too abstract to attract young people. To him, a better slogan might be: "Acem Meditation – get more out of life!"



## **International Acem Meditation Retreat in Taiwan 2009**

*Tuesday 7 April – Sunday 12 April 2009  
Fuhsing Youth Activity Center, Taoyuan county near Taipei*

The upcoming international meditation retreat in Taiwan, arranged by Acem Taiwan and Acem International, will combine local and global outlooks on meditation. You will meet meditators from Taiwan, Europe and other parts of the world in a

fertile context for exploration of existential and meditative issues – both in your own life and across cultural barriers.

### **Idyllic venue**

The retreat venue is beautifully situated next to what used to be Chiang Kai-shek's holiday resort, with a panoramic view of forests, lakes and mountains. The centre has recently been refurbished and provides a comfortable setting for long meditations. All rooms have their own bathroom



and toilet. Some of the most spacious rooms are designed to accommodate up to 8 persons but will be used as double rooms during the retreat.

### **Long meditations**

Training in long meditation above the 3-hour level provides deep relaxation and initiates basic processes of inner change. Refining your meditative practice helps to release more of the energy and resources residing within you, and lets you break with inhibiting psychological patterns.

### **Guidance and seminars**

In guidance groups, you will explore with words areas of the mind that meditation approaches with silence. Discussing your meditation provides insight and increases the effectiveness of the meditative practice. There will be groups in English, Mandarin, Spanish and Scandinavian.

Every evening there will be seminars on the psychology of meditation in English or Mandarin, with simultaneous or sequential translation. The seminars will be built on questions from participants and will attempt to unravel some of the typical meditative and existential conundrums you encounter during a retreat.

### **Excursions**

There will be plenty of time for activities and excursions. The nearby Chiang Kai-shek holiday resort is a famous attraction for local Taiwanese. If you are young at heart, you may even participate in some of the "war games" arranged by the youth activity centre. There are pleasant walking trails in

the woods, along the water and over a bridge to the other side of the lake.

### **Travel**

We highly recommend spending a few extra days in Taiwan, which has much to offer to visitors from abroad (see below). In the days immediately following the retreat, members of Acem Taiwan will arrange travel to some of the major sights of Taipei (extra cost). Travelling to other parts of East Asia is also easy from Taiwan.

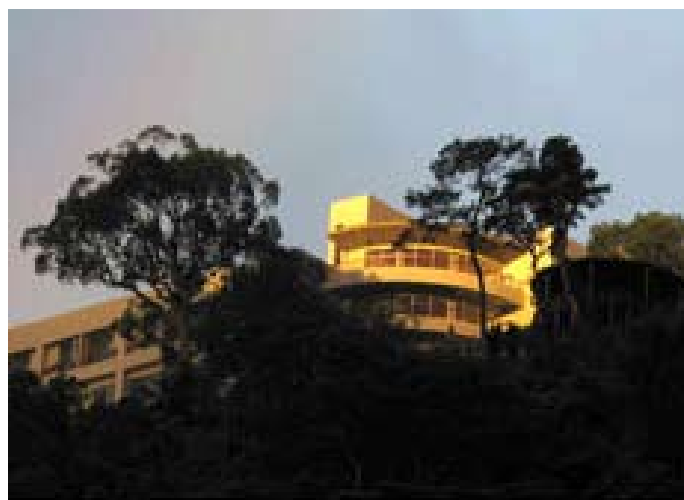
### **Course fee**

Registration and payment before end of January 2009: EUR 365.-

Registration and payment February 2009 or later: EUR 415.-

Fee includes board (lactovegetarian menu), lodging (double room) and all course activities during the retreat, but not travel to Taiwan or activities beyond the retreat dates. For travel tips, contact Acem Travels.

*Travel information about Taiwan:  
see [www.acem.com](http://www.acem.com)*



## Courses in collaboration with Acem

Acem increasingly runs meditation courses in collaboration with other institutions. These include both regular courses for beginners or practitioners of Acem Meditation and special courses in which meditation is one of several elements.

### Colleges of continuing education

In many countries, Acem Meditation courses are arranged through colleges of continuing (or adult) education, which may be public or private, may operate independently or as part of a national association, and may or may not be affiliated to regular universities. The courses in question are usually evening or weekend courses for beginners.

- **Norway**  
Folkeuniversitetet (in approximately 10 cities)
- **Sweden**  
Medborgarskolan (in Stockholm, Uppsala and other cities)
- **Germany**  
Volkshochschule (in 15 cities)  
Ökobildungswerk (Köln)
- **Austria**
- Volkshochschule (Vienna)
- **The Netherlands**  
VolksUniversiteit Groningen  
VolksUniversiteit Amsterdam
- **UK**  
Morley College (London)  
South Nottingham College
- **France**  
Université Populaire de Mulhouse
- **Canada**  
Burnaby Continuing Education (Vancouver)  
Vancouver School Board

### Other institutions

Courses in Acem Meditation are also held in collaboration with other institutions, including companies that want to provide their employees with opportunities for relaxation and stress management.

- **Norway**
  - Hjelp 24 (human resources consultancy)
  - Telenor (Norway's largest telecom company)
- **Taiwan**
  - Chunghwa Telecom (Taiwan's largest telecom company; in Taipei, Taichung and Kaohsiung)
  - Taipei Teachers In-Service Education Center

### Courses at Acem International Retreat Centre Halvorsbøle

Acem has also developed courses with special programmes to meet the needs of specific groups. These are typically held at Acem's retreat centre outside Oslo, Norway.

A stress management course combining Acem Meditation, Acem Yoga and stress management strategies is arranged in collaboration with:

**Kommunal Kompetanse** (Norway's largest provider of course and conference services for the public sector)

**Hjelp 24** (human resources consultancy)

This course is also attended by participants from the following professional associations:

**Den norske legeforening** (Norwegian Medical Association), **Norsk fysioterapeutforbund** (Norwegian Physiotherapists' Association), **Norsk sykepleierforbund** (Norwegian Nurses' Association).

The course is accredited as part of the specialist training and continuing education requirements of these three professional associations.

Basic stress management courses combining body meditation, Acem Yoga and stress management strategies are arranged for a variety of companies, including regular collaboration with:

**Foreningen for Brystkreftopererte** (Norwegian Breast Cancer Association)

**Norwegian University of Science and Technology**

## Tibet tour 2009 cancelled

*Oslo, 31 October, 2008.*

Dear Acem traveller,

It has been very encouraging to notice the great interest surrounding the Acem Travels tour of Tibet. Unfortunately, we regret to inform you that we will be unable to arrange the tour in the way originally planned.

We have long known that we were running a risk by choosing to travel to a politically sensitive area, and while this risk has not increased, it is still present. In addition, the economic basis for the tour has worsened dramatically during the past few weeks.

Not only are we in the midst of a deep and world-wide financial crisis; we are also in the unfortunate situation that most of the expenses relating to the tour are payable in currencies that have increased in value (US dollars, Chinese yuan, Taiwan dollars), while most of the income is in a currency whose value has decreased considerably (Norwegian kroner).

Because of the complexity of the tour, the price has been higher than we would have liked to, and the margins were small even before the economic turbulence. Given the recent changes, the price would have had to increase even further. In the present economic situation, it would be difficult both for individual travellers and for Acem as a voluntary organisation to set aside the amounts needed to cover the costs, especially since there is always a risk of further economic or political changes.

This is, of course, a great disappointment both for travellers who were looking forward to an exciting adventure and for those of us who have spent several months planning the tour. Still, we hope you will understand that the current situation does not allow us to arrange the tour according to our original intentions.

The retreat in Taiwan will be arranged as planned and will certainly be a great experience in itself. The location is fantastic, and the opportunity to mingle with meditators from another culture in their own environment is exciting. Taiwan is a wonderful and exotic place to travel, and in the near future,

you will receive information about possible travel arrangements there. While we realise that this will hardly make up for the loss of an opportunity to travel to Tibet, it will at least provide a highly interesting and more affordable alternative.

On behalf of Acem Travels,

*Halvor Eifring, tour leader*

*Karen Breen, administrative leader*