

Relational Sitting - Practice

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(Revised: 21. April 2015 by Nicola Neumann-Mangoldt)

FORMAT:

Dyad process.

Duration: 40 to 50 minutes

PURPOSE:

One of the purposes of Silent Sitting is self-observation and self-knowledge. What we observe and what we get to know about when we look to observe the “self” is our Box. So sitting is a method for studying Box Mechanics.

SETUP:

The two persons who will be practicing together should sit facing each other as closely as possible without actually touching.

INTRO / BACKGROUND:

There is a special form of Sitting called Relational Sitting. In Relational Sitting, two people sit together in contact with each other. This way we enlist the help of another in our quest for reliable self-knowledge. We learn how to use another person as a mirror in which we can see things about ourselves that might otherwise be difficult or impossible to observe. Just as we cannot observe our own back without help, many of our most important inner qualities are only revealed in contact with others. By observing the effect that contact has on a variety of other people, we can exercise our attention muscles, we can discover much about our Box, and we can explore what else we are besides a Box.

Sitting is a widely used practice in many traditions that explore the nature of reality and that intend to equip their practitioners with the knowledge and skills for reinventing reality. It is interesting to consider the history and the purposes of their practices.

The forms of sitting that focus the attention inwards were developed to aid those growing up in Eastern cultures. In these cultures, the primary social emphasis for centuries has been humility and cooperation. Sitting was designed to balance the development of Eastern people by strengthening their personal identities.

Relational Sitting was developed particularly for those who have grown up in Western culture. In Western culture the primary social emphasis has been personal identity and achievement. We are taught from childhood to be independent, to compete for our place in life, to be self-reliant, and so on. Relational Sitting can teach us how to

bridge the gulf between ourselves and others, and to overcome the fear of openness and relationship that can result from our upbringing in Western society.

INSTRUCTIONS / PROCEDURE:

The practice of Relational Sitting involves learning how to establish and maintain contact with another being. The two persons who will be practicing together should sit facing each other as closely as possible without actually touching. The spine should be kept erect.

When both partners are ready, you should establish and maintain eye contact. The aim is to gently focus your full awareness on your partner. This does not mean a fixed stare, but an uninterrupted, relaxed observation. You should put the kind of attention on your partner that you might normally reserve for looking at yourself in the mirror. If you find yourself becoming absorbed in thinking, mental chatter or internal dialogue, do not scold yourself. Just gently redirect your attention back to your partner's eyes. Your face should be relaxed with a neutral expression. No talking.

This is not a staring contest. It is not any kind of contest. We are not trying to "beam cosmic love" or read minds or achieve anything fantastic. It is about having your attention placed on the other person. If you need to blink or cough or scratch or wiggle, that is fine. This should feel pleasant and relaxed, but focused. The practice of Relational Sitting requires effort, but not struggle.

Relational Sitting is normally done for twenty minutes at a time. You should engage in Relational Sitting with as wide a variety of persons as possible, because each person that you meet can teach you something about yourself. In your self-observation practice, you should particularly note whom you have been willing to establish eye contact with, and whom you have avoided.

The eyes have been called the "windows of the soul". This is why there have been so many cultural and even legal constraints upon establishing eye contact with another person. For example, a slave or peasant was normally not allowed to gaze directly at an aristocrat or nobleman. Such an offense was punishable by a beating, or even, as in feudal Japan, with instant beheading. Similarly, women in some cultures have been prevented from establishing eye contact with men, lest they be considered sexually overt. Such controls over eye contact have had the full force of both civil and religious law. It is clear that this form of contact is potentially very powerful. It is difficult to hide one's basic humanity, and to pretend to be superior or even divine, if others can freely get a clear look at you.

Throughout the ages, saints and sages have been considered either brave or foolhardy, because they were willing to look even kings in the eye, and speak the truth they saw thereby.

(15 minutes, then probably change partners and pick a more dangerous partner)

DEBRIEF:

Sharing of experiences.