

For me there is a significant coincidence in the timing of this assignment. I have done an hour of meditation and tai chi practice each day for more than 35 years. In the second year I did my first four hour practice, and it was an epiphany of insight into emptiness. Toward the end of each subsequent year, I've refreshed that epiphany with another four hour practice. While I was heading toward this year's extended practice session, Stim gave this homework assignment. I found a significant coincidence in the timing there.

Before sitting down to meditate I took stock of my life, giving due notice to some prominent features. The idea I reflect upon now arose during the meditation (usually such a session is good for at least one helpful insight:) and it is this: the initially noticeable features were part of a gloss that commonly veils a deeper perception of life. One helpful part of doing this type of practice is that it dissolves some of the gloss and allows a more accurate perception of things. Taking away the gloss left the previously noted features in place, but it helped show the prominences as interrelated, as less separate.

For me, the essential elements of formal meditation are (1) breathing, (2) posture and (3) contemplation. Breathing is the most essential, posture is what you do with your body and contemplation is what you do with your mind. They work together (sometimes smoothly and sometimes with difficulty) to bring about better perception, in this case leading beyond a gloss of separateness. There is some difficulty in the mix, it takes effort, like any exercise. However, like any exercise, it allows you to get in shape, so to speak, and to appreciate the value of being there. Perhaps this contradicts some things you may hear about improving your perceptions effortlessly, without formal practice. I'm not saying formal practice is the only path to improved perception, but I am saying that any such path will involve some occasional difficulty.