Do You Want to Meditate?

There are lots of ways to pray. There are lots of ways to relax. There are lots of ways to focus, or think about the meaning in your life, or seek peace, or open your heart. I don’t see why you should meditate unless you want to or feel called to it. We all have plenty of important things to put on our should-lists: kindness, justice, mercy, eat broccoli, clean the bathroom, et cetera.

If you’re curious about meditation or you’re interested in trying it, don’t worry about whether you should or shouldn’t do it. Sure, there are lots of good reasons to meditate. But turn that part of your brain off for now. At least for me, the “should” method isn’t a helpful way to start on this particular subject. Sometimes an over-eager super-ego can get in the way.

If you enjoy walking quietly through the woods for months at a time (apparently you do!), then you will probably like meditation. You’re probably already doing a lot of it. Meditation is often just the intentional practice of ordinary activities. It can be as simple as breathing in and breathing out.

Try it:
Take a deep breath…exhale slowly…
Breathe in….exhale slowly…

There you go. You just started meditating. Do you want to do it again? If not, don’t worry about it. Thankfully we don’t have to remember to breathe! You’ve had a peaceful moment and now you can dive back into your day.

If yes, then go ahead, do it again. Don’t worry about doing it right or wrong.
Breathe in….breathe out…
Breathe in….breathe out…

That’s all you need to meditate. Breathing. Breathe in, breathe out. Your breath is your friend! Thich Nhat Hanh reminds us often, “enjoy your breathing,” Enjoy it. “It is very pleasant,” he says in the most pleasant way, like he’s swinging on Grandmother’s front porch (I enjoy listening to him on youtube). In The Miracle of Mindfulness, he speaks of the breath as a “vehicle,” a “tool,” a “wondrous method,” and a “bridge.” It almost sounds like a super-power, how he writes about it: the breath “reconciles body and mind,” helps you “take hold of your consciousness,” stops “mental dispersion” and builds “concentration power,” brings “peace and calm,” and opens “the gates of wisdom.”

Biblically, your breath is your life force, if I understand it correctly. In Genesis 2:7, God breathes into Adam’s nostrils the breath of life so that Adam becomes a living nefesh (soul, being, life breath). The nefesh is something everyone has or is; even animals get one. God’s giving it out like Oprah’s giving out cars. “You get a nefesh! You get a nefesh! You get a nefesh!” Somehow, I think, Charlie Parker ended up with a little extra nefesh.

Robert Alter, Hebrew scholar and literary critic, in his commentary on the Psalms explains that “The Hebrew nefesh means ‘life breath,’ and by extension, ‘life.’ And he continues, “Because it is the very breath that quickens a person with life, it sometimes carries the sense of ‘essential being,’” which he concedes is “more awkward” than translating nefesh as ‘soul’...”but ‘soul’ strongly suggests a body-soul split -- with implications of an afterlife -- that is alien to the Hebrew Bible and to Psalms in particular.”

Think of the traditional translation of the 23rd Psalm, “He restores my soul.” That’s nefesh. Or Psalm 103, “Bless the Lord, oh my soul.” More nefesh. Psalm 42 might be the most nefesh-full psalm: “As the deer longs for the flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, oh God;” “My soul thirsts for God;” “I pour out my soul.” Nefesh can also mean “throat” or “neck” by association (a.k.a. metonymy), so “thirsts” really stress the embodiment of nefesh. The most common biblical word for “spirit,” ruah, also carries the very physical meanings of “wind” or “breath.” In Psalm 135, the author describes human-made idols as having no ruah in their mouths.

You get my drift, don’t you? Breathing is not just a process supporting life, like eating and sleeping, it is essential to life. It is the basic experience of being alive! Return to your breath! This stuff gets me pumped up!

I’m getting carried away. I don’t want to mislead you by quoting Thich Nhat Hanh and the Psalms in the same breath. There are no breathing exercises in the Bible, at least nothing resembling the “mindfulness of breathing” instructions found in Buddhist scriptures. There may be some correlation between “meditation” in the Abrahamic scriptures and some of the “dhyana” (meditation, absorption) practices described in the Upanishads (this is me looking up “dhyana” in the Oxford...
Dictionary of World Religions). As far as I know “meditation” in the Bible means quietly reciting or reflecting on scripture and/or remembering God’s creative or saving acts. “Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all day long” (Psalm 119:97). “I will meditate on all your works, and muse on your mighty deeds” (Psalm 77:12). “But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:19). The Qur’an has some similar verses: “Oh ye who believe! Remember Allah with much remembrance; And glorify Him morning and evening” (Sura 33:41-42). “O thou folded in garments! recite the Qur’an in slow, measured rhythm” keep in remembrance the name of the Lord” (73:1-8).

Over the years, Jews, Christians, and Muslims have developed recitation and remembrance meditations in ways that naturally combine with the breathing rhythm. “Dhikr” (remembrance) is a basic Sufi practice of repeating certain verses from the Qur’an, aloud or silently. The “Jesus prayer” is praying a short prayer to Jesus or simply saying the name “Jesus” in conjunction with your breath.

I’m not trying to say that all religions practice meditation in the same way. And I’m not trying to talk you into one of these religious traditions (okay, maybe I am, a little bit). I’m just saying that 1) breathing is an awesome experience that all humans have all the time; 2) we can be aware of our breath and thereby our life in a meaningful, though not necessarily religious, way; and 3) breathing meditation fits pretty well into many different religious and humanistic traditions.

David Vinson, Hospitality Coordinator and Community Moderator

Note: This article is taken from the second chapter Meditating on the Trail — a book David wrote for his brother John Vinson to accompany him while he hikes the Pacific Coast Trail. If you’d like to read more or maybe get your own copy, connect with David — he’s happy to share. Catch him in the kitchen or email him: hospitality@richmondhillva.org

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Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.” (Matthew 11:4-5)

March 4, 2018. We pray for health care in Metropolitan Richmond: For persons living with terminal illnesses and for their families, friends, and communities; for persons working to find cures for diseases.

March 11, 2018. We pray for health care in Metropolitan Richmond: For all the sick and their caregivers, doctors, nurses, hospice workers, home healthcare workers, and all who minister to the health of others. For clinics, medical personnel, and all institutions that serve persons who are uninsured or underinsured.

March 18, 2018. We pray for health care in Metropolitan Richmond: For emergency response personnel and all emergency room staff. For hospitals, nursing homes, and hospice programs; and for persons diagnosed with terminal illness.

March 25, 2018. We pray for health care in Metropolitan Richmond: For a national health care system which promotes and encourages health, wellness, and well being for all people.

The ISAIAH PROJECT is a prayerful partnership of people in faith communities across metro Richmond who are steadfastly calling for the mutual prosperity, constructive relationships, educated diversity, justice, and hope for the future that regional transit would afford.

Faith communities are often acutely aware of the need and the benefits of regional public transportation. The work coordinating this broad base of awareness and support for the critical connections public transportation provides began at Richmond Hill in 2013 — these were also the first seeds of RVA Rapid Transit as a grassroots organization.

The ISAIAH PROJECT’s God-given strength lies in having an informed, diverse, and expansive array of voices calling tirelessly for regional transit. We pray and work for the day when, in both symbolic and palpable ways, our counties and city will be reconciled and connected via rapid transit for the collaborative and mutual prosperity of all.

New volunteers and partners are always welcome to join in this movement of faith communities to lead the way forward for our region.

Please contact Rev. Nelson Reveley (reveley@grace-covenant.org) to join in or learn more.

AVAILABLE NOW from the RICHMOND HILL BOOKSTORE

Richmond’s Unhealed History

by Benjamin Campbell

Ben’s book is available in a Kindle version for $5.99 at Amazon.com

$15.95 plus tax at Richmond Hill

or

$18.50 postpaid, tax included, by mail from Richmond Hill.

Your order from the Richmond Hill Bookstore supports Richmond Hill.

Prayer Books, Beads, and Blessing Bands make thoughtful, wonderful gifts…

Now on sale in the Richmond Hill Bookstore

March 2018
Individual Retreats

Richmond Hill offers individual retreats for persons who desire rest and time to seek God. Retreats may be taken in 24-hr increments between Mon. 4 p.m.– Sat. 4 p.m. In addition, more formal contemplative retreats are offered periodically on weekends for individuals who wish to be a part of a facilitated retreat rhythm. Spiritual guidance is available for any individual retreat.

Recommended donations: Basic $80 per 24 hrs. / Guided $100 per 24 hrs.
Contact Mary Lewis, 804-783-7903 or retreats@richmondhillva.org

First Friday Retreats

First Friday of Each Month | 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.
A day for quiet reflection and spiritual renewal. Structure and guidance will be provided for those who want it as well as the option for one-on-one spiritual direction, or you can simply spend the day in silence—your choice.
Suggested Donation: $20 (includes Lunch) Facilitator: Mimi Weaver, spiritual director and life coach. She can be reached at www.GraceMoves.com
Contact DeBorah Cannady at Richmond Hill to register 804-783-7903 or retreats@richmondhillva.org
Please register in advance. Space is limited.

Listening for the Silence

Second Tuesday of Each Month | 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Arrive at Richmond Hill at 8:45 to begin this spiritual experience. Lunch and chapel are included. Bring your Bible and your journal but leave the cell phone in the car.
Suggested Donation: $20 (includes Lunch) Facilitator: Rita Ricks, spiritual director
Contact DeBorah Cannady at Richmond Hill to register 804-783-7903 or retreats@richmondhillva.org
Please register in advance. Space is limited.

A contemplative path through Lent

Each Wednesday during Lent, we will explore our Lenten journey through the lens of Barbara Brown Taylor’s book, An Altar in The World. Contemplating what it means to be “Waking Up to God,” the day will begin at 9 a.m. with a devotional reflection and a discussion from selected chapters of the book. We will then move into silent individual reflection. The day will end with a re-gathering at 3 p.m. to share reflections, inspirations and take-aways.
Richmond Hill will begin a new weekday session of the RUAH School of Spiritual Guidance in September, 2018.

This weekday design is particularly intended to make the program available to clergy and other church professionals for whom Sunday classes are impossible.

The two-year program is composed of two 48-hour retreats and eight 24-hour retreats for each of two years. The 24-hour retreats are held on the third Thursday evening and Friday each month; the 48-hour retreats extend from Wednesday supper through Friday.

The program consists of monthly retreats in the context of the rhythm of life of the Richmond Hill Community. Prayer and faith sharing are a part of the discipline of all participants. One book is assigned each month on the upcoming topic.

Acceptance in RUAH XVII is primarily limited to clergy and church professionals. If you are interested in this program, please inquire immediately to the Rev. Janie Walker, Co-Pastoral Director of Richmond Hill.

The deadline for application is May 1st.

Some scholarship assistance is available. For more information or to apply, please contact Rev. Janie Walker, Co-Pastoral Director or DeBorah Cannady, Registrar of the RUAH School of Spiritual Guidance at Richmond Hill (804) 783-7903 or email: jwalker@richmondhillva.org or dcannady@richmondhillva.org

Where is God leading you next?

Are you called to serve in the City?

Pray, serve, discern, and live intentionally in the heart of the city.

The Richmond Hill Urban Service Corps is a one-to-two year commitment to live and serve with an intentional Christian community dedicated to the healing of metropolitan Richmond.

Beginning in August, four servant-leaders can join in this mission.

Applications are due to Richmond Hill by June 1.

To inquire or apply, please contact Rev. Joel Blunk at (804) 783-7903 or jblunk@richmondhillva.org

Opportunities to Serve:
- Community organizing
- Social media outreach
- Church mobilization
- Richmond Public Schools

Holy Week

Tuesday, March 27 through Thursday, March 29
Join us for silent retreat from 7 a.m. Morning Prayer through 6 p.m. Evening Prayer, for prayer, study, and meditation. Come for any or all of the time. A simple lunch will be served each day following mid-day prayer.

Good Friday, March 30 — Stations of the Cross
Meet at 12 noon at Patrick Henry Park, 2400 E. Broad Street for an ecumenical prayer walk throughout Church Hill and the East End.
**Worship Services**

**DAILY PRAYERS**
Morning 7:00 - 7:30 a.m.
Noon 12:00 - 12:15 p.m.
Evening 6:00 - 6:15 p.m.

**COMMUNITY WORSHIP**
5:30 p.m. - 6:30 p.m.
Every Tuesday
The community celebrates Holy Communion. Services are led by ministers of various denominations according to their traditions. We invite you to join us afterwards for dinner in the refectory.

**PRAYING WITH THE SONGS OF TAIZÉ**
Jim Bennett, Leader
7:30 p.m. first Tuesday
Taizé worship is contemplative and meditative in character, using short songs, repeated again and again in a candlelit chapel. The songs express a basic reality of faith, quickly grasped by the mind. The hope is this reality will gradually penetrate one’s whole being; thus the meditative singing becomes a way of listening to God. Our practice of Taizé includes singing, prayer for Metropolitan Richmond, and a period of silence. Jim Bennett, a skilled musician, leads this time of worship with a variety of instruments.

**SOAKING PRAYER SERVICE**
DeBorah Cannady, Leader
1st Thursdays at 10:00 a.m. and 3rd Thursdays at 7:30 p.m.
Those struggling with illness have benefitted from being “soaked in prayer” over periods of time. Prayer ministers are available to pray with those desiring emotional, spiritual, or physical healing. Participants are invited to find a comfortable place, sit, relax, and receive prayer. Participants may also come and go during the service.

**GENERATIONAL HEALING SERVICE**
5th Tuesdays at 7:30 p.m.
Rev. Dr. Paula O. Parker, Leader
Once a quarter, Richmond Hill offers a service for Generational Healing. This is an opportunity to invite God’s healing into your family, including generations that have gone before, as well as generations that will come after you. Participants are encouraged to bring the blessings as well as the pains and traumas of their ancestry written on a piece of paper (not to be shared). However, careful preparation of your personal genogram will help you pray more specifically for your family members.

For those who might find it helpful, 2-hour preparation sessions will be facilitated by Rev. Parker. For more information, call DeBorah Cannady at 783-7903.

**Community News**

**ALP spends Mindfulness Retreat at Seven Oaks Retreat Center**

It was truly a blessing to take a few of our students to the Mindfulness Retreat for Families and Caregivers at Seven Oaks Retreat Center in Madison, Virginia in late January 2018. The essence of the retreat was exploring the chapters of the book *The Toolbox is YOU* written by Maria Kluge. It allowed us to explore the importance of breath, open thinking, calm and cool-headedness, mindful movement and mindful language. Each morning began with yoga and stretching, while meals gave us a chance to practice mindful eating with the first fifteen minutes in silence. Each meal was prepared with locally grown ingredients that gave us the necessary energy to fully enjoy the powerful workshops. Awareness activities included group processing circles, gratitude practice, bonfire, labyrinth and river walk, drum circle, meditation and a talent show. The activities were creative and fun! Students were given space to share their views and perspectives without pressure or judgment.

Also, it was a delight to see Mr. John Lewis (former teacher at Armstrong) with his family at the retreat. He is now the owner and director of Apple Ridge Farms, whose mission is to transform the lives of underserved children and families. He has invited ALP to visit his farm in Roanoke, Virginia.

We would like to thank the humble and gracious organizers of the retreat (Dr. Susan Bodnar Deren, Dingani Mthethwa, Jeffrey and Ellen) and give special appreciation to Maria Kluge for sponsoring and facilitating the weekend. We look forward to future collaborations to practice mindfulness and implement strategies from her book.

Thank you for your continued support of the Armstrong Leadership Program and facilitating us with the means to provide our students with the opportunities they deserve. Learn more about Armstrong Leadership Program through Yvette Rajput at 804-783-7903, ext. 13, or, alp@richmondhillva.org

Like Us on Facebook @ ArmstrongLeadership
“Don’t Die…”

“As a kid, I was very active — going to dozens and dozens of leadership workshops and things that claimed to give you what it takes to be a leader. Armstrong Leadership has taken all of those workshops, embodied them in the spirit and the voice of Richmond Hill and turned them into one of the greatest experiences I’ve ever had in my entire life. And throughout that we have been on multiple retreats where we learned to work as, not only as a family within that program, but as a community, from taking what we learned on those retreats things back to our schools and homes and bettering everything from our selves to our surroundings. And within that program I learned one important thing. I want you to take these two words very seriously: Don’t die. It’s the same thing I told my fellow classmates. What I mean by that is; you can be killed more than physically. You can die emotionally, spiritually, and mentally. There are multiple ways for you to die as a person. And Leadership has shown me that, through strength, faith, humanity, and humility...that you can build yourself up to a point where you can no longer be killed. As it’s been said, ‘No weapon formed against you shall prosper.’ And that is the truth, and that is a standing thing at Armstrong Leadership. So please, for me, for yourself, and for everyone around you... don’t die.”

Remarks made at the 30th Celebration by Michael Allen, a 2017 graduate of Armstrong High School

Enjoy your day in the studio...

Facilitator: Brenda Giannini opens us to the sacred dimensions of our lives through the gifts of the visual arts.
Suggested donation: $30.00 (includes lunch) To register, please contact Mary Lewis, at (804) 783-7903 or by email: retreats@richmondhillva.org

Take a break from the rush and hurry of your busy day and join us in a creative retreat in the inspiring, prayer-soaked walls of Richmond Hill. Slip into the spiritual rhythm of prayer and quiet here. Enjoy personal time with your creative self. Our art space provides a perfect place for you to connect with your inner spirit while using your creativity. We look forward to having you with us!
March 2018

Metro Richmond at Prayer

In March:

Pray for Health Care
in Metropolitan Richmond.

Richmond Hill Mission Statement

Richmond Hill is an ecumenical Christian fellowship and intentional residential community who serve as stewards of an urban retreat center within the setting of a historic monastery. Our Mission is to seek God’s healing of Metropolitan Richmond through prayer, hospitality, racial reconciliation and spiritual development.

RICHMOND HILL’S DAILY CYCLE OF PRAYER

Pray for Metropolitan Richmond Every Day: For the healing of metropolitan Richmond; for the sick and those in our hearts; for the welfare of all our citizens; for the establishment of God’s order in our community.

MONDAYS: Our citizens who live in the City of Richmond, the Mayor, Manager, City Council, and School Board. Non-profit organizations and their ministries. All schools: students, teachers, and staff. Day care centers. All who suffer from addiction, dependency, and co-dependency. The Council, residents, and staff of Richmond Hill.

TUESDAYS: Our citizens who live in Hanover County, the Board of Supervisors, School Board, and Manager. The print and broadcast media. The churches of metropolitan Richmond: members and clergy. All who live in poverty. All who suffer from mental illness.

WEDNESDAYS: The Governor of Virginia, the General Assembly, and all who work in State Government. All who work in businesses which provide services to others. All who work in construction. Hospitals and nursing homes: patients, residents, and staff; all who provide health care. Victims of violent crime; all who commit violent crime. All senior citizens.

THURSDAYS: Our citizens who live in Ashland, Hopewell, Colonial Heights, and Petersburg, the town and city Councils and Managers. All who work in banks and finance; all making financial decisions for greater Richmond. Prisons and jails of metropolitan Richmond: prisoners and staff. All who are unemployed or underemployed. All public servants.

FRIDAYS: Our citizens who live in Henrico County, the Supervisors, School Board, and County Manager. All who work in the manufacturing industry in metropolitan Richmond. The police, fire, and rescue workers. The courts. All young people. All who hurt, need inner healing, or are unable to love.

SATURDAYS: Our citizens who live in Chesterfield County, the Supervisors, School Board, and County Manager. All who work in retail trade in metropolitan Richmond, and those who own our businesses. Counselors and spiritual directors. The Sisters of the Visitation of Monte Maria. All victims of abuse; all perpetrators of abuse.

SUNDAYS: Our citizens who live in the Counties of Charles City, Goochland, Powhatan, and New Kent, the Supervisors, School Boards, and Managers. An end to racism and racial prejudice. All places of prayer or worship: churches, mosques, and synagogues. Universities, colleges, and technical schools. All who seek God.

We pray daily at Richmond Hill for persons or situations for which our prayers are requested. Call us at 804-783-7903.