

EXECUTIVE TIME OUT

Esalen: Slow Down and Increase Productivity

By Christine Rolfe

I am working on an assignment and my phone rings. I answer it, of course. During the conversation, I reply to a few emails. I pause only to take a few bites of my lunch, taking care not to chew noisily into the phone receiver. Sound like a typical day at the office? Well, turn the phone on mute, push your key pad away and continue to read. Meditation and the practice of mindfulness are good for business. Just ask Apple, Google, Nike, Procter & Gamble, Deutsche Bank and Yahoo. These are just a few of the companies that encourage their employees to incorporate meditation practice into their day, offering meditation space and classes in the workplace. To increase concentration and focus, practice mindfulness or meditation. You will be more efficient and a little happier too. This is the reason I chose to visit Esalen – to slow down, still the mind and gain a little happiness.

Pulling into Esalen Institute in my husband's Hummer, I am immediately self aware. The parking lot is full of hybrids. Esalen is the land of Prius owners, and here we are barreling in with the Hummer. Will I fit in? But wait...now I am making assumptions and judgments and...sigh. I resolve to be open minded. I resolve to learn. I resolve to explore what Aldous Huxley calls my "human potential." I resolve to slow down, still the mind and gain a little happiness. I get out of the car and hear chimes. They sound like church bells and I immediately relax.

Esalen Institute was established in 1962 by Michael Murphy and Dick Price. Historical mind masters such as Abraham Maslow, Joseph Campbell and Allan Watts have gathered here, developing ideas that transformed and challenged the way of traditional Western thinking. Esalen continues to weave East/West philosophies and open minds to new ideas and discoveries. Esalen offers over 500 workshops a year, teaching an incredibly wide range of subjects from massage, writing, meditation, yoga – even improv classes! Esalen also offers month-long work study courses for those who want full immersion (and have the extra time). The work study programs offer courses on subjects such as leadership, self-discovery, theater and compassionate communication. Many colleges recognize Esalen programs for continuing education (CE) credit for psychologists, nurses, bodyworkers, acupuncturists and more. The strong thread of



Esalen's teaching is transformation. My husband and I chose to participate in Esalen's Personal Retreat. The Personal Retreat offered us the opportunity to participate in the yoga and movement classes, join the guided meditations, enjoy the hot springs, get a massage and explore the grounds on our own time. We only had a weekend to transform, but Esalen is powerful. I knew it would deliver.

Once we checked in, we followed the chimes out to the front lawn. Under the shade of a large pine tree overlooking the cliffs of Big Sur sat Maxwell. Maxwell worked at Esalen 12 years ago and was currently back to visit. He had about 30 singing bowls set up on a blanket and offered to play for guests. There was no charge, no request for donation. It was Maxwell's gift back to community. Esalen has a way of attracting the Maxwell's of the world. The sound

and vibrations generated from the bowls are believed to promote healing by entraining our brainwaves to synchronize with the resonance of the bowls. We not only hear the sound with our ears but we feel the vibration of the sound through our entire body. I was drawn to the sound and vibrations of the bowls. Listening to Maxwell play bathed my body in sound and it felt soothed...like a good massage. Amazing.

Next we headed to the hot springs. The roots of Esalen are grounded in the healing properties of these hot springs. These same healing waters have been flowing for centuries providing respite for Esselen Indians. In the early 1880s, Thomas Slate homesteaded the property and opened the springs as the first tourist business in Big Sur. Later in 1910, the land was purchased by Henry Murphy who intended to open a European-style spa once Highway 1 was completed. Construction of the road took 18 years to complete and then closed with World War II. After the war ended and the highway

reopened, the hot spring baths were finally opened. Today people travel from all over just to enjoy the hot springs, bathing suit or not. Perched on a rocky ledge just 50 feet above the ocean, the majestic views and calming sound of the sea explain the allure. Along with several large hot tubs there are private, white claw foot tubs – the original tubs from the 1880s. I poured some of the eco-friendly soup into the hot spring water and created my own

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•You may want to file an identity theft report at your local police department.

www.spamlaws.com/police-report-identity-theft.html

- Close any credit/debit cards currently open.
- Cancel all check books issued.
- Contact your local Social Security Administration Office.

www.ssa.gov

• Report the fraudulent activity to the Federal Trade Commission

www.consumer.ftc.gov/features/feature-0014-identity-theft

- Contact the three nationwide credit bureaus.

www.experian.com/

www.equifax.com/home/en_us

www.transunion.com/

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Jack Katzanek...

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“I’ve called the Inland Empire my home for 16 years and I am thrilled to have a chance to make it

a better place by working for the IIEP,” Katzanek said. “I’ve gotten to know probably thousands of business people, at small firms as well as large ones, and am looking forward to working with them to help the region move forward.”

Inter Valley...

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tive officer, Inter Valley Health Plan. “Peters’ experience and background will help Inter Valley continue

its mission of delivering highly personalized service to Medicare-eligible individuals in the Southern California community.”

Peters graduated with honors from California State University, Chico, Calif. where he received his bachelor of science degree in business administration and accounting. Peters is a member of several professional associations including the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants; California Society of Certified Public Accountants and Financial Executives International.

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bubble bath. It is no wonder why people travel from afar to partake - the baths are open 24/7 and open to

the public from 1:00-3:00 a.m. with reservations.

After soaking for a bit, I was called for my massage. The massage was in a private room just next to the hot springs. The touch was light and I was able to relax even more. Singing bowls. A hot soak. And now a coconut oil massage. I was asleep before it was over. Good night.

The next day I woke up completely relaxed yet alive for more Esalen adventures. My husband and I walked the grounds, exploring the wondrous gardens and farm. Both the flowers and vegetables seemed to be out of Alice and Wonderland. The sunflowers were giant, the lettuce was enormous, the kale was gargantuan... nothing could stop the growth and abundance of the gardens. We both were so inspired that we even discussed growing our own garden at home. The idea of eating a home-grown meal was gaining momentum. I was told that the lettuce from the garden was picked that day for the dinner salad. Farm to table in pure form.

We also visited the Art Barn, an art studio where people are welcome to paint, draw or craft. Supplies are provided and creativity welcomed. Esalen is about expression and discovering ourselves. Art is the perfect outlet. We watched as guests created their projects, absorbed in their work.

Next we explored the wilderness area for a hike. The tight dirt paths led us along the babbling creek. We climbed over fallen trees and crossed the water in our adventure-seeking ways. The area was cool and shady, perfect for our hike. We both wanted to continue and only decided to turn back due to the overgrowth of poison oak. With my husband in shorts, it was just too risky to continue. Long pants are mandatory.

To continue the quest for stillness, I joined a Loving and Kindness meditation. The teacher guided us through the practice and I left feeling calm and yes, maybe a little kinder. Definitely happier. A consistent meditation practice reduces anxiety, generates self-awareness and more well-being. In fact, the reasons for meditation seem to be countless. Some of the proven physical effects include lowered blood pressure, reduced insomnia, lowered buildup of plaque in coronary arteries and decreased headaches. Proven psychological effects with a regular practice include a greater sense of calmness, improved decision-making skills, increased mental clarity, memory, creativity and concentration. Indeed meditation is good for the self and good for business.

Right here, right now. When visiting Esalen, you will want to practice mindfulness or present moment awareness. Mindfulness is being engaged in and fully attentive to everything you are doing and experiencing, using all your senses. When you visit Esalen, you will want to pay attention to what you see, smell, taste and hear. You will want to pay attention to how you feel. Paying attention is important because when you visit Esalen you don’t want to miss a thing. It had been less than 48 hours and I was feeling restored. I was able to quiet my mind just a bit with hopes of bringing the stillness back into the chaotic working world. I felt focused, less distracted. As correspondent Dan Harris would agree, I felt 10% happier. And that’s a good return on investment. A very good return indeed.

Esalen Institute

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For additional questions on meditation and guided classes, email me at: ShineBrightAndBeHappy@gmail.com