
CHAPTER NINE

HOLDING MEDITATIONS

When I was contemplating what I wanted to convey on the subject of holding meetings, I realized that a lot of the savvy that goes into being a good group leader cannot be fully covered in any informational book, no matter how detailed, because people are infinitely various and each person will present unique and sometimes novel problems and challenges. The suggestions that follow are an attempt to regularize some of the more common challenges and come up with pointers that more than one or two of you may find useful.

People are creatures of habit and it will take them a while to get used to setting aside the time for your meetings so that they will be free to attend. For the first month, expect people to find it a little difficult to remember just when you do meet. Consequently, if you are only willing to hold a month or six weeks of meetings you will probably not build up a group of people that is committed to meeting and working together on spiritual questions, unless the group has a strong affinity, as sometimes does happen quite rapidly.

Once you have made the commitment to have a group and have decided on the day and time, whether it is weekly, monthly or fortnightly, pay close attention to your stability. If you see something coming up in the future that you absolutely cannot avoid, get a substitute to hold the meeting for you if at all possible. Just one week of being without a meeting can throw people off. They stop coming and perhaps never get the habit again once you are back. Remember that they are not in the business of serving you by accommodating unusual schedules that you might find convenient. You are offering a service to others and hopefully you will want to do so at others' convenience. This is not to say that you must hold meetings on a Saturday night because a member asks you to do so. If that is your night to spend personal time alone or to celebrate or coze with friends or family, honor yourself enough to keep private time private. But, once having chosen the time convenient to you, make it as convenient as possible to everyone by being there dependably at every meeting. You will note that I have little advice about the frequency with which you wish to hold your group meetings. I have never found any virtue in a particular periodicity. Weekly meetings are probably more grateful to those who come chiefly for inspiration and meditation. A longer time apart means more time to prepare programs and less time to develop a feeling of community, so channeling

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groups that are placing an emphasis on study can meet with any periodicity with good results. The first person to consult is, of course, yourself. You're helping far more if you offer fortnightly meetings for years than if you choose a rigorous schedule in a burst of energy, then burn out.

Your program format is entirely up to you. I would suggest that you carefully consider the benefits of evening meetings since more people can come then than at any other time. You would be frustrated if you attempted to keep the social processes out of your group. Expect social time before and after each meeting. Do not frustrate yourself by hoping that people will come on time, start on time or leave as soon as the study or meditation is at an end. Part of the process of seeking the Creator is talking with other people who are doing the same thing. Your best bet is to listen carefully during social times for opportunities to use the time for study. With a little direction a maundering conversation can be turned into a lively discussion. Sharpen your ears and your vocabulary and cultivate the flexibility that it takes to use interesting concepts within an aimless conversation as the starting point for a far more intentionally vectored discussion.

Don't expect people, by and large, to be able to sit longer than ninety minutes. Most people need to stretch after about 45 minutes to an hour. Sometimes this is quite impossible as one is right in the middle of meditation or a speaker's finest words at that point. However, scheduling material upon which one has to concentrate to last longer than an hour and a half at a sitting is not wise. Possible, often done, and sometimes unavoidable, but not wise. After the program's main content is done, try to build in a question-and-answer period. If your group is studying with speakers, ask the speaker to open his speech to questions and answers within the 60 to 90-minute period. If it is a meditation with channeling, encourage your contact to open the meeting to questions. The process of learning almost always involves questions and answers. Learning by rote works well if you have an audience completely under your control and are absolutely sure of what you are saying. If, instead, you feel that what you know is true for yourself but not necessarily so for others and if you wish to give others the free will to search as intensely as you have, you will encourage questions and discrimination in your students and discourage rote learning. If people do not know why they are thinking, saying or doing something it will all get mixed up anyway when the student attempts to put it to the test, so try not to be intolerant of others' confusion but, rather, support and nurture creative confusion and questioning.

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If you are having people in your home especially, but even if you are meeting in a public place, you as leader are responsible for refreshments. You may want to take up a collection in order to pay for them. Some study groups charge admission to cover the same costs. I strongly suggest that you offer only beverages before a meeting. Coffee and colas with caffeine are considered helpful for those involved in channeling sessions, since there are some indications that caffeine aids the telepathic process. Afterwards, your hospitality may be as generous as you wish. However, before a quiet, sedentary activity such as sitting in a meeting it is foolish to load people's stomachs up with food, and, heaven forbid, liquor. Both make people feel logy and drowsy, a consciousness antithetical to the questioning process.

Before you begin to have meetings, do some thinking about how you feel about hospitality. Face the responsibilities of what you will require of yourself in order not to feel guilty about offering domestic courtesy and be sure that you can satisfy yourself. I would suggest that you encourage people to help themselves even if it is your own kitchen. Put things out where people can find them fairly easily and let people serve themselves. You will be far more helpful to your students sitting and talking with them than you will be serving them drinks.

You need to be right there listening as much as possible because you are in a position to note, to some degree, the dynamics of the group. You will be hearing things that bring a group together and things that drive a group apart. If you notice that new people are feeling ignored and being left out you can make sure more than anyone else there that the person is brought into the conversation. If you hear joking and kidding you can encourage that and help the group to feel more cohesive and tied together in an enjoyable way. Take this side of being a leader quite seriously. It is most important to people who are finding your group and coming for the first time. It is the community as well as the channeling experience that people want when they come to you. It is human nature to want to belong and many people who are a wakening to what may be called a cosmic awareness feel distinctly odd. Your group is one place where an "oddball" with a questing mind and heart can come and not feel very odd, since everyone else in the group is in the same boat. Try to use your personal assets—sexuality, intelligence and personality—to make your group members feel comfortable and at home. Yes, I included sexuality: we all have it and we're all pretty aware of it. I don't mean, ladies and gentlemen, that you should flirt with others and be anything but chaste with one another as a general rule. What I mean is that you may smile warmly at someone and position yourself in a

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vulnerable and open way, perhaps moving slightly past the usual boundary of social space for a moment or so for the sake of making someone feel like a more intimate friend to you. This is a sexual tactic oftentimes. However, it can be useful to you as a leader in making people feel more comfortable. You are acting in an impersonal role as a group leader and you may look upon all of your assets as being impersonally appropriate as long as you are not charming people with mixed motives. Charm them; make them feel comfortable; but do it without attachment to any outcome, for you do not want to manipulate people. You only want to make it possible for them to feel comfortable. Almost everyone is shy in a new environment, and some people remain shy always. There will be more shy people coming to your meditation group or study group than you will meet in the general run of social intercourse since contemplative, thoughtful people are also often introverted. Expect and be ready for this challenge. If you yourself are shy, as am I, start saying to yourself, "Love the one you're with." It'll help.

If you have meditation students that are learning how to channel from you, try not to yield to the temptation to use your public meetings as teaching meetings for your students. Let the content of the meetings be devoted entirely towards contacts which are intended to inspire those who have come to hear the channeling. The teaching process is time-consuming and much too wasteful of your other students' time to be acceptable for the public meetings. It is also more difficult for new channels to exercise their instruments in front of a larger group of people than they have been used to in the intensive teaching sessions. It is better not to put a new instrument through that until the instrument says to you, "It is time for me to channel in a public meeting."

Here is a list of don'ts for you with a few comments.

Don't throw your weight around. You have developed opinions on everything that you have thought about or at least you are in the process of doing so and can talk about that. Because you are the leader of a group, your students may be hanging on your words. You may find the experience a bit heady and start offering your opinions on everything from the right recipe for Boston clam chowder to the validity of the Shroud of Turin with the same careless grace that you offer your opinion on how to aid one in deepening the meditative state.

Don't do that. The temptation is great. But that is exactly what it is: temptation. As a channel you are the ideal of yourself. You tune yourself to a state that you probably do not enjoy as a private person. When you come

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out of meditation and are not channeling you and I are as much bozos as anyone in this world. Our opinions matter no more than anyone else's, and someone else may have a better recipe for clam chowder! Don't misuse your influence.

Don't assume that people know anything. We turned the lights out at a very large public meeting years ago and settled down into the muscular silence of eighty seeking people. Into the thick velvet dark came a tentative masculine voice inquiring, "What happens when the lights go out?" We hadn't told this new student what to expect! Talk to your students before their first meeting about how your group meditates, about what channeling sounds like, what conditioning sounds like, what aids there are to meditation and so forth. Be sure that you have explored with the student the basic reasons that brought him or her to the meeting. Don't wait for confidences. Be bold and say "What brings you here tonight?" The sentence or paragraph answering that question will enable you to follow through with the information that that particular student needs for orientation to your particular meeting. No two meetings are alike. No two students are alike.

Don't take the formation of the circle lightly. Don't leave your own circle, and plainly tell anyone else who does so that it is undesirable. Circles that are restless and broken make it very difficult for good channeling to happen because the energy of the group is too unreliable. The energy can be rather low and still be excellent for channeling if it is stable throughout the meeting.

Don't lock your door during a meeting unless you want to make it impossible for late-comers to enter. Nothing is more distracting than a doorbell or knock in the middle of a profound silence or a quiet inspirational channeling. Unplug the telephone also.

Whatever you do to tune the group, don't let it be a spoken relaxation session unless you know each student well enough safely to predict that no one has the slightest probability of going into trance. I have had that happen to me on a couple of occasions. Once, spontaneously, and there is nothing that you can do about that. The other time it was my fault. I did not realize how very susceptible one of my students was to the deeper levels of concentration and effectively hypnotized him into a trance state. All I was doing was telling people to relax their heads, their necks and so forth, moving down to the toes little by little. Everyone else had a very good meditation. But for Charlie it was excruciating. This excellent channel has

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not used his gift since the time that he had so much trouble getting back into his body as a result of my relaxation suggestions.

Along the same lines it is well for you to call out the name of anyone who does not begin to move after a meditation. If anyone in the circle is sitting absolutely still, leave the lights off and be sure that the person is responding to his or her name before you illuminate the room. It is physically painful to someone in a trance and out of the body to come back into the body as quickly as one must do when the turned-on light triggers the reflex that pulls the consciousness back into the body.

Don't expect your students to attend meetings regularly in *perpetuo*. Some will stay a month, some a year; many curiosity-seekers leave after their first meeting never to return and a tiny few will eventually offer to join your work, becoming colleagues and associates. Know that a student will have an internal rhythm and needs to come and go in freedom. Avoid in every possible way making people feel guilty about missing a meeting, and don't assume students are ill because they miss a meditation. Your serene refusal to be egotically involved in who comes to meetings makes it possible for old-timers to dip back into the old group when the desire arises.

Don't get upset if a batch of new people suddenly falls in love, messily, with each other. The experience of opening the heart chakra to unconditional love is powerful, and if it happens to several people at once they may well believe that the whole world is full of wonderful, adorable people, especially the other students so similarly enthused. Counsel caution; keep and honor any confidences and trust that time will sort out the lovebirds into metaphysically and socially appropriate pairings, plus "leftovers," single people who are quite benefited from exposure to universal love, and usually more fit than before for a deep relationship.

Don't assume that you will remember anything. This last may be my private taboo, based upon my "spaciness." I make absentminded professors look smart. However, it may well be that to some degree we all have faulty memory. Get new students' addresses and phone numbers as soon as you can remember to do so. We use a Guest Book. There may be some reason that you want to call someone up on the phone. You will have a precious hard time doing so without a complete list of your members.

Try to record all of your channelings or your speaker's talks if you have any thought at all of keeping an archive of what you have done in this endeavor, or if you contemplate publishing your material. I found out years ago that no matter how obvious it may be to you that this particular session is not

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going to be worth recording, it will be *that* session that you did not record that you will wish that you had recorded.

Write down all the things that are borrowed from you, assuming that you are holding the meetings in your home and that your library is open for browsing. It is almost impossible to remember to whom you have lent books or other materials or when you lent them. If it is all written down at the time a book is taken it is much easier to retrieve the volumes that you have spent some resources to collect.

There are some do's to meetings as well, in my opinion.

Do try to keep it light. There is nothing more serious than the search for truth and yet there is a tremendous amount of humor involved in the nature and details of our quests. Much about the human condition is quite ridiculous and to put on the cloak of unflappable dignity is to leave a good deal of human nature quite uncovered. If you feel that the group is getting overly serious, or if there is some special occasion, by all means have a party in which no one has to say a single serious thing or listen to serious words. A silent meditation is almost always welcome, but in a party atmosphere it is not always necessary. In a serious-minded group it is good once in a while to get together just to laugh.

Do stay on good terms with your opposite numbers whether they be local or far-flung. Try to respect and have fellow feeling for people who run other groups. If someone is holding a meeting at a particular time, take pains yourself to choose another time, or talk to the first group about finding some way to accommodate each other so that both groups can appeal to the same people. It is a very large city indeed that has an unlimited supply of metaphysical seekers.

Do tell your story. Let people know how you got started in channeling and how you came to be offering group meetings. Nothing makes a person feel more at home than the feeling that he knows you. And nothing makes a person feel closer to you than knowing your story. In this particular application it is not egoistic to talk about yourself but a necessary part of being a good leader.

Note: anything can be overdone!

And, finally, do talk a lot about the concept of being a light group. There are a lot of people all over the world who share the concept of generating more and more light on planet Earth and who see that planetary generation of love, compassion and peace as being the most important work that we

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can do. You, as a group leader, need to make people aware that you do not function alone but that there is a large network of light groups in the community of metaphysical seekers, all of whom are dedicated to the same propagation of planetary light to offer to the Creator on behalf of Earth. When Don Elkins, my beloved companion and fellow worker, was alive, he used to “joke” a lot about saving the planet. Don always thought big, and I believe that he affected more people personally than almost anyone else I have ever met by his thoughts, his vision and his very being. It may seem like impossible, idealistic thinking to talk about generating enough light to create a different Earth. But that is the direction in which light groups tend to move. The more deeply one thinks about the reasons for banding together in groups, the more one realizes that the formation of any group that is positive in polarity is based upon the theory that we all are one and that together we are more powerful and able to aid others than we are separately. This makes other light groups most precious to us.

Above all, see yourself as ministering to people seeking truth. Your group is most likely made up of people who would go to some church, be it Christian or non-Christian, if only they could deal with the doctrines and dogmas of orthodox religion. Your group is functionally a kind of church, which is a good thing if you can respect the concept of group worship without insisting that to a general reverence be added specific detailed beliefs which your people are not able to accommodate. Respect your group as if you were a priest and they were your congregation. You are in the role of teacher to earnest pilgrims seeking the truth. You are ill-suited to lead them. Everyone is. Don't let that stop you from trying but rather keep a merry heart, a light touch and a warm smile as well. Balance every instinct towards compassion with a careful examination of the direction of conversation so that you do not offer sympathy when it would be more instructive and helpful to put things in perspective for a student. Always err on the side of compassion, but let your experience guide you and when you feel that a person is too close to his problem, do not be afraid to use your position as teacher to get the student's attention and say not “I know what is right,” but rather, “Here is something to think about.”

Good luck with your group! My prayers are with everyone who undertakes this appreciated and most needed service.