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This excerpt of the book - {Table of} *Contents* and the 4th chapter (titled: *Effortless Meditation*) (3 pages out of the 55 page book) - is being made available for the audience of Stillness Speaks in the form of a PDF.

For Peter's teachings and background, please [visit his teacher page](#) on [Stillness Speaks](#).

In our humble view, Peter's book is one of the clearest distillation of "*perennial wisdom* {without} *the trappings of time and culture*" that is very readable, engaging, deeply insightful, and a treasure trove of very relatable "wisdom gems" so give yourself the gift of ordering the full book directly from Amazon by [clicking here](#).

Chris, Sanjiv, & Cherie
Stillness Speaks

Seeds of Awakening
Peter Russell

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Effortless Meditation

You may be surprised to hear that meditation should be effortless, that no striving or concentration is needed. I know I was. When I first became interested in meditation, I was repeatedly told that it took great mental discipline and many years of practice. Indian teachers had likened the mind to a wagonload of restless monkeys that needed to be tied down and kept quiet.

And my experience appeared to confirm it. My mind was full of thoughts, and try as I may, I could not keep them at bay. Like many others, I naturally assumed that I was not trying hard enough; I needed greater mental discipline, not less.

Then I chanced upon Transcendental Meditation. Its teacher, the Maharishi of Beatles fame, challenged the whole notion of trying to control the mind. The monkeys, he pointed out, were wanting something--more bananas perhaps. Give them what they want and they will settle down of their own accord. So with the mind; it is restless because we are seeking something. And what is it we are seeking? We want to feel better--to be happier, more at ease, content. He argued that if we give the mind a taste of the inner contentment it is looking for, it will be attracted to it and begin to settle down of its own accord.

This made more sense to me than what I'd come across so far, so I learned his practice. And it worked. I found my mind becoming quiet without any effort. Indeed, as soon as I inadvertently started trying to control the process, in the hope that I could somehow help my meditation along, it did not work so well.

Now I am not suggesting that this applies to every type of meditation. Techniques designed to cultivate particular mental skills or states of mind, may well involve a degree of concentration or mental discipline. But when it comes to the basic skill of relaxing into a quieter state of mind, effort generally turns out to be counter-productive.

Instead, when you realize you have been caught in a thought, accept the fact. Don't judge or blame yourself. It happens—even to the most experienced meditators.

Instead of following the thought, as you might in normal life, gently shift your attention back to your experience in the present moment. And just notice what is there. It may be sounds around

you, sensations in the body, the breath, some feeling, a sense of ease or peacefulness. It doesn't matter.

Let the attention rest in the experience. Don't try to concentrate or hold it there. Ah yes, you will be sure to wander off again. But the practice is not learning how to stay present, but learning how to return to the present. If you wander off a hundred times, that is a hundred opportunities to practice gently returning your attention to the present.

Even then, trying and effort can arise in subtle ways. Maybe if I just added this or focused on that, it would be easier. Some of it is so subtle that we don't even notice we are doing it. A slight attempt to control the mind, a faint resistance to an experience, even wanting to have a good meditation, they all stand in the way of our letting go completely.

But when we do, we discover that there really is nowhere to get to, and nothing to do. It was the doing that was holding us back.