

# *On Life and Meaning*

MARK PERES

## **Episode 28 – Angela Gala – Mindful Meditation**

### *Daydreaming in French House*

And now a personal word,

My guided meditation session with Angela Gala was unexpected. We were seated at my kitchen table with microphones in front of us recording our conversation when Angela suggested we meditate. As they say in the performing arts, it's better to show than tell, and showing on a podcast has its magic. So I jumped right in.

Mindful of the long pauses as Angela had me close my eyes and breathe, I hoped listeners would stay with us. But as Angela noted, we don't really create anything exciting and alive until we let our self-consciousness go. It's true in art and in sports and in teaching and in writing and in leading and in doing. We are in the zone, in flow, when we are outside ourselves.

My first experience with guided meditation was in January 1982 on the campus of Rollins College. It was winter term of my freshman year. At the time, Rollins offered a four-week class between fall and spring terms. The class offerings during winter term were, let's say, on the fun and experimental side. Students were encouraged to study outside their comfort zone to fully experience the breadth of the liberal arts.

The best way to choose a good class was to choose a great professor. At Rollins in the 1980s, the department with the best reputation for teaching was the history department, which I will talk about another day, but I had that department covered as I was a newly declared history major. Running neck and neck was the Philosophy and Religion Department. One of the most popular and intriguing professors on campus taught in that department: Hoyt Edge, PhD. Dr. Edge was an elfish, mop-topped professor who taught philosophical psychology, cognitive anthropology, cross-cultural concepts of self, and parapsychology. Basically, that meant that Dr. Edge messed with our heads.

He was interested in his students having a variety of psychic experiences. We read William James and accounts of telepathy, clairvoyance, psychokinesis, psychic healing, and precognition. If we could have consumed mushrooms or taken LSD, we would have. But this was the dawn of the Reagan era, the days of academically sponsored acid trips were long gone, so the next best thing was deep, guided meditations to activate our untapped minds.

Dr. Edge would sit cross-legged on a table as we sat cross-legged on a Persian rug in the middle of French House, a small building with a one-room salon with a high ceiling and a fireplace with a mosaic of the Madonna—the mother of Jesus, not the singer—overlooking students who gathered.

Dr. Edge would invite us to straighten our backs, to close our eyes, and to breathe. For nearly thirty minutes we sat. Our minds would go crazy. But we sat. We breathed. And we finally relaxed. And, of course, that's exactly when he asked us to open our eyes.

It was good enough value on tuition for me to take several more classes in philosophy and religion and to minor in it. It was the start of many considerations of the mind. I have come to love the big unanswered questions: What's it all about? How do we live well? How do we create meaning in life? Indeed, that's the very point of this podcast, and I can trace it back, at least in part, to daydreaming in French House.

Today Angela Gala introduces students to the mysteries and possibilities of their bodies and minds. She invites young women and men into calmness and compassion. She sees in her students their wonder. It is an act of love.

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