

Zest for Life
Zest to be
Zest to be free
Zest to be me

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1. Preamble:

Luis de Rivera, in his 2017 / 2018 book “Autogenics 3.0”, introduces two types of Meditation new to Autogenic Training:

- i. Feeling the Feeling Meditation (Feeling Meditation): in this we focus on the feeling in the feeling. This is usually used for a distressing / unpleasant feeling that we have been experiencing – in such a way that we can transform the feeling and learn from it; learn what information it is potentially giving us.
- ii. Meditation on Constructive Feelings, in which we meditate, after an Autogenic Sequence, on a specific constructive feeling / emotion. Meditation on Constructive Feelings is of a very different nature to Feeling the Feeling Meditation, for in these Constructive Feeling Meditations we are focusing on the positive / wholesome; this links in with the development of Positive Psychology in recent decades¹. The four Constructive Feelings that de Rivera covers are:
 - i. Calm
 - ii. Existence
 - iii. Zest
 - iv. Love

De Rivera suggests that we start with Calm, and then, after a few days or a week or so, move on to Existence, then Zest, and finally Love. In this handout we look at Zest.

2. Zest – and the concept of Zest

We can get the feeling of zest from its use in terms of “the zest of an orange or lemon”. In this case, we are familiar with the positive tang it gives to food. We can also see zest in terms of joie-de-vivre, what gives us our get-up-and-go in the morning, motivation, enthusiasm, gusto, passion. So here we are using it in the sense of zest for life. Zest gives us the motivation and energy to embrace life and investigate appropriate and wholesome domains – and is thus linked to the Seven Factors of Awakening² [Hanh 1998 pp 214 – 220].

Luis de Rivera comments:

Bertrand Russell lists this feeling like one of the most important causes of happiness (IR: Well-Being). It is the feeling of thoroughly enjoying what you do, and you can think of it as a variant of enthusiasm. After realising existence, it easily comes out that living is action. It does not matter what you do; you are in zest if you do fully immerse yourself in your action, provided that you enjoy it fully, without distractions or extraneous thoughts. Living with acceptance of the

¹ Positive psychology “began as a new domain of psychology in 1998 when Martin Seligman chose it as the theme for his term as president of the American Psychological Association”; three others are also regarded as “co-initiators of this development: these are: Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Christopher Peterson and Barbara Fredrickson (source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Positive_psychology).

² For some years I have had a handout on the Seven Factors of Awakening, which from time to time I give out to AT students. It may be that a modified version of this will be available on the website in due course. Until then, if interested, please contact me (ross425@btinternet.com) and I will send you the existing handout (Seven Factors of Awakening (includes Joy, Ease, and Equanimity).

past and with curiosity for the future is a quality of zest, which entirely counteracts remorse and fear. Being present in what you are doing is an expression of zest and a natural evolution of the feeling of calm and existence.

When you are full of interest and zest for the objects of your activity, the magic of mindfulness is effortless. But it is quite impossible if you try to impose mindfulness on yourself as a duty. Evoke the feeling of zest when you go for a walk, not necessarily by a peaceful countryside, and observe with curiosity without prejudice – with passive acceptance (IR: Mindful Acceptance) – everything you come across.

If we are not in the flow of Zest, if we are not in the present moment, we may be negatively pursuing the past or getting lost in the future
[after Thich Nhat Hanh].

- ⊗ Look at the trees as if you have never seen one before.
- ⊗ Sense the presence of passers-by, notice their faces, their walking.....
- ⊗ Do not judge; accept everything as it is. And then, suddenly, you may discover that you are enjoying the simplest experience....

Another version of zest is “always do your best.” This is the advice given by the Toltec Nagual Miguel Ruiz. The question is not doing the perfect job, achieving the best result, outperforming everybody – no; doing your best is putting your being on what you are doing, as you are right then and there.

This concept of Zest is intimately linked to Mindfulness and Being in the Present Moment.

- Do not waste energies complaining that you could do better if you were healthier, less tired..... *El que hace lo que puede no esta obligado a mas* – “Who does what he can, is not required to do more” – says a Spanish proverb.

You are not the same all the time: your energies, your abilities, even your body varies all the time. However, if you have zest, you will always do your best.

- ⊗ Cultivate the feeling of zest in your meditation, and bring it often to your everyday life – even when it feels boring or hard.

de Rivera 2018 pp 135-137;

layout with minor alterations in text and

note: this 2018 edition is slightly different here from the 2017 version

In the above extract, Luis de Rivera gives an eloquent introduction to the concept of zest and Meditation on zest.

Annie Sturgeon, an Autogenic Therapist, and who kindly read through a penultimate draft, reflected beautifully on zest:

Zest is a great positive. I also liken it to exuberance. I once taught a little girl when she was about 8-10 years old. Her beauty was her exuberance; her zest for life and learning. So rare to come across such a positive, lively, joyful soul. She always ran to me and gave me a huge hug whenever she saw me as well, which was wonderful for both of us.

“Exuberance is beauty”, William Blake... so true.

This is a very moving description of the essence of zest; thank you, Annie.

3. Meditation /

3. Meditation on Zest

As already mentioned, this is the third of the four Meditations on Constructive Feelings that Luis de Rivera discusses in his recent book “Autogenics 3.0” [de Rivera 2017 / 2018]. In my experience, the Existence and Zest Meditations very much complement each other.

I have found the following three approaches helpful for this Meditation.

- i. As a formal meditation – perhaps after a Standard Exercise Sequence.
- ii. Recalling our experience of Zest at the end of an AT sequence. In this we recall, for example, the feelings of zest we have had when out on a walk or on holiday, or when absorbed in *creativity*⁽⁴⁵⁾. This then recreates the neuro-signature that was active during the original experience [cf. Benson & Stark 1996].
- iii. When out walking, as described in the quote above; or, for example, when we are simply looking out of the window.

4. Neuro-physiologically (Poly-Vagally) informed Epilogue – after Porges 2018-X.

Generally speaking, to be in the flow of Zest is interwoven with feeling safe; this occurs when our Social Engagement system is flourishing: that is, the Ventral Vagal and myelinated ³part of the Para-Sympathetic Nervous System (PSNS) is active. In situations of danger or life threat, zest will dissipate. This is because, as is well known, the Flight and Fight response to danger activates our Sympathetic Nervous System Stress response, with the release of Cortisol (and adrenaline); or, in the case of Life Threat, the ancient, unmyelinated, Dorsal Vagal System is activated (essentially below the diaphragm – sub-diaphragmatic).

However, if we are feeling safe, with activation of our Social Engagement Ventral Vagal System, this does not preclude the concurrent joy and zest of:

- ❖ PLAY [Panksepp 1998], and so the simultaneous activation of life-enhancing *SNS circuits*; i.e. these are active in
 - PLAY = Mobilisation without FEAR⁴ [Porges 2011];
 - = Mobilisation when feeling Safe [IR].
- ❖ Walking in the country / wilderness / mountains (same basic circuits as PLAY).
- ❖ Positive SEEKING – embracing curiosity [Panksepp 1998].
- ❖ Nursing mothers and intimate relationships, which, axiomatically in a safe context, are associated with an activation of the Dorsal Vagal system:
 - ⊗ i.e. Immobilisation without FEAR⁵ [Porges 2011]; that is
 - ⊗ Immobilisation when feeling Safe [IR].

³ Some nerves are covered with myelin, and this allows them to transmit neuronal messages much more quickly than those without a myelin sheath.

⁴ i.e. when *they* are not associated with the SNS activation from Danger – i.e. Mobilisation *with* FEAR.

⁵ This is in total contrast to Life Threat: which activates Immobilisation with FEAR.

Meditative practices such as Yoga, Tai Chi, and Autogenic Training activate the Myelinated Ventrals Vagal System, our Social Engagement System, and our Zest for life.





5. Thematically related articles on web (or at present works in progress)

B21	Flourishing Antigenically – <i>Pathways to Well-Being and Feeling Safe Whatever our Background</i> (after Porges)	
D-03	Look at the Cypress Tree (2015) (short version)	
E-03	Look at the Cypress Tree – <i>Autonomic Afferents and Well-Being</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Background Research Paper for talk given to the British Autogenic Society Annual Lecture London - 21st May 2016 (extended version of D-03) 	
F 1	A general introduction to Autogenics 3.0 (<i>based on the work of Luis de Rivera</i>)	
F 4	Some Consequences of Blocking Feelings – <i>of not allowing ourselves to feel the feeling</i>	
F 5A	Feeling the Feeling Meditation I	
F 5B	Feeling the Feeling Meditation II	
F 6.1	Constructive Feeling Meditation I: Calm	
F 6.2	Constructive Feeling Meditation II: Existence	
F 6.3	Constructive Feeling Meditation III: Zest (this article)	
F 6.4	Constructive Feeling Meditation: IV: Love and Self-Nurturing (especially in context of low self-esteem)	
F 6.5	Constructive Feeling Meditation: V: Inter-Being	
F 6.6	Constructive Feeling Meditation: VI: Compassion and Joy (the four immeasurables)	
F 7	Meditation on Five Sounds that can Heal the World (after Hanh) (i.e. this article)	
F 8	Meditation embracing Joy, Happiness, Inner Distress and Healing	

12. Some sources and references /

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