The background is a vibrant blue with a complex, abstract pattern. It features overlapping translucent geometric shapes, primarily triangles and polygons, in various shades of blue. In the lower-left corner, several thin, parallel lines radiate outwards towards the center. The overall effect is a textured, layered appearance.

Meditation

In Pursuit of the Real

A Manual

DANIELLE G. H. LEVY

Meditation:

In Pursuit of The Real

A Manual

BY

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*“Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it,
doesn’t go away.”*

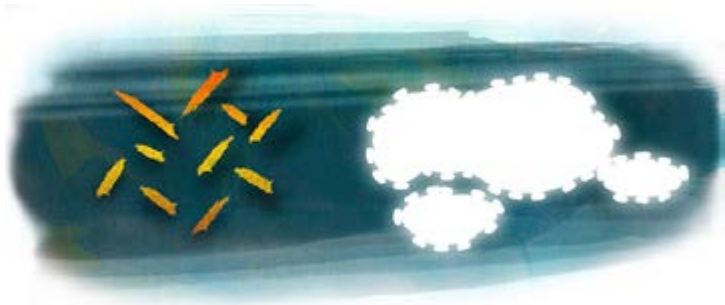
Philip K. Dick

Dear Reader,

Do not expect to agree with everything in this book. It is not necessary that you do. Just begin wherever it feels appropriate and continue while keeping an open mind.

The ideal is that you will find your own understanding, one that will surpass mine. Until then, feel free to borrow anything from this one.

I began studying, reading, practicing meditation decades before writing this book. I read numerous books, authors, thinkers on this and related topics and encountered many practitioners and techniques, people like Roberto Assagioli, Sri Aurobindo, Alice Bailey, Michal J. Eastcott, Mahatma Gandhi, Carl Jung, Elaine Pagels, Alan Watts, along with untold others. Bit by bit, as meaningful books and authors usually do, they informed my own understanding. I am indebted to them, who unknown to themselves inspired me and became part of what I am trying to impart. I may not remember everyone, but extend gratitude to all.



Chapter One

Why Meditate

Meditation Is a Form of Communication

In a far future perhaps, or in a nearer one depending on how fast we learn, it is conceivable that humanity will be able to communicate across distance without external aids. Telecommunications devices such as telephones may then provide support rather than serve as primary means of how we will communicate. Instead we shall presumably be able to reach anyone anywhere with the force of will. What we think of today as the objective world will have far wider parameters and the barrier between the visible and non-visible worlds will have been removed. Meditation

in whatever form it may survive would be turned to even higher ends. Its current purpose to establish a bridge between inner and outer realities will be well on its way to being consummated. For the present, this purpose which is not often recognized as such still graces us with the best of its revelation and power. As a reader will note, this perspective, being present or future, clearly assumes an aspect of reality which is not visible. The why of this assumption would take us away from the aims of this manual. Suffice it to say that love which is so crucial to being human is itself invisible. At best all we see of it are its manifestations.

Our contemporary view of meditation tends to be at great variance with its potential. If one were to imitate a television game show and ask, what are the five most common attributes of meditation, it is unlikely that most people would list communication as one of those attributes. That omission would surely reflect not only our lack of understanding about meditation but also our failure to grasp that potential. For the present, meditation is still the best means we have to communicate with unseen aspects of who we are. And while that places upon meditation an onus of proof that such communication actually does take place, it also highlights peculiar dangers and caveats of communicating in that way. As anyone can surmise it is easy to fool oneself, assume we are reaching an unseen dimension when we are not. It is easy to declare we have registered or discovered something in meditation when in fact it was nothing but wishful thinking.

Meditation as a Discipline

If meditation is going to fulfill its promise as a form of communication, it needs to be properly practiced, and when it is properly practiced it becomes a discipline.

Unlike the hard sciences, meditation does not explain objective reality. If the hard sciences explain the tangible world around us, meditation is similarly used to explain a subjective, intangible reality. Like any other discipline focused on a given study, anthropology, sociology, psychology or a host of others, it does not occur pell-mell, in some random fashion, but must follow certain protocols. Since it was introduced to the West on a large scale several decades ago, meditation has become the subject of countless lectures, books, interpretations, and while it seems to have acquired a measure of legitimacy, it is still misunderstood, still subject to not being taken seriously as a discipline. On those occasions when it might be, it tends to not be on a par with the importance given other disciplines. While that does not change what it can and cannot do, it may, at least partially, explain why its role in communication is not better addressed.

The most common association made with meditation is that it is a form of relaxation. Indeed, many feel they can attest to its efficacy in that regard. In fact, meditation has become so well recognized as a therapeutic tool, it is now used in the treatment of cancer, heart attacks, chronic pain and other illnesses currently benefitting from newer

treatment modalities. Even then, even when meditation seems to achieve a modicum of credibility, there is little understanding of its possibilities. Its effects on blood pressure, heart rate and other physical markers while providing reassurance and a sense it is beneficial and useful, nevertheless do not provide much more information on its ability to help us communicate with our formless counterpart.

Since we are not prone to think of meditation as a discipline, we are equally not prone to associate it with being difficult, perhaps that is because meditation as relaxation does not require the same level of concentration and focus. And yet as a discipline, it is related to a scientific method, meaning it speaks of a replicable orderly process that can be taught to and similarly experienced by others, the way a language is, driving a car, playing an instrument or many other skills. To the extent that it speaks of a body of knowledge that functions according to certain rules, meditation is all that and more. Meditation may not be difficult the way learning calculus may be, or qualifying for the Olympics, but anything requiring a consistent concentration is not easy. As anyone who has attempted it knows, silencing the mind holds its challenges. In addition there is the need to develop skills in communicating with something intangible and unseen and the vigilance that ought to accompany such endeavor, all lending meditation a certain level of difficulty, but still something that requires expertise, thought and care.

The practice of meditation as a form of communication may in itself only require a few minutes each morning or evening, but it is far more than just sitting, reflecting, pondering, or even exploring. It involves an attitude to life that dares us to see the world differently and to live our life by the highest principles we are capable of reaching. It does require daily effort and constant trial and error, but its rewards are in proportion to the effort exerted, rewards that revolve around expanding our inner sense of freedom, sensing a mastering over ourselves and our circumstances, enlarging our sense of joy and fulfillment and discovering better ways to contribute to our environment and to that of those who share it with us.

Meditation Cosmology

Because it connects us to an unseen reality meditation speaks to a cosmology that is unfamiliar to our everyday world. Dating back several thousand years, it has strong roots in the practice of yoga. Yoga is a Sanskrit word meaning union and is used to refer to a particular method of achieving union with what is transcendent. Thus Hatha Yoga, for example, works towards this union through the control of the body with the help of now well-known exercises. Bakti Yoga reaches union through devotion, usually devotion to a guru, an intermediary and teacher representing what's beyond us, whether it's referred to as divine or not. The obedience given the teacher represents a form of surrender, a way for the individual to transcend his or her own smallness. Karma Yoga, sometimes called the

yoga of the Baghavad Gita, emphasizes action and reaction, that is the importance of deeds and their consequences. It relies more on individual input than say Hatha or Bakhti yoga since an individual is enjoined to assess his or her actions and be mindful of their impact on others and on the future. Raja Yoga, perhaps the yoga closest to this form of meditation, seeks the union through the use of the mind. As we learn to increasingly use the mind and what it can do, concentration ensues and illumination and inspiration can follow. As such Raja Yoga seems the yogic system that may be closest to the Western counterparts practiced by many religious orders and groups engaging in contemplation.

Besides its link to the transcendent aspects of formal schools of yoga, meditation has also been used to enhance certain spiritual practices. Sufis, for example, reach a trance like meditative state removing them from this world and placing their consciousness on a higher level through the use of a prescribed set of ritual and poetic movements, such as those of the famous whirling dervishes. Many Tibetan monks use the intricate, powerful and interconnected images of mandalas. Others use chanting or drumming. While Western spiritual disciplines are not as prone to use the word meditation, many practices of contemplation are in essence forms of communication with what is transcendent.

Meditation in its most common usage of relaxation often bypasses its links to a transcendent reality, or for some, its link to spirituality. Yet, if one is to use meditation as a form of communication, its link to spirituality needs clarification. No matter how universal or ecumenical the use of the word spiritual may be, it still refers to a religious reality, even if religion is not traditionally defined or only loosely alluded to. If religions and spirituality are seen as concepts belonging to or arising from the tangible world, as part of what humans have needed to either use or create to explain their origins and purpose, then those concepts have no counterparts in the inner world that meditation reaches. Accordingly, the inner world of meditation looks to be irreligious or meta-religious, although it cannot be said to be averse with what is religious. What is transcendent is therefore not necessarily delineated by the tenets of a given religious tradition, but remains in large part a question mark. What this means is that while meditation may link to what is transcendent, whether the transcendent is spiritual or not is up to the individual practitioner. The transcendent itself as understood in this context may be religion neutral or spirituality neutral, but like the color of water that can reflect the color of its vessel, can be adapted to a practitioner's own cosmology. Meditation as defined here can be compatible with any religious tradition but is not in and of itself part of any one. Actually an atheist could practice this form of meditation. As anyone else he or she will connect to an inner world which in their case would most probably be energies in the scientific sense they

are used when the solar system or the galaxy are described. In the same vein, the properties of an inner self would just be those of one's conscience. It's rather doubtful a devout Christian, Jew or Muslim would turn to this form of meditation, its parameters may be too fluid for any person requiring or already part of a more orthodox system. Were they to, they would each touch what would no doubt correspond to their respective belief system. What is beyond our visible self is there no matter how we label it or whether or not we understand it. The context of this form of meditation is therefore one that is non-denominational, trans-religious, meta-religious, meta-physical all at once. Its apparent flexibility makes room for our ignorance. While religions, science and anything in between have made claims on the world we cannot see, the fact is we know little about that world. It's a limitation meditation reminds us of, and one necessary to remember.

Meditation and Mysticism

At first glance one would assume that since meditation reaches into an unseen world, it would have to be mystical. And while in the way we use the term, meditation is mystical, it is also more.

Mysticism paved the way for modern Western ideas of what is transcendent by addressing a reality beyond that of the visible. Throughout the many centuries of mystical experiences, contact with that reality has been what distinguished it. The idea was, and is, that through

contact with a larger reality one can achieve some form of enlightenment. The image of climbing the mountain of enlightenment is well known, and it is as if mysticism takes the mystic to the mountain and keeps him or her there.

While this kind of meditation is essentially the product of mystical discovery, it is also about what happens once we have contacted the inner world, and of what we do about the amorphous blend of energies we have found there. Do we merely content ourselves with the idea that it is all part of the cosmic vastness, or do we make our way as best we can through the forest, if not the jungle, of energies and forces. And if we do and are successful in learning to interpret correctly what we reach, then what do we do about, and with, that newfound knowledge? Following on the mystical tangents of meditation, if the keynote of mysticism is enlightenment, the keynote of meditation is disinterested service, a service that would begin where mysticism ends. It is rooted in the journey down the symbolic mountain of enlightenment so that a practitioner having appropriated some degree of enlightenment, however small or unassuming it may seem to be, can then adapt, modify, and qualify that understanding in order to share it with others. That does not turn a practitioner into an evangelist, it makes him or her other-oriented, focused on giving, sharing, improving conditions, cooperating, involved in bettering the world in whatever way is available.

The Framework of Growth

The framework of meditation and the reason why its function of bridging inner and outer worlds has importance is growth.

Growth is a generic term which has come to have psychological and spiritual meanings. Here it refers to the inner development that allows the inner self to infuse the individual with its values, a movement that permits the transformation of the individual from self oriented to other oriented. That framework of growth obviously exists between the interaction of what within us is transcendent and what is not. What happens is that an interface is essentially created, one that reflects the degree to which our material self has been infused with the quality and attributes of our abstract self, and one which grows as that process continues. Meditation thus becomes a facilitator, a guide, a partner in our growth. Through the contacts it permits, guidance can be received. Where that guidance comes from depends on one's cosmology. It could be called conscience, subconscious, Christ, Buddha head, soul, godhead, spirit, universe, or any name that seems apt and appropriate. I just call it inner self. By whatever name, it connects us to what is greater than ourselves, informs our being in the world and points us in the direction we are to go. That assumes of course that as human beings, as part of a planet, a galaxy, a universe, we are not thrown here, but are part of a greater whole, a greater whole which no doubt has a function, whether or not we are able to register, articulate or comprehend it, a greater whole which

therefore presumes a context larger than the inner self. In turn this context would have to be part of the reason for existence, and include some force, presence, principle or being which is usually referred to as god. It's helpful to remember that having an ecumenical non-religious view of this force, presence, principle, being does not mean it would be non-existent, for something has to be behind the orderliness and the rules of the universe, or else the work of mathematicians, physicists and others would be meaningless. It does suggest, though, that when this point of origin, this root of manifestation is defined in non-religious non-traditional terms, those terms would have to include a few question marks. The implication is that since the communication one engages in as a result of meditation connects us to what is greater than ourselves, it can't help but become related to the nature of this force, presence, principle, being. The growth so central to the framework of meditation would therefore have to also be related to whatever may be the agenda of this transcendent reality, for whatever its nature, it hopefully is aligned with how and/or why the universe came to be. And there a perimeter is reached, for one can only infer, deduce, surmise, project, even conjecture what this agenda might ultimately be. Yet, from the higher point of view meditation fosters, this agenda, at least at the level of humanity, gives every indication of being the alteration of human nature, rising from its self-centered self to become other oriented, self-forgetful and inclusive so that in the end this alteration can be the conduit to the unity not only of all of humanity but of humanity to all of which is it connected. It shouldn't be

difficult to see then that when practiced the way it is meant to be done, meditation can be an important way changes within the individual self can happen, changes meant to ensure a practitioner moves out of his or her selfish ways and toward being more self forgetful. And should such a view not be sufficiently sound or logical for some, perhaps one can at least entertain it as a hypothesis or assumption.

Way before self forgetfulness can take hold, though, certain results will begin to manifest themselves, the ability to better handle abstract concepts or develop wisdom, knowing how to participate in creating a better world, or the capacity for sacrifice. Sacrifice is normally thought of as a divine trait, Jesus upon the cross, the vow of the Bodhisattva who refused entrance into heaven until the last blade of grass was saved, yet it is increasingly becoming more within the grasp of average humanity, and often makes the difference between the kill or be killed survival attitude of the jungle or the I will endure to the point of death for the good of others that can be said to be a hallmark of a higher and better way. The hundreds of thousands of beings imprisoned on behalf of human rights demonstrate a capacity for sacrifice on behalf of others. Those willing to put their lives on the line for a cause larger than themselves also demonstrate the growth of our capacity to sacrifice. In more ordinary terms, parents who make adjustments in their lives for the benefit of their children, those who endure hardship for a principle or even go out of their way for a friend are learning what a capacity for sacrifice can mean.

Why Meditate?

It's not difficult to see that at its best meditation if practiced as communication and as a discipline would make us into better humans, slowly and laboriously to be sure, but still quite steadily. As it guides us to connect to a higher transcendent part of ourselves, the part which links us to what would have to be a higher agenda, one that, as far as those of us who take meditation seriously can tell, is to improve the lot of humanity and create a human family functioning without any kind of barriers, such as those of gender, ethnicity, race, religion or nationality. As the inner self helps us recognize how we can fit and work within this higher agenda, we come to identify it, acquiesce within it, appropriate it, integrate it within our life and being and finally merge with it. As we do, an iota of our lower nature is transformed, and we are ready to concentrate on the next iota. As we grow in our ability to contact the inner self, which is the repository of the transcendent agenda as far as an individual is concerned, we grow in inclusiveness, love and wisdom.

As we become more and more steeped in the world of the inner self, a world where all is seen in perspective, where substance supersedes form, and where separateness as we know it is non-existent, we become more able to conquer the dualities that are inevitably part of our nature. Our Yin and Yang so to speak blend and fuse. Parallel to our growing and becoming more and more conversant with the inner self, is our learning how to perceive life and

events through love and compassion. The effect is as subtle as it is important since it allows wisdom to alter and expand our perception of the world. This expanded and altered perception becomes the springboard through which meditation ushers us into the pursuit of the real, a perspective where the world we see and the world we do not, meaningfully relate to each other. What is real then acquires a new depth, and the otherworldliness we had heretofore thought of as unreal, can end up bringing practical results in the here and now in which we live, such as our capacity for love, forgiveness or cooperation. We are then able to realize that the world of meditation does not exist in a vacuum but is intended to improve the human condition.

The growth invoked by meditation is in turn meant to evoke progress beyond the individual self. Once our lower nature has sufficiently receded so that it shows itself only in extreme circumstances and when we have reached the point where self forgetfulness is a primary mode of response, we are better equipped to participate in the grandest adventure humanity can know, exploring how we can better engage in what the transcendent agenda might be—that is increasing the amount of inclusiveness in the world whether it be through extending what constitutes the limits of the boundaries separating us from our fellow humans or removing the many barriers that keep dividing us.

Transcendental Integrity

In some ways this form of meditation is more difficult to practice than those relying on the breath, mandalas, mantras, chants or postures. This is mostly due to the conditions under which this meditation takes place, a technique taking one to a world which some are not sure has legitimacy, a formless world where the possibilities for both delusion and illusion are always present. Furthermore, one's experiences cannot be precisely validated by others since we each have our own levels of understanding, our own individual make up and we each experience meditation in our own way, an experience which is simultaneously personal and universal and which does not fit within the current definition of the scientific method. It may seem incongruous that working with energies which are not yet understood or deciphered, much less agreed upon, one is supposed to achieve not only wisdom but also come closer to what is transcendent. The only possible approach one can take if one is going to be daring enough to engage in this adventure is what can be called transcendental integrity. One must learn to develop inner safeguards to ensure the validity of and to check and recheck the insights one gains in meditation. There is no hurry in the inner world. If it's true today, it will be just as true tomorrow or next month. If one feels something must be decided right away or ascertained without any delay, no doubt its validity if not compromised is spurious for no such truth has such urgency.

One must develop the habit of challenging oneself, is this the best I can do? Why have I arrived at this particular

conclusion? By assiduously questioning oneself and one's insights, one can learn to guard against the closing of one's mind and in so doing become more aware of and learn to better recognize how one's weaknesses and lower nature can subtly distort insights. Furthermore, it is important to be willing to fearlessly face being wrong and to see being wrong as a step towards something truer rather than a reason to criticize or blame oneself. Finally one must exercise humility, forever remembering that no matter what truth we may have reached, there is always a higher one. Our best is naturally limited by our capacity and as we grow so will the level of our best. Besides there is the ever present reality that someone with higher ability can and will go further than we.

Not for Everyone

As a form of communication between the visible and the non, meditation can provide a way of leading one's life and a code of ethics and principles. Yet it is not for everyone. Millions can write and even write well, few can write a novel. Similarly this form of meditation is for those who seek more than the comfort of sitting back and relaxing. It is for those who intimate there has to be more than what we see, that perhaps the unseen world is worth exploring not for its own sake or to satisfy one's curiosity but in order to better explore how to participate in whatever is animating one's being. This form of meditation is for those for whom reality ought to be more than conventionally defined success, for those who search for higher values, for

those for whom life is more than the pursuit of happiness and the satisfaction of the self, for those who are earnest in their quest for a higher dimension and for those who have not been able to find that dimension through rigidly defined dogmas whether in a traditional religion or other spiritual group. The practice of this meditation requires a good mind which is often open and an open heart which is often good, a willingness to extend oneself to others, to explore other-orientedness, and a belief in humanity and the cause of the human family. It requires our best, the courage to confront our worst, and the temerity to outdo ourselves. Few will obviously meet most of these criteria, but our intention is key, if our intention is to be more than we are, for example, that will be an auspicious beginning.

About the Inner World

Perhaps the inner world is the counterpart of the outer tangible world, perhaps it is its complementary flip side, yet in one important regard the inner world is the outer's opposite. While the outer world is concerned with form in all its many aspects, the inner world is formless. It is made up of energies not only too transcendent for our everyday awareness to register, but apparently also too unqualified to coalesce into concrete form. Learning to translate these energies and abstract concepts into concrete ideas and logical tenets is the skill of the practitioner. It can also be his or her downfall. Many in the past have attempted to formulate the nature of the inner world and have not had great success because the necessary grounding, the

precautions, the ordinary admonitions not to be swayed by the beauty of the mystical or the order of what one might see, were too frequently absent or ignored. The result has been a description of the inner world marred by a hodgepodge of concepts based on wishful thinking or erroneous deductions. It is common enough and can be seen in many fields. Until fairly recently, for example, it was not unusual for people to be inundated by erroneous ideas about cultures other than their own such as the stereotypes of the “savage African” or the “inscrutable Chinese”. In the same way, the host of faulty notions being propagated about the inner world can be as misleading and as much rooted in ignorance.

Before beginning therefore a practitioner is asked to reflect upon what concepts he or she may have been exposed to, what preconceived notions exist within, and how such notions may affect expectations of using meditation as a discipline. If done with an open minded attitude, meditation can serve as a useful tool for this self inventory. And just as an open mind is important when doing this inventory, it is also relevant when considering any idea in this manual that may seem new or foreign. It is best to be as objective and indifferent as possible, neither believing nor disbelieving, while allowing the process of meditation itself to determine truth or falsity. In other words one is asked to practice transcendental integrity, to experience, to search and to question before accepting a statement or concept as valid. One of the strengths of meditation lies in making us stronger conscious beings, not devotees or clones. It is this

inner private process, differing for each yet usually leading to similar or compatible conclusions that in itself lends this work its own form of legitimacy. The joys of one’s own process of discovery underline that legitimacy, a process that is in keeping with becoming a stronger conscious being.

For millennia, traditional religions have attempted to define the wide expanse between divine and human and to explain humanity’s role in that relationship. With rare exceptions, they have been looking upward to the perceived deistic system, and as such reflect human limitations. Meditation begins with those limitations and attempts to transcend them in order to become part of the larger world that automatically emerges when the outer one is seen with its inner counterpart. Since it is more inclusive and more deeply relies on the inner world than do traditional religions, the context in which this form of meditation exists is more encompassing and hopefully devoid of the rigidities and parameters that can make those religions so divisive.

The Transcendent Agenda: Our Part within It

The history of human progress is full of people who in their time and sphere clearly succeeded in fostering progress, people who worked for the betterment of humanity by creating new ideas, forging new norms, discovering new vistas, redressing past wrongs, bringing

into being broader solutions and in doing so seem to have externalized what does appear to be a transcendent agenda, or at least a part of it—Leonardo Da Vinci, William Shakespeare, Charles Darwin, Florence Nightingale, Nelson Mandela, Ludwig von Beethoven, Thomas Edison, Galileo Galilei, Winston Churchill, Marie Curie, Sojourner Truth. The list could fill tomes. In exercising their understanding of what seems to be a larger agenda, these workers for humanity not only apprehended a small piece of what that agenda appears to be but also were able to implement it. It may seem presumptuous for any one member of the human family to assume familiarity with the blueprint charting the goal of humanity, yet much can be deduced, if not about this agenda, then what its outline must be. What may validate what the insights of meditation may reveal are events and movements that have already manifested, such as the Renaissance in Western Europe or the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, historical events which help us infer broad strokes and the general intent of removing barriers and achieving unity. And because removing barriers is also an individual task, meditation can be our guide as to how to expand our inner horizons and directly or indirectly participate.

If one places all this within the context of evolution and the fact it is an ongoing process, what emerges from such broad strokes and intent is the notion that as evolution continues it is focused not on form, but on consciousness, and that as human consciousness evolves it overcomes its separatism, its self-centeredness and becomes increasingly inclusive

to the point of ushering in what is sometimes called one humanity, that is a humanity capable of functioning without its numerous current divisions. It is not then difficult to realize that as meditation guides us to remove our own barriers, we expand our own consciousness.

What we can also infer is that as it comes down to us, this agenda is impersonal, dealing with great sweeping movements that are beyond individual interests or the interests of specific groups. Yet as impersonal as this agenda may be and as paradoxical as it may appear, it is people who would necessarily be responsible for moving it forward. People like Pasteur, Jefferson or Martin Luther King, Jr. look to have simply responded to what it was about, a response without fanfare, usually to a need or strongly felt inner prompting. For them it was not (with some exceptions) a religious act, nor was it a case of “this is a larger agenda and I will follow it.” The dynamic is far more subtle and as such reflects an important goal of meditation, not only to bring the individual into line with what is beyond his or herself, but also to place that individual within a larger movement, or put more simply, align individual and larger agendas. Florence Nightingale did not go to the Crimea and eventually found the profession of nursing because she saw it as a part of a larger agenda, but because it was what she wanted to do. She wanted it so much, in fact, she fought her family and turned down a marriage proposal. What she wanted and what the larger agenda was pulling her toward had become aligned. What she wanted was no longer the product of a self-oriented

consciousness but of something much larger, of something that instinctively went beyond the boundaries of the individual and reached into the collective good. Closer to our own era, Nelson Mandela, a paragon of this dynamic, embodies the oneness of individual and larger agendas. The man who struggled against Apartheid and spent almost three decades in jail before being elected the first black President of South Africa is also known as having said, “The struggle is my life.”

If, as can be assumed, most of the workers for humanity, people like Einstein or Mandela, had no knowledge of meditation, why then should we bother? They served humanity without it, why can't we? One answer is because they were people who were already so infused with the values of the inner self, something most of us cannot yet claim. Another is adding to what is understood by the expansion of human consciousness. Within the context of meditation, it does not refer to vague and mystical notions of psychic powers and feats transcending natural laws. The expansion of consciousness referred to here centers around the progressive removal of the many obstacles, usually within ourselves, preventing us from reaching, expressing and realizing our share in the unfolding of a larger agenda, obstacles that when gotten rid of open the way for us to take our stand more and more as being one with the human family. It's evident therefore that meditation is geared to help us remove these obstacles and guide us to reach the goal of unity. Indeed giants like Einstein or Mandela could dispense with meditation, but most of

us need it to compensate for what in us is not yet fully realized. And while their contribution was momentous, ours does not need to imitate it, but simply be true to the direction of our inner self.

The World of the Inner Self

When practicing meditation one is quickly faced with a large expanse of energies of which we are but a small part. This world of the inner self, we soon learn, forms the matrix, for us the context, of the work we will do there. Allowing the inner self to guide is not only an immediate goal but also represents the map for future work, for as the world of the inner self is slowly penetrated, what the individual needs to become achieves greater clarity. The process whereby the inner self will hopefully and eventually control our ego bound self, slow as it is, ensures that at some point in years, or eons, to come not only some, but all will be able to express the qualities behind the larger agenda. If so that would mean it is a process which we cannot help but undergo—despite the myriad forms our resistance takes. That looks to be so because the process does presume that causal forces have been set in motion which we ultimately have no choice but to be absorbed into.

One way to describe the inner self would be as a strand in a larger fabric, and like the strand being made of the same material as the fabric, the strand representing our inner self becomes our individual connection to what's beyond

our material selves. That intrinsic link endows the inner self with the same qualities as those normally attributed to what is transcendent, however we may define that force, and therefore as endowed with those qualities such as patience, love, compassion, understanding, persistence, or selflessness. As part of the greater whole to which it naturally belongs, the inner self is the self we are to aspire to be and will eventually become once the growth we are to attain begins to assert itself. What strikes a practitioner is that the inner self works as our primary teacher, the particle that would have as much omniscience as there can apparently be as far as our individual self is concerned. And because the inner self works in tandem with the greater whole, it is also conscious of the collective good, meaning that its perception, its guidance or answers, while tailor-made to the individual, also preserve the good of the whole.

Since the inner self, the object of our communication, is what we contact in meditation, the more we are able to penetrate its realm, the deeper our understanding of its nature will be. In turn, the easier it will become to learn to manifest its attributes and weave them into our being. Since it is within us as well as greater than we are, it is the intermediary between the form and the formless. Just as our body represents the physical aspects of existence, the inner self represents its quality. It is the inner self that gives dimensions and layers to our being. Without it we would be bereft of much that gives worth to human existence. The quality of the inner self animates our form, giving it substance and texture. It is the inner self that enables us to

dream, that lies behind our values, our need for the good, the true, the beautiful. It illumines our being and thus makes it possible for us to develop sensitivity and see what lies beyond the visible. In everyday parlance we speak of soul in more ways than one and usually the word soul can be a synonym for the inner self.

Inner Constitution

As one already surmises, reaching the inner self through meditation automatically introduces us to the inner world. While it may at first feel like a big amorphous dimension, the inner world is far more organized. As one learns to reach beyond oneself, one recognizes levels, each with its distinctive feel, vibration, energies, or whatever word makes sense to us to describe what we reach.

The first level we'll undoubtedly encounter is the emotional, what many New Age groups or psychics call the astral plane. It is a dimension reflecting all the distortions of wishful thinking, and is the level for those whose consciousness may not be able to go beyond it, and can be said to be a correspondence to our emotions with all the miasmatic qualities one would expect from the smoke screen our emotions, whether pleasant or unpleasant, can create.

The next level we would encounter would be that corresponding to our minds. Just as our own mind is differentiated by essentially several levels, so are the inner ones we encounter. The first aspect of this level we shall

reach may be the level associated with the part of the mind that does errands, remembers to say hello and thank you, or follows a recipe to the letter. The next aspect may be the level when we begin to think, perhaps experiment with a recipe, place the use of a statistic in a larger context, or think through how to solve a simple problem. Beyond that we may encounter the level where abstract thoughts and concepts emanate, the level of creative problem solving, delving deeper into ideas.

Up to then the inner world can be said to be a counterpart to who we visibly are, to the kind of consciousness that would be expected from the emotions and mind we already have. After those levels the aspects of the inner world we encounter are those of the inner self proper and the dimensions beyond it. In that way contacting the inner self really makes it the intermediary to what is really higher, larger and transcendent. Reaching that level is the object of meditation, a level where time and space cease to have dominance and what is real begins to be understood with greater accuracy. The values we grasp at that level are those we try to bring back, bring down or whatever image suits our experience.

The distance between highest and lowest is one representing the difference between having a lower nature that frequently dominates and having none at all. It is a way to detach, transcend and journey out of the self-interest that controls the personal self. Self interest in this sense manifests itself through states such as jealousy,

anger, possessiveness, acquisitiveness, criticism, self-indulgence, greed, self-pity along with a host of traits we've resigned ourselves to associate with human nature, unaware those human traits need not be permanent nor need be as prevalent as they are. As self-interest comes under the control of the inner self it is replaced, eclipsed, shadowed by its opposite, self-forgetfulness. This results in characteristics such as goodness, givingness, simplicity, cooperation, patience, compassion, understanding, persistence, fortitude. As the process occurs, any number of combinations manifest themselves which is why some people have more good in them than others, others more selfishness than most.

As the inner self makes its presence felt, the individual becomes more sensitive to what lies beyond the visible, the emotions of others, for example. Self-interest is still keen but it may slowly acquire an enlightened element. Perhaps a solution to a problem may need to include the welfare of a loved one as well as the interest of that individual. As the inner self continues making inroads into the personal self, the individual experiences the need to share, to give to causes that he or she deems worthy, to participate in groups or activities meant to help others. As the grip of the inner self progresses, self-forgetfulness begins at first in little ways, for example, in just being silent at a meeting instead of speaking to be noticed, or being helpful in response to a need, rather than from being prompted to help by one's ego. It is a stage of development when the personal self is likely to be in conflict with the agenda of the inner self and

resist it with numerous stratagems. While the lower self may not be salient, it has not yet disappeared and can, on occasion, make itself felt. The person will indulge his or her jealousies, be possessive, rebel against doing something good because the interest of the self will not sufficiently be served. He or she is likely to feel what has been called compassion fatigue, forgetting altogether that true compassion cannot exhaust itself.

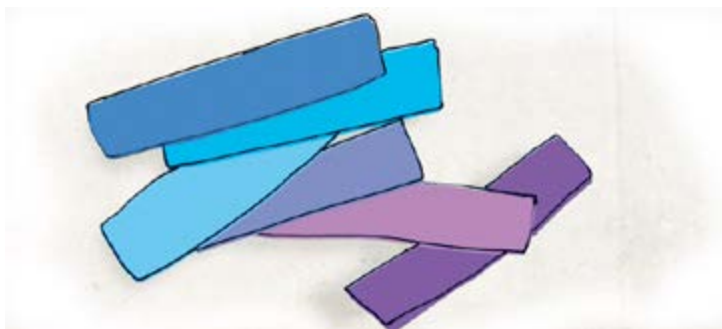
When we reach the stage of development where our inner self can be heard but our outer self rebels, we reach a stage where this form of meditation can begin to be very useful. If rightly used it can help avoid many detours and the emotional upheavals such detours can engender. Certainly being able to have a more direct grasp of the forces tugging within ourselves can ease conflict and facilitate resolution.

As the penetration of the inner self continues, the life of the material self is there but no longer takes precedence. The individual is more likely to make decisions based on values and principles rather than self-interest. He or she may be less swayed by public opinion and more able to function as a whole individual. The person may still be flawed but begin to respond to higher values and experience the need to accomplish something besides the happiness of the self. He or she is capable of enduring hardships for the welfare of another or for a cause, make small and not so small sacrifices, of thinking abstractly, of creating solutions, of not being swayed by emotions, of beginning to express wisdom. Since the individual is

increasingly dealing with what lies beyond the visible self, meditation is helpful not only on a personal level but also with whatever the person is trying to achieve.

As we keep growing and the inner self begins to control the outer self and we are able to be at one with the higher values of the inner self, whether or not we recognize them as that, our attempts may be tenuous since the outer self will not easily give up its own control over its tiny turf and will kick up its heels in any way it can. Regardless, many we acknowledge as heroes are examples of how the inner self can and does control, Thomas Jefferson, Martin Luther King, Jr., Gloria Steinem, Robert F. Kennedy, Rosa Parks among many others. They all demonstrate a power inherent in the control of the inner self, whether or not we agree with their politics or the significance of their contribution. They speak to the underlying wisdom inherent in such power, as well as the commitment to alleviate the ills around us. As meditation gains acceptance the task of the many who will hence engage in bettering conditions will be greatly eased, since meditation would facilitate their inner contacts and clarify their tasks. For them as for us, meditation will bring an understanding of looking at the world through a wider lens, where all that is unimportant pales and all that is truly important is made salient. They will have a keener grasp of what is real, will therefore better be able to pursue it and redefine what is or should be reality. In better utilizing the existence and value of the inner world, they will point the way to how to make needed decisions, decisions based on what is real, a reality

which is much larger than what we see—one that is wide enough to help us see the links between inner and outer worlds.



Chapter Two

How to Begin

Reaching the inner self is not in itself so unusual. It happens frequently although most do not realize they have done so, and many more do so with results so muddled, any insights are hardly recognizable. Contacting the inner self systematically, at will, being responsible for when we have, and being able to maintain this contact and ensure its accuracy is the heart of this kind of meditation. The following suggestions and techniques assume the reader is a novice. Even if that is not so, even if one has meditated with other techniques, it may be best to start as if one knew little. As the meditation process takes hold, speed can be quickly gathered, the fundamentals understood and one can find one's own rhythm.

The Alignment

This meditation is in several ways easier than most other types. The practitioner does not need to make the outer self conform to a superimposed higher order as would be the case with a mandala, for example. In part this is due to what is preliminary to the actual act of being at one with the inner self, alignment. Alignment is nothing more than bringing outer and inner self in line with each other. Many can be baffled by this term, wondering how they could possibly align their inner and outer selves like soldiers in front of a sergeant. The alignment refers to bringing the outer self in sync with the intention to meditate, and placing it under the influence of the inner self. As a pre-requisite it is roughly equivalent to relaxation. When meditation is used for relaxation, it brings inner and outer self together. Here it is only a preliminary step.

Sitting

Begin by finding a comfortable chair and place. Meditating regularly in the same place is helpful to consolidating the rhythm of the alignment. It involves silencing the outer self, but with time and the skill at doing it that inevitably comes with it, it becomes almost instantaneous.

The spine should be straight. We should not however be or feel tense, sit erect but relaxed. It is helpful to choose a chair that is not too soft. Despite any temptations, avoid cushy sofas. While many like to sit on the floor to meditate,

the back support provided by a chair tends to free us from the distractions of being physically uncomfortable or those of using our focus to sit straight. In addition some kind of back support can be an aid to maintaining the inner tension needed when the mind is alert and active. For this reason, lying down should be avoided, the necessary point of tension with the mind is absent in that position. Sitting on the floor can be considered an option, though, provided the lack of back support does not distract. It is helpful to remember that being erect enables the spine to be straight and that in turn enables the energies of the inner self to better flow to and through us.

Lighting

The room should neither be dark nor bright. If the light is too bright, it will be difficult to visualize accurately and clearly the sensory renditions of the contacted energies as well as interpret the symbols and imagery we are likely to register during meditation. This may sometimes also happen if the room is pitch dark. We can draw shades or drapes if necessary, but if we turn on a light, we ought to try to make sure it does not shine directly in our field of vision. What we see in front of us as we close our eyes should be of an even quality. If we are new to meditation, bright sunlight can be an added distraction. That is why meditating in the sunshine is not recommended. The amount of concentration required to meditate in the sun and still maintain the necessary alignment can often mitigate the inner freedom necessary to meditate

accurately. If we want to meditate outside, find a quiet shady spot.

Sound

The room or space should be as quiet as possible. Sounds like blaring radios or lawn blowers are most distracting and should be avoided if possible. Additionally, it may be that for some, the meditation process itself will amplify sounds in the environment, and once care has been taken to ensure a quiet moment, it is wise to learn to deal with whatever sounds may try to impinge on the process. To ignore them, we can imagine a protective shield between ourselves and the sound, surrender to the noise until it passes, postpone the meditation or try to proceed despite it. Should we lose concentration, we can make a conscious effort to refocus by sounding the OM. Sounding the OM in this manner is sometimes called the recalling OM meaning it is a means to recall our alignment.

Meditation with Others

Meditation is a private act. While many meditations take place in groups, they are not a substitute for being alone in communion with our inner self. The moods, feelings and sometimes thoughts, of those around us can influence how we meditate, at times by strengthening our own ability to reach deeper and at times can also interfere. Meditating with a small group, with people we know well, or with just another person can end up stimulating the outer self, the

part we are trying to silence. It is important therefore to learn the difference between meditation with others and meditation by oneself and make private meditation the core of our meditation life.

There is one exception, and that is when a group of two or more meditates together for the same reason and about the same thing. Then our contribution to the whole is in proportion to what we are able to give, and that is related to how well we have learned to meditate on our own.

A good balance when possible is to meditate alone as well as with a group.

When to Meditate

Early morning and sunset are optimum. Experienced practitioners who have learned to be sensitive to the energies beyond the self attest to this. It is why many varying disciplines also recommend meditating then. As an exercise in learning to recognize the existence and potency of what exists beyond the world we see, practitioners may want to try meditating at other times in order to compare the different experiences.

We should not, however, meditate when we first wake up. This meditation uses the mind and alertness is a prerequisite. If we go to work, for example, it would be best to meditate just before we leave the house. If we don't or work at home, we can meditate after our morning

routine, coffee, reading the paper, getting dressed, but before any meaningful interactions with people. If such interaction is unavoidable, then a few extra minutes of quiet before meditation will be necessary to detach from the hubbub around us. Another reason why meditating in the morning is important is that at this time we are still not yet completely steeped back into the daily routine which casts so many shadows on our ability to reach the inner self. If our schedule does not permit a full meditation in the morning, then we ought to try to take a few minutes to align ourselves, as if we were invoking the power of our inner self to be present and guide us throughout the day.

Many people cannot organize their meditation life around sunset, particularly when it comes so early in winter, and therefore it will not be possible for them to meditate at that time. If so, the next best thing will be to meditate as close to then as possible, perhaps when getting home.

Better to avoid meditating at night. If done properly, this meditation calls forth much energy and might keep one awake. We could then use meditation to relax but not to communicate with the inner self.

Whenever we choose to meditate, we shouldn't do this kind of meditation when we are tired, sleepy or overwrought, the meditation will only exaggerate those states. In this case also we can use meditation to relax but not to communicate.

Quieting the Body

We need to settle in a chair, loosening any clothing that may be too tight. We can then take a few breaths, as deep as we can make them, as slowly as we can and exhale also as slowly as we can. We may use any relaxation technique familiar to us or breathing exercises we already know.

When we feel relaxed and at ease, we close our eyes, and become aware of the weight of our feet on the floor and of our arms on the chair.

Quieting the Emotions

This is the trickiest part of the alignment procedure. We should not proceed until all emotions are silenced, for they would mar any insights we may reach assuming they do not first interfere with reaching the inner self.

Water is often the symbol for the emotions. We can therefore visualize a stormy sea and very slowly, by the force of our own will, visualize the storm ending and the waters becoming calm, as smooth as glass. If visualization is difficult, we can act as if we are doing it regardless. Given our intention and our following through with it, this means that the process will take place whether or not we are actually able to visualize it happening. If we cannot manage to calm the sea, our emotions are not sufficiently silent. In that case, it's best not to go any further. Instead perhaps we can just walk into the sea, imagining a bright

warm sun taking us in its rays, and let their warmth nurture and soothe us until we are ready to either walk out or feel ready to visualize a calm body of water.

Quieting the Mind

Quieting the mind is actually easier than we are prone to believe. Let's visualize a mountain, maybe one near the water we've just calmed down. We can make it as craggy or woodsy as we like or as tall as we fancy. Slowly we climb this mountain, maybe we discover a secret path or we just struggle along the rocks, whatever seems right. As we go up we leave behind the world of daily cares, the world of the mind that says, take out the trash, pay the bills, remember a call we forgot to return or a cross word with a co-worker. We soon reach the top and find a beautiful garden, replete with all the trees and flowers we love. Within the garden we find our way to a favorite spot, by a fountain, a waterfall, a statue, near an oak tree, by a lake, in a meadow among wild flowers, whatever seems most serene and perfect. As we sit there we become aware of being transported to another world. And of course because we are in a different realm, with no connection to our daily life, our mind isn't occupied with it and tends to be absorbed by the new reality. Consequently, focusing is much easier.

Reaching the Inner Self

As we sit wherever we have chosen to be, we become aware that above our head, perhaps a couple of feet, there is a

point of light, the symbolic representation of our inner self. It pulsates with life and is neither a star nor a circle, but something quite its own. Seated there we become aware of its ray which runs downward parallel to our spine, maybe a couple of inches away, and also goes upward to realms we will eventually discover or intimate.

We visualize how a rod of light from this pulsating center downwards to us, connects us to our inner self. Once we feel the connection is secure, we say the following, either audibly or not, whichever suits us best, "I and the inner self are one." Then we sound the OM.

The OM is much like pressing enter on a computer. It is a means to activate and a mechanism to anchor what we are trying to do. It reflects the rhythm of the breath, as if we inhaled the Oooo and exhaled the Mmmm. It is to be done deliberately, slowly, and not idly. If done properly, we will immediately be able to sense the flow of energy it brings forth by effecting what it is we are trying to achieve.

If we are meditating with others, we take a moment to pause and realize that others in the room are also connected to their inner selves. We try and visualize that point of light above their heads and also be aware of the magnetic pull each must be experiencing through these points of light and with each other.

We are now ready to meditate.

The Meditation

Meditation is only as effective as what we can bring to it. Our motives, although they are most of the time inchoate and unconscious, affect it greatly. Our intent, as declared through the alignment, also affects it. How much we understand of what we are doing and why are also important factors.

Meditation is meant to make us more conscious, that is more aware. Consciousness is far from a new concept when applied to meditation, and maintains its ordinary definition of knowing and being cognizant. What meditation enables is our cognizance of things we would not otherwise be able to know. Consciousness in this context refers to enlarging our own ability to be aware by including levels of knowing we hadn't been able to include before. Meditation therefore is also meant to make us more sensitive to what happens around and within us. Going off into a trance-like state is not meditation as it is understood here. Falling asleep which occasionally happens in the early stages may not be unusual but isn't desirable. It would indicate that the point of needed mental focus isn't present. Meditation, after all, is a word we often use to refer to reflection, and that is what we are about to do, reflect, cogitate, ponder, albeit in a larger context, one including the world of the inner self.

Seed Thoughts

To facilitate this reflection and to make sure the inner self participates in this inner conversation, it is useful to have a point of focus, perhaps a question or something that becomes the focal point of the meditation. Because of how this focal point works, some have called it a seed thought, meaning it flowers within as we deepen our understanding of its significance and unfolds hidden layers as we continue to meditate upon it. Koans are much like seed thoughts and can be used. Many biblical phrases make good seed thoughts:

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart always be acceptable unto Thee

I am my brother's keeper

Lines of poetry also can contain the necessary depth to provide insights:

Joy and woe are woven fine

To find a universe in a grain of sand

As we ponder and reflect a given seed thought, we can pierce through its surface significance and discover ideas and meanings we did not know existed or hadn't otherwise thought through. A good seed thought can be meditated upon for days and weeks and still be fruitful. It is obvious that to be effective a seed thought should not be too simplistic.

The Inner Self-Mind-Brain Con-

nection

At the heart of this meditation is the connection between the mind and the inner self, making the use of seed thoughts rather important. The effect of using them forges a bridge, a pathway, in time even a bond between the outer ego based personal self and the inner self. Here the mind is an intermediary, since it reaches both upwards to the inner self, the object of our communication, and downward to the brain, the concrete tip of our personal self. Without the upper reaches we could not reach insights, without the lower ones, we could not articulate them. The inner self-mind-brain connection is slowly arrived at, but with practice it is what makes meditation work. The deeper the connection is, the clearer and the more accurate our meditation will be. Without a connection between these parts of ourselves, meditation would remain an amorphous mystical whole without directly formulating the insights contacted.

Issues as Seed Thoughts

It is possible to meditate on issues and problems directly affecting our daily life by using them as seed thoughts. The danger, if we are not sufficiently experienced, is that we may be too personal and thereby inadvertently stimulate parts of us that we have just spent time and effort quieting. Care must be taken, therefore, to ensure that if we use a problem or an issue as a seed thought, that we adopt a detached attitude or that we phrase the issue in such a

way as to be as impersonal as possible. It would be best to have some practice at meditation before attempting to use personal problems as seed thoughts. Meditating on current issues or world problems as seed thoughts is a good way to gain practice before trying to delve into more personal problems and issues—assuming, of course, we remember that partisanship is not part of the inner world.

How Long to Meditate

Because when rightly done this meditation is so dynamic and can call forth such energy, it is best not to make the entire meditation longer than around twenty minutes. The quality of the energies we contact are actually of far greater import than the length of time we spend meditating. And if the majority of this time is spent finding our way around the inner world, that is fine too. A clear contact of but a few seconds is far more efficient than long periods of wishful thinking, loosely connected daydreaming, apparently comforting experiences, or any other state that can result when meditating without the right use of the mind.

Silencing the Mind

Although we took care to silence the outer self and its various parts during alignment, they may not necessarily stay quiet. More than likely, the lower aspects of the mind will make themselves known. This is particularly so in the beginning stages of developing proficiency with this kind

of meditation. As we sit to meditate, suddenly we may, for example, be reminded of a host of details we might have forgotten to attend to. Most often the mind brings up irrelevant or distracting subjects. Regardless, just remember that silencing the mind, as is the case with much meditation work is a matter of practice.

We begin by learning to be the Observer, the one who looks on, who sees and knows but is not attached. As such, we can quickly learn to see thoughts come and put ourselves in the position to choose: Is this a helpful thought, or not? We can of course, use will power, but that may be best for later, when we feel more experienced. In the beginning it may be best to find a small helpful mechanism to help us along. As thoughts come and as we choose whether or not they are useful, we can, for example, visualize a basket into which unhelpful thoughts can be discarded. Or we might prefer to visualize a hand that gently takes those thoughts away. In time as the inner self, the mind and the brain learn to work together, the activity of the lower aspects of the mind decreases greatly. It does remain something to watch out for though, since it is easy to trick oneself that one has registered something in meditation that has not come from the inner self.

Before Ending the Meditation

It is a good idea to give the inner self a chance to reach us. Once we have taken the seed thought or problem as far as we can for one session, we can wait a few moments to see

if anything else will be registered. To do this, we refocus on the inner self, that symbolic point a little above your head, concentrating our consciousness there as much as we can.

Since the inner world is impersonal, caring as much about any other person as it does us and since the energies contacted through the inner self could be of use to humanity as a whole, it is a good idea to take a moment to radiate those energies for others to share. We can allow our imagination full sway and visualize this radiating in whatever way seem appropriate.

Lastly, since we have been helped whether or not we are yet aware of it, we finish the meditation with a flash of thanks and gratitude.

Meditating on the Meditation

Still seated in the chair, eyes open, it is now important to take as long as needed to anchor within what happened during the meditation, a sort of debriefing. Notes are helpful, but first thinking through the thoughts and symbols registered during the meditation is in order. Often there is a discrepancy between the recollection and the meditation itself. The task is to work inwardly with the thoughts, the words, the images until we sense that point of peace allowing us to know our understanding is at one with what happened. Being frustrated or overly eager can interrupt or mar this process. Patience is always a good tool. It may take a few minutes or a lot more time just to

pull the entire experience into place. Do not rush. And if only part of it comes together, the rest may come later. The important thing is to be honest and recognize what portion of the meditation needs further probing.

When we feel we have taken this debriefing as far as it can go, the meditation is over. This does not mean that what happened is or should be separate from the rest of our day. In fact, if we are alert and if the right inner self contacts were made, it is more than likely that thoughts and insights will continue to manifest themselves, in the shower, while driving, while talking to someone, while watching television, when reading, or when doing anything else that our schedule calls for. These thoughts will answer questions that we may have had, amplify what we had understood, or sometimes, if we are sufficiently open, correct what we thought we had understood, and didn't. For this along with other reasons, it is very important to have an attitude that is the hallmark of an earnest practitioner and the open mind that characterizes such a person: This is the best I can do now, there is and will be more to understand tomorrow.



Chapter Three

How to Continue

Meditation Is an Attitude

Meditation is not a separate act, a distinct event that occurs from say 7 to 7:20 A.M., for when it succeeds its effects carry over to the rest of our life. It feeds the inner self as food feeds the body and in a similar way generates energy. While the results of meditation can manifest themselves as physical energy, they usually come in the form of insights, an inquiring attitude, a layer of wisdom, knowing what to question and what to make a priority as well as sensitivity to what lies beyond the mere appearance of people and events. As the day progresses, while we need not remember we are a practitioner, we may need to be mindful of what

meditation stands for—a way to reach a deeper aspect of reality. In practice, that means being sensitive to the world of the inner self. Through contacting that world and the vortex of energy which that contact generates, we place ourselves within a world that is far larger than ordinary perception, far gentler and yet far more demanding. In almost all things the world of the inner self is a world that stands at odds with the world of ordinary reality. Inner and outer worlds are juxtaposed, in more ways than one. They are opposites, each representing the end of the continuum that meditation aims to bridge.

The personal self seeks happiness, however ephemeral it may be, however fun or fleeting its pleasure. The inner self's nature is joy and what it imparts to one is the strength of that joy.

The personal self is naturally competitive, seeking to dominate or be the center. The inner self is cooperative and automatically seeks the welfare of all concerned.

The personal self is self-oriented, looking after its own little domain. The inner self is other oriented and self-forgetful.

The personal self first focuses on form, on the outer aspects of things and events. The inner self, in accordance with its nature, seeks quality, the inner aspects, the substance of events.

The personal self tends towards prejudice, the inner self towards tolerance.

The personal self seeks control, imposition of its own views. The inner self seeks responsibility and the good of all not only the good of the person it may be guiding.

The personal self tends towards blame, guilt, self-pity, denial, avoidance, divisiveness. The inner self towards clarity, love, understanding, compassion, unity.

The personal self is prone to immediate gratification and to a short term view of a situation. The inner self sees with a long term perspective, winning the battle is only important if it helps win the war between the higher and the lower.

The personal self is selfish, the inner self does not shun away from sacrifice.

The conflict inherent in these pairs of opposites is obvious and explains why the journey whereby the values of the inner self will prevail can be long and arduous. On a day to day level, however, the conflict is not insurmountable. Meditation, along with some of the techniques below, eases the process.

The Nightly Review

The nightly review may be easy, but it is also efficient. It complements the morning and sunset meditations and

punctuates the day with love and understanding. The reflection it calls for is itself a form of meditation.

The review is best done as the last thing or near the last thing you do before going to sleep. The mind is freed then and its lower aspects less likely to interfere. When done daily, the review contributes to the rhythm of meditation and aids in assessing progress or discovering soft spots. Skipping a day here and there may not be harmful but skipping the process altogether weakens the entire momentum.

The only trick to the review, if trick it is, is to remember not to cheat ourselves, for it is totally self-propelled. There is no prompter indicating a right answer, no monitor, no checker. We are on our own, which sometimes is the most intimidating time to be courageous and to look at ourselves mercilessly. The nightly review is not a judge surrogate, it is not an instrument of blame. It is a mirror and a guide, enabling us to see ourselves as the inner self sees and facilitating the journey towards a higher way of being.

How to Proceed

Once settled comfortably, we can answer as many of the following questions as possible for that particular day. Most of the questions do not have instant replies but require thought and introspection. We can take as long as we want. Again there is no need to rush. If some question is difficult to answer, then it may be a sign that somewhere there is

something that wants to be hidden and shouldn't be. If something makes us uncomfortable, then it too may be hiding something that needs to be aired. While we need not figure it all out on any given day, we do need to remember to address any questions that arise, lest our own integrity not be the staff it is meant to be.

Writing down some of the answers can often be helpful in articulating something that would not otherwise be as clear. Having a written record of the review is also useful in seeing progress over time. The more one advances in doing meditation, the more the nightly review will be able to be of use, will be able to reveal the ups and downs of our progress towards learning how to make and maintain contact with the inner self. A written record is also helpful in realizing the changes within fostered through contact with the inner self. Something we thought perfectly normal we may discover to be problematic months down the road or something we thought we wouldn't be able to do, turns out to be easy, or something you thought was objectionable turns out to be justifiable.

The Questions to Ask

The nightly review should include questions such as the following:

- How did my personal self manifest itself today? How did my inner self?

- What values did I need to use today? Were they inner self values or personal self ones?
- What was my first inclination in a given situation—to respond as an inner self, or as a personal one?
- Was it easier for me to remind myself to be an inner self than it was in the past?
- How did others respond to me today, as inner selves or as personal ones? How would I have acted in their shoes?
- What would I want to do differently were I to live this day over again?
- What quality was dominant in this day and was it from the inner self?
- Is there any behavior or line of thought as a personal self that I definitely want to avoid in the future?
- Is there a quality of the inner self that I know I must clearly endeavor to manifest? How did I use this day to work toward manifesting that quality?

Detachment

It's much easier to practice detachment if we understand it within the context of our own growth, and that growth is often being full of paradoxes—seemingly contradictory concepts that, when reconciled, expose not only a more inclusive perception but also the deeper understanding that accompanies it. When we can get past the paradoxes

we are able to see another paradox hidden within it, that detachment is not really what it sounds but rather involves attachment to the inner self. The concept of the personal self is also such a paradox. It may appear to be the proverbial bad guy, when in fact it is not. True, the personal self is the low end in relation to the inner self, and is what the inner self attempts to supersede, but the personal self is also the instrument of the inner self. Whether it fosters the growth of its values within us, or guides us to fulfill our share in the world, the inner self works through the personal self. As we become proficient with our meditation and as our mediation brings results, it is able to move us to grasp that the outer and the inner, the ego and the transcendent are part of the same self. They then cease to be separate pieces of us vying for control. Rather they become two aspects of who we are, two facets of ourselves. In the same way that we may use the right arm to do certain things and the left to do others and both arms to do still others, we can recognize that each part of who we are has its place and need not vie for control but can coexist. For most, however, that's likely to take a long time. In the meantime detachment can be useful with our meditation life. Of the many techniques to help one understand the difference between the inner and outer selves as well as to foster a bridge between them, detachment and being the Observer are among the most efficient. Many rebel against the very idea of detachment since we do live in the world and need to be attached to it not only to survive, but also in order to help anyone. What detachment really means is not achieving some free floating state or something

akin to suspended animation, but removing what hinders the work of the inner self. Detachment is just a way to separate ourselves from the barriers to what is transcendent within us. It begins with our awareness of what it is we must detach ourselves from, continues first with the will to detach ourselves and then with the vigilance to make sure our efforts are sustained. And although it may not be simple in its practice detachment nevertheless has deep simplicity. As we begin to get a handle on that simplicity, we discover we are free to perceive detachment from another perspective—that of the inner self. In turn that perception opens us to receive unanticipated rewards, the first being that detaching oneself in such a way isn't as difficult as we might have thought. Slowly, we come to recognize that the personal self may not relish having to make a change or an adjustment, yet the deepened contact with the inner self that this permits is well worth the effort.

Keeping in mind that we should be detached from all that hinders contact with the inner self already sets the stage to inwardly orient ourselves to what it is we should do. Such an orientation may take the form of a seed thought for meditation, for example: Is there a trait the inner self wants me to rid myself of in order to be more detached; is there a trait I should cultivate in order to be more attached to the inner self. Such reflections may also be part of the nightly review. One might ask in the review: Was I too attached today to the personal self way of doing things, or how would things have been different if I had been more attached to the inner self?

There are times when the idea of detachment in old fashioned terms, that is, separating ourselves from something, is still the best answer to a given situation. When we hear gossip about ourselves, when we are tempted to fall back on old patterns, when anger arises within us, the best way to handle these situations may be to just detach ourselves. In no instance, however, does detachment ever mean repression or suppression. Detachment is not an avoidance mechanism, nor is it a mechanism to separate ourselves from some aspect of reality either within ourselves or the world. Rather it is a way of looking at a situation with impersonality as if it were happening somewhere else or to somebody else. It is learning to not be controlled by emotions, to allow a higher part of oneself to dominate, and to transcend a lower way of doing x or y activity.

Being the Observer

Many experience difficulty with the idea of being the observer, yet once the concept is clarified, realize that it is not only easy, it can be fun. Being the observer is in line with the impersonality implied and/or required of serious disciplines, and that needed when attempting to focus on the transcendent part of ourselves. It is not impersonality as cold-heartedness, but impersonality in terms of separating ourselves from likes and dislikes, from emotions, from that which clouds judgments and makes us favor our own point of view. No matter how one would define higher reality, it exists for the good of the whole and its framework

would have to be far too large to be understood within the limitations or the parameters of any one person. Being the observer aids in overcoming these parameters. It is a way of looking at ourselves or at others as if we had no feeling, no preferences, as if we were not limited by our own prejudices. Being the observer is, of course, a way to invite the inner self to see with us and for us, to see as if the confines of the personal self had been lifted. In everyday language, being the observer means being objective. While we often think of objectivity as difficult, as with anything else it is not when we know how to do it.

Being the observer is a way to learn how to be wise and impartial, a way to see not only as if we were someone else, but also as if that someone else had all the qualities of our inner self. It does deepen our meditation life, and yet we cannot be the observer without first having some form of inner self contact.

The Three-Legged Stool

Meditating a few minutes a couple of times a day will yield results, but they will not be as life changing as they would be when it is practiced within its context of growth. Weaving meditation into our life pattern makes it a dynamic force for change and suffuses it with meaning and power. The best way to weave it into our life and achieve a measure of change is to integrate meditation with study and with serving others. As one might expect of such a three-legged stool, one leg is as essential as the other two.

Study

Study, as it is used here, refers to how the mind is used as much as to acquiring knowledge. While reading and pondering what has been read may be a foundation, learning does not necessarily have to occur within a conventional framework. If we think of wisdom as one of the ways knowledge can be transformed, the importance of reading and learning is even clearer. Reading about world issues and problems, for example, guides us to discover aspects of the world that link us to each other and help us to understand that whoever we are, or think we are, we are neither as small nor as important as it often appears. Reading about history, about the ideas that molded our cultures and civilizations, is also relevant, for to understand where humanity needs to go, we also need a sense of where we come from, how far we have, or have not, travelled. Another category of helpful reading may be in literature, poetry, the arts, for they often reveal the inner self at work.

Serving Others

Meditation does not exist in empty space but to help foster the working out of a higher agenda for ourselves and for the human family. However, before participating in the many activities of that agenda taking place at any time all around us, we must be ready. While comparatively few are engaged in these endeavors, many are engaged in supporting, aiding and forging the sought after results. Many civic and philanthropic organizations for example,

advance the working out of this higher purpose, think of Amnesty International, Médecins Sans Frontières, the Red Cross and the many causes that exist to fight poverty, child labor, underage marriages, women's inequality as well as so many others. These organizations and causes only exist with the support of thousands. With a certain humility, students of meditation work to recognize their place within the overall scheme. It will most likely not be at the center of whatever group, but it will contribute to the work of an organization, or group or cause.

Discovering our place within the larger agenda for the human family is a long process, and often several attempts are made. This process of trial and error is endemic to learning and to self-discovery and will hopefully be done in the right spirit. The idea is not to participate because we should or because it appears to be the right thing to do and certainly not to make ourselves feel important or worthy. The right attitude is one of yielding to the will of the inner self, allowing that ego less self to guide us. As we go through the probable many steps to find our place we will require open-mindedness and integrity. For some, probably very few, service to others may call for the initiation of some new something, being a pioneer or trailblazer, carrying a torch against the wind. For many, the right place is likely to coincide with the right choice of vocation. For others serving others may entail activities outside one's livelihood, community involvement or an affiliation with a particular group. Still for others it may be leading the best life one can, learning to recognize causes and organizations

carrying forth the higher agenda for humanity and supporting them with money, a vote, a commitment or all three.

No matter where we may end up, service to others begins with the heartfelt need to extend ourselves. It can be with our co-workers, with acquaintances, with friends, with whoever may come our way. The idea is not to do for others for the sake of doing, to interfere or be officious, but to answer a need, learn to develop an outgoingness, a sense of goodwill and givingness, to recognize the murmur of the inner self within and to act accordingly. In doing so, we act not from the ego, seeking to enlarge its perception of who we are, but from the seat of the inner self seeking to be of use for the progress of others. Serving others is an act of self-forgetfulness and as we develop the skills to implement the inner self's outward push, it is also increasingly an act of harmlessness. Service to others is the practical leg of the three-legged stool, teaching us to put into practice what the other two legs have revealed and taught.

Discernment

The nightly review, like the practice of the three-legged stool and indeed like all aspects of life if we are meditating, cannot rightfully proceed without remembering the art of discernment. In the spiritual literature of the East, this is often referred to as discrimination. By either name, it refers to the ability to distinguish better from best, higher from lower, appearance from quality. Without the voice of the

inner self it cannot be properly heard and implemented. Our choice of reading matter, for example or how we interpret and make sense of our meditation requires discernment. How else are we to know if our choices reinforce the tendencies of our ego or of our inner self? Just like its counterpart in the material world, whether used in reference to our palate or to our taste, discernment fosters the separation of the essential from the non. This exercise of our ability to be discerning is vital to cultivating the necessary simplicity and the shedding of all superfluous layers, thoughts, people, things and activities that interfere with and hide the clear pathway to the inner self.

Making meditation part of our life and integrating it within our daily routine may seem undoable until we practice discernment. Without it, the time needed for meditation may not seem to be there, but the time is there just as the need to find that time is there. It's up to us to exercise the necessary discernment to reshape priorities and discover why less can be more.

Using the Inner Self to Solve Problems

When meditation no longer seems new, at some point we come to realize that it is actually the inner self that does the hard work. We, as an outer self are but a receptacle and our contribution is to learn to be a better instrument. Since the inner self is our best self, learning when and how to use it is very much our responsibility. Once the idea of discernment

and its rewards are more embedded within us, we are likely to discover that being able to determine when to use the inner self loses its sense of being something separate from who we are. Although we may not yet be able to experience the oneness that comes from knowing that the inner self is part of us, we may begin to appropriate it. As a consequence, it becomes far easier to recognize which life problems we can submit to the inner self for illumination and insight and which problems would not be appropriate. Which shoes to buy may not require inner self input, for example, unless we need to refrain from living above our means, but which non-profit to contribute to may. Many personal or individual issues and decisions can, and often should, be submitted like seed thoughts in meditation, so as to enable us to see them in a wider, more enlightened, and frequently more practical light.

The inner self is our best teacher, though it seeks to infuse us with its wisdom it will never impose its will. Neither will it make decisions for us. It is entirely up to us to make decisions and take responsibility. The inner self does not seek to make robots out of us or clones of some kind but fully functioning beings. On the way to becoming a more perfected version of who we are, it is helpful to remember that we do have the right to make mistakes, for mistakes are part and parcel of the necessary process of trial and error. As long as we are honest enough to learn from our mistakes, the inner self will continue to guide us through them and towards the next step.

Invoking the Inner Self

Being or feeling stuck is a normal part of being a student of meditation. We all may reach a crossroads and not know where to turn or what to do. We may feel unsure about a meditation or an insight, a procedure or a technique, a problem, or a decision, a dilemma or a question. Once we have exhausted the possibilities of meditation and reflection, we can simply invoke the power of our inner self. This technique is literally as simple as it sounds. We just say in whatever way seems best, “I invoke the power of my inner self to guide me to” and fill in whatever the question, problem or issue may be. The answer will come in its own time and in its own way: An inner stirring, a thought rising from somewhere within, the words of a friend, an unexpected event, a book or TV program, even an insight in meditation. Surreptitiously but surely, the inner self will make itself known when we are detached, open minded and patient.



Chapter Four

What to Watch Out For

Dangers Do Exist

We're just beginning to accept that meditation has positive effects, the fact that it can also hold dangers is either ignored or overlooked. If it is true that meditation connects to energies that ultimately reach what animate life, then the very nature of such energies would automatically imply power, and that power could in turn have unexpected consequences. The more effective meditation is at reaching into those invisible, still not understood, transcendent realms, the more it can lead to problems. Why this is so is

not difficult to understand. Like water that takes the shape of a vase, as those energies interface with our imperfections, those imperfections distort the water's original purity and lead to inevitable deformations. Why we need to exercise care, can therefore be easy to grasp. Saying that meditation can create problems, however, is not to say there are no answers or in some cases prevention. The more we succeed at meditation, the more we know we have reached a new level of energy, the more we need to be mindful of the potential dangers. Another natural analogy applies, just as the sun shines on the flowers and the weeds, the contacted energies stimulate all of us, the good and not so good, the ego and the transcendent. While this duality may cause the problems, it can also insure that we are able to rise above them. Learning to be sensitive to what these problems may be will lessen their effect and in some cases prevent them.

Problems Relating to the Personal Self

The first kind of problem to be aware of are those concerning the personal self. Wedded to its own small, narrow domain, the personal self is not willing to surrender its control without kicking up its heels. Any student of meditation can expect certain traits to be heightened, particularly in the beginning, a sense of self-importance, a temptation to use the techniques for personal advancement and personal goals, a tendency to be separate from others, a twinge of elitism, a bit of self-centeredness, or a desire to impose our truth upon others.

As numerous or personalized as these problems may be, they are unavoidable. Our inevitable state of imperfection as human beings guarantees that we will fall prey to at least some of these problems. Because we are each individuals, the problems we face will be tailor made, reflecting our individual tendencies and propensities. There are however three traits that all practitioners will more likely than not be prone to and need to be aware of and work through: Inertia, unrecognized self-pity and the will of the personal self.

Inertia

The kind of inertia that will no doubt be experienced is that of the personal self refusing to do what it knows it should, resisting in myriad ways what needs to be done to advance to the next step and keeping us from developing the necessary will to forge ahead. It is a form of procrastination although it may not necessarily be accompanied by a list of excuses and complaints. In whatever form it takes, inertia is an obstacle to the inner self working out its purpose within us. Seen in the context of the conflict between high and low, inertia lets us know that the low is present if not winning.

Inertia is not measured in action, it is not a shying away from activity. It does not necessarily imply laziness as the term is usually used—although it could. Rather it is the reflection of the personal self asserting itself by saying: What the inner self wants me to do is too hard or too much

and I can't, or won't, as the case may be. Inertia reflects the resistance that is evoked when the inner self tries to work through our personal self, something it obviously can't avoid. Given that the personal self is essentially the polar opposite of the inner self, there may be certain logic to its push towards inertia. It may attempt to forestall the imposition of the inner self or desire to foil progress by creating a stalemate if not stagnation. Yet as prevalent as it is, recognizing how inertia manifests itself can escape our notice, for the inertia of the personal self has so many ways of cloaking itself, seeing through the miasma it can create can be a challenge. The wisest way to handle inertia is to assume we are under its spell, until the inner self in meditation indicates otherwise.

Self-Pity

Self-pity is a form of drawing attention to the self as a separate entity. It is as if an inner voice clamored poor me or any such phrase that means look at me or in some way draws attention to the personal self, how awful I had to undergo this or that, isn't it unfair I was born when women were not quite equal to men, isn't it sad I have to bear the consequences of having arthritis, or feel for me I have to endure insensitive co-workers. The reasons for self-pity are as endless as the kind of experiences we undergo. No matter what forms it takes, self-pity is rarely recognized. It then can grow or settle within us forming an even larger barrier to the voice of the inner self, the voice which reveals why a given experience or condition was undergone

or what lessons can be extracted from it. Because the world at large more often than not allows us to justify reasons for self-pitying behavior, self-pity can be an even larger obstacle than inertia. Seeing through the worldly acceptance of its causes requires the very inner self strength that its presence negates. The real obstacle, therefore, is not the presence of self-pity but the consequences of its existence. When it's there, we may feel empowered to act a given way or make a given decision, unaware of our true motivation. Our motives are more likely to be tainted by the personal self than we might have surmised because when all is said and done, self-pity clouds the path to the inner self, and what we think we hear as guidance may turn out to be a cover for the personal self's preference. In a rather unique if equally unrecognizable way, self-pity may propel us to place ourselves at the center of a drama that the personal self has created. Such circumstances place us at the center of our own stage and anytime our ego takes over in such a manner, the voice of the inner self is sure to be dimmed. And as it is, distortions are not only invited, they are expected. The way to deal with self-pity is to learn to recognize the many ways it will manifest itself in our life and our meditation life. The nightly review will help, so will invoking the power of our inner self. Most of all our own desire to dissipate it is key to eventually succeeding.

The Will of the Personal Self

The will of the personal self often gives rise to its own problems, reinforcing the inertia, self-pity, or whatever part

of our weaknesses may be useful to it in a given instance. The will of the personal self will often, with apparent good reason, foil every effort to let the inner self control. It is an action/reaction not unlike that of an organism fighting the injection of something foreign, a speck of dust in the eye or a grain of sand in an oyster. And just like the pearl which will eventually be formed out of that grain of sand, it is up to us to take this problem and redeem it into a strength. Through inner guidance, we can discover how to co-opt the personal self to find what it takes to see new things in new ways, be endowed with the courage to exercise our convictions, begin developing any number of traits indicating the inner self is present, or follow whatever course the inner self indicates.

During the actual act of meditation the will of the personal self will often not manifest itself in its usual forms, in terms which normally set it apart from the inner self. Even though we have taken care to quiet it, it can nevertheless be present albeit in a most oblique way. We may be trying our best to meditate on a given seed thought or issue, and become aware of thoughts and concerns giving every indication of being important or reminding us of something we might otherwise have forgotten but all in all having little or nothing at all to do with the meditation itself. It is then up to us to remember to be the observer, to use every ounce of discernment we have and spend sufficient time decoding and debriefing our meditation, in short, to check carefully to determine if anything occurred during meditation which was not of the inner self.

Over-Stimulation

As we penetrate the inner world, we increasingly experience energies, energies available through meditation as well as energies already existing around us that we had not previously been able to identify or learned how to sense. As the inner self is contacted, its energies too are released. All these energies can sometimes be too much to handle until or unless the inner self is able to advance in its control of the outer self. When it does, it means a larger capacity to process those energies, something that often translates as a greater stamina to withstand whatever we have contacted. In addition we may make a trial and error type of mistake and inadvertently contact energies which we ought to have transcended or shied away from. Often beginners of meditation meditate for too long, or the alignment is not as clear as it should be. The result of these circumstances is what can be called over-stimulation, a state where the body, as the recipient of these energies, overreacts. This may manifest itself as insomnia, a kind of tension, or irritability. The remedy is quite simple, stop meditating until the over-stimulation disappears.

Distortions: The Veils between the Real and the Unreal

Living as we do in an imperfect world, not yet controlled by the inner self, and being ourselves at various degrees of such control, we cannot help but be subject to numerous distortions, obstacles, and veils between ourselves and

our higher counterpart. Distortions also arise from the lure of the world in general. The effect is not unlike being imprisoned. Instead of bars, we are hemmed in by the host of misconceptions, veils and the like which make it that much harder to reach into the very transcendent realms that would free us. Left to our own devices, without the benefit of the inner self's guidance, our line of least resistance inclines us towards the easy, the expedient, the lowest, instead of the noblest, the harmless, the highest. What makes these distortions particularly relevant is that we are so taken in by them, we are not aware of how they manifest themselves or can hold us spellbound, and should others point them out we would likely disagree. We see them most clearly once we have outgrown them, once the inner self has prevailed and we can stand apart from them. And yet, being ever aware that they can exist within us is a huge help in trying to discover them and learn how to outgrow them.

Many distortions stem from our existing imperfections. Our jealousies, petty foibles, and of course larger faults obviously are traits we all agree ought to be overcome. Many other aspects of ourselves are sanctioned by the world but not by our inner selves. Our way of placing self-interest first, of feeling entitled to defend ourselves in many cases, of believing it is all right to gauge someone by how they appear to us may have justifications in the everyday world but no equivalent from the vantage point of the inner self. In many cases the cause of the distortion would

not be the lack of inner self control as the ignorance of its values and the principles those values create within us.

The way distortions affect the way we perceive every facet of the world end up forming a layer of miasma imprisoning us, a layer separating us from a larger view, separating us as well from what is real from what is not. It is the phenomenon which Eastern spirituality calls illusion and one that remains our challenge, regardless of how we refer to it. To free ourselves from its influence we need to penetrate through the layers the distortions have created. Meditation is uniquely suited to help us reach beyond these veils. Bit by bit we learn to pierce through them and release the imprisoned aspect of our being.

While an overall layer affects us collectively, our own distortions are the amalgam of those arising from mishandling or overemphasizing our emotions, our lack of clear thought and from overstressing our physical wellbeing. As we learn to better grasp the inner self, and as we learn to work with the energies we touch, we slowly learn to dissipate these distortions.

Distortions Arising from Emotions

Our most frequent battles are with the distortions that arise from our emotions. They are ever present and take on as many forms as there are behaviors, inevitably creating an emotional fog. These distortions sometimes combine

with each other or with those arising from our mental activity and/or with our desire for wellbeing and can end up creating a rather thick haze around us. Our vision is then clouded, and frequently what we cannot see is the distortion itself. By the time we can give the distortion a name, can see it within us, the worst of the battle is behind. What makes the distortion a problem is how it is used by our personal self. Thus we can be capable of anger and experience it without it being a distortion, and therefore without it interfering with the path to our inner self. Feeling fear if someone is standing before us gun in hand may not be a distortion, but being fearful that someone might shoot us were we to go outside would be (assuming of course the person is not living in a war zone). At times a distortion can be so pronounced that it will seriously affect behavior and attitudes. Fanaticism is an example. The wall it erects can seem insurmountable, the person is held back unable to see what led him or her to being hemmed in by extreme beliefs.

No one is immune to distortions, they are part and parcel of being human at this stage of humanity's development. Those who can dissipate a given distortion can become the leader of a particular cause or issue. The 19th century crusader Dorothea Dix saw through the harsh treatment of the indigent insane and worked to change the law in Massachusetts and create a movement with repercussions beyond the indigent and beyond that commonwealth. Doubtful Dorothea Dix was free of distortions, but people like her can see through something most of us can't. When

we manage to see through a distortion whether on our own or through the help of someone else, we begin to recognize it as the limitation it represented, remove that veil and be one step further in our pursuit of the real.

Distortions are not restricted to unpleasant emotions. In the same way that any emotional state can cloud our vision, many emotions can allow distortions to enter. Some of the most frequent are: Fearfulness and fear, ambition, pride, being overwhelmed, denial, avoidance, a sense of either superiority or inferiority, anger, criticism, suspicion, manipulateness, arrogance, rigidity, intransigence, self-indulgence, excitation.

Dissipating our distortions so that we can learn to see past them thus clearing the path to the inner self is a painstaking process involving a combination of previously mentioned techniques: Being the observer, detachment, invoking the power of the inner self, the nightly review and inner reflection. Since the inner self is in many ways our best teacher, meditation itself should be used as an adjunct to these techniques, indicating when and how to use them and guiding the process of initially recognizing the existence of a given distortion.

Most distortions are focused around our weaknesses. When we unduly focus on our strengths, knowingly or not excluding other necessary traits, then distortions can settle around our strengths too. Being devoted, for example, can easily become a distortion. Learning to be honest about

our weaknesses as well as our strengths is therefore a prerequisite to being able to recognize our distortions.

Working on a distortion is not dissimilar to eliminating a fault. The difference here is that the inner self is more overtly guiding. Not only is that guidance without judgment, it usually is an opportunity to do what we need to do with greater ease and fewer detours. When a distortion becomes one of our shortcomings as it sometimes cannot help but to, enlisting the guidance of the inner self ought to be a first step, for blaming ourselves is not an answer. While taking responsibility for a distortion is ultimately a goal, the process from discovering to dissipating it will vary. Not only could it be a matter of years, it could entail the forming of a new habit or developing a new strength. If one is working on what has become a fault, an efficient way to proceed is by developing the opposite quality. Thus if one is ungiving, which is a way of holding on to the personal self and the ego, the guidance may be to cultivate givingness.

Distortions Arising from the Lack of Clear Thought

Distortions that arise from the lack of clear thought are so ubiquitous that were we aware of how deeply they affect our daily lives, we would often feel foolish. The import of not thinking clearly can be far reaching, many of our world problems, for example, would be resolved, were we able to see through the illusions that shadow most of our

thoughts. As individuals the impact is no less important, for it is in piercing through that layer, illusion by illusion, veil by veil, distortion by distortion, that we will free ourselves and hopefully weaken the overall fog we are forced to live within. Were we to think clearly, for example, think without the distortions of our many fallacies and deceptions, it would most surely enable us to see equality and do away with discrimination and prejudice. It is instructive to remember that concepts which are familiar to us, like racial classifications, have no grounding in the formless world of the inner self. Much that is destructive in the world can be traced to illusions stemming from our distortions. Racism is an instance where several illusions interact and coalesce, including illusions we hold about equality, race, ethnicity, superiority, power. On a more personal level many relationships would not be entered into or decisions not made or made differently were we to see more truly to the core of issues without the distortions that arise from our lack of clear thought.

Distortions Arising from Over Emphasizing Well-Being

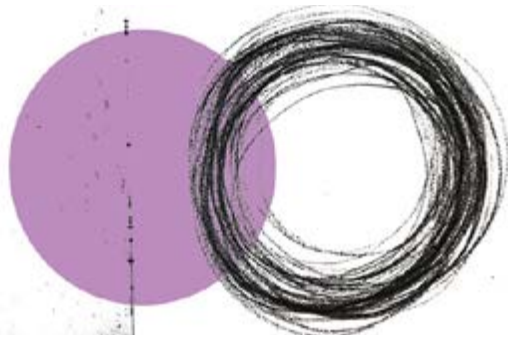
Of the three forms of distortions, the one arising from our emphasis on well-being is the trickiest to understand, for it is a distortion which in many ways we cannot help since it arises from our being in a material form. What turns it into a veil or obstacle is over-emphasis, exaggeration, lack of perspective. The world is replete with behaviors which we think of as legitimate and normal but which can

nevertheless be problematic. Food may be a necessity, but overindulging leads to weight gain and its attending health issues. Having a glass of wine may be recommended, but too much alcohol is a problem. Less obvious may be the stress our culture places on grooming. It may be important to look attractive, but is it necessary for example to alter styles every season? How important is it to want to wear designer jeans or own a designer watch? It is not difficult to see why this set of distortion can be tantamount to creating a prison for ourselves, a gilded cage perhaps, but an enclosure nonetheless. What makes it ever so tricky is that the distortions often arise out of need, like food, drink, clothing and other necessities. Freeing ourselves from these invisible bars require a steady effort and a keen vigilance. In itself such vigilance is no small feat, for these fogs are so linked to the world of appearances in which we live. Self-indulgence underlines that we are engaged in distorting something, so are attitudes or habits overemphasizing the pleasure of the senses. In and of itself being sensual, whether with food or anything else, is not an issue, the problem begins with any exaggeration or deep attachment. Having sex, for example, may be natural, but pornography can be an issue.

As one can already deduce, these types of overemphasis can cause us to focus on the form aspects of the world at the expense of its quality, the inner quality that is the hallmark of the inner self. Since that quality informs how we perceive what is around us, this distortion can act as a block to the substance already within us, along with the ability to

enlarge that substance. As a whole these kind of distortions can make us more self oriented, keeping us from reaching into that part of us that would aid us in making better judgments about people and events. In general, engaging in overemphasizing the material aspects of our being makes us feel good, but even that is an illusion for ultimately it ends up limiting the very ability to expand our hold on the part of ourselves that is as far as we can know the source of what is good, true, and beautiful.

Whatever the distortions whether they stem from our emotions, thought or attachment to our well-being, they needn't keep us from learning to see ourselves as clearly as possible, that is how the inner self sees us—something indeed facilitated through meditation. We can begin by remembering that just as our strengths reflect the presence of the inner self, so our weaknesses tell us where it has not yet been able to penetrate.



Chapter Five

What to Look Forward to and Work Toward

Identifying with the Inner Self

Once meditation becomes a more natural process, once we are no longer self-conscious about remembering this or that, once alignment is established, and once contacting the inner self comes relatively easily, we can turn our attention to move toward identifying with the inner self. Learning to contact the inner self is on one level a rather technical exercise, if we follow certain steps, we will succeed. Identification with the inner self is more willful and requires more concentration and understanding.

While the inner self represents our individual speck of space, or maybe smaller than a speck given the immensity of the universe, our everyday consciousness is far removed from such reality. In many ways identifying with the inner self is a way to bridge the discrepancy. It asserts, affirms, recognizes, underlines as the case may be, that we are more than we appear and that our formless higher self is indeed higher than our visible self. In doing that, it bridges our separateness and isolation, reminds us that we are connected to much that is beyond ourselves. On another level this identification reasserts our substance, the qualities that make us up, the love, compassion, dreams, goodness that are ours. Inner self identification is not a one time act but a slow march beginning with grasping the union that is intrinsic to who we are, that of our outer and inner selves. As we do, we slowly learn to reach, realize and express the qualities of our higher self, and the more we do, the more we are able to identify with it. Identification, however is more than just learning to express those qualities, it is learning to see what the inner self sees, to BE the inner self, so that when we use the word I, it is hopefully not the I that represents that amalgam of molecules that one typically thinks of as who we are, but rather the I that is inclusive of the inner self. The personal self is then relegated to its proper place of being an instrument of the inner self.

Identification means at one with and it would indeed be misleading to think we could achieve it quickly or even by just wanting it. Identification with the inner self will

manifest itself slowly, in small increments, through the changes in our consciousness. It will probably be reflected in our capacity to be sensitive to what lies beyond the normal purview of the senses, to what it is that in common parlance we refer to as intuition, sharpen our ability to love, deepen our wisdom, enable us to see more of human strengths and more of human frailties than we had previously been able to see. Part of this widened perception includes a truer version of compassion. If we achieve some inner self identification we will also note that a critical attitude will be supplanted by a compassionate one, that self orientation will be superseded by a sense of oneness with whoever is within our immediate orbit, and that ascertaining the needs of those around us will take priority over what it is we might personally want.

While the results of identifying with the inner self are predictable, how long it will take is not. It is up to an array of factors such as how quickly and clearly we are able to respond to what the inner self is attempting to convey, how much we are able to overcome inertia and self-pity, whether we develop new distortions along the way, the degree to which we practice integrity and how free we are to utilize inner self guidance. The road therefore begins as all journeys to mastery with small steps and consistent application. As such, opportunities to practice identification with the inner self can encompass much of our life. For example, how do we meet a conflict with a co-worker, a neighbor, a store clerk, a friend, do we retaliate, criticize or engage in suspicion, or do we learn to see that

person as the inner self sees him or her, as a struggling individual, the way we all are knowingly or not.

A New Inclusiveness

When we begin to be sensitive to identification with the inner self, when the reality of another can co-exist within us, we enter a new realm of inclusiveness, the realization that we are not only linked to others but also have a responsibility to them. The inner self is not bound by the separation and divisions that abound in the tangible world. Contrary to what one might expect, being inclusive is not a surrender of who we are but an extension of our boundaries. When we do, far from losing ourselves, we will discover, often to our surprise, that inclusiveness is a sure way to discover who we really are. If we can reach this level of identification, as it makes its way through us, we realize that were we to say I am the inner self, the meaning will have acquired substance. For the first time we can see that perhaps we might know what it means after all, perhaps the inner self is more than theory, it is real and can validate what the inner world is about.

As with anything else in meditation, there is no magic, only a process whose existence, order and beauty evoke the majesty of what is meant by magical. How we undergo the slow march leading to identification is such a process, one called into action by the inner self, a thrust to recognize, learn and gradually overcome the barriers that separate us from our human brothers and sisters. As we become more

proficient in reaching and expressing the world of the inner self, we automatically fall under the sway of that thrust. As the identification unfolds, another important movement parallels it, the will of the personal self diminishes. When we say I want, we come to mean what the inner self wants. The iota of self that has merged no longer belongs to the separate entity bearing our name but to our higher self. The I becomes the larger entity, it is not an I seeking the preferences and choices of the individual person, but an I automatically responding to the needs and wants of what is best for the greater good. People like Nelson Mandela then cease to be enigmas, and their lives, being, consciousness, decisions and struggles are that much clearer.

Recognizing Identification with the Inner Self

The qualities of someone able to identify with the inner self are not necessarily visible or readily understood. These qualities such as other orientedness, self-forgetfulness, generosity, honesty, compassion, each a sign the inner self is present, reach beyond appearance. Many people may appear selfless when in fact their actions are self-serving. Many may engage in acts of kindness not for the sake of others, but to be liked or gain approval or public recognition of some kind. There is more to recognizing self-forgetfulness than what may appear to be a selfless act. Our inner self will guide us of course to see the difference. The inner self will also help us see what is possible for a particular person and not what it is we may

wish for that person. It is soon obvious that the presence of identification with the inner self helps expand how we interpret our environment by automatically including what is not visible. And we soon realize that what is visible is too narrow for us to see what is truly there.

What Is Truly Real

We now have the technology to create realities that don't actually exist. We look at a photograph and think it represents a real situation when in fact photographic techniques allowed the whole scene to be conjured. History can be altered and the news faked. Facts can therefore no longer be the signposts we once thought they were. If not for how the inner self changes our perception and insights, we would be minus one key way to know the difference between what is real and what is not.

When we consider how many believe the most outrageous stories, stories with no earthly facts, we can't help but wonder how our capacity for deluding ourselves far outstrips our ability to identify with the inner self. What may be harder to wonder about, if easier to infer, is how simple it is for any of us to mistake some of its imitations for the inner self. Wishful thinking, the desire to know something we don't, the penchant for self-aggrandizement, in however small a scale, often may trick us into thinking we know what is beyond appearance when we don't. This means that being able to challenge ourselves to know when or how we are likely to deceive ourselves ought to

be a routine part of your meditation practice. Unless we are mercilessly honest with ourselves and experience a commitment to truth and integrity, it is doubtful that the inner self will be able to serve us in ascertaining what is real.

There's a unique sense of joy to succeeding in separating the ephemeral from the lasting, the high from the low, the good from the not so good in this way, in being able to detect the difference between the real and the unreal. And when we succeed, even if in a small way, we have a taste of why it is that meditation is truly an adventure, perhaps more so than braving jungle wilds ever were, certainly as rewarding and filled with as much anticipation, excitement, courage, temerity, patience, persistence or the other qualities required of any such endeavor. We can also feel a certain gratification that we have contributed an iota to redefining the gap between the inner and outer worlds.



About the Author

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