Meditations

A Spiritual Logbook

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Abstract

A meditation is a voluntary exercise intended to increase awareness, sustained over some time.

The main purpose of the present *Meditations* is to inspire and assist readers to practice meditation of some sort, and in particular 'sitting meditation'.
This includes practices such as: observing the mechanisms of one's thinking, stopping unnecessary thought, forgetting things about one's self and one's life that are irrelevant to the current effort of meditation, dealing with distractions, becoming aware of one's breath, being here and now.

After such practice for some time, one gets to realize the value of meditation, and one's commitment to it grows. The need for behavioral improvement becomes more and more obvious, and one finds it easy and natural to put more discipline into one's life. Various recommendations are given in this regard.

Prior to such practical guidance, so as to prepare the reader for it, the book reviews the theoretical teachings relating to meditation in the main traditions of mankind. The ultimate goals of meditation, the various methods or techniques used to achieve them, the experiential results of meditation, and the interpretations given to them, are topics treated here.

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Be mindful…

but do not mind.

PART 1:
SOME THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. What is meditation?

We may define a meditation as a voluntary exercise intended to increase awareness, sustained over some time.

May be counted as meditative endeavor: any volitional activity intended ***to increase one's own awareness***, generally or in a particular field (e.g. mentally, physically, socially, religiously, etc.). The term 'increase awareness' is here intended very broadly, to include all other similar expressions for the intensification, concentration, making more acute, focusing, deepening, heightening, raising, widening[1], enlarging, expansion or prolonging – of consciousness (or attention).

Meditation, note well, includes a time factor. It implies intentionally ***prolonging the duration*** of awareness at a certain level. This may mean sustaining attention at one's usual level for more time than usual; or surpassing one's

[1] Broadening of consciousness should be understood not only as (like a beam of light) 'covering more space', but more generally in the sense of 'bringing more things into consciousness', i.e. additional external or internal data or considerations. Psychologically, this may be taken to mean making things that were previously unconscious or subconscious more fully conscious. For examples, one's motives during action become clearer or one's habitual responses become more evident.

usual level of attention, for one's usual span of time or longer. A merely momentary burst of extra consciousness can hardly be called meditation: it has to go on for an extended period of time.

Meditation on something[2], then, means lingering over it, devoting some attention to it, more than usual and/or for more time than usual. At first, one may succeed in sustaining the attention only briefly before wandering off; after a while, one may succeed in generating brief bursts intermittently; eventually, one may succeed in staying focused continuously, for a longer and longer time. Such improvements of performance depend on regular training.

Our definition of meditation thus covers *a wide array* of specific purposes, methods and techniques, among which we may mention the following. Note that these categories and examples are given off the cuff, without pretending to propose an exhaustive list or a taxonomy. Note that some of the categories given overlap; or again, some of the examples given really fall under two or more categories, though listed under only one.

- Focusing on touch sensations: feeling one's whole body or some part of it, observing one's feelings, sentiments, emotions, being aware of contact points, lines and surfaces (e.g. in yoga *nidra*).
- Postures and movements: e.g. sitting strait and immobile, walking slowly and mindfully (*kinhin*), yoga *asanas* and

[2] That is, on some object – in the widest sense of the term 'object' (i.e. be it material, mental, spiritual, or whatever).

mudras, *tai chi* exercises, Hassidic dancing, Dervish whirling.

- Breathing awareness and exercises: e.g. feeling one's breath, yoga *pranayamas*, *chi kung*.
- Focusing on "bodily energy centers, pathways, flows"[3]: e.g. yoga *chakras* and *prana*, Chinese meridians and points and *chi* flows, the *sephirot* of kabbalah.
- Focusing on visual data: e.g. observing random or selected outer or inner sights, concentrating on candlelight, a symbol, a *mandala* or a statue.
- Focusing on auditory data: e.g. observing random or selected outer or inner sounds, making music, chanting religious chants or reciting a *mantra*.
- Thought awareness or control: e.g. observing one's streams of visual memories and imaginations and of verbal thoughts, blocking such streams; *metta* meditation (developing universal love).
- General activities performed with full awareness: e.g. *karma yoga* or *samu* (doing chores), *zen* poetry, calligraphy, drawing and painting, gardening, flower arrangement, tea ceremony.
- Involving the thinking mind: e.g. prayer, study of religious texts (primary or secondary), useful philosophical reflection, puzzling over a *koan*.[4]

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[3] This involves touch sensations and imaginations.

[4] N.B. Although some prayer or study or koan activity may be counted as meditation, it does not follow that all such activity is necessarily meditative. Some of it has the opposite, *soporific*

With regard to *prayer*: it is of course primarily intended as a means of communicating *to* God (or alleged incarnations of Him or gods or godlike creatures or even saints), by way of praise, invocation, confession, supplication, thanks, blessing, and so forth. Nonetheless, it is also often consciously intended as a way of getting spiritually[5] closer to or communing with the deity concerned, and in this perspective may be described as an attempt to expand or intensify awareness (of the deity).[6]

Similarly, *textual study* (e.g. Torah or Talmud study in Judaism) has many aspects. On the surface, its objective is to absorb the teachings within the text. But practitioners consider the information thus received to be a permanent communication *from* God (or the like), whose meaning is perpetually renewed according to the current life context of the reader. Here again, then, a consciousness-raising communion occurs, or is pursued.

A *koan* may be described as a riddle that is superficially meaningful but insolvable by rational or obvious means[7].

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effect; it is used as an escape, rather than as an instrument of consciousness development.

[5] I use the term 'spiritual' in a not very mystical sense, simply intending: 'pertaining to the spirit (or soul)'.

[6] For example, every time one blesses God for the food one is about to eat or has eaten, one is reminding oneself of Him – i.e. raising one's awareness from the material level of ingesting food to a spiritual level involving reflection on its source and purpose.

[7] For example: "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" – the answer to this question is not rational ("one hand cannot clap"

> Its role (according to practitioners) is psychological – to fatigue the rational faculty to such an extent that it abdicates and allows reliance on a more intuitive kind of consciousness, one more able to break through to absolute reality. A credible reply to a *koan* can only be given by someone who has actually attained realization, and is only recognizable as such by someone who also has.

Meditation exercises are not necessarily mutually exclusive; sometimes, it is sometimes useful to use two or more of them at the same time. Thus, for instance, one might meditate on one's body posture and breathing while reciting a mantra. The mind is a complex domain; it can function on many unrelated planes simultaneously. For example, one can remember yesterday's events at home, while trying to solve a problem at work, while humming a tune; again, one might at once have verbal thoughts and visualize things.

Note that if awareness increases or persists spontaneously, i.e. without *ad hoc* volitional intent or effort (in the present or a sufficiently recent past), it is not counted as a product of meditation as such. It should also be noted that not all means used to allegedly raise awareness do indeed raise awareness – some techniques have the opposite effect: they diminish consciousness, they make it lower, narrower or shallower.

> Thus, the use of psychotropic drugs like LSD or marijuana may not properly be regarded as meditation

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or "one hand clapping makes no audible sound"), nor even demonstrative (waving your hand back and forth as if clapping).

(even if such use was voluntary), for though they may give a momentary illusion of "high", they in fact on the whole diminish the scope of consciousness. Similarly, some techniques used in African Voodoo cults or other sorceries to produce "trances" would not be counted as meditative, insofar as they are found to in fact block awareness. Indeed, many would argue that certain common forms of religious, social or political indoctrination, which are claimed to raise awareness, in fact do – and are moreover secretly intended to do – the exact opposite.

In sum, 'meditation' refers to any means that in fact produces the effect of intensified or lengthened awareness. The mere claim that an activity has such effect does not automatically qualify it as meditation. In some cases, we may be uncertain as to whether to regard the activity under consideration as meditative or counterproductive.

Meditation is intended to awaken one, not to put one to sleep. Whatever the technique used, the essence of meditation is ***relaxed watchfulness and mindfulness***. Note this well. It is not a matter of by force grasping for something, but of sustaining one's alertness, one's "presence of mind" (or more precisely put, one's spiritual presence). It is naturally, with good humor, repeatedly remembering to be maximally aware. This implies a balance of determination and adaptation.

Will is involved in meditation, in the way of effort to increase one's receptiveness and attentiveness, so that one notices all that is going on. Also, as a meditation session progresses, the

meditator (i.e. the one meditating) has to be sensitive to changing circumstances and needs, and flexibly apply the appropriate technique(s), to make the meditation advance and not stagnate. One cannot force things, but must proceed with judgment and with precision. This is called "using skillful means".

Thus, the means and the end of meditation are essentially the same. Awareness is begotten by awareness; awareness begets awareness.

The aim of meditation, note well, is not only to increase awareness punctually, during the time one is meditating, or by a spillover effect for a short while thereafter – but also to make increased awareness a general habit in one's life.

The lessons we learn from 'formal' meditation sessions ought to be carried over in one's everyday thoughts and activities, in the way of 'informal' practice of mindfulness[8]. Although formal meditation is passively beneficial to times of non-meditation anyway, its full benefit becomes manifest to the extent that one actively continues to effectively meditate in the midst of ordinary living.

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[8] For example, meditation teaches one to intend (thoughts or actions) with a minimum (if any at all) mental or oral verbal expression; thereafter, one speaks less, or more efficiently, i.e. no more than necessary for the task at hand, to oneself or to others.

2. Thought and meditation

Although some thinking activities count as meditative, this is true only in some cases and under certain conditions. Usually, note well, thought is considered as antithetical to meditation.

This is essentially because thought consists of auditory or visual mental phenomena that are *intentional*. That is, thought consists of mentally projected sounds (mostly words) and/or sights (illustrating our meanings) by which we refer to *other* things. Meditation, on the contrary, consists in focusing on mental or other phenomena *for themselves*. The meditative attitude is more *experiential*.

If we compare thinking to sleep or stupidity, thinking is of course more conscious, and therefore (relatively speaking) qualifies as 'meditative'. Similarly, if we compare human thought to the cognitive power of lower animals. But in practice, much of our thinking is a sort of autonomic function of our brain, which goes on (and on and on) without our apparent voluntary participation or approval, or even seemingly against our will.

Our brain is continually flashing sounds and images into our mind. Such thinking is very dispersed and layered. A chain of thoughts arises suddenly – often triggered by some

perception recalling a memory, and then proceeding through further mostly incidental associations – and goes on for some time, usually stopping due to the beginning of a new chain. Two or more such chains may occur simultaneously.

While there are thoughts that carry no noticeable emotional charge, most are accompanied by some positive or negative charge (e.g. a feeling of hope or of anger). Although some lines of thought are seemingly idle wanderings, many of them may be characterized as driven by some overall attachment (one seems driven by sexual lust, another by financial greed, another by power fantasies, etc.).

Generally, then, below the surface of our trains of thought, all sorts of *influences* on our volition are operating. We experience impulses, desires, emotions, and so forth. These influences all either put new trains of thought in motion or further stimulate them[9].

This has been called "the scattered mind" – but, more precisely, it is our (i.e. the self's) attention that is going every which way.

It is as if we are constantly subject to a strong centrifugal force, pulling our attention away from the center (from stability). This can be very fatiguing – in some cases, sickening. So long as our mind operates in such an obsessive-

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[9] For example, a sensation in our sex organ may cause us to remember a past lover, which in turn may cause reflection on marriage and divorce, etc. This line of thought might then suddenly swerve in another direction entirely, e.g. because we recalled a piece of music heard at that time; then we perhaps think about the singer, his political opinions, etc. And it goes on and on.

compulsive mode, we are not its master but its powerless puppet or victim. When we think, it should be because we have chosen to do so with some intent, not because we are forced to.

An important technical function of meditation is to show us how to control our thinking; this helps us find inner peace and improves the cognitive effectiveness of our intellect.

Very often, our problem is having too many thoughts in too many directions, and meditation helps us to rein them in, and achieve a ***more concentrated*** mental life. It teaches us to become *one-minded*; that is, to make our attention *one-pointed*.

Sometimes, our problem is the opposite: we tend to get stuck in a rut with repetitive thoughts, and meditation helps us develop a ***more expansive*** mental life. It trains us in the art of extricating ourselves from mental knots; we become more *open-minded* and *broad-minded*.

Usually, both the responses of concentration and expansion are needed to bring our intellectual faculty fully under control. If we achieve such levels of inner strength, we can also on occasion truly *stop* thinking and for a change *just* experience. Such control may seem impossible at first, but as one progresses in meditation it becomes more and more feasible – and its benefits become manifest.

Thoughts are sometimes valuable instruments of knowledge; but very often, they are mere interference, useless background noise. One way to learn how to stop extraneous thinking is by use of a '**mantra**'. This technique consists in

repeating some meaningless sound(s) or a word (or phrase or sentence)[10] again and again for a long period of time.

A mantra is not exactly a 'thought', even when it is made up of some meaningful word(s), because the meanings of the words involved do not play an essential role in the meditative process. Its role is to occupy the mind and chase off disturbances. Reciting a mantra can help us develop our mental 'muscles' by giving us something to concentrate on *to the exclusion of* all other things.

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[10] Every tradition proposes mantras. In Judaism, I suppose any verse from the Psalms or Prayer book would do (but beware of using any Name of G-d in vain); one might try, for instance "*Oseh shalom bimrumav, hu yaaseh shalom alenu ve-al kol Israel, ve-imru amen*" (May He who makes peace in His heights make peace on us and all Israel, amen), or more briefly "Shalom". An example from the East (*Heart Sutra*) is "*Gate, gate, paragate, parasamgate, bodhi svaha*" (which means, I am told: Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone far beyond, greetings enlightenment); another one is simply "Om", pronounced deep and long, like the Tibetans. Some people say almost any statement can be used as a mantra. This may be true (though I doubt it), but what seems clear (to my limited knowledge context) is that the mantra must be voluntarily adopted. One cannot use a catchy tune or song that has already infiltrated one's mind as a mantra, because that is precisely the sort of mental content that a mantra is supposed to clean out of the mind! Thus, beware of advertising jingles, or pop music or songs – they have been pumped into your system by the media, because of their stickiness and with very commercial or political motives: they are not convertible into mantras. Avoid such mental viruses like the plague: they will not liberate your mind, but enslave it or at least thoroughly fatigue it. A good mantra is *not* mentally sticky – what makes it 'good' is precisely that we have to make an effort to keep it in the mind.

Use of a mantra is based on acknowledgement that the brain tends to favor having a mental content. We therefore give our minds a chosen auditory content (the mantra), as we might give a hungry dog a rubber bone to chew on, to keep it busy and out of trouble. This content, being meaningless or having very limited meaning, is not such as to produce chains of thought. Rather, we can use it to *push off* any thoughts that try to arise, using it as an excuse for our refusing to attend to them.

In this way, we fool our brain, granting it the satisfaction of having mental content but at the same time attenuating its tendency to feed us new thoughts. Eventually, it becomes possible to drop recital of the mantra, and yet not be subject to involuntary thinking. This greatly enhances our concentration on experience, which was the intent of the whole exercise.[11]

It should be mentioned that sometimes the mental maelstrom is so absorbing that one is unable even to focus on a mantra for more that a few seconds. In such cases, one has to remember again and again to make the effort of mantra recitation.

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[11] Although the primary utility of a mantra is to clear the mind, it can also teach us to watch our thoughts come and go without getting too involved in them, i.e. absorbed in them, carried off by them. What the mantra does here is teach us how to develop a mental platform on which we can sit and watch our thoughts (verbal, visual/auditory and emotional mental phenomena) with some detachment. The Subject of consciousness is gradually distanced from the mental objects of consciousness, either by suppressing them or at least by objectifying them.

Mantra recitation is only described here as one of the ways to calm the mind, though perhaps one of the easiest. Other methods might of course be used to achieve the same result, like meditation on one's breath, on one's body or on some visual symbol[12].

After some practice of mantra or other forms of meditation, it becomes possible to control one's mind by direct will, without resort to such artificial methods. Having already (in this session or previous sessions) experienced a relatively calm state of mind, one learns to remain attached to it or keep returning to it.

It should be added that there are also methods of meditation that resort to meaningful thought, to the same effect.

Prayer is such a method, because if one prays correctly one is intensely concentrated on one's prayer, to the exclusion of all other mental content. Note well: it is not because formal[13] prayer is often repetitive (like a mantra) that it functions as a meditation, but because of its demands on our attention. If one prays without investing effort, letting all sorts of stray thoughts occupy one's mind in the background while one utters hollow words, one cannot be said to be meditating, let alone truly praying.

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[12] Like a Jewish six-pointed star – or a Christian cross or an Islamic crescent. Christians also gaze at icons or statues. Buddhists use complex *mandalas,* filled with significant drawings, as objects of meditation, and also gaze at statues.

[13] I am of course here referring to prayers found in prayer books, rather than to prayers one makes up as one goes along.

> Repetition of a Divine or divine name is (in my opinion) a subset of prayer. This practice is found in most traditions, including (to name a few) in Jewish kabbalah (e.g. that of Abraham Abulafia), Sufism (*dikhr*) and Buddhism (e.g. the *nembutsu*). Although such recital acts in much the same way as a mantra, it is best classified as prayer, since the use of that specific name is considered essential to its efficacy by its practitioners. It is not meant as a mere mind-filler, but as a key to the door of some specific spiritual realm.

More precisely, one can distinguish three levels of meditation (in Hebrew, *kavanah*) in prayer, each of which of course has many degrees. At the lowest level, one at least makes the effort to focus on the words one utters (from memory, or by reading the sounds out of a prayer book), without thinking of irrelevant things. At the next level, one makes the additional effort to concentrate on the plain meanings of the words and sentences one is uttering, so that they are not just sounds.

At the highest level, one additionally takes care to adopt appropriate attitudes. The latter include: being aware Whom one is addressing, where one is (if in a holy place), feeling awe and love, and – as appropriate to current circumstances – expressing submission, worship, penitence, entreaty, gratitude, etc. Here, then, one is relating oneself to the prayer or to the object of prayer.

Of course, one usually weaves in and out of the different levels and degrees of attention, depending on one's motivation, mood, stress, worries, distress, etc. One's

measure of concentration divulges the importance one attaches to the prayer. If one prays patiently and intently, it signifies a certain amount of sincerity. But prayer with a scattered mind is not entirely worthless, because most people have difficulty controlling their attention.

Note in this context that other forms of meditation can be beneficial to concentration during prayer. One must, for a start, show one's seriousness of purpose by eliminating as many external disturbances as possible. Trying to pray while the TV is turned on is obviously not very favorable. Moreover, it is recommended that before formal prayer one sits or stands quietly for some time, till one reaches a palpable inner silence, stillness and serenity, a calming of one's thoughts, movements and emotions – one's subsequent prayer will then be greatly enhanced.

Similar comments can be made with regard to study of religious texts, or to philosophical (or other) discourse. Insofar as such thinking activity trains us to concentrate our attention, in various ways and to various degrees, it may be classed as meditative. But to the extent that it is done 'unconsciously', it is mere thought and not meditation.

The *koan* exercise, by the way, has a similar function. The *koan* is not intended to divert our attention, but to strengthen the psyche. As the practitioner puzzles over his chosen absurd riddle, his attention becomes more and more intensely focused and exclusive. Without such increasing mental concentration, the exercise is a waste of time.

Ordinary thought, more often than not, is *an obstacle* to successful meditation. If, for instance, during a *tai chi* move your mind wanders off to the pretty girl watching, or you wonder what you will have for supper tonight, or you reflect on something annoying someone said to you yesterday – you are bound to wobble, or forget some move, or make a wrong move.

If an activity requires a certain amount of concentration, and such concentration is not provided, the performance is bound to be imperfect. Whatever one's meditation, one has to constantly make an effort to concentrate, and not allow oneself to just 'go through the motions' while thinking of other things. Pretending to meditate is not meditation.

Mastering one's thinking activity, then, is an essential part of all meditative endeavors. So long as anarchy reigns in one's mind, one's consciousness remains at a superficial level. Paradoxically, it is only when thought is brought under control that it can begin to dig deep and fulfill its cognitive function.

3. The goals of meditation

Meditation is a means to enhanced consciousness. The ultimate goal of meditation is, accordingly, to attain *the highest level of consciousness* possible to one. This *summum bonum* (highest good) is generally understood as threefold, although the three aspects are ultimately one and the same event, which may be called '**realization**'.

The first aspect is '**enlightenment**', which may be defined as the overcoming of all personal ignorance, illusion or delusion, in the broadest sense. It is a maximal, all-inclusive consciousness; the widest and deepest potential for knowledge (including information and understanding).

The second aspect is '**liberation**', which may be defined as the overcoming of all personal weaknesses, difficulties or obstructions, in the broadest sense. Thus, *enlightenment relates to cognition, while liberation concerns volition*. Granting they are possible achievements, they necessarily come together and not apart, with liberation as a necessary adjunct of enlightenment. Knowledge is freedom.

> Note that the term 'enlightenment' (or 'illumination') is often construed as referring to some inner experience of light. But that mental analogy to physically 'seeing a light', though occasionally valuable, is not the essence

> intended by the term. One should rather have an image of a man walking tentatively in the dark, feeling his way slowly – when suddenly a bright light is turned on. Now, he can at last see everything around him and where he is going, and he can walk about freely, and find any object he seeks without knocking into things. This analogy is preferable, because it illustrates the conjunction of light and liberty. A man in the dark is like a man in chains, hardly able to move, uncertain and afraid, unable to travel directly to any destination and having to expend much too much effort to go any distance. When the light goes on, he is instantly freed from his invisible chains, and he can hop, skip and jump at will, and dance with joy.

The third presumed consequence of achieving the apex of consciousness is greatly enhanced ethical understanding – or '**wisdom**'[14]. *This relates to the third function of the soul, which is valuation.* It suggests a maximum of sagacity in one's value judgments and pursuits. It would not suffice to have knowledge and freedom, if one were ignorant of values and thus incapable of virtue.

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[14] Some would contend that the attainment of enlightenment/liberation places one "beyond good and evil". But the sense of that phrase should not be misconstrued as implying that one then becomes independent of morality. Quite the contrary, it means that one becomes so wise that one cannot imagine any trace of value whatsoever in immoral or amoral practices. The proof of that is that realized teachers always preach morality to their followers. Not because the teacher needs to remind himself of such strictures, but so as to preempt the followers from losing their way on the way to realization.

Just as valuation in general involves the operation of both the functions of cognition and volition – so wisdom is the natural and necessary outcome of enlightenment and liberation. At every level of human experience, sagacious valuing is indicative of a harmonious intersection between knowing and willing. Wisdom, or extreme sagacity, occurs when these functions reach their peak of perfection.

It should be stressed that wisdom does not only signify *knowing* right from wrong in any given situation, but also implies naturally *doing* what is right and avoiding what is wrong in that situation. It is not a mere theoretical understanding of values, but additionally involves a practice of virtue that testifies to having fully internalized such understanding. The cognitive and volitional faculties of the sage are concordant.

While full enlightenment, liberation and wisdom may be identified as the ultimate goal(s) of meditation – we may of course still consider increased but less than complete degrees of knowledge, freedom and discernment (between good and bad, right and wrong) as valuable intermediate goals. The situation is not "either-or" – i.e. either total blindness, impotence and stupidity, or utter perfection. We may have to gradually work our way towards the ideal, going through partial improvements until we attain the desired result.

Our experiences are likely to be proportionate to our progress along that Path or Way. We may have momentary so-called mystical experiences of lesser intensity than the ultimate experience of enlightenment, but find such reward

encouraging and stimulating. If we practice meditation correctly and regularly over an extended period of time, our sense of freedom may increase noticeably. Things seem clearer and easier, and we exhibit more and more wisdom in our choices.

Traditions thus speak of a *via perfectionis* or *dhammapada* (way of perfection), implying a long spiritual road to be traveled, until the final step radically changes everything for us and we attain full realization.[15]

It should be noted that the term 'realization' has a double meaning, one relative and one absolute:

- It signifies, firstly, the actualization of one's personal full potential as a human being, i.e. the full maturing of our faculties of cognition, volition and valuation.
- Additionally, it suggests that this self-perfection coincides with the extreme achievement of cognition of absolute reality, maximum freedom and wisdom of choice.

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[15] I should add that I cannot, so far in my life, *personally vouch* for the feasibility of utter enlightenment, liberation and wisdom. I assume it to be possible, because many human traditions claim this to have been attained by some individuals: this is hearsay evidence in favor of the thesis. Moreover, it seems conceivable and reasonable to me that such heights of achievement should be possible. However, to be quite frank about it, I have not myself reached them. But even if I too were a live witness, the reader would still have to consider the information as second-hand, until if ever he or she in turn personally attained realization.

Logically, these two attainments are not necessarily identical: it could be argued that a given person's relative best is still not good enough in absolute terms. However, some spiritual philosophies overcome this possible objection by considering the possibility of stretching the pursuit of ultimate perfection over more than one lifetime.

Furthermore, there are two ways to view the meditative enterprise; these ways are referred to in Zen as pursuit of gradual vs. sudden realization.

- We can view ourselves as standing somewhere on a mountain, eager to climb up to its peak, by diligently "working on ourselves". We have to find the best way to do that, either feeling our way alone or using maps handed down to us by predecessors, or traveling with other seekers. Sometimes we may fall back, and have to climb again just to reach our previous position. Sometimes the mountaintop seems nearby; then, as we approach it, we discover the mountain is much bigger than it seemed from lower down. This mountain climb may take a lifetime of hard labor; some say many lifetimes.
- Another way to view the challenge is as a puzzle to be solved. If we could only find the key, it would open for us the door to realization. No need for one to climb or move mountains. One needs only constantly be alert for some clue, attentive for some hint – which may fleetingly

come from anywhere[16]. If we spot it somehow, a veil will be lifted and all will become clear right where we stand. The mountain will instantly disappear, and we will suddenly find ourselves at its central axis (just like someone at the top). There is no climbing to do; the job requires detective work.

Of course, both perspectives are true and worth keeping in mind. The long-term climb seems to be our common lot; but it is our common hope to somehow immediately pierce through the mystery of existence. The latter is not so much a shortcut on the way up, as a cutting through and dissolving of the underlying illusions. Moreover, the theater of our search for insight is not so much "out there" as "in here".

Another distinction to note is that between temporary/partial and permanent/full realization. On the way to complete realization, one may momentarily experience glimpses of it. Such fortunate foretastes of heaven do not however count as realization in a strict sense. One is only truly realized when one is irreversibly installed in such experience.

With regard to terminology, note that the terms realization, enlightenment, liberation, and (the attainment of) wisdom, are in practice mostly used interchangeably, because one cannot attain any one aspect of this event without the others.

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[16] This is the proactive spirit of *koan* meditation, advocated by the Rinzai Zen school, as opposed to the more "passive" looking *zazen* meditation, advocated by Soto school. The latter, which would be classified in the preceding paradigm of mountain climbing, is of course in fact not as passive as it would seem to the onlooker.

Sometimes, realization (etc.) is written with a capital letter (Realization), to distinguish complete and definitive from partial or temporary realization. Usually, the context makes clear which variant is intended.

Another term commonly used for realization is '**awakening**'. This term suggests that our existence as ordinarily experienced is like a dream – a dream of problems that cannot be solved from within the dream, but only by getting completely out of the state of sleep. I have experienced such dreams occasionally: I was somehow cornered in a very difficult situation and could imagine no way out of it, no winning scenario; so (realizing I must be dreaming), I simply willed myself out of sleep[17], solving the problem in a radical manner.

To the person who has just awoken, the world within the dream, with all its seemingly inescapable difficulties, permanently loses all importance, instantly becoming nothing worth getting concerned with anymore. This metaphor illustrates how spiritual awakening is more than a set of ad hoc solutions to the problems of ordinary existence: it is a general solution that cuts through the illusions and takes us straight to the underlying reality. This image makes realization easier to conceive.

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[17] The experience may be compared to being at some depth underwater, and deliberately swimming up to the surface.

4. Theory and practice

It is well to distinguish meditation *practice* from *the theory of* meditation.

The present text is a 'discourse on meditation', for which a term ending in '–logy' ought to be coined if one does not already exist[18]. This text is not itself 'meditation', although to be honest it is intended *to record* insights obtained during meditation sessions, *to develop a theoretical understanding* of the nature and function of meditation, and thus *to serve as a practical guide and inspiration*, and help the author and others find ways and means to improve meditation. Such a text might thus, in the limit, be viewed as itself a meditation, in the sense that it is intended to intensify one's awareness – but, nevertheless, reflecting on meditation should not be regarded as a substitute for actual practice of meditation.

There is on the one hand the activity of meditation *per se*, which involves some technique like for instance ceasing to

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[18] I do not know the classical Greek term for 'meditation', which could be used as prefix here. Perhaps the Aristotelian term for practical wisdom, *phronēsis* (Gk. φρόνησις), can be used in a modified sense; whence, "phronetology" or maybe "phronetics". Or perhaps we should prefer the Epicurean term for lucid tranquility, *ataraxia* (Gk. ἀταραξία); whence, "ataraxiology". These are just amateur suggestions.

think discursively; and on the other hand, we may be thinking about or teaching meditation, even while trying to meditate. The latter is in a sense also a sort of meditation, but it is less directly, less purely so. The latter is a means, whereas the former is its end. Theory is no substitute for practice, and may even in many circumstances constitute a formidable hindrance. Discourse is often helpful, and maybe even necessary; but at some stage, it must be stopped to allow meditation proper to proceed.

Meditation is something that ought to be *done*, rather than something to be talked or written about, or heard or read about. To forever only think about and/or discuss it – is to engage in a sort of sterile mental masturbation. The popular injunction "Just do it!" applies here, as it does in sports. One has to be pragmatic about it and get on with it, practicing regularly, and learning and advancing by doing.

Moreover, although meditation may be broadly defined as a de facto "pursuit" of increased awareness, in practice it is not lived as a goal-orientated activity. It is most successful to the extent that one succeeds at eliminating such other-direction from one's mind, and one acts in a "goal-less" manner. The reason for this is that, at least with regard to meditation, focusing on a goal, however ethically justified, *distracts* one from the means, and therefore reduces its effectiveness.

For this reason, it is necessary to behave in a paradoxical way, and having decided once and for all to meditate, one forgets all about the goal and concentrates on the means. Such "squaring of the circle" is admittedly not always easy.

But no one said meditation is always easy. It requires willpower, effort, perseverance, and much ingenuity and skill. To get anywhere worthwhile, a price has to be paid.

However, although efforts must be made, and sustained, and sustained – at some stage, meditation gets to seem effortless. This is not so surprising, if we consider that the means and end of meditation are essentially one and the same – more consciousness.

Once meditation is understood to be at its best when freed of ulterior motives, one sees that there is no "bad" meditation session. Every session should be viewed as successful and beneficial – even if one did not have a noticeable positive experience, even if one only experienced difficulty throughout. The benefits are often subterranean and incremental – as becomes clear after months or years, when one suddenly realizes one's situation has considerably improved over time. All time spent meditating is valuable; the effect is cumulative. The mere act of meditating is "like money in the bank"!

The meditator should not attach to any particular scenario of meditation. Usually, the session starts with difficulties, and ends on a higher note. Sometimes, on the contrary, a session starts "well", and then seems to degenerate. At other times, the best experience (if any) seems to occur in the middle of the session. But it does not matter how it goes, because it is not the purpose of meditation to give us impressive or pleasant experiences. When encountering turbulences, one should rejoice at having gotten the chance to discover them.

Such encounters are the real value of meditation, without which the underlying difficulties would remain unseen and untreated. One cannot clean up the house without raising dust.

Concerning theories, I do not see why a synthetic (or more pejoratively put, eclectic or syncretic) approach is to be excluded at the outset. Many teachers recommend a single spiritual tradition be chosen and adhered to, rather than trying to construct a patchwork from various sources. One problem with such picking and choosing is that one tends to select what seems personally easiest, which does not necessarily make up an effective pathway, and may even in some cases be very misleading. Nonconformity is often just hedging one's bets – and often a risky, razor-edge path; some would call it spiritual brinkmanship.

On the other hand, an advantage of spiritual individualism is that one is more able to avoid getting bogged down in ideas and rituals that have no real bearing on meditation, but are the accretions of centuries of popular superstition and clerical religion. Also, one can tailor one's means more precisely to one's specific needs. Moreover, the different traditions undoubtedly have things to teach each other[19]. A jack-of-all-trades is a master of none – but special qualifications can sometimes take you out of a bind that others were never trained to handle.

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[19] As the Talmud puts it: "Who is wise? He who learns from all men… 'From all my teachers I have gained wisdom'" (*Sayings of the Fathers*, 4:1).

In any case, in the course of meditation, it is certainly wise to keep all interpretative doctrines at bay, or in dynamic equilibrium, and concentrate single-mindedly on here and now experiential factors. For meditation is not the taking up of a particular point of view, but an attempt to integrate or transcend them all.

Doctrines are worth studying as helpful guides; they often protect one from errors or preempt foolishness. Nevertheless, they should not be allowed to control one's spiritual life to such an extent that one gets to lose touch with obvious realities. They are useful tools, but one must remain critical (in a healthy-minded way), and conscious that they sometimes overly inhibit spontaneous research and discovery. To my mind, there is a human element in all doctrines, and we should never surrender personal intelligence and accept them blindly. We should be prepared to distill the essentials from the non-essentials in them.

Meditation is a natural and universal practice, common to all people and peoples (and perhaps even all higher animal species). Nevertheless, different cultures have emphasized different techniques, experiences and interpretations of meditation. However, such divergences ought not be excessively stressed in our study of meditation: what is amazing is how much disparate cultures converge in their purposes, methods and results.

Whatever their doctrinal variations, these different traditions have in common a very human yearning for "**spirituality**" and efforts to improve in that direction. The realization of

spirituality is the identification of oneself with something beyond, or over and above, the physical, and to some extent mental, concerns of everyday life. It is the initial realization that there is more to life than these materialist concerns. A "spiritual person" is someone on his or her way to, or who has come to, this initial realization – as evidenced by interests in thought and commitments in action.

Meditation practice is one common expression of such realization. It is a pursuit of redemption or salvation (in some sense of these terms) – a personal, and eventually collective, soteriological endeavor. But it is ultimately religiously neutral – its power and value is biological and neurological, independent of any religious preference.

However variously they interpret it, all those who discover the practice of meditation consider they have found a precious treasure. It is, over time, a powerful aid to self-improvement, helping us unravel knots deeply buried in our psyche, gradually clearing it of all cognitive, attitudinal or behavioral difficulties. Just as a seed one plants in one's garden takes time to become a seedling and a mature plant, then to flower and bear fruit, the results of meditation unfold over some time.

5. Interpretations

The underlying philosophy of meditation, in common to the main religious traditions, is often referred to as "**theosophy**"[20]. To formulate such a philosophy is of course not to claim it as necessarily true in all respects; we must admit it to be a speculative philosophy or metaphysic. We can pursue the ends it sets in the way of a personal faith, without having to definitively 'prove' it and 'disprove' competing doctrines.

If we consider the seven historically most influential current mystical traditions – namely those of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and Secularism[21] – without meaning to ignore or discard others (which are here

[20] Etymologically = God + wisdom. This may also be conceived atheistically (despite its name). It has also been called "the perennial philosophy" (by Aldous Huxley), because of its recurrence in history and across cultural barriers. Many writers throughout the ages have managed to formulate all or parts of this philosophy with considerable success, and I do not here presume to equal or surpass them. My purpose here is only to discuss some aspects of it, on the assumption the reader has already studied (or will eventually study) other texts.

[21] Wherein I would include Confucianism, though it has some conceptual commonalties with Taoism; which one would expect, since they both come from the same culture, China.

assumed to have much in common with parts of one or the other of the main paradigms[22]), we can highlight some of the similarities and differences between them.

In almost all these traditions, meditation is understood as a "return" to some original high state of consciousness, or "reunion" with the underlying spiritual Source. Man is considered as having at some stage "fallen" from his natural, ideal spiritual condition, and become apparently "detached" from his place in the unity and totality of absolute reality – and thereafter, he struggles to recover it, and merge back into the whole[23].

In the secularist approach, the corresponding argument would rather be developmental and/or evolutionary: i.e. though to all evidence we never before had higher consciousness, it might be something we (as individuals and as a species) can realistically strive for so as to reach our fullest neurological and biological potential. This developmental or evolutionary peak, however, need not be assumed to correspond to some mystical experience of absolute reality.

One major *issue of interpretation* is that of admission or rejection of Monotheism, the belief that the ultimate reality is a spiritual Person, i.e. God. Four of the seven traditions – namely Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism – opt for

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[22] All of which, by the way, the author has studied to varying degrees – theoretically through various texts, and in some cases practically.

[23] Judaism speaks of *teshuvah* (return), *devekut* (adhering) and *yichud* (unification). The Sanskrit word 'yoga' refers to union, as does the Greek word *henosis* used by Neo-Platonism.

monotheism, although to varying degrees. Judaism[24] and Islam[25] insist on exclusive monotheism, whereas Christianity[26] opts for a three-in-one doctrine, and Hinduism[27] accepts a large pantheon of alternative or lesser forms of divinity (avatars and gods).

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[24] Judaism rejects any notion of incarnation of God. In the Jewish view, God is spiritual and not material. The Torah statement that God created humans in His image and likeness (Genesis 1:27) must be understood to refer to spiritual, not physical resemblance. God's infinity cannot be concentrated in a finite being (as many other religions suppose when they deify some historical or legendary figure), and He is not to be confused with the phenomenal universe of matter, space and time (as Spinoza confuses Him).

[25] Although it should be mentioned that there is a doctrine within Islam that grants Mohammed, the Messenger of *Allah* (God), the Divine status of "human incarnation of the Spirit" (to quote Martin Lings in *What is Sufism?* Cambridge, UK: Islamic Texts Society, 1993. [P. 33]). In this context, Islam should be compared to Christianity and Hinduism rather than Judaism.

[26] The doctrine of the trinity was a logical outcome of the apotheosis of Jesus, the founder of Christianity. The Church wanted to grant Divine status to this man, yet at the same time emphasize his spirituality and reaffirm the Judaic doctrine of unity. Note that the Christian idea of trinity differs from the apparent radical duality of Zoroastrianism. Whereas Christian philosophy seems to adhere to the unity of God at the highest level, Zoroastrian philosophy seems to regard the two basic formative forces of good and evil it posits as irreducible primaries. Analogous concepts and issues are found in Hinduism, in greater multiples.

[27] It is in practice cheerfully polytheist, although at an academic level it acknowledges monotheism as the ultimate truth. Polytheism generally tends to a radical pluralism (of many irreducible primaries), although some forms of it may be considered relatively compatible with monism (or monotheism).

Buddhism, on the other hand (at least officially), denies that the ultimate reality is an eternal spiritual entity, or Soul (*Atman* in Sanskrit), with consciousness, volition, values and a personality (i.e. a Self) – in short, denies the existence of God[28] – and instead affirms the ultimate "emptiness" of everything[29].

However, upon closer scrutiny we find that Buddhist doctrine does (perhaps as it has evolved over time) suggest a substantial ultimate reality of sorts – something called "the original ground of mind (or of being)" or "Buddha nature", which for all intents and purposes could be equated in many ways to the monotheistic idea of God. Moreover, it is evident that the Buddha has de facto become deified in the popular mind, and we find the Buddhist masses identifying him with what we would call God.

Taoism is comparable to Buddhism, in that the Tao (or Way) seems like something impersonal, much like the "empty original ground". But there are occasional mentions of Heaven in Taoism that suggest a belief in God, or which leave the issue of God relatively open or ambiguous[30]. On the

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[28] Which was in Buddha's India advocated by Hinduism.

[29] Note that Jewish mystics (kabbalists) have proposed a similar concept, that of the *Ayn* (Hebrew for "There Isn't", i.e. Non-Being, different from and beyond ordinary being) or *Eyn Sof* ("There Isn't an End", i.e. Infinite, in extension or breadth [Great] and in intension or depth [Unfathomable]).

[30] Anyway, Taoism is essentially a Monist philosophy, in that it conceives the Supreme Ultimate principle as a Unity. However, since Taoism describes this One as giving rise to Two (Yin and Yang), and then to Many, it may be compared to Dualism, and

other hand, while Taoism does have Immortals (comparable to Buddhas), it does not seem to treat them quite as gods[31].

Secularist philosophy, like Buddhism, rejects the notion of God. Atheists may nevertheless engage in meditation with rather materialist psychological and ethical motives, arguing that it is healthy for the individual to pursue centering and peace of mind, and good for society in general that people do so. They also point to practical benefits, like improved concentration at work, or better human relations. Thus, they meditate on the basis of a more narrow meliorism and eudemonism, i.e. as a means to self-development and happiness in a materialist worldview framework.[32]

The doctrinal diversity of the main traditions should not blind us to their essential unity. They mostly agree that the ultimate reality, the common source of all appearances, has to be unitary. *Diversity always logically calls for explanation: only a Unity seems to have a satisfactory finality.* This One is the Absolute – while the multiplicity of appearances, whether

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even, at times, to Pluralism (this is not said with any intention to downplay Taoism, but rather to point out its richness).

[31] To my limited knowledge (which is why I have placed this religion closer to Secularism). However, it should be noted (though the books we read about it in the West little mention the fact), Taoism as it has been popularly practiced in China involves many supernatural beliefs (many of which we would class as lowly superstitions) – ghosts, demons, exorcisms and the like.

[32] Note that some secularists nowadays subscribe to meditation with reference to ideas that were in fact diluted from general theosophy, or some fashionable Eastern religion like Buddhism, while unaware of or refusing to admit their spiritual motives and interest.

they seem real or illusory to us, are in comparison to it all relative. The true philosophy is thus necessarily Monist, which does not mean that we can deny the parallel existence at some level of plurality.

Among the features the traditions have in common, then, is the aetiological idea of the underlying unity of all existents being an inexplicable, uncaused, first cause. In monotheism, this is the status of God, the Creator of the world. Similarly, Buddhists and Taoists speak of the "unborn" and "unconditioned" as the background and origin of all phenomena.[33] Concerning the debate between Theist monism and Atheist monism, more will be said further on.

We should also emphasize the soteriological commonalities between the different traditions. The world as a whole strives for its salvation, the return to its primeval unity. Redemption is both an individual and collective need and task. By improving oneself, one helps others improve and repairs the world as a whole; and one improves oneself by making an effort to help others and take care of the world.

In Buddhism (or at least its Mahayana version) it is considered that the highest realization (Buddhahood) is only possible to those who dedicate themselves to the redemption

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[33] Note that the idea of causelessness is also found in secularism. In modern physics, we have it in the Heisenberg Principle, which can be taken to suggest spontaneity of some natural processes; or again, in the Big Bang theory, with regard to the existence of the primal seed of matter and the initial explosion thereof. In psychology, some thinkers (though not all) admit the existence of freewill in humans.

of all others sentient beings (this is called "the way of the bodhisattva"). Those who more selfishly work only for their own salvation (as Hinayana Buddhists are accused of doing[34]) do not, so long as they do so, reach the highest spiritual peak.
In Judaism, and similarly in other monotheistic religions, since we humans, like sparks issuing from a flame, all share in the spiritual substance of God, we may – by working to redeem ourselves and helping other people find salvation[35] – be said (with all due proportionality and respect) to participate in God's redemption[36]. Reciprocally, He has a direct interest in our salvation and it is equally to His advantage to promote it. All have a common interest, and cannot find true rest in isolation.
This is in Hebrew called *tikkun atsmi vehaolam*, meaning the 'repair' of oneself and the world, implying a loss of

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[34] I think this is an unfair accusation. The Theravada (called Hinayana by the Mahayana school) ideal is to concentrate on fixing oneself first; and then once has done so, one's sincere compassion for others will naturally be awakened (this is a possible interpretation of Gautama Buddha's trajectory). Whereas the Mahayana consider it is necessary to work on oneself and for others at the same time, because each side of this path helps the other succeed. Both approaches are probably equally valid, I would suppose – depending on the character or "karma" of the person involved.

[35] The *tsadikim* ("just men" in Hebrew), and in particular the *Moshiach* ("Anointed" one, or Messiah), are actively involved in saving souls. That is their spiritual profession, we might say. But ordinary people also of course participate in this work occasionally, if only as amateurs.

[36] This is implied, notably, in the philosophy of the kabbalist Isaac Luria.

wholeness that has to be recovered. It should be stressed, however, that this doctrine is not an invitation to pretentious claims to human divinity. Though we hope to someday be reunified with God, the Divine Source of our soul or spirit – that does not mean we will ever *become* the whole of God. It only means we will lose our illusory individuality, and discover our real place in the universe as very tiny fractions of God's wholeness.[37]

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[37] It should be noted that orthodox Jewish doctrine might not include a final reintegration of all souls into God. I base this supposition on oral rather than written teachings. I recently questioned one Rabbi on the subject (namely Rav Mendel Pevzner of Geneva, a Lubavitcher chassid). He taught that we will never merge back into God – but will always remain separated as individual souls, having the function to eternally declare God's sovereignty and praise Him. Moreover, he confirmed, some evil individuals (at least the likes of Adolf Hitler) will never return to God. I did not inquire on what texts this doctrine is based, and even whether all Jewish authorities agree with it. I was a bit skeptical when I heard the part about the righteous souls remaining separated; but upon reflection, it does not seem logically inconceivable. Certainly, there are people who deserve eternal damnation and can never be purified of their sins whatever hell they go through. Granting that, then the possibility that just souls remain forever suspended in paradise sounds reasonable, too. It is worth emphasizing in this context that Judaism teaches love of life on earth more than any other of the main religions: Judaism cannot position itself radically against the world (totally rejecting the body and mind), since it considers that God created this world (including human beings) intentionally and that He views his Creation as "good" and even "very good" (Genesis, chapter 1). Notwithstanding all such issues, let us not forget that God remains One throughout: He always was One, He is still One now, He will always be One. Any separateness people may experience is an illusion of theirs, which their Maker does not share in.

6. The coexistence of the One and the many

There are apparent logical difficulties in the idea of Monism that need to be addressed, if we are to grant it credibility. One question people ask is: How can the world be essentially and absolutely (and only) One, and yet appear as a multiplicity of passing phenomena, entities and events? Can a whole be at once considered unitary and as having parts – is not such an idea self-contradictory? Are the One and the many compatible?

This question can be answered, without indulging in overly mystical discourse, if we realize it is already loaded with a certain epistemological point of view. There are in fact two possible viewpoints as to the cognitive and metaphysical relationship between the apparent many and their essential oneness. We can inductively claim either "unity in diversity" or "diversity in unity".

In the first thesis, which is most commonly known and advocated, and which is the premise of the above question, the One is a *conceptual derivative* of the many. According to this Pluralist theory, we directly experience a world of multiplicity, and then use our rational faculty to hypothesize

an underlying Unity. The One is then a mere concept – it is the most universal of all concepts, the fact of existence all phenomena share, the ultimate uniformity they share.

The problem with such a view of the One as derived from the many by conceptualization is that, as we have already mentioned, it has an inherent contradiction – the concept (of unity) we derive from the percepts (of manifold things) is in logical conflict with its source. Since things are primarily (phenomenologically) many, it is difficult to credibly affirm that they are ultimately (ontologically) One. The epistemological order of things affects the metaphysical perspective.

However, there is an alternative to this theory, which is less widely known and advocated, namely that the many are *ratiocinative derivatives* of the One. This Monist hypothesis, which is found already in Buddhist philosophy, and is today implied by modern physics, offers a less paradoxical dichotomy. In this reverse perspective, pure (pre-rational) experience is quite unitary; it is the cognizing Subject, who cuts this phenomenological primary given into a multiplicity of shapes, colors, motions, sounds, etc.

If we sit in meditation and just experience, we can soon realize that without interference on our part the multiplicity *is* a unity. It is only when we start analyzing it – making comparisons and contrasts, considering logical compatibilities and conflicts, and so forth –that the original unity is broken down into a seemingly endless multiplicity. Granting the epistemological primacy of unitary experience,

we can understand that ratiocination is the source of apparent multiplicity. In that case, the One and the many do not appear so much in logical conflict, and we can safely opt for a Monist metaphysical position.

Another question people often ask is by what process did the One generate the many? Was the One inherently *unstable*, that it had to break down into the many? Note that, whereas the preceding question related to the statics of the Whole-parts relationship, this one concerns the dynamics of it.

However, we can reply that this second question, like the first, involves presuppositions. One need not view the relationship of the One and the many as having a beginning or an end – it can be viewed as timeless; we can consider that the One has always been actually one and the same with the apparent many. Another viewpoint, more accurate in my view, and more in line with the Monist thesis just formulated, is to say that the One is always potentially apparently many, such potential being actualized as of when and so long as some Subject engages in ratiocinative analysis.

While the second question can be asked even from a non-theistic (or atheistic) perspective, it is most often asked in relation to Monotheism. People ask: Why did God create us, and the world at large? Was He discontented, in need of something, moved by some want, or did He act capriciously? If so, does such supposition not contradict the idea of God as perfect and self-sufficient, as well as ultimately One, alone and indivisible?

Moreover, if He created us intentionally, why is it our mission in life to go back to pre-Creation? Does not the idea of 'repair' (*tikkun*, in Hebrew) imply an error to be corrected? Perhaps the error was not the Creation as such, but only the "original sin" in the Garden of Eden, i.e. a misuse by us of the faculties God gave us? Did God not foresee such misuse of volition (in which case He would have refrained from creation altogether)?

It is proper for a believer to ask such critical questions, for belief in God should always be based on rational reflection, so as to have a maximum of credibility and solidity.

Certainly, ideas suggesting that God might be subject to unfulfilled desires or that He might yield to some passing fancy are unacceptable, since they imply He has some incompleteness or fault, or that He is causatively determined or weak of will. However, the simple answer is that volition (in humans, and by extrapolation to an infinitely greater degree in God) is *free* – and to say that it is free is to mean that it can operate spontaneously, without mechanical connection to some reason, need, desire or whim[38].

If an Agent (a human soul or God) must have a motive to ever at all exercise will, then there is ultimately no such thing as freedom of the will. It follows that to ask the question "why did God create?" is a misrepresentation of the nature of volition. To insist for some explanation or motive for a

[38] See my work *Volition and Allied Causal Concepts* for a thorough analysis of freewill.

purely volitional act is to demand a deterministic framework where none applies. The question is therefore inappropriate.

Thus, the Judaic teaching that "God created us because He wanted to do good to someone other than Himself" is reasonable and consistent. It does not imply that God is lonely, or that He yields to a sudden impulse, or the like; for such explanations would assign an inappropriate causal model to God, implying some thoughts randomly arise within Him independently of His will, and then influence or determine Him. Granting God is the most fully volitional of beings, such functioning is inapplicable to Him; His will has to be solely and entirely His own choice and responsibility, a pure expression of Himself.

We can nevertheless rationalize God's creativity ex post facto as follows. We could say that so long as His unity remains undifferentiated, His great powers of consciousness (omniscience), volition (omnipotence) and valuation (justice and lovingkindness) remain unactualized potentials – i.e. their reality is concealed. In order to give these powers their full reality, God has to decide at some point *to exercise* these powers, i.e. to actualize their potential. To do so, He has to create a diverse and changing world, creatures capable of good and bad, etc. – a world in relation to which He can not only be, but also act.

This seems to me a coherent theory. Note well that it does not affirm that God has actual consciousness, volition and valuation before he exercises these powers. There is a level or depth at which God is purely One – prior to any thought,

will or intention of His whatsoever. Then at some stage, He Himself spontaneously decides to set a multiplicity in motion, starting with the creation within Himself of His own powers, and proceeding with their exercise by creating and running the world as we know it.

In this perspective, the scenario of a world having bad in it as well as good, although God was fundamentally well-meaning in creating it, is comprehensible. Good can only be exercised in a framework where bad is also possible. If good were the only polarity possible, i.e. if bad was impossible, there would be no choice of good and therefore nothing could be characterized as good (since good presupposes freewill, otherwise all you have is mechanics). Therefore, the possibility of bad had to be allowed. Obviously, God did not fear to make allowance for the bad: He trusted the good would triumph over it.

In this perspective, too, it is perfectly natural for God to both create a world *and* will it to return to its original oneness. It does not signify a "change of mind" on His part. On the contrary, it is indicative of His strength and confidence – that He can *ex nihilo* set a diverse world in motion and expect this multiplicity to ultimately return to its unitary source. No error is involved – it is all quite intentional.

7. Methods and experiences

Another area of comparison and contrast between traditions is that of *methodology*. Comparative study of religion shows that there are many means, as well as ends and results, in common among the traditions, although distinctions can surely be made. Some meditation techniques are found in two or more traditions, while others are peculiar to one tradition. The differences are often differences in emphasis, rather than fundamental differences.

Sometimes the descriptive and prescriptive language used varies, but the essential message is the same. For instance, sitting down with a holistic awareness, a Jew might reflect and marvel at the omnipresence of God in the midst and depths of the here and now, whereas a Buddhist might view his parallel experience as a serene contemplation of the Emptiness of all things.

Thirdly, despite the underlying universality of the motive behind meditation, the so-called *mystical experiences* emerging from meditation, or occasionally apparently spontaneously, may be very different.

There are evidently strong *cultural influences* on the concrete content of experiences within the different traditions to take into account. Jews have Jewish visions, Christians have

Christian visions, Moslems have Islamic visions, Hindus have Hindu visions, Buddhists have Buddhist visions, Taoists have Taoist visions, and so forth[39]. Or they respectively imagine their "visions", and think and say they saw them[40]; or they are reported by others to have seen them, even though those others cannot conceivably personally guarantee they did[41]. Moreover, there may be individual variants within the same tradition[42].

Such disagreements among and within traditions are significant, since they logically throw doubt on the finality of the mystical experiences of the parties in question. That is, through comparative religion we realize that what within a given tradition appears as universal, turns out upon further scrutiny to be culturally influenced or affected by individual parameters. But we can ignore such variations once we realize they relate to sights and sounds, i.e. to phenomenal experiences.

That is, they very likely involve *mental projections*. How else are we to explain, from a neutral standpoint, the often-

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[39] For examples: Saul saw the prophet Samuel, Paul saw Jesus, Mohamed saw the Archangel Gabriel, Arjuna saw Krishna, a Buddhist might see the Bodhisattva Kuan Yin and a Taoist might see Lao Tzu.

[40] We need not of course take all claims for granted offhand; we can and should exercise caution, and remain somewhat critical while also open-minded.

[41] Not having shared in the experience; or never having interviewed the one claimed to have had it.

[42] For example, the vision of the prophet Ezekiel concerning the future Temple does not match Rabbinical expectations in some details.

conflicting narratives within competing religions? It is not inconceivable that some of the events told in the holy books actually occurred, and are not mere figments of someone's imagination; but they could not all have been real, since each religion makes some claims the others strongly doubt. Thus, without outright and blanket skepticism, philosophers are duty bound to remain cautious.

We ought perhaps to make a distinction between two kinds of mystical experience: religious experiences and meditative experiences. Religious experiences may be spontaneous, and are usually (though not always) representational: they involve concrete forms (whether they be judged real or imaginary), and they tell a story or pass a message. Meditative experiences require work to obtain, and are usually (though not always) *non-representational*: they relate to *the quality of* current perceptions or insights, rather than to their contents, or they go *beyond* content.

We must not forget that the absolute we conceive as universal is not phenomenal (i.e. made up of sights, sounds, etc.), but utterly *non-phenomenal and formless*. Mystical visions are bound to be relative to preceding ordinary experience (which seems to start through the senses, and continues in the mind through memory and imagination, and which suggests all sorts of forms that we propose by mental acts of abstraction), whereas the ultimate mystical experience of the One is necessarily unconditioned by such factors.

Thus, the apparent relativity of visions and ideas from one culture to another need not deter the individual from an

optimistic spiritual quest. For one may consider that the Absolute is bound to express itself in some particular relative form, as of the moment an experience is verbally or otherwise described for purposes of communication.

For this reason, it is possible to function entirely within a chosen tradition, and still hope to transcend all relativity. One may also, in my view (as a mere philosopher), be somewhat eclectic, learning aspects of the spiritual path from different traditions, yet not allowing any to be overwhelming[43], and still reach transcendence.

Furthermore, while there are significant phenomenological differences in many of the mystical experiences generated by different traditions, it is surprising (or perhaps not so surprising) to see how many similarities there are between them. This is especially evident when the experiences involve a minimum of representation of phenomenal content or forms. As an example, I would propose the experience described in Exodus XXIV:10 – which would surely appear equally credible to a Jewish or Buddhist meditator.

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[43] It is probably easier to function entirely within a given or chosen tradition, for most people. However, those of us who are well trained in logic and philosophy find it more difficult, for we are not always readily convinced by the arguments and doctrines traditions may offer. It is undoubtedly good to have simple faith; but it is also wise to avoid being manipulated and fooled. Most exasperating of all are the doctrinaire apologists and propagandists of religions, who consider that The Truth must necessarily be exactly as formulated by their religion's founder(s). This last criticism applies equally to those of the Secularist persuasion. A healthy balance should be cultivated.

All those who (claim to) have attained realization of ultimate reality agree that it is an experience that cannot be fully put into words. It is something so different from ordinary belief that it cannot be adequately described; no words can express it; no words can do it justice. We may very roughly verbally approach it, to some extent from various angles, but it is too delicate a balance of dynamic experience to be captured, frozen and passed on.

Alternatively, the choice of words that realized individuals occasionally use to signal their understanding of experience (such as *koan* formulated by Zen masters), are comprehensible only to other realized persons and quite obscure to ordinary folk like us. That is why such experience or understanding is called "a mystery" or "mystical". These are not pejorative characterizations, but simple admissions of most people's limits of comprehension.

In conclusion, meditation is ideologically neutral, although capable of differing interpretations. However we interpret meditation and whatever techniques we adopt for it, we should not forget to view it as a *natural* activity. To meditate is to be in the most natural place of all, to be what one really is at heart. It should be experienced as something essentially effortless and perfectly comfortable. It is to be at home.

PART 2:
UNDERSTANDING THE SELF

8. The individual self in Monism

Granting the Monist thesis briefly described in the preceding chapters, we can understand that our respective apparent individual selves, whether they are viewed as souls (entities with a spiritual substance distinct from mind and matter) or as something altogether non-substantial (as Buddhism suggests), have a relative mode of existence in comparison to the Soul of God (in Monotheistic religions), or to the underlying Original Ground of such being or the Tao (in competing doctrines).

If our selves are relative to some absolute Self (or a "Non-self", in Buddhism), they are *illusory*. In what sense, illusory? We might say that the illusion consists in artificially differentiating the particular out of the Universal – i.e. it consists in a para-cognitive somewhat arbitrary act of ***individuation***. Apparently, then, tiny fractions of the original Totality have given themselves the false impression of being cut off from their common Source. They (that is, we all) have lost touch with their true Identity, and become confused by

their limited viewpoint into believing themselves to have a *separate identity*.[44]

To illustrate the illusoriness of individuation, we can point to waves in a body of water. A wave is evidently one with the body of water, yet we artificially mentally outline it and conventionally distinguish it, then we give it a name "the wave" and treat it as something else than the water. *There is indeed a bump in the water; but in reality, the boundaries we assign it are arbitrary.* Similarly, goes the argument, with all things material, mental or spiritual.

The **Buddhist** thesis on this topic is generally claimed to differ somewhat, considering that all empirical appearances of selfhood are phenomenal, and nothing but phenomenal. And since phenomena are impermanent like wisps of smoke – arising (we know not whence – thus, from nowhere), abiding only temporarily, all the while changing in many ways, and finally disappearing (we know not wither – thus, to nowhere) – we may not assume any constancy behind or beneath them. Our particular self is thus empty of any substance; and similarly, there is no universal Soul.

This thesis is of course sufficiently empirical with regard to the fact of impermanence of phenomena; but (in my view) there is a conceptual loophole in it. We can point out that it

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[44] Rather than suggest like Bishop Berkeley that we are ideas in the mind of God, the viewpoint here advocated is that we are, as it were, ideas in our own minds. God invented us, yes, and allowed for our seeming individuation; but He has no illusions about our separateness. It is we, in our limited and therefore warped perspective, who misperceive ourselves as individuals.

rejects any idea of underlying constancy without sufficient justification (i.e. by way of a *non-sequitur*); and we can advocate instead an underlying substance (material, mental or spiritual), with equally insufficient justification, or maybe more justification (namely, that this helps explain more things).[45]

Furthermore, we may, and I think logically must, admit that we are aware of our selves, not only through perception of outer and inner phenomena, but also through another direct kind of cognition, which we may call 'intuition', of *non-phenomenal* aspects. There is no reason to suppose offhand only phenomenal aspects exist and are directly cognizable. Indeed, we must admit intuition, to explain how we know what we have perceived, willed or valued *in particular cases*. Conceptual means *cannot* entirely explain such particulars; they can only yield generalities.

Thus, while understanding and respecting the Buddhist non-self doctrine, I personally prefer to believe in the spirituality of the individual self and in God. I may additionally propose the following arguments. To start with, these ideas (of soul and God) do not logically exclude, but *include* the notion of "emptiness"; i.e. it remains true that particular souls and the universal Soul *cannot* be reduced to phenomenal experiences. Moreover, Monotheism is logically more convincing, because the Buddhist thesis takes for granted without further ado something that the God thesis makes an effort to explain.

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[45] We shall further debate the issue of impermanence later on.

The manifest facts of consciousness, volition and valuation in us, i.e. in seemingly finite individuals, remain unexplained in Buddhism, whereas in the Monotheistic thesis the personal powers of individuals are thought to stem from the like powers of God. That is, since finite souls are (ultimately illusory) fractions of God, their powers of cognition, freewill, and valuing (though proportionately finite) derive from the same powers (on an infinitely grander scale) in the overall Soul, i.e. God.

In truth, Buddhists could retort that though this argument *reduces* the three human powers to the corresponding (greater) powers of God, it leaves unexplained the existence of these same powers in Him. They are derivatives in humans, all right, but still primaries in God.

Yes, but a distinction remains. Monotheism views the ultimate Source as having a personality, whereas for Buddhism, the Original Ground is impersonal. For the former, there is a "Who", while for the latter, only a "What" if anything at all. It seems improbable (to me, at least) that a person would derive from a non-person. Rather, the particular soul has to have this sense of personal identity in the way of a reflection of the universal soul's personality.

But in truth, we can still intellectually reconcile the two doctrines, if we admit that such arguments are finally just verbal differentiations and that we should rather stress their convergences and complementarities.[46]

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[46] Needless to say, I do not intend this statement as a blanket approval, condoning all beliefs and practices included in

In any case, the apparent meditative success of Buddhists does not logically exclude the logical possibility that their doctrine denying soul and God may well be an error of interpretation – since other religions also report meditative successes although they resorted to other interpretations. If we generously accept all or most such human claims at their face value, we logically have to conclude that ***correct interpretation is not necessary for meditative success***.

This suggests that meditation is ultimately independent of doctrinal quarrels. Competing, even conflicting, doctrines may be equally helpful – depending on cultural or personal context. Therefore, meditation is ultimately a pragmatic issue; it does not need particular dogmas to yield its results. Whatever your religious preference, or lack of it, just add one ingredient – meditation; this single measure will over time naturally perform wonders anyway.

The modern **Secularist** denial of spiritual substance (a soul in humans and God) can be depicted as follows. We are in this case dealing with a materialist philosophy, which grants solid reality only to the phenomenal (and conceptual inferences from it). The material phenomenon is regarded as exclusive of any other, although if pressed secularists will acknowledge

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practice under the heading of Buddhism. I have in past works for instance voiced my reserves regarding the worship directed at statues (idolatry). Even from a Buddhist point of view, this is a weird and spiritually obstructive practice (since it involves mental projection of "selfhood" into purely physical bodies). Moreover, I do not see how this can be an improvement on the worship of God. If devotion is a good thing, surely the latter is its best expression.

some sort of additional, mental substance, imagined as a sort of cloud of "consciousness" hovering in the heads of certain material entities (i.e. at least humans and possibly higher animals).

This substance is conceived as a sort of epiphenomenon of specific combinations of matter (namely, those making up a live human body, and in particular its neurological system). They effectively consider mind as a rarified sort of matter. The proponents of this thesis make no clear distinction between the stuff of memories, dreams and imaginings, on the one hand, and the one experiencing these inner phenomena and indeed (via the senses) outer phenomena, on the other. And therefore, they reject all notion of an additional spiritual substance or soul as the essence of self.

This philosophy can thus be doubted on two grounds. Firstly, it fails to clearly and honestly analyze mental experience and draw the necessary conclusions from such analysis. Notably missing is the distinction between the intuited "cognizing, willing and valuing self" and his (or her) "perceived mental (and sensory) experiences", i.e. the distinction between soul and mind within the psyche. Secondly, while secularism does tend to monism in respect of matter, it refuses a similar monist extrapolation with respect to souls, and so denies God.

Today's Secularists of course pose as "scientists"[47], and by this means give their doctrine prestige among non-

[47] Some are indeed scientists – in their specific field, such as Physics. But this does not entitle them to a free ride in the general

philosophers and superficial philosophers. But this stance is not scientific, in the strict sense of the term. *Physical science has to date not produced a single mathematical formula showing the reducibility of life, mind, consciousness, or spirit/soul to matter.* Materialists just *presume* that such a universal reductive formula will "someday" be shown possible. Maybe so; but until that day, they cannot logically rely on their presumption as if it were established fact.

They *think* their materialism is "sure" to be eventually proved all-inclusive – but this expectation and hope of theirs has for the moment, to repeat, no scientific justification whatsoever! It is just a figment of their imagination, an act of faith, a mere hypothetical postulate. Secularism is thus *just another religion*, not an exclusive inference from Science.

"Science" is entirely defined by rigor in cognitive method, without prejudice. It demands all available data be taken into consideration by our theories, and duly explained by these theories. Genuine philosophers are not intimidated by the intellectual thuggery of those who pretend that science is exclusively materialist.

In the case of the Materialist theory, the evident data of life, mind, consciousness and spirit or soul has hardly even been acknowledged by its advocates, let alone taken into consideration. It has simply been ignored, swept under the

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field of Philosophy. I am thinking here of Hubert Reeves, who appears on TV claiming atheism as incontrovertible fact, as if any other view is simply unthinkable. Laypersons should not confuse his prestige and media-presence with logical confirmation of his view. The underlying fallacy is *ad hominem* argument.

carpet, by them. That is not science – it is sophistry. What is speculative must be admitted to be such. And two speculations that equally fit available data are on the same footing as regards the judgment of science.

9. The impression of self

What do we mean by "**the self**"? This term refers primarily to ***that which seems to cognize, to will and to value*** at any given moment. That is, these functions seem to emanate, at any given time, from a single point or place, deep within "one's own" bodily and mental experiences, which we each call "I" or "me" or "myself".

The self is the one who is conscious, the one experiencing, the one sensing, the one feeling, the one imagining, the one conceiving and thinking, the one liking or desiring, wishing or hoping, the one taking action, etc.… or the one abstaining from such functions. Thus, the self is the Subject of consciousness, the Agent[48] of volitional acts and the Valuator of value judgments.

It is an error of observation to claim that cognitions, volitions and valuations can occur without a 'person' doing the

[48] Note well, the word Agent as used here simply refers to 'the one who acts' – the actor of action, the doer of the deed. Agency here implies volition – a machine (or any other deterministic entity) is not considered an agent of its actions, except in a metaphorical way. Moreover, the colloquial connotation of agency as 'acting on behalf of someone else' is *not* intended here, though such instrumentality is logically subsumed under volitional action.

cognizing, willing or valuing. Clear and honest observation recognizes that the distinctive nature of these events is to be relative to a self.

The self is an object of direct, subjective experience, or self-intuition, not to be confused with the phenomena due to sensation of matter or to mental experience. It is not something merely conceptually inferred from such experienced phenomena, but something *non-phenomenal* that is itself experienced.

Note well: our "I" is not a single phenomenon, or an aggregate of phenomena or even a mere abstraction from phenomenal experiences; it is an ongoing non-phenomenal experience. (It may well be, however, that the self would be transparent to itself, were it not subjected to phenomenal experiences that it has to cognize and deal with, through consciousness, volition and evaluation[49].)

The self, as here technically defined, *exists for at least a moment of time*. Logically, it does not necessarily follow from such punctual data that the selves intuited at different, even contiguous, moments of time are one and the same self. That is, the *continuity* of self is an additional, perhaps more conceptual idea – although we generally (all except Buddhists) subscribe to such subsistence.

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[49] The self may, in this sense, be said to be 'relative' – not meaning that (once and so long as it occurs) its existence is not 'independent', but that *its own awareness of its own existence* is dependent on external stimuli.

This in turn, note well, does not logically necessarily imply eternity since the beginning or to the end of time – although again, many (but far from all) people subscribe to this additional idea. In addition to our punctual and continuous ideas of self, note also that we think of self as something *cumulative* – our past momentary selves seem to accrete over time, making us heavier with responsibilities as we grow older.

Self-consciousness, here, note well, simply means "consciousness of self" – i.e. with reference to any reflexive act of consciousness, in which the self is both the Subject and the object, which is assumably a direct and immediate cognitive (intuitive) act. Self-consciousness can also mean consciousness (i.e. intuition, here again) of any of the three functions of the self, viz. cognition, volition and valuation.[50]

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[50] The phrase "self-consciousness" is additionally sometimes used, in philosophy and science, to refer to consciousness that one is conscious of some other object – i.e. to "consciousness of consciousness". The latter might be an instant event, made possible by the Subject's dividing his attention, partly on some object and partly on his consciousness of that object; or it might involve a time-lag, assuming that the Subject is first conscious of some object, and a bit later retrospectively conscious of that first consciousness (either directly while it is still "echoing" in his mind, or indirectly through longer-term memory). Another, more colloquial and pejorative, sense of the term "self-consciousness" refers to the awareness we may have of some other person (or persons) observing us, which causes us to behave in a more awkward manner, i.e. without our customary spontaneity or naturalness, because we use our will to make sure the observer gets a certain "favorable" (in whatever sense) image of us.

These three functions, or ways of expression, of the self do not operate independently of each other but are interrelated in various ways. They may occur simultaneously or in complex chains. Cognition is the primary function, but may also occur after volition (e.g. acts of research) and valuation (e.g. deciding what to research). Volition usually implies prior cognition, but is sometimes "blind" (whimsical). Valuation is a particular sort of volition, since it implies choice; and it always implies cognition, if only the awareness of something to evaluate (but usually also awareness of various considerations).

The above proposed definition of the self refers to the essence of selfhood. In relation to this essential self, everything else is "the world out there", "Object", "other". It is our deepest inside, deeper even than the mind and body. Aspects of mind and body are also often colloquially called self, but this is a misnomer. Self, as here understood, may therefore be equated to what we commonly call the "**soul**", without prejudicing the issue as to what such assumed entity might be construed as.

One widespread theory is that the soul is composed of some non-material, call it 'spiritual', substance. This might be hypothesized as having spatial as well as temporal location and extension, or as somehow located and extended in time but not in space[51]. Another possible way to view it is as a

[51] Or again, we might like the poet Khalil Gibran consider the soul as "a sea boundless and measureless" (*The Prophet*. London: Heinemann, 1972.)

special sort of 'knot' in the fabric of space-time, a knot with different properties than those of so-called material entities. Some philosophers (notably, Buddhist and Materialist ones) altogether deny the soul's existence[52].

Whatever the theoretical differences between competing traditions, concerning the existence and nature of the self, they generally agree on the value and need in practice – i.e. during meditation – to forget, if not actually erase, oneself. This is of course no easy task. Certainly, at the earlier stages of meditation, when we are appalled to discover the mental storms in a teacup our ego concerns constantly produce, it seems like a mission impossible. But there are ways and means to gradually facilitate the required result.

At the deepest level, one has to eventually *give up on the Subject-Object or self-other division*. If Monism is considered as the ultimate philosophical truth, then there must indeed be a plane of reality where this duality noticeably dissolves. On a practical level, one undoubtedly cannot logically expect to reach the experience of oneness, until one has managed to surrender attachment to the common impression of duality between self and other, or Subject and Object.

Such surrender is not a psychological impossibility or an artificial mental acrobatic. This is made clear, if we reflect on

[52] But in my opinion, they fail to adequately explain the peculiarities of cognition, volition and valuation.

the fact that the Subject-Object or self-other division constitutes *ratiocination*, i.e. a rational act[53].

Just as our 'reason' divides outer experiences into different sense-modalities, or each modality into different qualities and measures (e.g. in the visual field: colors and intensities, shapes and sizes); or again, just as it makes a distinction between outer and inner experiences (e.g. between physical sights and mental visions) – so, our rational faculty is responsible for the self-other impression. This does not have to be taken to mean that our reason is inventing a false division, producing an illusion; yet, it does mean that without the regard of a rational Subject, such distinction would never arise in the universe.

These insights imply that there is *no need* to epistemologically invalidate the Subject-Object distinction[54] to realize that we can still eventually (if only in the course of meditation) hope to be able to free ourselves in practice from this automatic reaction. We wish to at some stage give up the distinction, not because it is intrinsically wrong or bad, but because we wish to get beyond it, into the mental rest or peace of non-discriminative consciousness.

Sitting in meditation, one's "self" usually seems to be an ever present and weighty experience, distinct from relatively

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[53] See my *Ruminations*, chapter 9.

[54] The Buddhists regard it invalid – but I would minimally argue that it has some credibility, like any appearance has until it is found to lead to antinomy. Indeed, I would go further and argue that any attempt at such invalidation is unjustifiable, and even logically impossible.

external mental and material experiences. But if one realizes that such self-experience is a rational (i.e. ratiocinative) product, a mental subdivision of the natural unity of all experience at any given moment, one can indeed shake off – or more precisely just drop – this sense of self, and *experience all one's experience as a unity*.[55]

Note well, the task at hand is not to *ex post facto* deconstruct the rational act of division, or reconstruct the lost unity of self and other by somehow mentally sticking or merging them together, or pretend that the Subject or the Object does not really exist. Rather, the meditator has to place his soul in the pre-ratiocinative position, where the cutting-up of experience has *not yet* occurred. It is not a place of counter-comments, but a place of no (verbal or non-verbal) comment. It is the position of pristine experience, where the mental reflex of sorting data out has not yet even begun.

All things are accepted as they appear. An impression of self appears, as against an impression of other? So well and good – it need not be emphasized or noted in any way. It is just experienced. If no distinctions are made, there are no distinctions. We remain observant, that's all. We enjoy the scenery. Our awareness is phenomenological.

In pure experience, what we call "multiplicity" may well be manifest, but it is all part and parcel of the essential "unity". Here, essence and manifestation are one and the same. Here,

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[55] This would of course be one aspect of overall "integration" (what is called *Samadhi* in Sanskrit, *Wu* in Chinese, *Satori* in Japanese).

Subject and Object form a natural continuum. The totality is in harmony, bubbling with life. It is what it is, whatever it happens to be.

Before getting to this stage of integral experience, one may of course have to “work on oneself” long and hard.

10. Impermanence: concept and principle

Buddhist meditators attach great importance to the principle of impermanence. They consider that if one but realizes that "everything is impermanent", one is well on the way to or has already reached Realization.

However, the principle proposed by Buddhism should (in my view) be approached more critically than its proponents have hitherto done. They have taken for granted that such a principle is immediately knowable, in the way of a direct experience, and have not given enough attention to the *epistemological issues* this notion raises.

To be sure, we can and do commonly have direct experience of *some* impermanence: that of present changes. Whereas we might rationally analyze change in general (when it occurs) as an *instant* replacement of one thing by its negation, many phenomena of change evidently occur in a present *moment* (an extended amount of time). If, for example, you watch a dog running, you are not personally experiencing this sight as a series of successive stills of the dog in different positions, but as one continuous series of moves.

A good meditation on such evident impermanence is meditation on water[56]. One sits or stands calmly in front of a body of water (the sea, a river, a lake, a puddle), watching the movements on its surface – reflections on it, waves or wavelets, currents, droplets of rain, listening to the sounds. I find this practice both soothing and a great source of understanding about life.

But we must keep in mind that the concept of impermanence covers a wider range of experiences than that: it includes changes not sensible in a present moment, but only inferred over time by comparing situations experienced in distinct moments, whether contiguous or non-contiguous. Such inferences imply a reliance on memory, or an interpretation of other present traces of past events. Still other changes are known even more indirectly, through predominantly conceptual means.

Generally speaking (i.e. including all sorts of experience under one heading): we first experience undifferentiated totality, and then (pretty much automatically) subdivide it by means of mental projections and then conceptually regroup these subdivisions by comparing and contrasting them

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[56] The Greek philosopher Heraclites must have practiced this meditation, when he reportedly wrote "you cannot step into the same river twice". This meditation is commonly practiced, even unwittingly. Other similarly natural meditations consist in watching rain falling, wind blowing through trees, clouds shifting in the sky, candlelight flickering, or the sparks and flames of a camp or chimney fire. "Watching" of course here means, not just being aware of sights (shapes and colors), but also awareness of sounds, touch-sensations, temperatures, textures, etc.

together. Buddhist philosophy admits and advocates this analysis: the subdivision and conceptualization of the phenomenological given is, we all agree, ratiocination (i.e. rational activity); it is reason (i.e. the rational faculty) that mentally "makes" many out of the One.

It follows from this insight (we may now argue) that *impermanence cannot be considered as a primary given*, but must be viewed as derived from the imagined subdivision and conceptual regrouping of the initially experienced whole. Even to mentally isolate and classify some directly experienced particular change as "a change" is ratiocination. All the more so, the "impermanence" of each totality of experience, moment after moment, is an idea, obtained by distinguishing successive moments of experience; i.e. by relying on memory, and comparing and contrasting the experience apparently remembered to the experience currently experienced.

The latter act, note well, requires we cut up "present experience" into two portions, one a "memory" (inner) appearance and the other a more "currently in process" (inner and/or outer) appearance. This is rational activity; so, "impermanence" is in fact never directly experienced (contrary to Buddhist claims). Unity phenomenologically precedes Diversity; therefore, the experience of diversity cannot logically be considered as disqualifying the belief in underlying unity.

This argument is not a proof of substance, but at least serves to neutralize the Buddhist denial of substance. It opens the

door to an advocacy of substance[57] by adductive means, i.e. in the way of a legitimate hypothesis to be confirmed by overall consideration of all experience and all the needs of its consistent conceptualization.

Note well that I am not here denying validity to the *concept* of impermanence, but I am only reminding us that "impermanence" is a concept. Being a concept based on experience of change, it is indeed a valid concept. This is true whether such change be considered as real or illusory: it suffices that such change appears phenomenologically for a concept of it to be justified.

The *principle* of impermanence is more than that the mere concept. It is a *generalization* of that concept. It is not a mere statement that change exists – it is a statement that only change exists, i.e. that everything is continually changing and there is no underlying rest. Now, s*uch a general proposition logically can simply not be validated with reference to experience alone*. There is no epistemologically conceivable way that, sitting in meditation, the Buddha would be able to *experience* this (or any other) principle *directly*.

This principle (like any other) *can indeed* conceivably be validated as universal, *but only* by adductive methodology. It must be considered as a hypothesis, to be tested again and

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[57] Note well that an issue within the thesis of substance is whether we advocate a single, undifferentiated substance, or a multiplicity of distinct substances. To admit of substance is not necessarily to uphold the latter, pluralist view. In Physics, the unitary substance view would be that matter is all one substance, vibrating in a variety of ways.

again against all new experiences, and compared to competing hypotheses as regards explanatory value. The result is thus at best *an inductive truth*, not a pure experience or a pure deduction from experience.

Furthermore, in addition to the generalization from particular experiences of change to a metaphysical principle of the ubiquity of change, the principle of impermanence involves a second fundamental generalization. Since it is a negative principle, it involves the act of generalization inherent in all negation; that is, the generalization from "I found no permanence in my present experience" to "There was no permanence to be found in my present experience".

While the conclusion of negation by such generalization is not in principle logically invalid, *it is an inductive, not a deductive conclusion*. It stands ab initio on a more or less equal footing with the competing speculation that there might well be an underlying permanence of some sort. The latter positive hypothesis could equally well be (and sometimes is) posited as a postulate, to be gradually shown preferable to the negative assumption using adductive means.

> Even within meditation, note, constancies do appear side by side with changing phenomena, if we pay attention to them. Thus, for instance, if I meditate on water, I may reflect on the inconstancy of its surface; but I may also reflect on the underlying constancy (during my period of meditation, at least) of the horizon or shoreline, or of rocks in or around it, or simply of the fact of water, or its

color and consistency, etc. I may, moreover, later discover that water is uniformly composed of H_2O.

Seen in this light, the status of the principle of impermanence is considerably less sure. To present such a principle as an absolute truth knowable directly or obtained by some sort of infallible analysis of experience would be dishonest.

All this is not said to annul the important moral lessons to be drawn from observation of impermanence. A "principle" of impermanence may still be proposed, if we take it as heuristic, rather than hermeneutic – i.e. as a useful "rule of thumb", which helps us realize that it is useless to attach importance to mundane things, and enjoins us to strive for higher values. Beauty is passing; pleasures are ephemeral. Life is short, and there is much spiritual work to be done…

With regard to predication of impermanence, it is relevant to ask whether the concrete data (experiences, appearances) referred to are phenomenal or non-phenomenal, i.e. whether they can be physically or mentally seen, heard, felt, smelt or tasted, or instead are intuited. To indicate that the data at hand is phenomenal, and so particularly transient, does not in itself exclude that relatively less transient non-phenomenal data might also be involved behind the scenes. That is, while current objects might be perceivably transient, it does not follow that the one perceiving them is equally transient.

Of course, whether the data is phenomenal or not, it may still be transient. However, transience has degrees. Data may be merely momentary, or it may appear more continuously over a more extended period of time. The issue here is not

"transient or eternal", as some Buddhist philosophers seem to present it. The issue is "momentary or continuous" – with the eternal as the extreme case of continuity. It is analytically erroneous to ignore or exclude offhand periods of existence that are longer than a mere 'moment' of time and shorter than 'eternity'.

Moreover, as already pointed out, the underlying claim that all phenomena, or for that matter all non-phenomenal events, are transient is not something that can be directly observed – but can only be based on generalization. There is no *a priori* logical necessity about such ontological statements – they are epistemologically bound to be inductive. Even if all appearances experienced by me or you so far seem transient, there might still be eternal existents our own transience makes us unable to observe.

Conversely, only an eternal being could *experience* eternity – and it would take such a being… an eternity to do so (not a mere few hours, days or years of meditation)![58] This however

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[58] I am not sure of the truth of this statement of mine. I have in the past argued (among other reasons so as to provide an argument in favor of the doctrine that God can tell the future) that this issue hinges on the span of time an onlooker can perceive in one go. The higher one is spiritually placed, the longer a 'moment' of time covers. God, who is "above it all", at the peak of spiritual perspective, can see all time (all the things we class under the headings of past, present and future) as the present moment. Proportionately, when we humans meditate, the present is longer, i.e. the 'moment' of time our attention can include at once is enlarged. Thus, one (conceivably) need not wait forever to experience eternity, but may ultimately do so through spiritual elevation. This may be the "eternal now" experience many people

does not exclude the possibility of ascribing eternity to certain things on conceptual deductive grounds. For example, I can affirm the laws of thought to be eternally true, since they are incontrovertible; or again, I can affirm all contradictions or exclusions of a middle to be eternally false. Furthermore, Buddhists implicitly if not explicitly ascribe some sort of eternity to the existential ground in or out of which all transient phenomena bubble up. That is, although particular existents may well all be transient, the fact of existence as such is eternal. Therefore, their argument is not really intended as a denial of any permanence whatsoever (as it is often presented), but more moderately as a denial of permanence to particular existents, i.e. to fragments of the totality. And of course, in that perspective, their insight is right on.

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have reported having. Note additionally that, if we accept this hypothesis, we have to apply it not only to external events (i.e. phenomenal physical and mental experiences) but also to inner experience (i.e. intuitions of cognitions, volitions and valuations by self). The latter is more difficult, more problematic, because it implies that *one's own* being and experience is already consumed, i.e. all telescoped into the present. Still, why not.

11. Not an essence, but an entity

Buddhist philosophers have stressed the idea of impermanence, with a view to deny the existence of "essences" in both the objective and subjective domains. However, an impermanent essence is not a contradiction in terms. This means that the question of essences is more complex than merely an issue of impermanence. Several epistemological and ontological issues are involved in this question. We have indicated some of these issues in the preceding chapters.

With regard to the objective domain, comprising the material and mental objects of experience, i.e. the phenomena apparently experienced through the senses or in the mind – their reasoning is that we never perceive firm "essences" but only constantly changing phenomena; whence, they conclude, the objects we refer to are "empty".

In reply, I would say that it is true that many people seem to imagine that the "entities" we refer to in thought (e.g. a dog) have some unchanging core (call it "dog-ness"), which remains constant while the superficial changes and movements we observe occur, and which allow us to classify a number of particulars under a common heading (i.e. all particular dogs as "dogs").

But of course, if we examine our thought processes more carefully, we have to modify this viewpoint somewhat. We do "define" a particular object by referring to some seemingly constant property (or conjunction of properties) in it – which is preferably actual and static, though (by the way) it might even be a habitual action or repetitive motion or a mere potential.

Note too, there may be more than one property eligible for use as a definition – so long as each property is constant throughout the existence of that object and is exclusive to it. The defining property does not shine out as special in some way, and in some cases we might well arbitrarily choose one candidate among many.

However, defining is never as direct and simple an insight as it may at times seem. It requires a complex rational activity, involving comparison and contrast between different aspects and phases of the individual object, and between this object and others that seem similar to it in some respects though different from it in others, and between that class of object and all others. Thus, the property used as definition is knowable only through complex conceptual means.

Therefore, our mental separation of one property from the whole object or set of objects is an artifice. And, moreover, our referring to all apparently similar occurrences of that property as "one" property gives the impression of objective unity, when in fact the one-ness is only in the mind of the beholder (though this does not make it unreal). In short, the definition is only an abstraction. It indeed in a sense exists in

the object as a whole, but it is only distinguishable from the whole through cognition and ratiocination.

The material and mental objects we perceive are, therefore, in fact nothing other than more or less arbitrary collections of phenomena, among which one or more is/are selected by us on various grounds as "essential". The "essence" is a potential that can only be actualized relative to a rational observer; it has no independent actual existence when no observer is present. Definition gives us a mental "handle" on objects, but it is not a substitute for them.

An entity is not *only* its definition. An entity is the sum total of innumerable qualities and events related to it; some of these are applicable to it throughout its existence (be that existence transient or eternal) and some of them are applicable to it during only part(s) of its existence (i.e. have a shorter duration). Although the defining property must be general (and exclusive) to the object defined, it does not follow that properties that are not or cannot be used for definition cease to equally "belong to" the object.

It is inexcusably naïve to imagine the essence of an entity as some sort of ghost of the object coterminous with it. In fact, the entity is one – whatever collection of circumstances happens to constitute it. The distinction of an essence in it is a pragmatic measure needed for purposes of knowledge – it does not imply the property concerned to have a separate existence in fact. The property selected is necessarily one aspect among many; it may be just a tiny corner of the whole entity.

We may thus readily agree with Buddhists that named or thought-of objects are "empty"; i.e. that it is inaccurate to consider each object as really having some defining constant core, whether phenomenal or non-phenomenal. But the Buddhists go on from there are apply the same reasoning to the Subject (or soul) – and this is where we may more radically disagree.

They imply that the Subject of cognitions is itself cognized by way of phenomena, i.e. like any other object. This idea of theirs has some apparent credibility due to the fact that they confuse the Subject with his 'inner', mental phenomena[59]. But though such phenomena are indeed internal *in comparison to* physical phenomena sensed in the body or further out beyond it, they are strictly speaking external in comparison to the "soul".

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[59] See the Buddhist doctrine of the Five Component-Groups. In this doctrine, the fourth and fifth groups, comprising the "determinants" and the "cognitive faculty", are particularly misleading, in that cognition, volition and valuation, the three functions of the self, are there presented without mention of the self, as ordinary phenomenal events. That is, the doctrine commits a *petitio principii*, by depicting psychic events in a manner that deliberately omits verbal acknowledgment of the underlying self, so as to seem to arrive at the (foregone) conclusion that there is no self. No explanation is given, for instance, as to how we tell the difference between two phenomenally identical actions, considering one as really willed by oneself, and the other as a reactive or accidental event – for such differentiation (which is necessary to gauge degrees of responsibility) is only possible by means of self-knowledge, i.e. introspection into one's non-phenomenal self, and they have dogmatically resolved in advance not to accept the existence of a cognizing, willing and valuing self.

Anyone who reflects a little would not regard, say, the stuff of a dream he had as himself. His self-awareness is the consciousness of something more inward still than the stuff of imaginations. He is the one experiencing and generating the imaginations. The soul is not a phenomenon – it has no smell, taste, solidity, tune or color; it is something *non*-phenomenal.

The self is not perceived as an object in the way of mental phenomena (as the Buddhists suggest), but is intuited directly in the way of a Subject apperceiving itself (at least when it perceives other things, or when it expresses itself through volition or valuation). Our soul is not a presumed "essence" of our mental *phenomenal* experiences; it is an entirely different sort of experience.

Of course, it could still be argued that – even granting that acts of cognition, volition and valuation are non-phenomenal events, known by self-intuition – such acts are mere momentary events, which do not necessarily imply an underlying non-phenomenal continuity (an abiding self). Admittedly, the fact that we cannot physically or mentally see, hear, smell, taste or touch the acts of the self does not logically imply that the self is abiding.

However, note that this last is an argument in favor of the possibility that the self may be impermanent – it does not constitute an argument against the existence of a self (whether lasting or short-lived) underlying each act of cognition, volition or valuation. That is, these functions are inconceivable without *someone* experiencing, willing and

choosing, even if it is conceivable that the one doing so does not abide for longer than that moment.[60]

To deny that cognition, volition and valuation necessarily involve a self is to place these apparent events under an aetiological régime of natural determinism or spontaneity. That subsumes willing under mechanistic causation or chance happenstance – i.e. it effectively denies the existence of freewill.

Similarly, it implies that there is no more to knowing than the storing of symbols in a machine (as if the "information" stored in a computer has any knowledge value without humans to cognize and understand it, i.e. as if a computer can ever at all *know*). And again, it implies that valuing or disvaluing is no more relevant to a living (and in particular sentient) being than it is to a stone.

The effective elimination of these three categories (i.e. knowing, willing and valuing) by Buddhists (and extreme Materialists, by the way) is without logical justification, because in total disaccord with common experience.

The confusion may in part be caused or perpetuated by equivocation. Because we often use the word "mind" – or alternatively, sometimes, "consciousness" – in a loose, large

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[60] Note well that I am careful to say the *possibility* that the self is impermanent; which does not exclude the equal possibility that the self is permanent. The mere fact that the cognitions, volitions and valuations of the self are impermanent does not by itself allow us to draw any conclusion either way about the permanence or impermanence of the self. Additional considerations are needed to draw the latter conclusion.

sense, including the soul, it might be assumed that the soul is similar to mental phenomena in its substance. But the soul and mind are only proximate in a spatial sense, if at all. The soul is not made of mental stuff or of consciousness – the soul uses consciousness to observe mental and physical events (and, indeed, its intimate self).

The self or soul is not an abstraction from mental or physical phenomena. It receives and cognizes mental and material information (and it indirectly chooses and wills mental and material events) – but it is not identical with such information (or events).

Only intuited events of cognition, volition and valuation can be considered as truly parts of, and direct responsibilities of, the soul. And even here, it would be inaccurate to necessarily equate the soul to these functions. Such a positivistic approach is a hypothesis to be adopted inductively only if we find no good reason to adopt the alternative hypothesis that the soul is more than the evidence of its functioning.

Thus, the inevitable impermanence of the phenomenal world cannot be construed as necessarily implying a similar impermanence for the self. Even granting that material and mental objects are "empty", it does not follow that the self is a non-entity, i.e. non-existent as a distinct unit. The self is not a material or mental substance or entity – but it is a non-phenomenal substance and entity. We may legitimately label that distinct substance 'spiritual' and that entity 'soul'.

Note well that such labeling does not preclude the idea, previously presented, that the individual soul's individuation

out from the universal spiritual substance or universal soul is ultimately illusory. We may thus well consider the soul as impermanent in its individuality, while regarding its spiritual substance as eternal.

Upon reflection, this is pretty much the way we view the phenomenal realm, too – as consisting of impermanent illusory individual entities emerging in a permanent real universal substratum. Their illusoriness is mainly due to the conventionality of their individual boundaries.

At this stage, then, we find ourselves with two 'monistic' domains – the one giving rise to material and mental phenomena and the other giving rise to spiritual entities (souls). Obviously, such double 'monism' is not logically coherent! We therefore must assume that these two apparently overlapping domains are really ultimately somehow one and the same.

So, we have perhaps come full circle, and our opinions end up pretty much coinciding with the Buddhists' after all. We ought perhaps to lay the stress, instead, on our difference with regard to *continuity*.

According to Buddhist theory, the self has no continuity, i.e. our self of today is not the same person as our self of yesterday or of tomorrow. In this perspective, they are causatively *connected*, in the sense that earlier conglomerations of phenomena constituting a self 'cause' later ones – but there is no *thread of constancy* that can be identified as the underlying one and the same entity. It is not

a case of mere succession of totally discrete events; but there is no essential identity between the events, either.

However, many (myself included) object to this theory on various grounds. While we may admit that one can logically regard selfhood (i.e. being a Subject and Agent) as punctual at every instant without having to assume its extension over a lifetime, we must realize that such an assumption removes all logical possibility of a concept of moral responsibility for past actions.

If one is no longer ever the same person as the person committing a past virtuous or vicious act, then no good deed may be claimed by anyone or rewarded, and no crime may be blamed on anyone or punished. Ex post facto, strictly speaking, the doer of any deed no longer exists. Similarly, looking forward, there is nothing to be gained or lost by any Agent in doing anything, since by the time any consequences of action emerge the Agent has already disappeared.

In such a framework, all personal morality and social harmony would be completely destroyed. There would be no justification for abstaining from vice or for pursuing virtue. Even the pursuit of spiritual realization would be absurd. Of course, some people do not mind such a prospect, which releases them from all moral obligations or responsibility and lets them go wild.

It is very doubtful that Buddhism (given its overall concerns and aims) supports such a nihilist thesis[61]. In any case, such a

[61] Although the Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna seems to relish it.

viewpoint cannot be considered credible, in the light of all the above observations and arguments.

12. Distinguishing the ego

The self was above defined – from a philosophical perspective – as *the apparent Subject of cognition and Agent of volition and valuation*. But – in common parlance – most people identify themselves with much more than this minimal definition. To clarify things, it is therefore useful to distinguish two meanings of the term.

In its purest sense, the term self refers to what is usually called the soul or person. In a colloquial sense, the term is broader, including what intellectuals refer to as "the **ego**". The latter term – again from a philosopher's point of view – refers to the material and mental phenomena, which indeed seem rightly *associated with* our self, but which we wrongly tend to *identify with* it. Thus, by the term ego we shall mean all aspects of one's larger self *other than* one's soul; i.e. all extraneous aspects of experience, commonly misclassified as part of oneself.

This is just a way to recognize and emphasize that we commonly make errors of identification as to what constitutes the self[62]. If we try to develop a coherent philosophical

[62] The word 'ego' originally, in Latin, meant 'I'. Nowadays, in English, it is commonly understood in the pejorative sense used by me in the present essay. I do not subscribe to the sense used in

system, looking at the issues with a phenomenological eye, we must admit the self in the sense of soul (i.e. Subject/Agent) as the core sense of the term. The latter is a non-phenomenal entity, quite distinct from any of the material and mental phenomena people commonly regard as themselves.

We tend to regard our body, including its sensory and motor faculties, as our self, or at least as part of it. But many parts of our body can be incapacitated or detached, and we still remain present. And, conversely, our nervous system may be alive and well, but we are absent from it. So, it is inaccurate to identify our self with our body.

Nevertheless, we are justified in associating our self with our body, because we evidently have a special relationship to it: we have more input from it and more power over it than we do in relation to any other body. Our life takes shape within the context of this body. For this reason, we call it 'our' body, implying possession or delimitation.

With regard to the mind, a similar analysis leads to the same conclusion. By 'mind', note well, I mean only the apparent

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psychoanalytic theory, which presents the ego as a segment of the psyche "mediating between the person and reality". Such a notion is to me conceptually incoherent, since it ascribes a separate personality (i.e. selfhood) to this alleged segment, since to "mediate" anything implies having cognitive, volitional and evaluative powers. The ego of psychoanalysts involves a circularity, since it raises the question: who or what is mediating between the person and reality, and on what basis? The common sense of 'ego' is, I would say, closer semantically to the 'id' of psychoanalysis.

mental *phenomena* of memory and imagination (reshufflings of memories), which seem to resemble and emerge from the material phenomena apparently experienced through the body (including the body itself, of course). Mind is not a Subject, but a mere (non-physical) Object; a mind has no consciousness of its own, only a Subject has consciousness.

This limited sense of mind is not to be confused with a larger sense commonly intended by the term, which would include what we have here called soul. I consider this clarification of the word mind very important, because philosophies "of mind" in which this term is loosely and ambiguously used are bound to be incoherent[63].

The term I use for the conjunction of soul and mind is 'psyche'. Of course, below the psyche, at an unconscious level, lies the brain or central nervous system, which plays a strong role in the production of mental events, although it is not classed as part of the psyche but as *part of the body*. Some of the items we refer to as 'mind' should properly be called brain.

> The term "unconscious mind", note well, refers to *potential* (but not currently actual) *items of consciousness stored in the brain* (and possibly the wider nervous system); for example, potential memories. Such items are called mind, only insofar as they might eventually appear

[63] Equivocal use of the term mind leads some philosophers into syllogistic reasoning involving the Fallacy of Four Terms, in which the middle term has different senses in the major and minor premises, so that the conclusion is invalid.

as mental objects of consciousness; but strictly speaking, they ought not be called mind. The term "unconscious mind" is moreover an imprecision of language in that the mind is never conscious of anything – it is we, the Subjects, who are conscious of mental items (mental equivalents of sensory phenomena, as well as ideas and emotions).

Thus, mind refers to a collection of evanescent phenomena, without direct connection between them, which succeed each other in our 'mind's eye' (and/or 'mind's ear') but which lack mental continuity, their only continuity being presumably their emergence from the same underlying material brain. The mind cannot be identified with the self, simply because mental events are experienced as mere objects of consciousness and will, and not as the Subject and Agent of such psychical events. Moreover, the mind may momentarily stop displaying sights or sounds without our sense of self disappearing.

Nevertheless, our mind is ours alone. Only we directly experience what goes on in it and only we have direct power over its fantasies. Even if someday scientists manage to look into other people's private minds and find ways to affect their contents, one person remains in a privileged relationship to each mind. It is therefore proper to call our minds 'ours', just as we call our bodies 'ours'.

Thus, the self, in the colloquial sense, is a collection of three things: soul, mind and body – i.e. spiritual, mental and material experiences. But upon reflection, only the soul

counts as self proper – the ego, comprising mind and body, is indeed during our whole lifetime "associated with" our strict self (that is, soul), but it should not be "identified with" that self. The ego is merely an appendage to the self or soul, something 'accidental' (or at best 'incidental') to it.

However, this should not be taken to mean that the soul has no share in the ego. Many of the physical and mental traits that comprise the ego are at least in part due to past choices and actions of the soul. The soul is thus somewhat responsible for much of the ego; the latter is in effect a cumulative expression of the former. Some people have big, mean egos, to their discredit; others have smaller, nicer egos, to their credit. Moreover, the soul tends to function in the context of the ego or what it perceives as the ego.

In more narrow psychological terms, the ego is a particular self-image one finds motives for constructing and clinging onto. It is a mental construct composed of images selectively drawn from one's body and mind – some based on fact, some imaginary. Compared to the real state of affairs, this self-image might be inflationary (flattering, pretentious) or it might be depreciative (undemanding, self-pitying). Ideally, of course, one's self-image ought to be realistic; i.e. one must at all times strive to be lucid.

13. Dismissing the ego

On a practical level, such insights mean that what we regard as our "personal identity" has to be by and by clarified. We gradually, especially with the help of meditation, realize the disproportionate attention our material and mental experiences receive, and the manipulations we subject them to.

Because of the multiplicity and intensity of our sensory and mental impressions, we all from our birth onwards confuse ourselves with the phenomena impinging upon us. Because they shout so loudly, dance about us so flashily, weigh upon us so heavily, we think our experiences of body and mind are all there is, and we identify with them. To complicate matters further, such self-identification is selective and often self-delusive.

It takes an effort to step back, and realize that body and mind phenomena are just fleeting appearances, and that our self is not the phenomena but the one experiencing them. Even though this self is non-phenomenal (call it a soul, or what you will), it must be put back in the equation. *We may associate ourselves with our bodily and mental phenomena, but we must not identify with them*. There is no denying our identity happens to currently be intimately tied up with a certain

body, mind, social milieu, etc. – but this does not make these things one and the same with us.

Gradually, it becomes clear that our personal confusion with these relatively external factors of our existence is a cause of many of the difficulties in our relation to life. We become attached to our corporeality or psychology, or to vain issues of social position, and become ignorant as to who (and more deeply, Who) we really are.

To combat such harmful illusions, and see things as they really are, one has to "work on oneself". One must try and diminish the influence of the ego.

Specifically, one has to overcome the tendencies of egotism and egoism. Egotism refers to the esthetic side of the ego, i.e. to our narcissistic concerns with appearance and position, our yearning for admiration and superiority and our fear of contempt and inferiority. Egoism refers to the ethical side of the ego, i.e. to our material and intellectual acquisitiveness and protectionism.

The issue is one of degree. A minimum of self-love and selfishness may be biologically necessary and normal, but an excess of those traits are certainly quite poisonous to one's self and to others. Much daily suffering ensues from unchecked ego concerns. Egotism produces constant vexation and resentment, while egoism leads to all sorts of anxieties and sorrows.

On this point, all traditions agree: no great spiritual attainment is possible without conquest of egocentricity. Self-esteem and self-confidence are valuable traits, but one must

replace conceit with modesty and arrogance with humility. Meditation can help us tremendously in this daunting task.

Of course, *it is none other than the self (i.e. soul) who is egocentric!* The ego is not some other entity in competition with the soul in a divided self, a "bad guy" to pour blame on. We have no one to blame for our psychological failings other than our soul, whose will is essentially free. ***The ego has no consciousness or will of its own: it has no selfhood.***

The ego indeed *seems to* be a competing self, because – and only so long as and to the extent that – we (our self or soul) identify with it. It is like an inanimate mask, which is given an illusion of life when we confuse our real face with it. But we should not be deluded: it is we who are alive, not the mask.

Rather, the body and mind (i.e. the factors making up the ego) are mechanistic domains that strongly *influence* the soul in sometimes negative ways. They produce natural inclinations like hunger for food or the sex drive or yearning for social affiliation, which are sometimes contrary to the higher interests of the soul. For this reason, we commonly regard our spiritual life as a struggle against our ego inclinations.

Not all ego inclinations are natural. Many of the things we think we need are in fact quite easy to do without. As we commonly say: "It's all in the mind". In today's world, we might often add: "It is just media hype" for ultimately commercial or political purposes. People make mountains out of molehills. For example, some think they cannot make it

through the day without a smoke or a drink, when in fact it is not only easy to do without such drugs but one feels much better without them.

Often, natural inclinations are used as pretexts for unnatural inclinations. For example, if one distinguishes between natural sensations of hunger in the belly and the mental desire to titillate one's taste buds, one can considerably reduce one's intake of calories and avoid getting painfully fat. Similarly, the natural desire for sex for reproductive purposes and as an expression of love should not be confused with the physical lusts encouraged by the porno industry, which have devastating spiritual consequences.

Thus, the struggle against ego inclinations ought not be presented as a struggle against nature – it is rather mostly a fight against illusions of value, against foolishness. It is especially unnatural tendencies people adopt or are made to adopt that present a problem. It is this artificial aspect of ego that is most problematic. And the first victory in this battle is the realization: "this is not me or mine".

Once one ceases to confuse oneself with the ego, once one ceases to regard its harmful inclinations as one's own, it becomes much easier to neutralize it. There is hardly any need to "fight" negative influences – one can simply ignore them as disturbances powerless to affect one's chosen course of action. The ego need not be suppressed – it is simply seen as irrelevant. It is defeated by the mere disclosure of its essential feebleness.

Meditation teaches this powerful attitude of *equanimity*. One sits (and eventually goes through life) watching disturbances come and go, unperturbed, free of all their push and pull. The soul remains detached, comfortable in its nobility, finding no value in impure forces and therefore thoroughly uninfluenced by them.

This should not, of course, be another "ego trip". It is not a role one is to play, self-deceitfully feeding one's vanity. On the contrary, one experiences such meditation as "self-effacement" or "self-abnegation", as if one has become transparent to the disturbances, as if one is no longer there to be affected by them.

This is, more precisely put, ego-dismissal, since one has ceased to identify with the forces inherent in the ego. Such dismissal should not, of course, be confused with evasion. It is abandonment of the foolish psychological antics – but this implies being very watchful, so as to detect and observe them when they occur.

There is no need for difficult ascetic practices. One has to just become more aware and sincerely committed; then one can nimbly dodge or gently deflect negative tendencies that may appear. Being profoundly at peace, one is not impressed by them and has no personal interest in them.

Many people devote much time and effort to helping other people out materially or educationally. This is rightly considered as an efficient way to combat self-centeredness, although one should always remain alert to the opportunities for hidden egotism and egoism such pursuits offer.

Granting Monism as the true philosophy, it would seem logical to advocate ‘altruism’ as the ultimate ethical behavior. However, this moral standard is often misunderstood to mean looking out for the interests of others while ignoring one’s own interests. Such a position would be simplistic if not dishonest. If we are all one, the all-one includes and does not exclude oneself.

Thus, I would say that whilst altruistic behavior is highly commendable and admirable, working on oneself first and foremost would seem a very necessary adjunct and precondition. Conceivably, when one reaches full realization, one can pretty well forget oneself altogether and devote oneself entirely to others – but until then one must pay some attention to one’s legitimate needs, if only because one is best placed to do so.

14. Relief from suffering

Many people look to meditation as a momentary oasis of peace, a refuge from the hustle and bustle of the world, a remedy against the stresses and strains of everyday living. They use it in order to get a bit of daily peace and calm, to get 'centered' again and recover self-control, so as to better cope with their lives. Even so, if they practice it regularly, over a long enough period, for enough time daily, they are sure to discover anyway its larger, more radical spiritual benefits.

One general goal of meditation we have not so far mentioned is relief from suffering. We all to varying degrees, at various times of our lives, experience suffering – and nobody really likes it[64]. The wish to avoid or rid oneself of suffering is often the primary impulse or motive for meditation, before we develop a broader perspective (like "spiritual development", for instance) relating to this practice.

Thus, "liberation" is often taken to at first mean "liberation from suffering", before it is understood as "liberation from

[64] Not even masochists, who use one kind of pain as a palliative against another kind of pain. For instance, they might pursue physical pain to avoid having to face some sense of guilt or to forget some unpleasant childhood experience.

restraints on the will". These two interpretations are not as opposed as they might seem, because suffering is *a negative influence on volition*, so when we free ourselves of the former, we experience the latter's release. Contentment, the antithesis of suffering, implies a smoothly flowing life.

> The relation between meditation and relief from suffering is not always simple and direct. Although it is true that over time meditation renders one immune to many disturbances, it may first for awhile make us much more sensitive to them[65]. When we are more unconscious, our faculties function in coarser ways, so we feel less. As we refine our faculties, and become more conscious, we naturally feel more clearly. For this reason, a meditator may even on occasion find inner peace a bit scary and build a resistance to it, like someone who gingerly avoids a surface he suspects has a static electricity charge[66]. Peace, too, takes getting used to.

Suffering should not be confused with pain, but rather refers to our psychological response to feelings of pain. Some

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[65] A meditator may barely notice a sudden loud noise like an explosion, yet find "music" like rock or techno (with very few mellow exceptions) utterly unbearable! In contrast to a non-meditator, who might jump up with fright at the explosion, yet find supermarket canned music relaxing.

[66] Such resistance has been called "the dread of enlightenment". In fact, most people who have heard of meditation but have never dared to try it have this dread. They think that they will somehow get lost and drowned in the sea of enlightenment. Indeed, they will do so – in the sense that they will lose their individuality. But what must be understood is that this prospect is not frightful but cause for elation.

people cannot handle felt pain at all; whereas some, though they feel the same pain, do not take it to heart as much. Moreover, suffering refers not only to experienced pain, but may refer to lack of pleasure; i.e. to the frustration of not getting pleasure one wished for or expected, or of having lost pleasure one had for a while.

All this of course concerns mental as well as bodily pain or pleasure. Pain or pleasure may be felt as a purely physical sensation (e.g. a burnt finger or a pang of hunger); or as a visceral sentiment occurring in the body but having a mental cause (e.g. cold fear in the belly or warm love in the chest); or again, as a purely mental experience (e.g. a vague feeling of depression or elation).

Suffering primarily refers to actual pain; but it often refers to remembered or anticipated pains. For example, one may suffer for years over a bad childhood experience; or again, one may suffer much in anticipation of a big and difficult job one has to do soon. Suffering can also relate to abstract or conceptual things, whether past, present or future. For example, one might suffer at the general injustice of life. In all such cases, however, some present concrete negative feelings are felt, and the suffering may be taken to refer to them.

Buddhist teaching has the fact of human suffering at its center. This is made evident in the Four Noble Truths taught by the founder of this religion, viz.: (1) that life is suffering, i.e. that suffering of some kind or another is inevitable in the existence of sentient beings like ourselves; (2) that such

suffering has a cause, namely our *attachments* to things of this world, our desire for pleasures and aversion to pains; (3) that we can be rid of suffering, if we rid ourselves of its cause (attachment); and finally, that the way to be rid of suffering is through the Eightfold Path.

The latter list of means includes meditation, as a very effective tool for discovering one's attachments and the ways to break away from our addiction to them. Just as soon as one begins to practice meditation, one discovers its power to make us relatively indifferent to pain or lack of pleasure – i.e. to make us suffer less readily and intensely.[67]

Buddhists argue, additionally, that the ultimate obstacle to freedom from suffering is belief in a self – for to have a self is to have *particular interests*, and therefore to experience pain when these interests are frustrated (as is inevitable sooner or later) and pleasure when they are (momentarily) satisfied. It follows, in their view, that liberation from suffering (the third Noble Truth) would not be conceivable, if the "emptiness" of the self were not advocated. For only a 'non-self' can be free from the blows inherent to an impermanent world like ours.

However, I beg to differ from this doctrine, not to categorically reject it, but to point out that an alternative

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[67] In yoga, they teach an attitude called *pratyahara*, which consists in focusing clearly on pain one is feeling, calmly assessing its exact extent and intensity; after awhile, a pain thus stared at tends to disappear or at least it feels less urgent. This is, then, a sort of detachment from or transcendence of pain – not through avoiding it, but by facing it.

doctrine is equally possible. We could equally argue, from a Monotheistic point of view, that when the individual soul dissolves back in the universal Soul, which is God, it is conceivably free from all subjection to the vagaries of this material-mental world. The illusion of individuation, rather than the alleged illusion of selfhood, may be considered a sufficient cause of liability to suffering; and the removal of this cause may suffice to remove suffering.

Again I emphasize: the debate about the self is theoretical and does not (in my view) affect the effectiveness of meditation.

The practical lesson to draw from the Buddhist teaching is the importance of 'attachment' in human psychology. This realization, that the root of suffering is the pursuit of supposed pleasures, or avoidance of pains, is central. Anxiety, frustration, vexation, anger, disappointment, depression – such emotions are inevitable under the regime of attachment, in view of the impermanence of all mundane values.

If worldly pleasure of any sort is pursued, pain is sure to eventually ensue. If the pursuit of pleasure is successful, such success is necessarily short-lived, and one is condemned to protect existing pleasure or pursue pleasure again, or one will feel pain at one's loss. If the pursuit of pleasure is unsuccessful, one experiences the pain of not having gotten what one wanted, and one is condemned to keep trying again

and again till successful. Similarly, the avoidance of pain is a full time job with no end in sight – a pain in itself.[68]

It is therefore wise to steer clear of attachment, and develop a more aloof approach to the lower aspects of life. This not only saves one from eventual suffering, but releases one's energies for the pursuit of lasting spiritual values.

Meditation helps us (the self, the soul) to objectify and thus transcend the feelings experienced in body and mind. This can be understood by contrasting two propositional forms:

(a) "I feel [this or that feeling]", and

(b) "I am experiencing [having a certain body-mind feeling]".

These two sentences might be considered superficially equivalent – but their different structure is intended to highlight important semantic differences. In (a), the subject "I" is a vague term, and the verb and its complement are taken at face value. In (b), the subject "I" is a more specific term, and the verb and complement are intended with more discrimination.

In (a), the subject considers the act of feeling a feeling as its own act, an extension of itself. In (b), the subject lays claim

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[68] Suffering takes many intricate or convoluted forms. Consider for instance the frustration of a rich man, who already has everything he could possibly need or want, and so finds nothing new to spend his money on. He is not free of material attachments, he has the necessary material means, but the world has nothing more or new to offer him. This is a danger of riches – because the tendency in such situations is to turn to new, more and more perverse, sensations.

only to the cognitive fact of experiencing, considering all else as mere object relative to this exclusively cognitive act. The sense of "I" is therefore clearly different in the two sentences: in (a), the ego is meant, whereas in (b) it is the self or soul that is meant.

This is to illustrate that to transcend feelings, we have to objectify them, and more precisely identify our "I" or self with our spiritual dimension (or soul) rather than with our body and mind.

PART 3:
SOME BEHAVIORAL DISCIPLINES

15. Taking up the challenge

People without a spiritual life are comparable to walking dead; they are like busy empty shells. They have a body and mind, for which they work in many ways; but it is as if they have no soul, since they devote almost no energy to it. It is only when one lives a spiritual life, a life filled with more and more spiritual concerns, that one can be truly said to be alive. Try it, and you will understand.

Once one has desired and resolved to attain one's fullest potential realization[69], one should go about doing whatever is necessary or useful to that end, and not dither or indulge in conflicting or useless pursuits. One should strive with determination, intelligence and discipline.

The seeker has to take personal responsibility for his or her enlightenment and liberation. Do be open to and indeed look for spiritual guidance, but fundamentally be your own "guru" (wise teacher).

It is important to realize that life is short and the work to be done is long. When one is young, one generally has the impression that there is plenty of time left to one to do what has to be done, and one thinks one has time to indulge a little

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69 A posture Buddhists call "*boddhicitta*".

(or a lot). As one passes middle age, and looks back, one realizes how quickly time flies and how much time one wasted for nothing worth anything. And as one reaches an older age, one is very sorry one did not make the required effort when one was younger and much stronger.

And of course, none of us knows how quickly he or she will die. It could be today, tomorrow, this week, this month, this year, within a few years… no one knows. We are all like a flower: first a bud, then a fresh, tender unfolding of beauty, then we wither away, never to be seen again.

A good image of the spiritualizing process is that of a baby in the womb. The womb symbolizes 'this world' (i.e. the material world), and outside the womb is 'the next world' (i.e. the spiritual world). Just as a baby in the womb gradually forms and grows, in preparation for its exit into a more independent existence, so does our spiritual work prepare us for 'death' from this world and 'birth' in the next one. Spirituality facilitates our transition.

With regard to the quality of volitional response required, a general recommendation I would make is: rather use "smooth will" than "rough will". Our will is rough when we try to use "force" to effect change, i.e. when we act in a relatively unconscious manner, without accurate aim, wasting energy. Smooth will is the opposite approach – it is "thoughtful", quiet strength, masterfully applied how, where and when appropriate, for as long as necessary.

We can illustrate the difference with reference to fighting. The less experienced fighter throws punches wildly,

> blindly, hoping one will perchance land successfully. The winning fighter calmly waits for an actual opening, and aims his blows precisely; he sticks to his opponent and shoves him off with just the required amount of power, following up on his advance till the job is fully done.

I do not propose to write a guidebook for spiritual seekers. I do not consider myself sufficiently qualified. I would just be repeating what many other people have said or written in all the traditions. Moreover, there is so much to say, so many details to mention, that the task is in truth infinite.

Nevertheless, I would like to make some remarks relevant to the current cultural situation. Present-day society, under the influence of educators, media and politicians who pander to the lowest impulses of people, has swerved very visibly (in the space of my own lifetime) to the side of utter shallowness and moronic hedonism. I would like to here respond to some aspects of this onslaught, and offer readers some advice.

Whoever is sincerely interested in meditation, has to adopt a lifestyle favorable to it. This may not be found easy at first. There are many bad habits to break, but with sustained intelligent effort, it is quite feasible.

In fact, little effort is necessary other than continued, regular meditation practice – more and more daily. Because, as one advances in meditation, one's behavior tends to naturally align itself with the level of consciousness it produces. Things that seemed valuable before simply cease to impress us so much, and they fall by the wayside by themselves.

Still, some personal determination is needed – or one risks losing the treasure of meditation. One has to have character to move forward.

16. Face facts with equanimity

A first step in spiritual work is to look upon one's present "life situation" as a given – i.e. to accept it as stands, without whining and complaining as to how "the cards were dealt out". This is not an attitude of fatalism, because the intent is to improve on that situation. It is just a realization that any situation one finds oneself in at any time is mere landscape, mere theatrical *décor* around the play of one's life, which is essentially an *internal* play. Things and people around one are only stage sets and supporting cast – the inner drama is what counts.

In particular, one should not allow oneself to be distracted or distressed by people and events in the surrounding world one perceives as stupid or evil, to the extent that one's spiritual work is considerably hampered or blocked. Meditation requires and fosters equanimity and serenity; if this is indifference, it is born of perspective rather than narrow-mindedness. If we were in "nirvana" instead of "samsara", there would be no need for spiritual development.

It is silly to waste precious time and energy on resentment. We have to view the world we happen to find ourselves in as a given – *this world is by its very nature* (as a multiplex, with changing and interacting particulars) *an imperfect world with*

imperfect people. It is useless to get sad or angry at situations or people; things and people are what they are. Once these facts are acknowledged and accepted, rather than evaded or rejected, one can begin to act (mostly on oneself) to change things for the better.

Whatever one's situation – whether one is healthy or sick, surrounded or alone, free or enslaved, rich or poor, employed or jobless, married or single, etc., etc. – one will always be called upon by life to exercise certain virtues, like courage, effort, perseverance, purity, strength, kindness, integrity, and so on. A rich person seems to have it easier than a poor one – but poverty may in fact facilitate certain virtues whereas riches make them more remote; similarly, in all other cases.

Life makes the same *moral demands* on all of us, and changing the surrounding scenery makes no difference to the basic challenge involved. It is useless to shake one's fist at God, or to envy or blame other people, for one's present condition. One should regard one's current situation (whatever it be) as *the best possible context and framework* for the virtues one spiritually needs to exercise right now.

One must see that the situation one happens to be in provides the ideal opportunity for the currently needed virtues. One can view it as "God's will" or as "one's karma"; but in any case, as the best place to be for one's spiritual progress. With this realization, one can face one's situation with gratitude and optimism, and deal with its difficulties with energy and even relish.

> I recently had a very strong direct experience of detachment. It was after a full day of fasting and prayer (Yom Kippur), including periods of meditation. I stood in my room in the half-light coming from the window, realizing that all things and events can be compared to furniture laid out in a room. All experiences, whether good or bad, pleasant or painful, can indeed be viewed as mere parts of the scenery, without attachment or self-identification. Whatever you come across, you can take in stride, just as you walk around furniture.

Face every situation in your life with equanimity. Face the facts – and put the emphasis on solutions, rather than on problems. There is never any justification for feeling overwhelmed by the tasks at hand: deal with one task at a time, and all the work gets done. Keep bouncing back no matter what difficulties arise; resilience is the mark of liveliness, the will to live.

There is no doubt that will is continuously called for in the course of meditation – at the physical, mental and spiritual levels. In sitting meditations, we have to sit down and stay put, controlling our posture, directing our attention. In moving meditations (such as yoga or tai chi), likewise, we have to make the appropriate moves, at the appropriate rates, with appropriate attention. We have to develop the right attitudes, direct and intensify our awareness, detach from our passions, be patiently mindful, and so on.

All this implies volition, although not always in the simple sense of "forcing oneself to do" something, but usually in a more refined and precise manner. Gradually, as one's discipline develops, one finds it easy to do the right things at the right time, seemingly without effort.

17. Stop substance addictions

Meditation is all about getting to "know yourself" – your body, mind and soul. Almost as soon as you start meditating, you realize that you want to know yourself as you basically are – and *not* yourself as modified by various substances.

In this matter, there is no difference between substance use and abuse. Any quantity that has a noticeable effect, whether it is harmful or indifferent to physical health, is too much for meditators.

If you take drugs, such as psychotropic chemicals[70], marijuana, tobacco or alcohol, or even coffee, occasionally or regularly, in small or large quantities, whatever your pretext or excuse – both your mind and your body are necessarily affected.

If you are having a meditative experience, and you have recently taken some substance, you will naturally wonder whether what you are currently experiencing is "for real" or just an effect of it.

If the experience is negative, you are clearly being shown the need to stop taking such substances. If the experience is positive, ask yourself whether you are satisfied with kidding

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[70] Heroin, Opium, LSD, Cocaine, Crack, Speed, Ecstasy, etc.

yourself that you are on a spiritual level worthy of such experience or you will henceforth demand of yourself "the real thing".

On a mental level, then, even if the effect of substances seems or feels good, it is bad. From the meditative point of view, there is no profit in it, only loss; it is not a shortcut to spiritual experience, but a constant hindrance.

On a physical level, too, whatever the substance you indulge in, it is sure to retard your progress in meditation. For instance, so long as you smoke grass, hash or tobacco, you cannot properly practice meditation on the breath. Or again, if you are drunk or stoned, and try to do yoga or tai chi, you will find your equilibrium and coordination inadequate.

Apart from their direct effects on mind and body, the substances we are discussing here all have nefarious spiritual implications. The very fact of resorting to some sort of substance – whether to palliate one's life difficulties or out of sheer hedonism – constitutes a spiritual weakness and surrender. Whether such substances are harmful, or merely useless indulgences, with regard to body and mind, the very fact that one has not gotten the matter under control is indicative of a failing of the soul. One has either not reflected sufficiently on the issues involved, or not exercised willpower in accordance with reason.

Spiritual development requires one take full charge of one's life. It is imperative to completely purify oneself of artificial material inputs, as soon as possible. Of course, this cannot always be done in a flash – but it is much easier to do than it

seems to be (as one realizes later, looking back). Use every means at your disposal.

There are social services ready to help drug addicts of all kinds. The medical establishment and alternative medicine offer all sorts of solutions to the problems of tobacco and alcohol dependence. Do whatever works for you, but do it! If you are serious about meditation, and refuse to only pretend to meditate, be an absolutist and get rid of all material impediments without delay and forevermore[71].

The practice of some sport(s) is very helpful in this struggle for physical health. When you walk, run, cycle, swim or play ball, you soon see for yourself the negative effects of the use of substances; and when you do stop using them, the love of exercise will remove from you any desire to return to your old ways. Keep meditating all the while, because that will motivate you and show you the way to go.

[71] A policy of zero tolerance is most likely to succeed in the long run. For instance, an ex-smoker need only smoke one puff of one cigarette to return to his old ways; so, no compromise should be indulged in, not even in imagination, ever. When one is free of such dependence one has no regrets, only a sense of relief, and incredulity that one ever found such a thing at all attractive.

18. Don't stuff yourself silly

The use of drugs is but one aspect of a larger vice – that of pursuing sensations. Our bodies and minds are constantly hungering for sensory inputs and outputs – that is their 'nature'. It is their way of self-assertion, their expression of existence. Such sensationalism, let loose unchecked, is bound to debilitate us. Fortunately, we have inner resources that enable us to judge and restrain such tendencies – our reason and willpower.

The main sensuous dependence of many people nowadays (in our rich Western societies) is simply food. Food is of course natural and necessary to our life and health, in reasonable quantities. But some people are munching for much of their waking hours; or, if they manage to limit their eating to regular meals, they eat far more than they need or is good for them.

A full stomach is not conducive to meditation. Energy that is required to focus consciousness is diverted for purposes of digestion. Food is soporific, or at least tiring. For this reason, meditators control their intake of food – not only its quantity and frequency, but also its quality. It is wise to abstain from

heavy, difficult to digest foods, for instance. Many opt for vegetarian diets to various degrees.[72]

Sports (if only a bit of daily exercise or walking) are helpful for digestion, as well as to develop resistance and recover fitness. Physical exercise is energizing, raising one's level of alertness during meditation, but one should not get overly excited by it to the point that one cannot calm down. To avoid getting drowsy during meditation, enough (but not too much) regular sleep is necessary.

A good way to reduce one's eating is, paradoxically, to take the time to enjoy it – growing it (if possible) or shopping for it, preparing and cooking it carefully, laying then clearing the table, washing the dishes. Eating then becomes more conscious, in the way of a ritual[73]. Eventually, one finds time to notice the difference between pleasing one's taste buds and satisfying natural hunger.

One gradually realizes the impossibility of ever satiating the hunger for oral sensations, and the need to resist such pseudo-hunger if only to relieve one's body of the stress of incessant digestion, not to mention the accumulation of fat.

All this is of course obvious and generally well known. But one has to actually take control. To do so, one must realize that one *can* indeed readily do so – by looking upon the stirring of desire as something external to oneself, a mere

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[72] One should not of course eat too little, either. This too stresses the body and disturbs meditation.

[73] Some have called this "slow food", in contradistinction to "fast food".

phenomenon that can and does influence one's freewill but cannot overwhelm it.

19. Limit input from the media

It is nowadays nearly impossible for most of us to avoid influence in one form or another from the various media of communication among human beings. Whereas in times past many people could pass most of their lives in relative isolation and freedom from external influences, today this is very difficult.

Of course, in the past one's family relations and village neighbors could and usually did have overwhelming influence. In today's more individualistic setting, in a much more populous and technological world, the overwhelming influence comes from the media.

"The media" includes principally every press, cinematic and electronic medium of information, propaganda and entertainment. Novels and non-fiction books, newspapers and magazines, fiction movies and documentaries, radio and television, the Internet and mobile telephony – these are the major media we are subject to, at time of writing, in my part of the world.

On the surface, the media are free (of government controls) and competitive. But, in view of the spiritual and intellectual poverty of most producers and consumers, most of the media tend to develop, and for a time perpetuate, certain beliefs and

values in common. We call this almost general tendency towards the lowest common denominator our "culture".

Thought is standardized and formatted in easily digested bits, and the flavor of the day is mass-fed. Although fashion currents are getting more and more short-lived, the fact of homogeneity continues. This is of course a reflection of human nature – "man is a social animal", and imitation is the stuff of social cohesion.

Admittedly, not everything is spiritually debilitating in our culture, but many things are and it is important to be aware of such things. It is for instance very important to be aware of the devastating emotional influence of daily, and indeed hourly, news bulletins in the press, on the radio and on TV, and in the newer media. The emphasis being on dramatic bad news, we are bombarded with data that seems designed to arouse negative emotions in us[74].

All this is food for sensation and idle thought. One who is intent on developing the art of meditation has to overcome the strong temptations the media offer. It is important to reduce such sensory input to the minimum necessary, because it only serves to keep us in a certain excited state of mind. We cannot truly plunge into the depths of our nature, into true self-knowledge, if we allow such distractions to constantly rule over us.

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[74] Pity at the victims of natural disasters, heinous civil crimes, wars and terrorism. Anger at criminals, at unjust officials, or even at lying and misleading journalism. Hatred towards people who seem to be destroying the world, or simply in response to other people's hatred. And so on.

Of course, as concerned and responsible citizens, we do need some information, on which to base our judgments and actions. But consider the massive input from the media, and ask yourself how much of that you actually need to fulfill your duties. Following such considerations, find ways and means to limit input as much as possible.

Gradually, as one advances in meditation, one realizes most media inputs to be useless interference in our lives, which block rather than enhance contact with reality. The media pound images and sounds into one's mind, and it takes great effort and time to clear them out. It is easier to just stop them from entering it in the first place.

In this respect, one particularly poisonous input is pop music. This is like a mental virus, because it is sound that is easily memorized even against our will. It consists of some simple, usually repetitive, often loud, jingle – which seems designed to enter the mind of anyone within earshot and remain glued there as long as possible. This causes people to become habituated and attached to the sounds in question, and to buy the record (as the music publishers have well understood).

Such "music" differs considerably with regard to adhesive properties from more classical music. When such a virus enters one's mind, it is sometimes difficult to shake off. We may try to listen to or recall some other sound, to smother out the first. Or the virus may stay on for quite a while, disappearing from consciousness (though often remaining in memory, to reappear at some future time).

20. Forget your face

We live in an age of utter narcissism. Many multi-billion dollar enterprises, such as the clothing and cosmetic industries[75], depend on making egotists out of us and keeping us that way. Of course, one should look decent and smell nice; but there are reasonable limits to such external concerns. At some point, they cease to be expressions of hygiene, and self-respect and respect for others, and become ego obsessions and compulsions.

The confusion of self with one's face and body leads more and more men and women today to pass a lot of their time in front of a mirror. This culture of the body is materialism, in its most radical sense. It indicates a failure of spirituality.

Some people "speak to themselves" in the mirror. In my view, a person who does so suffers from a severe *alienation from self*. Looking into the reflection of one's eyes and speaking to one's image, as if it is another person, is indicative of confusion between self and factors of the ego. Why address oneself so indirectly, when one can do so directly within the mind (or out loud, but without a mirror)?

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[75] I should also mention the photographic and home movie industry, which thrives on people's desire to linger on their own physical appearance.

Many people gaze at their reflection for extended periods, fretting and worrying about the shape and size of each feature of their body, and in particular their face. They use artificial means to conceal uglier aspects and emphasize more beautiful aspects. Some spend hours in "fitness centers" to improve their physical shape (not meaning their health, but their contours). Some go so far as to resort to plastic surgery (of their face, their bosoms or their sex organ)[76].

Such behavior patterns are contrary to meditative pursuits. When meditating, we strive not to identify with face or body. At first, they seem very present – because we look upon the world through our face and some parts of our body are visible to us, and because of the weight of the touch sensations within the body and in the surfaces of contact between the body and its physical surrounds. But we strive to eventually become effectively 'transparent' to these and all other phenomenal impressions.

Such transparency is facilitated to the extent that one forgets one face and bodily form. Literally, forget! Beware of even accidental confrontations with a mirror. One may occasionally look into a mirror, e.g. to comb one's hair or to shave – but in such case one should not look at one's whole face, and especially not into one's eyes. Big mirrors are best

[76] Sometimes, at the supermarket, I notice women who have had their face turned into something monstrous by plastic surgery. Can these women truly imagine they have been beautified, I wonder? I feel so sorry for them.

avoided – prefer smaller ones, or stick to the edges of larger mirrors[77].

It sounds silly at first, but the vain attraction to one's reflection in mirrors has to be resisted, if one wants to eventually free oneself from one's ego. Once one forgets exactly what one looks like (which can be done, as memories also fade), one can no longer bring up images of "oneself" during meditation, and the burden of ego is reduced. And incidentally, beauty (true beauty) naturally ensues from a healthy and spiritual lifestyle.

[77] I call hotel suites with a wall-to-wall mirror in the bathroom, which are common these days, "wanker's paradises".

21. Give up sensuality

A certain level of spiritual realization is required to overcome another weakness common in this day and age – sensuality, by which we shall here mean *the yearning for and pursuit of sexual sensations*. Sensuality includes sexual fantasies, reminiscences and anticipations, since all such mental rehearsing of sex causes sexual sensations, almost as effectively as actual sexual acts do (and indeed, some people's sex lives are entirely imaginary).

Sexual activity is of course normal and necessary from a biological point of view[78], as is food. The problem with it is that it is a very strong force in our body and mind, capable of driving us on a mad search for gratification at any cost. This is especially true when we are young, and our reproductive instincts and powers are at their peak. But it can also be true

[78] Human beings would not exist as such without reproduction. Moreover, sexual relations not specifically aimed at or resulting in reproduction are biologically justified, since they serve to maintain a family bond, which is useful to survival of the couple and their children. This biological perspective is also, by the way, the Jewish "middle way" regarding sex – a more moderate doctrine than that found in other religions, one based on the general idea that life on earth (if properly lived) is a good thing, intended by the Creator.

during late middle age and early old age, when many people cling to their waning sexual abilities (to seduce and perform).

From the meditative point of view, one problem with sex is the energy it dilapidates, which would be better used for spiritual advancement. Without sufficient energy, one cannot meditate long or deeply. Loss of sperm for men (and I assume there is some equivalent incident for women), even if involuntary, is a spiritual retardant; all the more so, if voluntarily caused.

More broadly, sensuality diverts one's attention from the things in life that really matter, the deeper issues. It reinforces confusion of self with ego[79]. It narrows people's concerns to futilities, making them shallow. Their thoughts become frivolous and prurient, their language full of "dirty words". They cannot concentrate or think straight.

Once enslaved to sensuality, one becomes dependent on the receptiveness and complicity of others. When partners are available, all seems well for a while. But when relationships become more tenuous or complicated, or they cease to be, much emotional and social difficulty ensues. Sometimes, sufficient anger is aroused to generate physical violence. Much time is wasted trying to "fix things" in the couple; and

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[79] Notice, as an indicator, the *chutzpa* that is eventually written on the face of people who engage in unnatural sex acts, for example. Such people confuse their brazenness, impudence and insolence with self-assurance. They boast of "gay pride", only to mask their profound sorrow and shame. But even straight sex (even based on "love") takes its toll, increasing narcissism and selfishness.

very often things get even more problematic. One's life becomes woefully entangled – for what has ultimately very little value: some mere sensations!

People regard "romantic love" as the ultimate justification of sex (apart from bonding and reproduction)[80]. But, honestly, most sexual relationships are not based on love, but on lust[81] mixed with possessiveness and dependence. The word love is brought up as sugar coating, as a seductive lie; the liar even lies to himself or herself, too, so as to make the lie more credible to the partner. The true love people may sincerely feel for each other has nothing to do with sex: it is a matter of mutual respect, trust and support.

Of course, sexual attraction for members of the opposite sex is normal and natural. When a man sees a pretty, well-shaped, fresh girl or young woman, he cannot but feel attraction; and similarly, a woman is attracted by a man. These are biological instincts, inscribed in our genes, for the perpetuation of our species. But for this, we would not be here. One has to accept the fact and take it into consideration as a factor, when trying to increase one's chastity. One does

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[80] This is, historians tell us, a relatively recent argumentum.

[81] Lust may either be selfish (in which case one pursues self-gratification, without concern for the partner's pleasure or even pain), or it may be cooperative (in which case, the sex acts involved are most accurately described as mutual masturbation). Cooperative lust is sometimes confused with love, note. As for sex with prostitutes (some of which, by the way are unwilling partners – effectively slaves), it is frankly based on lust – but its inherent cynical truthfulness does not justify it.

well to remember that "grace is delusive and beauty is passing"[82].

Look upon your sexual impulses and desires as mere visitors in your house – as temporary events that can never rule you, if you do not allow them to. Strength of character is possible, even easy, and very rewarding. Do not draw pleasure even from passing sensations, not even in your dreams. Keep your mind and hands clean. Purity of thoughts, words and deeds is essential to spiritual success. And it makes one happy, too.

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82 Proverbs 31.

22. On "sexual liberation"

Contrary to what popular psychology teaches, so-called sexual liberation is in fact enslavement to passions. Sexual indulgences of various sorts may give one a momentary feeling of relief from the pressure of sexual urges, but their longer term spiritual (and indeed physical and psychological) effects are mostly devastating.

Masturbation is not a solution to sexual urges, but a further problem. Masturbation diminishes sexual potency, and general energy and health levels; it reduces self-respect and self-confidence, and lowers attractiveness to the opposite sex; it produces inner conflicts, and makes one melancholic[83]. However strong one's urges, they can be overcome. Never indulge in masturbation at all: it is not worth the trouble!

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[83] Moreover, I suggest, it draws many to homosexuality, or at least increases their tolerance towards it – for two reasons: firstly, masturbation is an intrinsically sexually ambiguous act, since the man or woman engaged in it is effectively playing both sex roles, the active and the receptive; secondly, the pornographic stimulants in use often involve images of people of one's own sex (in couples or groups), or worse still people of the same sex (one's own or the opposite sex) in homosexual situations. Such licentious behavior is antithetical to spiritual progress.

Nowadays, posing as "sexologists", psychologists, journalists and other opinion-makers, shamelessly tell youth that masturbation is harmless and even good for them. But in truth, such teachings and encouragements are spiritually destructive; their purposes are, in the last analysis, commercial and political. They serve only to enslave people to their baser impulses, and thus to weaken them physically, psychologically and socially.

The same popular opinion makers and "sexual liberators" have given modern society widespread **pornography** and **homosexuality**. Sexual activities, which less than a generation ago were commonly regarded as among the most ugly and depraved, have apparently become fashionable and are defended with "righteous" indignation[84].

The destructive effects of such ignoble behavior, on individuals and on the fabric of society, are willfully ignored. Do not be a "fashion victim"; do not believe in these media figures, those who pretend to liberate (from moral restrictions and rules) when they in fact enslave (to sensations). They are just seeking to justify their coarseness and perversity of spirit, by sullying everyone else.[85]

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[84] This reversal of moral roles has to be noticed and understood, especially by inexperienced youths.

[85] Don't let them tell you "it is okay, it is natural" (as they keep hammering, *ad nauseum*) – it certainly is neither okay nor natural. It all depends where an opinion is coming from. If a person is spiritually base, his or her opinions are accordingly muddy. Inversely, if a person is spiritually high, his or her thinking is accordingly clear. You do not have to first believe in any tradition to despise homosexuality – just live a pure life and you will be able to

Next in line are **pedophilia** and **bestiality**, no doubt. Today these are frowned upon and illegal, but who knows for how long more? I just read on the Internet that efforts are being made to change that already[86]. From the spiritual point of view, this is just a logical development: once the floodgates of sensuality are sufficiently loosened within them, people lose all sanity and become slaves to increasingly weird passions. The abnormal then seems normal.

It is good and wise to have certain inhibitions. Anyone intent on spiritual progress has to learn to *master* their sexual impulses and behavior. This refers to all sensuality, whatever form it takes, from the normal to the deviant. Control your thoughts and words, as well as deeds; remember: first come tempting thoughts, then come encouraging words, and finally the deeds are done.

In this matter as in all others, the psychological sequence of events is as follows[87]: first, we perceive something (or someone, e.g. a beautiful girl); then we evaluate it, finding it likeable (or disliking it); then we desire to have greater or more permanent contact with it (or to avoid it); then comes

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see for yourself the spiritual corruption it causes in the people concerned. Opposing it is not "just a religious prejudice", as its proponents contend, but a clear insight from spiritual purity.

[86] "Pedophiles in the Netherlands are registering a political party to press for lowering the legal age of sexual relations from 16 to 12 and to allow child porn and bestiality. The [party], which plans to register tomorrow, says it eventually wants to get rid of the age limit on sexual relations" (worldnetdaily.com news alert, 30.5.2006).

[87] Based largely on descriptions in Buddhist psychology.

imaginations (building up the desire by projecting its satisfaction) and rationalizations (so as to fit, however artificially, the idea of such action in one's belief system); finally, we take action (and eventually have to face the consequences).

To say we have free will is to admit that we can at any stage in this sequence of events intervene in our inner or outer behavior, and to stop or reverse things – although this is not meant to deny that such good will may get more difficult as things proceed. To realize this freedom of will, one has to understand that the perceptions, affections, appetites, imaginings and self-justifications that precede volitional action are just only *influences* (of varying intensity) on such actions, they can never *determine* it.

The simplest intervention is to avoid the initial perception, i.e. to deliberately steer clear of potential temptations or turn one's eyes away from them when they accidentally occur. Next, we can challenge the evaluation, and suggest that the object is not as likeable as it may seem. Or again, we can admit the object likeable in itself, but still avoid desire by pointing out its incidental disadvantages. If desire persists, we can still control ourselves by not indulging in imaginations or rationalizations that reinforce it and make it more likely.

Finally, however weak we have been till now, we can still at the last moment opt out of the misdeed concerned; or having already put it in motion, we can still change course. It may be increasingly hard to do, but it is still in our power. This is

why we are held morally (and legally) responsible for our actions – and this power of choice is also our great dignity as human beings. So never say "I can't stop myself" – you would only be lying so as to excuse yourself!

23. Practice non-attachment

As previously implied, **suffering** is a negative personal response to sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touch sensations, or feelings or emotions of any sort, that have been, are now or are anticipated to be experienced (for whatever reason) as painful or as loss of pleasure. It is an *attitudinal or volitional response* of the soul to certain actual or potential information inputs – a response of rejection, of wishing or trying to avoid or get rid of certain psychologically unpalatable objects.

It should be noted that there is a positive equivalent of this response – it is **enjoyment**. This attitude or will, to sense or mental impressions perceived as positive (i.e. pleasant or as loss of pain), consists in wishing or trying to grab or cling on to certain objects. Enjoyment is not to be confused with pleasure. Enjoyment is to pleasure (and negation of pain) as suffering is to pain (and negation of pleasure).

Suffering and enjoyment are thus two sides of the same coin – which we can (like the Buddhists) call **attachment**[88]. These are not phenomena, but spiritual reactions to phenomena,

[88] This is, of course, but one facet of the connotation of 'attachment', which includes all affections and appetites – likes and dislikes, desires and aversions, hopes and fears, etc. See my work *Volition and Allied Causal Concepts*, chapter 10.

note well. That is, whereas pleasure and pain are parts of the realm of body and mind, enjoyment and suffering are direct expressions of the soul.

In the case of suffering, we "draw pain" from pain or insufficiency of pleasure – we are sad, depressed, etc. *in view of* experiencing negative phenomena. In the case of enjoyment, we "draw pleasure" from pleasure or reduction of pain – we are joyful, euphoric, etc. *in view of* experiencing positive phenomena. This is said primarily of current pain or pleasure of any sort, but it also applies to remembered or anticipated pains or pleasures.

Suffering is adding pain on to pain (or to insufficiency of pleasure) – it compounds and prolongs pain by reinforcing our susceptibility. For example, say a motorist rudely drives into the parking place I got to first; there is a first reaction of pain at the experience of such an uncouth person, as well as at the loss of the parking place and at the prospect of having to seek another; but if I allow anger to rise in me – this is the extra pain of suffering.

Similarly, enjoyment is getting pleasure from the fact of increasing pleasure (or of decreasing pain). For example, say the said rude motorist feels pleasure at having gotten the parking place first; if he starts congratulating himself and boasting about it to his passenger – that's the extra pleasure of enjoyment.

Detachment or asceticism, or (less pejoratively put) **non-attachment**, consists in becoming aware of *the distinction between* the attachment of self to pleasures or pains, and the

primary pleasant or painful objects, events, sensations, mental impressions, ideas, etc. Once one develops this awareness, one becomes able to *abstain from "drawing"* pleasure from pleasure, and pain from pain, i.e. able to cease emphasizing pleasant or painful feelings with enjoyment or suffering. Such emphasis (i.e. attachment) is, in the last analysis, an unnecessary compounding of the problem posed by pleasure and pain.

Pain is known to all as a negative influence on the will – although, if we ignore or overcome this influence, we turn the pain into an instrument of improved will. Similarly, people must realize, pleasure can be a negative influence, if we attach to it – i.e. it is equally wise to detach from pleasure as from pain. The two poles must be treated in the same way, for *one cannot become independent of the one while remaining dependent on the other*.

To succeed in detaching from pain, one must also detach from pleasure. One cannot be a hedonist and hope to avoid suffering pain or displeasure. The moment one allows oneself to enjoy (i.e. cling to) pleasure, one sets oneself up for the suffering of pain (i.e. trying to head it off or push it away or run from it). The two imply the same addiction of spirit, the same spiritual affliction. One has to give up on enjoyment of pleasure or diminished pain to become truly free.

It is of course easier to give up suffering than to give up enjoyment. But one has to understand that both these habits build up the ego (or more precisely, the self-identification with the body-mind complex). If the ego is sustained by

enjoyment, it will continue to feed suffering. Such habits cannot of course be stopped overnight: but, gently does it, they can be weeded out over time.

Thus, when experiencing pleasures, do not linger on them and try to maximize them, as we are all wont to do, but instead look upon them meditatively. This will enable you to also find liberation from pains – i.e. to contemplate them calmly, without fearing them or trying to minimize them.

The causes of or reasons for the pleasures or pains are interesting to know, but ultimately rather irrelevant. Meditators do not pass too much time looking into their life story for the particular sources of their psychological problems; Freudian-style psychoanalysis is itself a form of attachment and self-confusion with phenomena. Meditation is concerned proactively with remedying and preventing the root causes of problems, just as a mechanic fixes a car without needing to know how it crashed.

Underlying both suffering and enjoyment is some sort of radical discontent. Suffering expresses this condition by self-pity; enjoyment expresses it by trying to give oneself a boost. The opposite of both these reactions is the attitude of *contentment*. This is not the opposite of suffering only, note well, but the antithesis of both suffering *and* enjoyment[89]. It is

[89] Most translations of Buddhist texts imply the opposite of suffering to be happiness; but this is inaccurate. The term contentment is more appropriate here, and this is the contrary not only of suffering but also of enjoyment, as just explained. Note well that contentment is not an emotion, something the soul passively feels, but *an attitude*, an actively chosen posture of the soul's will.

freedom of the spirit from passing material and mental phenomena of whatever polarity, freedom from the ups and downs of random emotions.

Non-attachment does not mean feigned or forced detachment (the latter is a pejorative connotation of the term detachment, but not its only sense). Non-attachment is not emotional paralysis, in the way of someone who has built up rigid defenses against emotions. It consists in being cool and collected, not frozen or repressed. It is "being zen" (as people say nowadays in French), i.e. not getting overly excited over virtually nothing. If one meditates sufficiently and well, non-attachment comes naturally.

It has to be stressed, so there is no misunderstanding: recommending 'non-enjoyment' (in the sense above defined) does *not* mean being *against* pleasure. To be impassive is not to be apathetic. Naturally, pleasure is preferable to pain or even to non-feeling.

If one experiences a pleasure (or is relieved of a pain), so well and good – there is no intrinsic harm in that. There is no reason to in principle reject pleasure as such when it happens to occur; nor even to avoid pleasure if one sees it coming – indeed, to do so would constitute another form of attachment. On the other hand, one should not try to make an existing pleasure last or increase; nor, a fortiori, should one pursue pleasure for its own sake or pass one's time dreaming of it

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The term happiness is perhaps best reserved for the ultimate bliss of enlightenment, for no one can be said to be truly happy who has not permanently reached such realization.

when one lacks it. Such hedonist behavior is bound to result in unhappiness (sadness, resentment, conflicts, weakness, etc.) – it is not worth it.

Note however that, because of the polarities involved, our position relative to suffering is not entirely symmetrical to the one just formulated with regard to enjoyment. Our advice to avoid suffering does not logically imply a fatalistic acceptance of pain as such. In the case of pain, if one can avoid it (before the fact) or get rid of it (after the fact), one should of course do so, if there are no more pressing considerations to the contrary.

One should do so – because pain is an obstruction to consciousness and volition, as is most evident in tragic situations (like certain diseases, or like torture). The problem of suffering arises only when pain becomes one's overriding focus, i.e. when any amount of pain (real or imagined) is unbearable. Oversensitivity to pain is spiritually unhealthy.

It is natural to protect and cure our soul's body-mind appendages from harm, and even to look after their wellbeing. The issue here is only to what extent such concerns and pursuits are biologically valuable, and at what point they become harmful in themselves. The limit is attained when our more materialist concerns and pursuits begin to hinder or damage our ultimately more important spiritual values.

Thus, the posture advocated here is: neither exacerbated hedonism nor extreme asceticism, but moderation and wisdom.

PART 4:
SOME SITTING MEDITATIONS

24. Time, place and posture

The following chapters are not intended as a step-by-step guide to meditation, but rather to help the reader deal with some of the practical issues that arise in the course of meditation. But first a few words on getting started….

When should one meditate? In principle, anytime – but in practice you will get best results if you select the time when your environment allows you maximum isolation and peace. I personally find the middle of the night an extremely precious time for meditation: there are almost no sights or sounds to disturb one at that time, and one can really get deep. Of course, prepare the ground as necessary; e.g. turn off your fridge if you can hear it.

But there is no hard and fast rule: some of my most satisfying meditation sessions have been in the morning or the evening. In the morning, one is well rested and thoughts have not yet multiplied; but one may be impatient with meditation, knowing that one has many things to do in the day ahead. In the evening, one may be tired and full of thoughts; but sometimes the fact that one's day is over allows one to develop intense meditation.

You should try different meditation times, and find out the time of day or night that suits you best. This may vary – e.g.

your readiness to meditate may differ on weekdays and on the weekend. As you progress, your favorite time may change.

How often and how long should one meditate? In principle, as often and long as possible! Some grand masters are reported to have meditated for several days non-stop, and pursued such an intense regimen for years. Beginners like us should just do their best. The important thing is to *commit oneself to regular meditation*, and slowly increase the time devoted to this exercise.

If you are just starting, first institute a minimum of 10 minutes a day. I use an alarm clock (not a loud one) to make sure I do not sit for less than the time allotted. At first, let that meditation period be anytime in the day that you happen to be free. This gives you a chance to try different times, in accord with your routines. After say after a week or two of this, institute a regular time, e.g. in the morning before breakfast, or in the evening before going to bed.

Once you have mastered this first discipline, increase the time to 20 minutes a day, and stick to that for a few weeks. Alternatively, you might – rather than increase the time per sitting – try sitting for the same amount of time twice a day; see how that feels. Gradually thereafter, increase the total amount of time per day: first to half an hour, then to 40 minutes, then to one hour, then to 90 minutes, and so forth.

Don't exaggerate, though, because the most important thing is not how much you can meditate in one sitting or one day. The most important thing is to meditate the amount of time

you have decided you can handle, *every day without fail*. Once you settle comfortably in a certain amount of daily meditation, stick to it – don't go back to a lesser amount.

The reason for this rule is that the effect of meditation is gradual and cumulative. It takes time to build up in you the magical changes it is capable of producing. Things happen bit by bit – if you give them time to happen. Do not be over-ambitious and try to sit for too long too soon, or you will experience rejection. Also, do not sit for too short a time, if you can manage more, because the shorter amount of time may be insufficient for noticeable results.

Note that on the weekends you might sit for longer amounts of time and/or more often, than you do on weekdays. But here again, if you do that, it is best to make it a habit.

Where should one sit and meditate? In principle, one could meditate anywhere. But in practice, it is wise to pick a spot that is reasonably quiet and where no one is likely to disturb you. Facing natural scenery is nice, if you are outdoors; but there should not be too much activity in front of you. If you are indoors, better face a window or a blank wall than an area cluttered with furniture or other objects.

In short, avoid having things in your range of vision that will distract you, directly or by association of ideas stimulating thinking activity. Similarly, do not place yourself where you can hear your neighbors' music or conversation. However, background sounds need not deter you from meditating, if they are not too loud or persistent. The same applies to other sensory input.

Go to the toilet before you sit. The air you breathe when you meditate should be fresh; open a window for a while as necessary. Your body should be kept warm, but not so warm as to make you drowsy. Wear loose clothes, so as not to impede blood circulation or breathing. Loosen your belt, so your belly is free to move. Take off your glasses.

What **sitting posture** is best for meditation? The ideal posture is the "lotus" position, i.e. sitting cross-legged, with the left foot on the right thigh and the right foot on the left thigh. This posture is best, because of the feeling of stability and oneness it gives one's body during meditation. For most of us in the West, this is not an easy position to assume, however; and if done using force or excessively it can damage your knees. But note that, if you are willing to make the effort over enough time, there are yoga exercises that train you for it[90].

The next best posture is the "half lotus": sitting on a cushion, you fold one leg by placing one foot over the opposite thigh, and fold the other leg *under* the first. Practice the half lotus on both sides equally, and in time you might attain the full lotus. A third option is to sit cross-legged with both legs folded down – most people can do that briefly; but, in my opinion, this is not very good for meditation, because the

[90] Such as the Butterfly (sit with your foot soles touching each other and gently push your knees up and down or swing them left and right) and the Crow Walk (sit with your bum touching your heels, put your hands on your knees, and then walk). Such exercises of course need time to bring results.

back tends to curve and keeping it straight is a constant struggle.

Another common posture is to squat, without crossing one's legs, on the upturned soles of one's feet (the "Diamond" pose); this is a comfortable posture if you can do it. Not so recommended is to sit on the floor with both legs folded outward, because this twists the knees unnaturally.

If you find these Eastern postures too painful to sit in for long periods of time or if you just cannot sit in any of them[91], do not foolishly let that deter you from meditation – just sit on a chair! Meditation is something mostly non-physical, although physical pain can be an object of meditation and transcending pain through meditation can be very satisfying indeed. You do not have to look like a Buddha when you meditate. Just do the practical thing, and choose the posture appropriate to your body.

If you sit on a chair, do not rest your back or arms on any support; sit on the edge of the chair or use a stool. Do not sit on a couch; nor can you meditate slouching or lying down. The seat should be neither too high nor too low, so your legs form a right angle and the soles of your feet are flat on the ground, with your knees apart about a shoulder-width. If the seat you are using is very low, cross your lower legs a bit, resting the outer edges of your feet on the ground[92].

The important thing, however one sits, is to keep one's back and neck straight. Sitting partly on a cushion lifts up the

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91 E.g. if your knees are damaged or fragile.

92 But this blocks circulation in the feet somewhat.

lower back and helps straighten the spine. Stretch your spine, as if it is tied down at the coccyx and you are pulling it upward from somewhere above your head. Your torso should be upright. But do not push your chest out and pull your belly in; instead, draw the shoulders back and relax them downward (both equally), and let the belly relax outward.

The head should feel like it is floating over the neck (allowing maximum energy flow through the *chakras*). Bend it slightly forward, pulling the chin inward; but do not rigidly lock into this position. Do not however let your head bow down (this is indicative of heavy thoughts); and do not let it fall back, either (this movement away from objects in sight is indicative of fear or arrogance).

Relax your face: mouth, forehead and eyes. Look straight ahead, eyes turned a bit down. Do not stare at any particular object, but rather rest your eyes without insistence on the region in front of them. If you find yourself too caught up in visual stimuli, then close your eyes for a while and turn your attention inward. If you find that with closed eyes you think too much, reopen them.

Rest your hands on your knees or thighs, but do not lean on them. Alternatively, join your hands below your navel (on or above your lap), resting one hand on the other, with the palms upturned and the thumbs lightly touching[93]. Breathe

[93] This is the "cosmic *mudra*", favored by Zen meditators. There are many more possibilities, which you may discover from other sources. The important thing is to facilitate internal energy flows and avoid blocking it, however one positions the hands.

freely and calmly. Repeatedly check and correct your posture, throughout the sitting. But preferably stick to your posture and avoid any need of corrective movements.

Once you have well positioned yourself, mentally choose some meditation technique (such as awareness of your breath) that seems appropriate to your current state of mind. Lock your attention firmly onto the chosen method, and do not let go till the end of the time you have allotted. Do not loosen your grip; do not allow your mind to wander and distract you from this concentration.

If you are meditating for a long period, and halfway through you seem to have reached an impasse (e.g. acute restlessness or mental agitation), it may be beneficial to get up and walk about very slowly and mindfully for a short while. Always end your meditation sessions with a few minutes of such ‘walking meditation’, timing your steps to match your breathing (at a rate of one or two breaths per step).

At the end of your meditation, do not immediately subject your senses to strong inputs, or spring directly into cogitation or action. Avoid jarring experiences or activities; otherwise, your head may experience some fragility in the hours ahead. Keep the meditative mood going for as long as you can.

25. Observe the mechanisms of thought

It is normal for thoughts to arise during meditation. Look upon your thoughts with a non-judgmental, benevolent attitude, to begin with; you do not want to get into conflicts with them. You want to get to understand thinking, before you can hope to master it.

To the beginner in the art of introspection, thought appears as a long series of obscure mental goings-on, a unitary mental event that zips past almost uncontrollably. Slowly, as one becomes more proficient, one learns to analyze one's thought processes in various ways.

The realm of what we call "thought" is very broad, much broader than some people realize. In its largest sense, the term refers to *any content of consciousness other than apparent direct experiences* of matter, mind or self. Thus, it excludes, firstly: purely sensory perceptions; secondly: mental percepts when they are not taken to symbolize or refer to something beyond themselves; and thirdly: intuitions of one's self and/or its functions.

Notice first the different *specific forms* of thought. Thoughts may, as commonly supposed, take the form of

"verbalizations", i.e. verbal sentences "inside the head[94]" or spoken out loud to oneself or to other people. But some thoughts take the form of visualizations and (visual memories or imaginations) and the auditory equivalent of that ("auditorizations", let us call them) – audiovisual mental projections ("perceptualizations" would be an appropriate general term), which may or may not involve words.

Note that concrete memories seem to be the storage of past experiences; whereas concrete imaginations are mental projections about what past, present and/or future might be, or even fictions without precise temporal location.

Moreover, what we commonly call "thought" is often more precisely acts of will, or velleities (incipient acts of will), or intentions (to will), or valuations. We know most of our personal acts of will, as well as velleities, intentions and valuations, directly through intuition (or apperception). This self-knowledge may be memorized; and in turn, these intuitive memories may be used as elements in imagination.

Such imaginations relating to will may or may not be accompanied by audiovisual imaginings and/or verbal thoughts. One may also, by mock will[95] within oneself (with

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94 Or, as people used to say, "in one's heart".

95 Note well that mock will is *not* mere visual imagination of will, for will is insubstantial, i.e. non-phenomenal (known only by intuition). If I imagine my arm moving, it does not follow that I am imagining that I am moving (by will causing the movement of) my arm. I must either conceptually add on "suppose I am moving it" – or I must, more concretely, by volition produce a representative micro-movement, or faint velleity of movement, or mere intention to move, in my physical arm right now. Such *symbolic* will, in which a

or without perceptualizations and/or verbalizations), mentally *project* will, velleity, intention or valuation on oneself *or other people* (for example, I may thus imagine the girl I desire desiring me back).

Many of our thoughts are or involve value judgments, which may be positively or negatively inclined. These thoughts constitute our affections and appetites, and often generate emotional responses, in one's body and/or mind. These emotional charges may in turn generate additional thoughts on the same issue, and increase or decrease our previous valuations. Thoughts may also imagine emotions through words or preverbal intentions, or by audiovisual imaginings (e.g. a woman crying and wailing).

Notice furthermore, the abstract, conceptual domain that we seem to derive from the concrete perceptual (material and mental) and intuitive (self-knowledge) domains. The latter, experiential domains serve as data and springboards for our eventual ratiocinations, comparisons and contrasts, conceptualizations, logical checks, theories, rationalizations, and all such non-experiential aspects of our beliefs.

Thus, all told, there are many different formal building blocks to what we commonly refer to as our thoughts. One "thought" may involve various combinations of these different formal elements.

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real will stands in for an imagined will, often underlies so-called mental projections about one's own or other people's acts of will (into the past, present or future, or without time location).

Note in particular that an apparently purely verbal thought involves mental projection of word-sounds (or very rarely, the visual images of written words) and the intentions that give meaning to these words. Very often, little noticed behind these words, there are additional visual and auditory memories and imaginations, as well as volitional-evaluative events and emotive phenomena, all of which further enrich the verbal elements.

Logicians further analyze verbal thoughts into "logical forms", with reference to their semantic content. For instance, "X is Y" is a logical form, "X is greater than Y" is another, and so forth. We may also in this context keep in mind grammatical distinctions, like the first person, the second person, etc., or like the past, present or future tenses. Analyses of discourse such as these help clarify and evaluate our thinking procedures.

Logicians, and indeed all thinkers, are also of course concerned with issues of the truth or falsehood of thoughts. It is important in this context to distinguish deductive (analytic) and inductive (synthetic) reasoning. The former can yield truth or falsehood, the latter only probabilities (degrees) of truth or falsehood. Most thinking involves both kinds of reasoning.

But *during meditation*, we are not all that interested in the epistemological evaluation of all our thoughts, because this would only perpetuate and multiply thought. We are in a receptive posture of observation, rather than active posture of research. We must of course be honest in our observation, i.e.

not distort or evade the information at hand, to ensure it is truthful. But we should with discipline leave more complex cogitation concerning the data to another time.

All that is one level of analysis of the phenomenon of thinking – identifying its elements. These elements are usually put together in different compounds, or *scenarios*. For example: I imagine a scene where I tell my friend: "sing me a song!" and she answers: "no, I intend to go home". Note that all this is going on in my head – my friend has nothing to do with it (though she, if she at all exists, may in the past have behaved in a similar manner).

The elements in this scenario are: "I imagine [the whole scene]"; "I imagine myself saying something ('sing etc.') to someone"; "I imagine that someone having an intention ('to go home')"; "I imagine that someone answering verbally". Each of these elements is in itself a thought of some form, and the elements come together in the overall scenario, not necessarily by mere addition (like a series, like beads in a necklace), but often nested (imbedded one inside the other).[96]

We each often reenact the same scenario in recurring *patterns* of thought. For example, a loser in matters of love may always imagine a girl he would like to accost rejecting him.

Yet another way to analyze thought is *thematically*. This refers to the overriding driving force behind the thought

[96] There is an infinite number of possible scenarios, of very variable complexity and nuance. I imagine X; I imagine myself imagining X. I intend to do X; I think I intended to do X yesterday; I think I will do X tomorrow. I imagine Mr. Y doing activity X; I imagine Mr. Y intending to do X. Etc.

process. One chain of thought is moved by lust; another by avarice (financial greed); another by self-justification; another by family attachments; another by scientific curiosity; another by piety; and so forth.

It is important to distinguish these various aspects of thought. When a thought arises during meditation, if you are instantly able to thus analyze its structure and understand its causes, it ceases to absorb you so much. Its underlying foolishness and futility are made apparent. You become relatively immune to the hypnotic power of your thoughts and you can disengage from them more readily.

Pursuing further, we have to distinguish two aspects of what we call mind: the volitional aspects and the unconscious-involuntary aspects. The latter could (for our purposes here) be called ‘the automatic mind’. This ‘mind’ seems to have ‘a will of its own’, in opposition to our own will. However, this is only a figure of speech, for the automatic mind has no volition – it is merely a theoretical construct, which we figuratively hold ‘responsible’ for our unconscious drives, involuntary acts, etc.

The memories and verbal thoughts that arise and go on (in some direction, for some time) seemingly spontaneously and automatically, in meditation (and in the rest of living), are productions of the brain for which we are not necessarily directly to blame. But they are not usually as random and haphazard as they appear – no, they are driven by our desires, dislikes, hopes, fears, etc. And these affections and appetites are not mere happenstance, but are consequences of the soul

(the self) over time having certain preferences and making certain choices in action.

That is, they imply volitions of sorts, at one time or another, if only on a very low level of consciousness. Once our at least indirect personal responsibility for seemingly random thoughts is realized, it becomes easier to overcome them in meditation. They become more intimate and tractable. It is important to observe how "random" thoughts arise during meditation:

> I may notice an emotional charge affecting me. I realize I am suffering a little. I can (or assume I can) trace that feeling to something someone said or did – e.g. they made some philosophically erroneous remark. I then try to alleviate this suffering of mine, by preparing or planning to prepare some countermeasure – e.g. the counterarguments I will offer to correct the error. This gets me thinking about different options.

In such ways, thought is driven on and on. We get caught up in it, trying to redress wrongs or improve our situation in one way or another. This is "samsara", the entanglement and unending grind of our minds. It is better to disregard suffering or fancies, and move on. It is better to act than to react. It is best to be content, unafraid and satisfied. Thought, however random it seems, always has underlying causes.

Meditative awareness of one's thoughts can be described as mentally placing oneself "above" one's own thought currents, so that one is watching them with some detachment as they proceed. In this impassive spectator's posture, thoughts

appear as mere mental *events* in which one is not too involved – as relatively objective flutters of activity. This is sometimes called "self-awareness" (inaccurately, in my view).

We must however distinguish simultaneous thought-awareness from ex post facto awareness of one's thoughts. The former is the more difficult to attain, though it becomes easier as one's mind gets calmer. Most thought-awareness is after the fact; it is really awareness of the final echoes and the memories of thoughts, rather than awareness of the thoughts themselves. Simultaneous awareness is strong enough to transcend thoughts in full bloom, whereas retrospective awareness allows us to get feebly caught up in them for a while.

Note that meditation itself calls forth some initial thought. Meditation instructions are thoughts, so are philosophical observations and reflections about meditation. Such thoughts are sometimes useful and sometimes even necessary to meditation – but one must be able to eventually stop indulging them, too, otherwise one misses the whole point of the exercise. One can instead direct one's course through wordless intentions and volitions.

When I give myself instructions in meditation, like "try counting your breath" or "go back to breath awareness" or again "okay, now let go all techniques" – I am acting like my own guide or guru. This role is at first necessary to regulate one's meditative activity, and try and reach a favorable state of mind by the shortest, most effective route. Every sitting is

different in this respect, so you cannot use a standard roadmap. However, the more often and longer one meditates, the quicker one gets there and can drop off all voluntary discourse.

Meditation is largely an empirical process of self-discovery. One cannot be told the way fully in advance by other people, but must gradually learn it by practice. The methodology is mostly trial and error, though philosophical insights can clarify one's ways and means as well as goals and ends. Thus, thought is not all bad, but can give us direction, motivation and inspiration. But in excess such thoughts can become impediments, so one should tread them lightly and drop them a.s.a.p.

26. Stop unnecessary thinking

Notice meditation involves some "paradoxes". You want to stop all volition – but that is a major act of agency! You want to be fully present as a Subject, attentive to all that's going on, and yet you don't want to change anything: you don't want to stop fantasying or thinking, but only to observe it happening – but that of course "changes everything"! You want to get beyond your "ego", that ever present heavy "I", which is a fiction, an erroneous extrapolation from phenomena, you want it to disappear – yet you are never more "present" than when you succeed!

Such conundrums can at times, in early stages, seem muddling and even paralyzing. We are trying apparently to "square the circle". We get tied into knots difficult to unravel. This too feeds thought. Here too, we must learn to cut the Gordian knot and move on. The key is to realize that when discourse gets stuck like this, it does not mean that the action contemplated is impossible. It is a problem of discourse, not action. Go on with your meditation, and put aside all philosophical speculations (leave them for some other time, when you are not meditating).

Don't blame others for the problems you encounter inside yourself or in your life. Avoid negative judgment of others,

for it is only a way to divert attention from your own problems. Don't let negative emotions arise and take over your consciousness – no disgust, resentment, anger or hatred. Stop them dead as soon as possible (and it is possible at any stage). Such thoughts and emotions are useless, and they hamper inner peace.

Similarly, avoid delighting in things that give you pleasure. Let the thought of them pass without greed. Think: my body and mind are mine, they belong to me in the sense that they are associated with me and I am to some extent responsible for them, but they are not me, not to be identified with myself, my soul. When I attach myself to positive or negative sensations, thoughts, emotions, I confuse myself with things really external to myself.

When you manage to stop active thought, a sort of passive thought process occurs – consisting of echoes of thoughts, velleities of thought, pretexts to pursue thought. It is as if your (automatic) mind is trying to tempt or provoke you to think, because it feels uncomfortable or vulnerable with inner silence. One of these passing thoughts may eventually hook you, like a fish caught seizing a dangling worm; then the thought drags you on a long journey, till you realize you what is going on and opt out.

This underlying tendency to thought in the mind may be viewed as a "background noise", without which mind just disappears. The mind's contents are mere holograms, inner light and sound projections without much substance; in their absence, there is no mind. When we allow ourselves to get

absorbed by thoughts, we give this mind tendency free reign. More precisely, if we do not switch off the "automatic pilot" of mind, it strongly draws us into chains of thought.

In this perspective, one can understand and feel compassion for people who are overwhelmed by their thoughts, sometimes to the degree of committing crimes apparently "against their own will". If we have not acquired the habit to check our thoughts, they have a momentum of their own, and can counsel us to do some regrettable deeds. It takes an effort to stop the mind's anarchic tendencies. It is not so easy, especially if we try to do it "by force". Rather, the way to do it is by gently, gradually calming the mind through meditation.

To eventually control thought, one should develop a habit of not talking too much, if at all[97]. For a start, don't talk more than necessary *to yourself*; avoid ongoing discussions within your head or out loud. Use your mind efficiently. Monologue is important and difficult enough to resist – but even more important and difficult is avoiding unnecessary discussions with other people, about this, that and the other.

For in dialogue, you have two or more minds at work, babbling away, feeding each other material that keeps the conversation going on and on. Chance eruptions of thought in one mind stimulate new eruptions of thought in the other. There may be no connection between the discourses of the people concerned. People more often than not talk at, rather

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[97] Strictly speaking, this includes talking *in writing* (which is of course just what I am doing now)!

than to, each other. They seem to just want to release through speech some energy pent up inside them[98]. They search for something more to add, to make sure they have exhausted their conversational reserves.

Another wise precaution is to minimize input of stimuli like the news, in newspapers, on TV or the Web. Most journalists seem intent on producing the maximum amount of worry and anger in us, as they pound us with an endless barrage of bad and maddening news stories. It is probably best to ignore it all, and concentrate on spiritual concerns.

Our minds may be variously "elastic", i.e. able to bounce back to natural peace quickly or slowly. When one sits down to meditate, one has a certain amount of "echo" of sounds and sights leftover in the mind, which takes varying amounts of time to die down. Emotions can be particularly persistent. Perhaps some people have a quicker rate of recovery of inner peace than others (and likewise, the same person has sometimes a quicker rate than at other times).

Just as in the physical domain, the skin tissue of a youth quickly recovers its smoothness if we pinch it, whereas that of an aged person takes more time – so in the mental domain, individuals may have varying mental elasticity. This refers not only to sights and sounds – but also to emotions; for instance, if one feels anger surge – it may subside quickly or

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[98] In some cases, the process is triggered and kept up by a seeming need of attention; as if people need to be acknowledged to exist by being listened and talked to. Conversation also of course serves as a means of social bonding.

do so with difficulty. And indeed, the idea can be extended to all thoughts; for instance, if one has some worry, it is variously possible to stop thinking about it.

If we wish to achieve the meditative state of being "in the present", we must obviously train ourselves to have more elastic minds – minds able to switch off a thought at will.

The easiest way to achieve non-thought is to abstain from thought from the moment you wake up in the morning (or in the middle of the night) to meditate. Don't stir up thoughts before you sit to meditate, and you will have that much less work to do once you sit. It is also wise to *get in touch with your inner yearning* for enlightenment and love of meditation practice, so that you are well motivated and your attention is sincerely focused as you prepare to sit.

When you sit, immediately position your attention (as it were) at the mental place where thoughts spout forth. *Go to the very root of thought formation inside your mind, and stop thoughts from even arising* (so you will have no need to suppress them thereafter). This is an efficient, surprisingly easy technique – a shortcut to steady presence of mind in the here and now. Seeking nothing, just sit… and sit… and sit.

27. Dealing with distractions

In Judaism, the concept of "impurity" relates to idolatry, bloody hands, improper sexuality, and other such specific misdeeds; and there are degrees of purity or impurity. In Buddhism, the concept of "impurity" is much more radical than that – it refers to (almost) all thought, because thought is considered as stirring the mind up and obscuring its native clarity.

Impure thoughts and actions, according to Judaism, eventually cause suffering – feelings of shame, guilt, regret, remorse, reproach, ugliness, dirtiness, unclarity, confusion, conflict, pain and so on. If, for example, one has a weird sexual dream, one feels soiled by it upon awakening; if one practices similar perversion in real life, one is all the more so hurt. Buddhism goes further, and teaches that all ordinary thoughts and actions are polluting, in that (or insofar as) they "load us with karma" and blind us to the crystal clarity of ultimate reality.

In one of the 'koans' of *The Gateless Gate*[99], two Zen monks argue as to whether a flapping flag is moving or the wind

[99] A collection by the monk Mumon. See *Zen Inspirations*. Ed. Miriam Levering. London: Duncan Baird, 2004. (p. 114.)

moves it; their teacher (the Sixth Patriarch) intervenes, saying that it is neither, but instead it is their minds that were moving. When years ago I first read this story, I took it as a statement in favor of the mind-only school of Buddhist philosophy; but today I understand it – a bit better supposedly – as a practical instruction.

Events take place all around the meditator (i.e. in his mental as well as material surrounds). Our common tendency is to (to put it graphically) pounce on almost every such passing enticement. But the meditator must exercise self-restrain, for every such pouncing motion prevents him from true stillness of mind. He must not be a slave to events, but remain impassive. To keep the mind still requires a firm commitment of will to stillness. This is achieved most readily by focusing attention at a deeper level.

If we position our mind (i.e. our attention, to be more precise) at the surface of things, it tends to attach to external distractions or passing thoughts. We become absorbed in the wrong way. The above koan teaches us that such mental "attachment" does not only mean that the mind passively sticks to passing phenomena, but that it actively moves out and grabs them or even seeks them out. It is not something static, but dynamic. Attention is rarely at rest for long, but repeatedly *shifts* over from one object to another.

Thus, the word attachment here refers not only to the fact of gluing attention on some object irrelevant to the meditation, but to *the action* of transferring such gluing from one random object to the next. This motion occurs again and again, so

that the mind is never at rest on some fixed object of meditation. To stop such overly nervous reaction, one must avoid compulsive or obsessive movements of attention. One must cultivate a more impassive outlook, and look further inward.

A Zen teacher[100] long ago reproved me angrily for fidgeting while in meditation, by shouting at me "Don't move!" This exhortation should be understood not only physically, but of course mentally, and even spiritually. Physical movements proceed from mental movements, which in turn would have no significance were it not for movements of the soul, i.e. the instability of its attentions. If the spirit holds steady, the mind calms down and the body follows suit.

If inner or outer disturbances assail you – whether they appear as sights, sounds, emotions, or in whatever phenomenal modality – consider yourself as *transparent* to them. They pass through you, unable to affect you in any way. They are just turbulence in the scenery. They are all manifestations of a domain parallel to and apart from the spiritual one you are resting securely in. You can observe it, but it cannot move you.

It is useful in meditation to look upon distracting surrounding things and events as occurring in the domain of 'samsara'. Samsara is a powerful and pervasive force, attracting our

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[100] The Japanese monk called Roshi, who had a Zen center in Jerusalem's Mount of Olives for some years. This occurred back in 1979.

attention. It drags our spirit down, keeping us away from the peace and freedom of meditative absorption.

It is like a swamp, with quicksand at every turn. Our pleasures and successes suck us into this domain, by making us like it and want to stay in it longer. And our pains and failures bind us to it, too, by their negative psychological impact and by getting us frantically involved in trying to find ways to get away from them[101].

But samsara becomes its opposite, nirvana, the moment one regards all positive and negative things and events as opportunities for spiritual progress. They offer the challenging material needed to work on oneself. Thanks to our efforts to transcend their influence through meditation and other works, we can attain true happiness and enduring peace.

Samsara is not essentially an 'external' problem. It is not your bad moods, the pains in your legs or the offensive people out there that make up samsara. It is something within you – your personal outlook on such things and events that makes the difference. If they distress you and can shove you off course, you are subject to samsara. If instead you remain

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[101] The noise you hear, and the yearning for silence or nicer sounds. The ugliness you see, and the yearning for beauty. The evil around you, and the yearning for good. The conflicts, and the yearning for peace. The problems, and the yearning for solutions. The worries, and the yearning for all to be well. The failures, and the yearning for success. The pain you feel, and the yearning for relief from it or for pleasure instead. All these are aspects of samsara.

internally unaffected and stay your course, you are effectively free of it.

When Zen masters say that realization is “neither samsara nor nirvana”, they mean that it is not necessary to be literally transported out of this world of matter and mind into some other dimension. The illusion of having a certain unpleasant and restrictive mental and physical environment can equally well and more immediately be dissolved by a mere change of attitude towards it. The moment one is detached from its influences, one is already free. One can be in the midst of it, but it cannot have the same effect on us.

Wherever and however you happen to be – with nice or nasty people, in a prison or a luxury setting, in health or in sickness – if you are essentially above it all, if you remain centered and mindful, you are already ‘there’. It is sufficient: there is no need for more. Realization is not a place, like a paradise – it an internal (spiritual) freedom.

Many Zen sayings and stories emphasize this. Like the sayings: “Chop wood, carry water” or “When thirsty, drink, when hungry eat”. Or the story of the Zen master who, when he screamed in pain, disappointed one of his students, who confused equanimity with insensitivity.

It is well to note in this context that many apparently paradoxical statements in Buddhism (like “neither samsara, nor nirvana”) are not intended as logical statements of fact, but as psychological recommendations.

On the surface, such statements seem to appeal to some “tetralemmatic logic”, in crazy disregard of the laws of

thought. They seem to affirm the possibility of contradiction (i.e. to say that "both X and not-X" can be true) or to deny the necessity of exhaustiveness (i.e. to say that "neither X nor not-X" need not be false).

Such paradoxical statements cannot be reconciled with normal logic: they are in fact inconceivable and *they can only enter into discourse by divorcing the words used from their meanings*. Such incoherent statements are usually proposed by or to people ignorant of logic, as deceptive attempts at discursive one-upmanship[102].

But if we look more closely at certain mystical statements, which seem to communicate something valid and wise, we realize that their apparent antinomy is only due to verbal inaccuracy. They do not refer to facts, but to *our approach to* facts. They do not mean that the objects labeled X and not-X can coexist or both be absent, but refer to *our intentions towards* those objects can both be adopted or discarded.

Thus, it is perfectly consistent to recommend that, in meditation, we ought not allow ourselves to get entrenched in

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[102] That is to say: if I say "X" and you say "not-X", a third comes and says "both X and not-X" and a fourth trumps him by saying "neither X nor not-X". But if we proceed thus, there is no end to it; for another contestant might say "both [both] and [neither]" and so on *ad infinitum*. Since the tetralemma denies the laws of identity, of non-contradiction and of the excluded middle, anything goes, and nobody can win any argument. If no one can ever tell reality from fiction, how can the advocates of the tetralemma be dispensed from this rule (of theirs) and claim their paradoxical logic applicable to reality? Such discourse does not make any sense. Only the thesis that the laws of thought are universally applicable makes sense.

definite predications like “This is X” or “This is not X”, but we ought rather keep an open mind. This is not a claim that something might be “both X and not-X” or “neither X nor not-X”, but merely advice to withhold judgment on the issue, i.e. to regard it as irrelevant (in the present circumstances, at least). It is simply an injunction to relax one’s rational faculty for a while and be content to only observe things, just as they are, without discursive interference.

In the specific instance of the Zen “neither samsara, nor nirvana” – it seems superficially inconsistent, considering that nirvana is originally the label given to the negation of samsara; but in the present context the intent is that we should not *pursue* nirvana anymore than samsara, because this attitude of pursuit is as much a hindrance if our attachment is to nirvana as if our attachment is to samsara. This does not deny the value of nirvana, but only reminds us that *pursuit of* nirvana keeps us locked in samsara, since samsara is the realm of attached existence irrespective of what it is we are attached to.

28. Sitting forgetting

In meditation, thinking appears as a product of unconsciousness, because it takes an extra effort of consciousness to be aware of one's thoughts in the way of an observer – as events embedded in the mind field, coming and going without our entire participation. During meditation, I look behind me and see a long trail of scattered thoughts and bodily movements, all of which upon reflection seem rather pointless wastes of time and energy, mere restlessness and agitation.

Meditation is a very important instrument of spiritual development. Meditating consists in getting the soul to mindfully stop reacting to the body's and mind's usual drama and noise, so that the way things really are (whatever that happen to be), within and outside us, is allowed to shine through. Meditation is aimed, to begin with, at developing immunity to external and internal distractions.

Meditation is thus not inner chatter or manipulation, which would compound the problem to be solved. It is not artifice; it is nature. It is not a method for producing visualizations or extraordinary sounds for entertainment purposes, or for religious excitement. On the contrary, we seek inner stillness and silence through it. Even attempting to reproduce past

meditative experiences, however interesting they seemed, is counterproductive.

It is essentially, as one Zen description has it, "sitting quietly, doing nothing".

A simple, direct method of meditation is known as: "sitting forgetting". The name of it aptly describes it – by doing this, we quiet and calm the body and mind. Sensations and thoughts are like stirred dust – let that dust settle and avoid stirring up more dust. Keep in mind that you cannot settle dust by force – that just stirs up more dust. The volition involved here, then, is that of non-action and self-restraint (against all physical and mental activity).

Our thoughts are composed of sensations (through all the senses), mental perceptions (the mental equivalents of sensory perceptions), memories, visual and auditory imaginations, anticipations and expectations, and theoretical discourse, including discourse about the current meditation, which means: abstractions, conceptualizations, formulating propositions, developing arguments and counterarguments, and ordering knowledge.

Apart from the initial stages of sensing and perceiving in the present tense – i.e. cognition of the here and now – all subsequent stages of thought rely on memory. Therefore, if we wish to intensify our cognitive contact with the here and now, which is the first intention of meditation, we must learn to put memory aside for a while, i.e. to *forget* everything.

Forget *the place and time* in the world that you are in. What the apartment you are sitting in looks like, what its address is,

in what city and country, what planet; what time of day it is, what day of the week, what month and year. All that is memory. If you are fully concentrated on the here and now directly in front of you, you ought to be able to ignore all other places and times.

Forget, even, *your own identity*. Who you are, your name, what you look like, your family relations and friends, past episodes of your life, your present context, your financial worries and future plans – all such details require memory, and so must be forgotten during the meditation session. Remembering is allowing the brain to contribute mental images and intentions that are not immediately relevant to present experience.

Memory could be viewed as stored "karma": it reflects and echoes previously lived experience, extending the sensory (material) domain into the mind. Our fantasies and theoretical thoughts, being based on memories reprocessed in various ways, may likewise be viewed as bundles of "karma" – carrying and perpetuating past experiences beyond their natural existence. The word karma is appropriate here, because this storage of experience has eventual consequences on our inner and outer life.

Memories are of course part of the whole present experience when they occur; but in this context, they are to be viewed as extraneous parts, which distract us from the more direct experiences. At first, of course, memories are unavoidable, and have to be treated just like pure experiences; but

gradually, they are to be weeded out, by repeatedly preferring to turn one's attention to the here and now.

Sitting forgetting is not an attempt to permanently abolish or destroy all memories, but is a way to eventually control the delivery of memory items to conscious attention. Instead of an involuntary and anarchic delivery, which distracts and confuses thought, we develop a more poised and appropriate delivery. It is an exercise that strengthens the memory faculty, rather than damaging it. We forget and stop thinking during meditation – but later, when we need them, our powers of memory and clear thinking are increased.

Of course, it is impossible to *make oneself* forget something – for the moment one thinks of it in order to forget it, one brings it to mind. So, the word forgetting is here meant in an ex post facto sense, not as an action to be done. Sitting forgetting is also called "just sitting".

Sitting in meditation, I at first observe my attention wandering away from my chosen here-and-now object of meditation. My mind is scattered, unable to hold onto its intended object for more than a moment or two; my control over my own mind is feeble. Remembering irrelevant things is failing to remember that I am supposed to be meditating; it is forgetting the here-and-now, in favor of the *not* here-and-now!

The antidote is persistent focus and attention. Generating more awareness; increasing concentration. Gradually locking onto a chosen object; returning to it again and again every time the mind strays. Collecting one's mind; striving for one-

pointed mind, for one-mind. Eventually, one attains a degree of contemplation that may be characterized as no-mind, because mental interference has disappeared. At the end, I may even forget myself, forget that I am sitting there meditating and just experience the object.

Just sit comfortably, check your posture often, eyes open without staring (occasionally eyes closed if need be), watching breath naturally go in and especially out of nostrils (counting breath for awhile, only if you cannot follow breath without doing so), keep returning to breath come what may (without discussing why your attention strayed away), watching thoughts run through your mind without getting caught up in any of them, letting them wind down (if necessary, use mantra for awhile to help them do so), watching them gradually disappear, experience the resulting inner tranquility, quiet and light, don't push it or lose it….

If perchance you have some special meditative experience, such as an extraordinary clarity, peace or joy, do not lose your composure – remain steady in it, neither trying to perpetuate it or intensify it, nor trying to escape it or attenuate it. These are, paradoxically, two opposite tendencies common in such circumstances: an impulse to hold on to what seems nice (attachment), on the one hand, and an impulse to get away from what seems unusual (fear of enlightenment), on the other hand.

29. Breath awareness

In meditation, we direct our attention on various means, rather than on any goals. We focus on our posture, our breathing, our mental contents, and other such current experiences, rather than on enlightenment, liberation, or similar ends. This is reasonable, since any shift of attention towards some purpose is bound to diminish or remove our concentration on present events. Once they have served to motivate us to start meditating, goals become irrelevant and can even cause interference. Once engaged, meditation should be wholly intent on means. The goals will come to fruition when their time is ripe.

Meditation is not a pursuit of "special effects" (unusual interesting experiences) – but a search for the shortest, most direct route to certain major insights. The means of meditation are characterized as techniques, to emphasize they are to be used as and when useful, and dropped as soon as they have fulfilled their function, or replaced when another instrument would seem to be more effective. We should not get attached to them: they are disposable tools justified only by their effectiveness at the time concerned.

Awareness of breath is a valuable meditation technique. Because breathing involves a natural, cyclical movement, it

both draws attention (as all change does) and tends to be forgotten (as all unchanging things do). Both these features make it valuable, since we do not only want our attention drawn (by the movement) but also want an effort on our part to be called for (to maintain and concentrate awareness).

Ideally, you just quietly focus your whole attention on your breathing for a long time; your mind becomes calmer and clearer. Patiently, without interference, follow your breathing every step of its way. In practice, at first, this may not be as easy to do as it sounds. Difficulties commonly arise, for which a variety of solutions are traditionally proposed.

Adopting breathing as your object of meditation, you resolve to resume breath observation again and again, whenever some sensation or incipient thought turns your attention away. No sense blaming yourself, or arguing about the causes of such digressions. They may at first be quite frequent and prolonged; but in time, they become rarer and briefer. Just ignore them and persevere, and the meditative profit eventually comes.

In early stages, it is very difficult to capture one's natural breath. The moment one directs one's attention towards the breath, one's volition seems to interfere. This may be due to the will tending to be coupled together with consciousness, so that whatever consciousness aims for is also to some extent grabbed at by the will. The will to cognize the breath is confused with a will to control the breath; that is, 'breath awareness' is confused with a 'breathing exercise'.

Alternatively, the sudden shift of attention towards the breath deflects the breath. That is, the breath is momentarily interrupted by the effort of attention; and volition intervenes to artificially restore breathing, until the natural function gradually takes over again. In short, the relationship of consciousness and will is very delicate; and there is a fine line, easily crossed, between natural and forced breathing. So, one must tread gently and carefully.

In any case, continue to be mindful of your breathing, even if it is unnatural and you seem unable to get it to be natural. Tell yourself that your object of meditation does not have to be your natural breath – it could just as well be your unnatural breath. This indifference is likely to eventually defuse the underlying conflict, if you persevere long enough.

Often, too, the in and/or the out breath is/are imperceptible, and we are tempted to force breath a bit, or to invent it somewhat, so as to be able to perceive it. Avoid such temptations, and instead meditate on the apparent absence of breath[103]. Alternatively, feel (or even look at) the up or down movements of your abdomen as indices of your breath coming in or going out.

Cigarette smokers are at a great disadvantage in this meditation technique, as are people whose nose happens to be clogged by a cold or flu. For in such cases, the breath is

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[103] Undetectable breath that is not necessarily a bad thing – it may indicate your breath is very fine, smooth, regular, etc. Sometimes, of course, breath is undetectable because your attention is absorbed by thoughts.

heavy, loud and ragged, and it is very difficult to get past willed breath and find natural breath. In such circumstances, people with some yoga training physically clean out their nose using a *neti* pot and use to appropriate *pranayama* breathing exercises.

Other people may, until their handicap is cured, just abandon breath awareness and resort to some other meditation technique (like mantra recitation, for instance). However, do not give up on the breath awareness techniques too soon, because often they succeed in unblocking blocked noses. Or, if you do abandon breath awareness, return to it after a while and you may find it easier.

I get the impression that there are two breath currents taking place simultaneously: beneath the coarse, noisy current, there is a finer, less manifest current – and it is the latter breath that really gives us the air. When meditating on the breath, try to spot the more hidden, underlying air current, and preferably meditate on that. Eventually, the gross, louder breath should disappear.

Breathing can also be affected by ego interference. If you think of breathing in and breathing out as an activity of yours, as a pulling in of air and pushing out of air by you, you are too present in the equation. Rather think that the air is coming in from and going back out to the surrounds, and you are just sitting there observing events. Better still: forget yourself.

As soon as you are comfortably seated, take a couple of deep breaths. Give your mind a couple of minutes to settle down

naturally, before starting breath awareness in earnest. Then slowly try to "become one with" the breathing.

Every so often, during any meditation, check your posture, as this affects breathing patterns. If your posture is incorrect, avoid making abrupt moves to correct it, but rather move very carefully so as not to affect breath rhythm. To avoid having to repeatedly correct posture, best preemptively remain attentive to keeping a good posture. Also, frequently check that your mind is clear. If you are involved in thoughts, your attention to breath is obviously diminished.

If one's thoughts are very loud and insistent, as often happens, it is best to use a breath-counting technique for a while, before using silent breath watching. There are many scenarios; one I use is to: breathe in and out naturally, then think "one", breathe in and out naturally, then mentally say "two", and so forth, to "ten", then think "first set". Repeat this till the fifth set of ten breaths (i.e. fifty); then start again for another round of fifty breaths. After a few rounds, I usually stop counting and concentrate on the breath wordlessly.

Note that no counting is done during each breath cycle. I do the counting at the end of each in and out breath cycle, rather than (as others prefer) at the beginning. It might seem the same, but I find calling the number first tends to encourage interference of will more. However, this is not a very important detail (some teachers suggest using both ways).

The important thing is to have *an attitude of patient observation* towards the breath. If you get impatient, your

breath tends to artificially speed up. If you disapprove of its rhythm, your breath tends to lose its rhythm.

If your emphasis of attention is on the counting, your will tends to interfere with the breathing cycle, so as to make it even and fit it into a mechanical enumeration sequence. The breath becomes rather forced and speedy, and you lose consciousness of it eventually, focusing in a routine manner on the numbers instead. You try to rush through the task of counting ten then fifty breaths, to get it over and done with and go on to the next stage. This is not the right attitude. What's the rush? Rather, let the breath go on and on at its own pace.

Feel the air as it travels into and out of your body – through your nostrils, mouth, throat, lungs and belly. Feel every detail you can of the physical contacts between the traveling air and these channels. Feel obstacles (like a blocked nose); feel temperature differences. There are also contextual sensations and imaginations, including smells smelt[104], sounds physically heard or mentally hummed, visualizations of the breath in motion, and visual effects inside your eyelids or in your mind if your eyes are closed, the "internal clock" measurement of breathing rate, the sensation of up and down movements of the belly. Also be aware of your thoughts concerning the breath.

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[104] Smells may come from one's own body or the surrounds. Note that interpretation is involved: one can imagine the smell sensations one has to be from this or that source, whereas in fact they are from elsewhere.

Notice that sudden sensations, emotions, bodily movements and thoughts all affect (and conversely, are affected by) the breath's rate and pattern. For instance, an exciting (positive or negative) thought tends to speed and disturb the breath, whereas a calming thought slows and smoothes it.

All these factors together constitute your awareness of breath. Gradually try to become aware of them all, separately and together. But do so without artifice, just watching. Breath may be, to various degrees, natural or forced; long or short; slow or fast; light or heavy; rich or poor; smooth or ragged; regular or irregular; even on both sides, or uneven; equal in and out, or unequal; physically silent or noisy; with or without parallel mental sounds; you may feel it all the way along its route or only on part of it; it may be warm or cool, all or part of its way; smells may come with it; and so on.

Notice also the changes in these various parameters over time. Take the time to detect every detail you can (though do not worry if you cannot detect very much). But then, at some point, stop such intellectual interference. Its purpose is to increase your interest and sharpen your concentration; but taken to excess, it ends up making your mind wander. Return to mere watching your breathing, without complications or pretensions. Silently, with increasing calm and concentration.

Eventually, even give up intentionally focusing on the breath. You may continue to be aware of it, but this happens without intention. Your attention may rest partly on your breathing, and mostly on other things. You are mindful of it, yet free of it.

30. Being here and now

Clear your mind of all idle thoughts, and "be here now". This means in part – do not be absorbed elsewhere and/or at another time. If one's attention is elsewhere than here to any extent, it is insufficiently "here". Likewise, if one's attention is not entirely in the present, it is not enough on the "now". Keep in mind that only the here and now can actually be directly experienced. One can only be conscious of something "elsewhere" or "at some other time" through memory and/or imagination – i.e. indirectly.

The moment one thinks – whatever be the subject matter and whatever the form the thoughts take (memory recalls, audiovisual imaginings, verbal discourse, wordless intentions, attitudes, velleities or volitions) – *one's attention is necessarily diverted to some degree from the more here and now experience* (sensory and intuitive aspects of experience).

Admittedly, one's "thoughts" are also in a larger sense parts of the here and now, together with more direct experiences; but in this context we wish to distinguish between secondary and primary elements of the here and now. Note also that the said diversion of attention occurs not only in cases where the thoughts concern past, future, imaginary or theoretical topics,

but even in cases where the thoughts are reflections on the here and now.

For this reason, if we wish to concentrate on the here and now, we must avoid distracting thoughts and aim for eventual inner silence. Although such peace of mind may at first require exercise of the will to achieve, it is possible to eventually just naturally rest one's attention on the here and now without effort.

But awareness of the here and now is not essentially awareness of the objects presently before you; such contents of awareness are merely an intermediate stage, a means. It would more be more accurate to describe awareness of the here and now as awareness of the space and time in which present objects seem to reside. The objects are relatively incidental – it is finally perhaps just the fact of awareness that ought to be focused on.

Awareness of space and time independent of their passing contents means that we focus on the supposed container of material and mental events rather than on those phenomenal events, or any intuitive or intellectual events. The contents are transient, the container – or the one experiencing it and the experiencing of it – are relatively constant.

Thus, in meditation, whether sitting or moving, one tends towards consciousness of the fact of awareness, rather than of its content. This means: neither adhering to nor avoiding or evading any content of consciousness that happens to appear at any time. This may be what meditators describe as the experience of "being in the eternal present", because one's

attention is not following or escaping one's perceptions, intuitions or thoughts, but one is contentedly resting in pure awareness.

The statement "Time does not exist, it is a perpetual present"[105] is in my view a good reminder of a philosophical truth – that time is a theoretical construct; in practice, all we experience is the contents of the present moment that our sensory, mental and intuitive faculties happen to get in contact with. (The present moment, note, is extended in time, not a mere instant of time.)

We must notice that "the present" is in fact a very, very brief moment – and a variegated and complex event. It includes experiences in the various perceived phenomenal modalities: sensed sights and sounds, and touch, smell and taste sensations, as well as the mental equivalents of these sensory experiences (memories of them[106] or derived fantasies); and it also includes experiences in the various intuited non-phenomenal modalities: one's cognitions, volitions and valuations. *Sometimes only some of these modalities are included* in our present; sometimes perhaps all.

Moreover, in all combinations of these modalities of experience, all we can lay claim to at any moment is *very partial and fleeting glimpses* of any supposed perceptual and intuitive totality. I do not see everything that is before me, but my eyes roam from one point of interest to another.

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105 Quoting Claude Chabrol's movie « *La fleur du mal* ».

106 At least sights and sounds; I am not sure the other modalities of sensation are clearly reproducible in the mind.

Similarly, my ears focus on one sound then another. I may feel my hands, then my lips, then my eyelids, etc. Mental images and sounds are also flickering, changing. My self-awareness comes and goes.

The continuous, all-inclusive present we ordinarily assume is thus in truth *composed of* very tiny flashes of experience of various sorts. *We* give this patchy experienced present some apparent solidity and coherence, because we continually mentally correlate sensations and memories, and add the present occurrence of the present to some past occurrences of the present and to some anticipated occurrences of the present.

What we ordinarily call "the present" is more precisely mostly a ratiocinative construction (by means of intentions at first, well before any verbal interference) of many more punctual presents, as well as some remembered and anticipated presents.

As one advances in meditation, one becomes more conscious of this mental act of putting together a jigsaw of elemental present, past and future (i.e. actual, earlier and later) experiences of various modalities, to make up a more continuous and consistent compound present. It is very difficult to spot the purely here and now experience.

Given the elusiveness of the present, consider how approximate and uncertain are our memories of the past, and all the more so our anticipations of the future. Reflecting on such complications, one cannot but also look upon our

abstract, conceptual, theoretical knowledge as open to much doubt.

But keep in mind that we cannot logically take such skepticism so far as to make a blanket denial of all knowledge – for then we would be denying our denial too! Such reflections nevertheless serve to motivate us to look for and concentrate on the elusive purely experiential present. It is the key to getting us in contact with "reality" eventually.

Meditating on impermanence does not mean building a philosophical system around the fact of impermanence or a supposed principle of impermanence – it means, simply, watching things come forth, stay a while (some briefly, some more insistently), and then eventually go. Similarly, some apparent causal relations may be observed, but should not arouse discussions. Just watch it all patiently, without mental comment, unaffected.

You are stationary, at the center of the world, watching some things – including your perceived body and mind in motion, and your intuited self's consciousness, acts of will and value-judgments – occurring around you like a 3D movie, coming, staying and going, seemingly interacting. Your self is immune in this ongoing display, inwardly still, realizing the relative illusoriness of all surrounding events. Being in the perpetual present is perhaps identifying oneself with this central empty position.

On occasion, especially sitting cross-legged in lotus pose with eyes closed, the present is experienced in a very tactile manner, as the sensation of one's whole body as one piece.

Ordinarily, we experience scattered bits and pieces of the body separately; but during meditation, when great peace descends on us, the body can get to feel truly unitary, and this is a very pleasant and relaxing feeling. In this experience, the body is as it were suspended, for our focus is entirely on it, to the exclusion of surrounding matter.

> But it is worth also occasionally trying to realize the continuity between one's body and surrounding matter. The dividing surface between them is in truth ultimately imaginary, if one considers it at the atomic and subatomic levels. The body is constantly ingesting air and other substances from the surrounds; and the body is constantly releasing sweat and other substances to the surrounds. Who can say at what point in space and time such substances are or are not "part of the body"? Any characterization of a molecule in one way or the other, as inside or outside the body, is sure to be arbitrary. Moreover, elementary particles are ultimately but bundles of waves, and it is impossible to objectively say where a wave starts or ends. All matter is interlaced, without boundaries. Therefore, in reality, we are one with the surrounds. Reflect on and feel that oneness.

Meditating on the here and now, it is best not to stare at the physical or mental phenomena around us, but rather to focus on the emptiness between them – that is to say, the empty

space between visible bodies[107], the rest surrounding movement[108], the quietness in the midst of which sounds are heard[109], the moments of non-thought separating thought[110], and so forth. Become conscious of the transparency, stillness and silence underlying all experience.

Become aware that there is something formless in the apparent forms you see, hear, feel, smell and taste – they are all part of a single continuum, which we are in the habit of projecting divisions into. But do not deliberately blur your vision. When the mind calms sufficiently, the ratiocinative acts that cut up (and then compare, contrast, conceptualize,

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[107] Better, the empty space they all seem to inhabit. More precisely, it is the space between oneself (the observer) and the objects (observed) that one should focus on. Or even, one might profitably focus on an imagined "transcendental space" *within and behind* all phenomena. Or perhaps most accurately put, what we are looking upon here is the "space of mind", i.e. the extension in which mental images and sounds seem to occur; this *mindspace* can be experienced even when we have managed to clear our mind of all sights and sounds, i.e. even when it is empty.

[108] Movement grabs attention more than rest: this is a biological law, to draw our attention to possible predators or prey. But actually, considering one moment at a time, rest is by far the larger portion of our experience. Become more aware of this underlying rest, at least during meditation.

[109] If there were only sounds, no sound could be clearly distinguished. It is only due to a background of silence that sounds are heard.

[110] As meditation proceeds, thoughts become shorter in length and less frequent, and inner peace gradually gains a foothold and spreads. As soon as you notice this development, start focusing on the emptiness between your thoughts, instead of getting involved in the thoughts themselves. In this way, the "space" between them is expanded, and their dampening is accelerated.

order and describe) the empirical domain gradually dampen, and one has a more receptive and holistic mode of experience.

An experience I have occasionally, when I reach a great depth of inner peace, is that of pure water. The vision of a calm pool of clear, fresh water, supposedly reflecting the calm of my mind. Or a lovely downpour of transparent, refreshing water, as if a tap were suddenly opened allowing energy to flow from the upper to the lower levels of my psyche. Or the image of rain coming down into me, like a blessing from the heavens above. All such experiences are very satisfying and encouraging. It should be stressed that these are not voluntary visualizations, but visions that suddenly and unexpectedly just happen to one.[111]

[111] Such experiences can also seem negative or of doubtful polarity. Once, meditating after an unfortunate wet dream, I experienced clean waters near my sex organ being polluted by some brown waters. One time, I experienced fire – and could not decide how to class this vision.

31. With or without a self

An experience I once had: as I came out of a meditation, I felt my mind tangibly slipping back into its habitual identity, as one might sink into a comfortable, familiar old couch. This insight suggests to me that our ego-identity is a sort of 'mental habitat', a set of mental parameters that we attach to because we have become used to doing so. But meditation teaches us that this tendency is not inevitable – we can get off the couch, and if we must sit somewhere sit elsewhere.

What is called 'fear of enlightenment' may simply be the centripetal force that pulls us back into our habitual identity. The individual self feels secure in the ego-shell it has manufactured for its own protection; it restrains consciousness from leaving its usual limited view on things and flying up high into the universal perspective. Without this tendency of resistance to change, we fear our "I" might suddenly dissolve and leave us defenseless.

One should avoid basing one's meditation on a metaphysical or other ideological prejudice. Meditation ought to be a process of free discovery, rather than of imposing some preconceived notion on oneself. The way I figure it is: if there is some important basic truth out there, then it will make its appearance to me too eventually. This is not an

attitude of lack of humility or faith, but one of respect for the efficacy and universality of meditation.

This is the attitude I adopt towards the Buddhist doctrine of "no self" (*anatman*). If the Buddha discovered through deep meditation that there is no soul, then everyone else ought to in time be also able to (if they proceed with similar enthusiasm). From a merely discursive, philosophical point of view, I am personally (as already explained above and in previous writings) not convinced of this notion.

However, this resistance to arguments that do not strike me as entirely logical does not prevent me from agreeing that it is sometimes appropriate in meditation *to behave as if one has no self*. Though I believe that it is the self that so behaves, I do believe it is possible to behave in a quasi-selfless manner. Thus, the Buddhist doctrine that there is ultimately nothing behind our impression of having a self, other than passing clouds of phenomena, can be used for practical guidance without having to be accepted as a theoretical dogma.

For selflessness, in the sense intended here, is indeed meditatively, psychologically and morally valuable, if not essential. To be cognitively truly "in the present tense", you must get to ignore all the memories and anticipations that make up your phenomenal identity or ego. Indeed, even your underlying soul, that in you which cognizes, wills and values, has to abstain from making its intuited presence felt. By becoming *de facto, if not de jure, absent*, you make way for pure experience.

In meditation, then, we do hope for apparent if not real self-effacement. We try to get past the cognitively imposing impression of self, and attain some transparency of being. Our ego (the superficial self), which is an aggregate of phenomena, including all our modalities of perception, bodily sensations, emotions, fantasies, our life's motives, the people we think about, and so forth – should fade away in the course of meditation. Likewise, our soul (the deeper self), comprising our being conscious, our willing and our valuing, apperceived by intimate intuitions, should eventually disappear.

Such disappearance need not be taken to mean that the soul is really nullified. It may be (in) there, yet cease to appear. The Subject of awareness is in fact present, but its awareness is not turned upon itself (as is its wont to do). There is a surrender of subjectivity, in favor of objectivity; a self-abnegation of sorts occurs. You cease to be a person in your own mind, and focus on whatever else happens to be present.

In this state of absorption[112], you have no name, no accumulation of character traits, no past, no future, no history, no family, no record, no intentions, nothing to think of or to do, no loves and hates, no desires and fears, no virtues and vices. Moreover, you forget your cognitive presence, your will to be there, your value judgments – and you just are. This state of self-forgetfulness makes possible a

[112] Presuming it is in fact possible – I cannot confirm it firsthand.

more universal consciousness, because self-consciousness tends to limit our vision.

It may well be (allow me to suggest it, as at least conceivable) that the Buddhist dogma of "no self" is a deliberate doctrinal lie, by the religion's founder or later authorities in it, with the best of intentions – made on the premise that, even if this doctrine is logically untenable, it is *useful* to meditation, because *the belief in it facilitates* self-effacement. The intent in proposing this doctrine was not to express some theoretical truth, but rather to generate a *practical* consequence in a maximum of people. The intent was to get a job done – viz. to help people get to realization.

If believing there is no self more readily advances to consciousness without self-consciousness, and thence to universal consciousness, then teachers may do people a favor by telling them there is no self. But teachers could also admit to people that there is a self, or even just that there *might be* a self, but tell them they should *act as if* there is none. Even if the former method is perhaps more efficient, the latter method may still be effective. The ultimate result may be the same, although in one case we are treated as children and in the other as adults.

There is no doubt that – not only in sitting meditation, but also in moving meditations, and indeed in everyday life – self-awareness of the wrong sort can interfere with the clarity of one's consciousness and the smoothness of one's actions. Granting the self is a hurdle to ultimate insight, it has to one way or the other be annulled. A simple solution to this

problem is to deny the self's existence. Another, if more demanding, approach is to recommend *pretending* there is no self.

Thus, even if we do not entirely accept in the Buddhist idea of emptiness (non-essence or non-identity), we might yet reap its benefits and manage anyway to render our self inconspicuous and unobtrusive. The alternative method here proposed seems logically legitimate, because it acknowledges that the seeker cannot really know in advance whether or not there is a self, except by hearsay evidence (the reports of allegedly realized predecessors).

The *anatman* doctrine is far from convincing on a deductive level; therefore, it can only be proved inductively, by personal observation, if at all. The issue of self versus selflessness is a hurdle, but it must not be made out to be an impasse. If realization is indeed a human potential, then this hurdle can be passed over without resorting to dogma. So, if belief in selflessness helps, quasi-belief in it is ultimately just as good.

Concerning the above comments on the issue of self, the following objection may be raised. What about the more Hindu and Jewish doctrine of universal consciousness, viz. that it is consciousness of the grand Self behind all individuated selves, i.e. consciousness (to the extent possible) of God? How can that metaphysical interpretation be rendered compatible with the Buddhist recommendation (based on denial of whatever substance to any self) to forget the self?

We can argue that even if ultimate realization is consciousness of God (the reality of Self behind all illusory little selves), it can still be considered necessary to overcome one's habitual, insistent focus on "I, me and mine". And indeed, if we look at the moral injunctions of Judaism – and the Christian, Islamic and Hindu religions – the emphasis on modesty, humility and altruism is evident everywhere. It means: get past egotism, egoism and selfishness, and see things more broadly and generously.

If we reflect on this, it is obvious that no consciousness of God, to whatever degree, is possible without surrender of all conceit, pride and arrogance. No one dare face his or her Creator and Judge as an equal. One has to have an attitude of deep reverence and total submission; any disrespect or defiance would be disastrous. Even in a Zen approach, the attitude is one of utter simplicity, lack of pretentiousness. "You'll never get to heaven" while flaunting your ego as usual.

32. Whether mind or matter

Note that similar arguments to the above can be used in other metaphysical fields. For example, the Yogacara school's "mind only" doctrine (Mentalism) may be found useful to the meditator, to help him distance himself from apparent matter and material concerns. But such utility need not depend on the literal truth of the doctrine; it may suffice to regard it as just a tool. In spiritual pursuits, one has to be pragmatic, and not get bogged down in disputes.

It may be enough to think and act as if matter does not exist, for the same meditative benefits to ensue. Even if one considers the existence of matter as the most inductively justified hypothesis, the one most successful in explaining all available data – one retains the mental power to put those theoretical convictions aside during meditation, and flexibly attune one's mind to the outlook intended by the Yogacara doctrine, so as to attain more important insights.

The doctrine that our experience even while awake is "but a dream, an illusion" can be rephrased, in modern (computer age) terms, as: all that appears before us is "just virtual world". We can equate phenomenal appearances to a sort of massive hologram, a 3D movie "empty of substance" – yet

which produces in us the same emotions, desires and reactions of all kinds, as a "real world" would.

The equivalence between the illusory and the real is at least conceivable in relation to the modalities of sight and sound, for it is introspectively evident that we can dream up sights and sounds as clear as those we apparently sense.

But in the case of touch (and smell and taste) sensations, I am not so sure we *can* perfectly reproduce them mentally, even in the sharpest dreams. However, I am not sure we *cannot* do so, either. There is (to my mind, at least) an uncertainty in this regard, because it is hard to tell for sure whether the tactile (or odorous or gustatory) phenomena that we experience in dreams (or in awake memory or imagination) are truly mental (memory recall) – or simply physical (present sensations) events that we interpret (intentionally or verbally) in certain ways.

For example, if I kiss a girl in my dreams – am I producing in my mind a phenomenon comparable to the sensation of her lips on mine, or am I simply *reading* the sensations currently felt on my (lonely) lips as equivalent to the touch of a girl's lips? These are two very different scenarios. For, if I can imagine touch (as I imagine sights or sounds), then the phenomenological difference between mind and matter is blurred. But if touch (etc.) is not mentally reproducible, then careful observation should allow us to tell the difference between dream and awake reality.

Thus, we ought to distinguish two types of memory – the power of recall and that of mere recognition. In recall, the

original impression (seemingly due to physical sensation) can sometimes, voluntarily or involuntarily, be fully reproduced in a relatively virtual domain (i.e. the apparent mind). In mere recognition, the power of reenacting the original impression is absent, but if a similar impression does arise, one has sufficient memory of the original (somehow) to be able to relate the later impression to the earlier and declare them similar[113].

But even while using such distinctions to discriminate between apparent matter and apparent mind phenomena, they do not provide us with the means to judge between Mentalism and Materialism. Because the mind-only advocates can easily argue that these are apparent distinctions within the realm of mind; that is, recall and recognition may be two categories of event within the framework of Mentalism. They could equally well be viewed as categories within a Materialist framework. Therefore, we have no *phenomenological* means to decide between the two theories.

This being the case, the mind versus matter issue (so dear to metaphysicians) is quite irrelevant to the meditator. Whether it turns out metaphysically that mind is matter or that matter is mind, or that there is a radical chasm between them, does not make any difference to the meditator. Meditation is a phenomenologically inclined discipline. Whether an object is yellow or red is of no great import to the meditator; all he cares to know is what it appears to be. Similarly, the

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[113] That is, we "sense" a vague familiarity, but we cannot clearly establish it.

metaphysical difference between mind and matter is of no great significance to him.

What seems evident phenomenologically is that mind and matter are not totally unconnected realms of appearance. (a) They contain comparable phenomena (i.e. sights and sounds within them seem to resemble each other). (b) Their "spaces" to some extent overlap (note the fact of hallucination, i.e. projection of mental images outside the head – as e.g. when one takes one's glasses off and they still seem to be on).

(c) Also, mind and matter seem to have causal connections – in that our memories (and thence imaginations) seem to be caused by our material perceptions; and in that we produce changes in the material domain after having mentally imagined such changes (e.g. in technological invention).

(d) Even if we wished to claim mind and matter to be radically different substances, we would have to admit they have in common the fact, or stuff, of existence. Similarly, the subsumption of mind under matter or matter under mind seems ultimately irrelevant. In the last analysis, it is a merely verbal issue. Whether the answer is this or that, no change occurs in the facts faced.

Meditation is not a search for the answer to the question about the ultimate substance(s) of existents[114]. All the same, this statement should not be taken to exclude the possibility

[114] So far as I can tell. Some Buddhists, particularly those of the Zen persuasion, have had the same indifference to the issue. However, some Buddhist philosophers have debated it for centuries. It is surprising. Perhaps these monks were curious or looking for entertainment.

that a fully realized person might experience something concerning the mind-matter issue, and might wish to comment on it.

Rather than linger on such philosophical conundrums during meditation, we should rather always infinitely marvel at the mystery of the facts of consciousness and will. How is it that existents "appear" to other existents? One part of the world seems to "know" another part of it, or even itself! Whether such appearance is momentary or goes on for a lifetime of years or eternally – it is a truly wondrous event! Similarly, how amazing it is that some entities in nature can apparently to some extent "affect" themselves or other entities in nature, by way of causation or (even more amazing) by way of volition!

Such questions are not asked idly or with hope of philosophical answers, in the present context, but to remind oneself of and remain alert to the miracle of consciousness and will. One should not take such powers for granted, but be aware of one's awareness and one's choice of awareness. At least, do so to some extent, but not to a degree that turns your meditation into a pursuit. Irrespective of any passing contents of consciousness, and of what stuff consciousness is 'made of', the fact of consciousness remains extremely interesting[115].

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[115] Some have called this the "field of mind"; but, though the term "mind" here conforms to frequent colloquial use, I would avoid this expression, and prefer the broader term "field of consciousness", reserving the term mind-field to the putative

"Mind-only" philosophers (and this category includes not only Yogacara Buddhists, but in the West the likes of Hume and Berkeley) have proposed that we only perceive mental phenomena, by arguing that all so-called material phenomena have to be processed through local sense organs, sensations and brain, before the perceiver can access them.

That doctrine is wobbly, in part because it starts by assuming the validity of our scientific perceptions of the sensory organs and processes, and ends up by denying the reality of the very empirical data it is built on. That is, its proponents fail to reflexively ponder on their own information sources.

However, our first objection is not the main logical argument against it. The main reason that doctrine does not stand firm is another epistemological error. The Mentalists make the same mistake as do the Materialists – which is the common error of Naïve Realism. They each assume their doctrine is the only conclusion that can be drawn from the data at hand. But, as evident from the fact that both schools appeal to the same empirical data – that data can be interpreted either way.

It is not through a deduction that the issue can be resolved, but only through an open-ended induction. The only way to decide is by considering both these theories as scientific hypotheses, to be evaluated with reference to the totality of ongoing empirical findings. That is to say, only through a systematic, holistic, gradual approach, which we might refer

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substratum of mental phenomena, i.e. to a specific category of contents of consciousness.

to neutrally as Subtle Realism. This, of course, is the Phenomenological approach.

In phenomenology, the emphasis is on *appearances as such*, without immediate concern as to their ultimate status as realities or illusions, or as mental or material, or with any other such fundamental characterizations of data. Phenomena *qua* phenomena – and likewise intuitions *qua* intuitions – are always true. Taken "for itself", every appearance *is* just what it *seems* to be.

The issue of falsehood (as against truth) only arises when appearances are no longer regarded *at face value*, and we use some of them *to signify* some other(s), so that we have to try to judge their truth value relative to each other. For this reason, phenomenology provides us with the most conceivably solid foundation to any philosophy or science.

33. Already there

A phenomenological stance is consistent with the teachings of meditation by Zen masters, when they insist that meditation is not a pursuit aimed at acquiring Buddhahood (ultimate realization). We are already Buddhas, they teach, and *zazen* is merely the typical behavior of Buddhas.

By sitting in meditation, we simply express the "Buddha-nature" already in us, rather than try to add it on to us. We express our native Buddhahood, our very "ground of being" as conscious entities. We just settle comfortably into the "nature of mind", i.e. into pure consciousness.

Placing and resting one's consciousness at the phenomenological level, the domain of appearances, we naturally, without artificial activities, recover our true identity and a true perspective on all things. By floating freely on and in the waters of the ocean, we become one with the ocean and know it more intimately than any motorized mariner ever could.

Similarly, in Judaism and like religions[116]. Faith in the existence and omnipresence of God – an effective faith in

[116] Christian ideology (of Pauline origin, if I am not mistaken) is that faith suffices for salvation. But the purpose of this idea is to attract converts, by making that religion seem easy; it is an

everyday life, including trust in His guidance and providence and submission to His rule – is considered *equivalent, for most intents and purposes*, to full consciousness of God.

In other words, it is not necessary to be at a supreme level of consciousness of God's presence in order to be agreeable to God. If one believes in Him and serve Him as one should; whatever one's spiritual level, if one lives, thinks and acts in a manner that constantly acknowledges His unseen presence and kingship, one has equally well fulfilled one's duty.

If one acts *as if one has* God-consciousness, then *one effectively has* God-consciousness. Just as a servant does not require an audience with the lord of the manor to fulfill his task, one does not need to receive fancy personal revelations to conscientiously and loyally do one's job in this world. Our works, whatever they are, loudly proclaim our actual spiritual position.

By "works", here, I mean: mental and physical behavior, including personal, social and religious acts. I am using the expression in a broad manner, tolerant of various traditions. I

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advertising ploy, to obtain a first commitment. I doubt if any Christian would seriously consider a mere declaration of faith sufficient. Faith still has to be proved in practice through certain good works; faith has to be lived out, through certain required behavior patterns (like loving your neighbor, for example). Some works are indeed discarded by the Christian faith-only doctrine; these are certain Judaic commandments, like the prohibition of pork or the need to wear prayer phylacteries. (A similar approach is found in Pure Land Buddhism, by the way: on the surface, faith is initially presented as enough; but thereafter, there is a teaching about good works. This includes, not only chanting a certain name, but various moral injunctions.)

am referring to moral virtues most people agree with, like personal rectitude, common decency, helping others, fairness in law, kindness to animals, and so forth[117]. Without moral behavior, one cannot seriously claim to believe in God. Therefore, such good behavior may be considered (partial) evidence of belief.

Religious acts, like prayer or various ritual acts, are also (partial) evidence. If one prays to God, one may logically be assumed to believe in Him (at least that much); one would not bother praying otherwise (except of course pretending to pray for the social benefits it might bring; e.g. to belong in a community). Similarly for other acts of worship: engaging in Divine service may (normally) be taken to imply belief in the Divine.

Of course, orthodox Judaism takes all this much further, and insists all the 613 commandments (the *mitzvoth*), as understood by the Rabbis, must be obeyed. Strictly speaking, any deviation from this principle would be a failure of belief in God. That may well be true – I do not here argue for or against it[118]. All I wish to do here is point out that we are to

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[117] From the Judaic viewpoint, this would refer to the "laws for the children of Noah" (i.e. for humanity at large). This is considered ordinary "savoir vivre" (*derech eretz*, in Hebrew). It does not only include external actions, but the underlying thoughts (for example, if you hate your neighbor in your heart, overt displays of benevolence are hypocrisy).

[118] Although, as I have pointed out in *Judaic Logic*, belief in God does not necessarily imply belief in an alleged revelation from Him. The latter is an additional step, found in each of the Monotheistic religions in relation to a different "revelation".

some extent conscious of God well before we reach our spiritual ideal.

This defines the Monotheistic equivalent of the Zen concept of being "already there". Another way to express the same thing is to remind us that we were created in God's image and likeness – i.e. that our deepest nature is God-like. This may be equivalent to the "original face" spoken of in Zen.

If one keeps this theoretical self-knowledge in mind, and constantly reminds oneself that one's soul is a bit of God's own holy spirit, one can hardly go wrong in practice. One will naturally engage in "imitation of God", doing one's best to honor this treasure within us and others, and not dishonor it in any way.

As of the moment I interiorize the Zen notion that I am one with the universe, or the Jewish notion that I am a piece of God, I am as good as "already there" (that is, here and now). I have already effectively awakened to the effervescence of existence, to the miracle of all that occurs. The distinction between this practice and some ultimate attainment as a result of it becomes, as the saying goes, "purely academic".

Nevertheless, paradoxically, all this is not intended as an argument to stop meditating! Why? Because if one does not meditate, one cannot *know* firsthand and experientially that one is "already there" – one can only at best "think so" by

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Similarly, within Judaism historically, there have been believers in the written law (Torah) who had doubts relative to the so-called oral law (Talmud). I say all this quite objectively, without intending to advocate one position or another.

hearsay and conceptually, and that is simply not enough. One must keep meditating to advance, and it is only ongoing meditation practice that makes one's current spiritual level equivalent to the ideal level.

Thus, keep meditating! For without some spiritual practice, you sink back into gloomy darkness; while with practice, in one way or another, you are already (as above explained) effectively enlightened. It is that easy.

About this book

Unlike my other works, this is not principally a work on logic, but on meditation and spirituality. All the same, being a logician, I naturally evaluate all statements heard or made with logic in mind – so, in that sense, this is a work of applied logic.

In the present work, as in all those that preceded it, I attach great importance to epistemological issues. Religious traditions often present us with ready-made ideas or principles, without sufficiently considering their epistemological status – their logical consistency, their alleged exclusiveness, the means by which they were obtained, and so forth. Often, apologists for mystical doctrines, finding themselves somewhat distant from reason, choose to defend them by opposing them to reason.

A lot of my work, here, consists in showing that reconciliations are possible between mysticism and reason, although in some cases the doctrines under examination have to be modified somewhat to accord with logical standards.

Each book I have written has helped me improve my thinking on the subject concerned. At first I try to summarize my past and current thoughts, but so doing I open the door to their clarification and evolution. I clean up confusions and fill gaps, and move on to the next stage. Thus, a book is not only a status report, it pushes one forward. As for this book, just as soon as I started writing it, my meditation was improved.

Note that I write primarily to help myself advance philosophically and spiritually. I then share the product with eventual readers, in the hope of helping them and inspiring them, as other people have done for me. This personal involvement ensures my work is honest and sincere. It is offered to the public in all modesty – I intend no pretentious claim of supreme wisdom or great originality.

Avi Sion

STARTED IN MARCH AND COMPLETED IN JULY 2006.

« I went in and left myself outside »
(said by a Persian Sufi.)

Works by Avi Sion, to date

- **Future Logic**: Categorical and Conditional Deduction and Induction of the Natural, Temporal, Extensional and Logical Modalities. Revised ed. Geneva: Author, 1996.[119] (454p.)
- **Judaic Logic**: A Formal Analysis of Biblical, Talmudic and Rabbinic Logic. Geneva: Slatkine, 1997.[120] (262p.)
- **Buddhist Illogic**: A Critical Analysis of Nagarjuna's Arguments. Geneva: Author, 2002. (65p.)
- **Phenomenology**: Basing Knowledge on Appearance. Expanded ed. Geneva: Author, 2005.[121] (144p.)
- **The Logic of Causation**. Rev. & exp. ed. Geneva: Author, 2003.[122] (247p.)
- **Volition and Allied Causal Concepts**. Geneva: Author, 2004. (175p.)
- **Ruminations**: Sundry Notes and Essays on Logic. Expanded ed. Geneva: Author, 2005.[123] (180p.)
- **Meditations**: A Spiritual Logbook. Geneva: Author, 2006. (76p.)
- **Logical and Spiritual Reflections**. Rev. & exp. ed. Geneva: Author, 2008.[124] (276p.)

All these works may be consulted on the Internet, at **www.TheLogician.net**

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119 First published by author in Vancouver, B.C., 1990.
120 First published by author in Geneva, 1995.
121 First published by author in Geneva, 2003.
122 First published by author in Geneva, 1999. The first edition comprised only Phase I (Macroanalysis), whereas this edition also includes Phase II (Microanalysis).
123 First published by author in Geneva, earlier 2005.
124 First published by author in Geneva, earlier 2008.

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