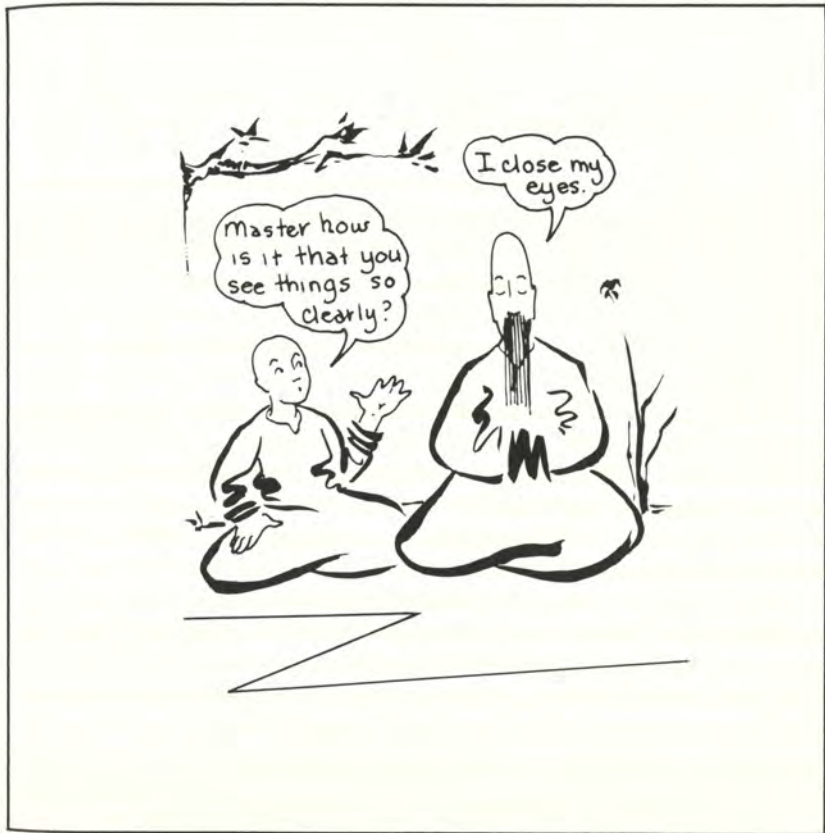
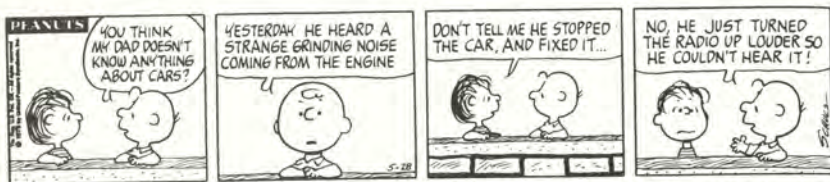


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Meditation & the East: The Zen Master





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We may laugh at our friend Charlie Brown. He admires his father's knowledge about cars. Yet we know that his father didn't fix the car, he merely avoided a problem. How often do we do the same with ourselves? How often do we get so wrapped up in our daily routines, living in the external world, that we forget to tune into ourselves; forget to evaluate our own internal motors?

All of us can see clearly that Charlie Brown's father made a mistake by trying to avoid the message the car's engine was giving him. Why then do we, who can clearly see someone else's mistakes, so often seem to make the same mistakes ourselves? Certainly we are admonished enough that we are living in a "wakeful sleep," in a "state of drunken awareness." We are told to tune in, turn on, attain higher and altered states of consciousness.

Why don't we? If it's clearly so good for us, as others say, what prevents us? Let me suggest a couple of answers that are often overlooked when people are discussing consciousness.

ORDINARY AWARENESS: AWKWARD SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

As an introduction, let me ask you to swallow three times. Please stop reading, close your eyes, and swallow three times.



- Swallow once.
- Swallow twice.
- Swallow three times.

What did you notice as you became aware of swallowing? Was it difficult? Did your throat and jaws begin to tighten? If this happened, your reaction was normal. It appears that when we first focus on ourselves, or on a behavior that we are doing, an awkwardness occurs; a kind of self-conscious stumbling effect. This has been wisely illustrated in the poem "The Puzzled Centipede."

*The centipede was happy, quite
Until the toad in fun
Said, "Pray, which foot comes after which?"
This worked his mind to such a pitch,
He lay distracted in a ditch,
Considering how to run.¹*

This stumbling self-consciousness seems to be a natural occurrence, part of the process of ordinary awareness. You have seen its effects for yourself, when you observed your swallowing. This same process of stumbling self-consciousness occurs when we, as individuals first observe ourselves and our place in the world. This initial self-conscious awareness has been referred to as existential anxiety, facing the abyss, confronting one's humanness. It has been poetically described as humans facing the emptiness of the universe, facing their human frailty, shouting to a God who is a

God of silence. It is we as individuals being forced to choose who we are, what our values are, and how, in a very fundamental sense, we fit into the world. The pain, the confusion, the "nausea" of Sartre come from this process of standing back and questioning one's place in the world. Nowhere is this more clearly illustrated than in facing one's own finiteness, one's own death, or the death of a loved one.

In the Eastern literature there is an ancient Chinese novel about a dissolute nobleman that vividly illustrates this relationship between death and consciousness. The author of the novel, according to legend, wrote the book in biographical form about a personal acquaintance whom he disliked intensely. After writing the book, he put poison on the corner of each page and gave a copy to his enemy. The nobleman, enthralled and engrossed in the story about his own life, lustfully licked his fingers to turn the pages. In so doing he poisoned himself before he could finish the last chapter. The last chapter told of the author's plot and the nobleman's subsequent death. In a sense, we are the same as that nobleman — we are conscious of the last chapter's inevitability, yet we will never have the opportunity to read it.

What good does it do us to know of the last chapter's inevitability? What good does it do us to see how frail and delicate and helpless we are? No matter how aware we are of our finiteness, this does not change either our frailty or the inevitability of our death.

Even in Western literature, awareness, or increased consciousness, is often seen as a curse. For example, in the Bible, human beings first gain awareness when Eve eats the apple (Genesis 3:7): "Then the eyes of both were opened and they knew they were naked." Is this awareness joyful? No. The increased awareness of their bodies caused Adam and Eve to "sew fig leaves together and make themselves aprons," and caused Adam to hide among the trees of the garden: "I was afraid because I was naked" (Genesis 3:10-11). Before awareness, Adam and Eve lived nonconsciously and blissfully in the Garden of Eden. After awareness, they saw their nakedness, felt awkward and self-conscious, and became afraid.

Classical psychoanalytic therapy uses different labels, but

describes a similar phenomenon. According to Freud, most individuals have little consciousness about themselves and develop elaborate defense mechanisms to avoid self-awareness.

To a certain extent, it makes sense that we don't want to tune in to the problems of our internal selves. Even though we are told that we are now in a state of drunken awareness, and should overcome that state, it appears that the act of focusing on oneself, of raising one's consciousness of oneself, is, at least initially, a more painful experience than the so-called state of lesser consciousness.

Therefore, why change? What is in it for us if we change our way of perceiving the world, if we focus in an intense and searching way, on ourselves?

MEDITATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS

I commend you Siddhartha . . . that you have again heard the bird in your breast sing and followed it.²

In order for Siddhartha to hear the bird in his breast sing, he needed to tune in, in a sensitive way, to his internal self.

In this section we will discuss meditation, which is one of the more powerful Eastern techniques for attaining this increased consciousness of ourselves. In discussing this technique, we will point out some advantages of tuning in to ourselves. We will see that the first phase of meditation is similar to the previously described awkward (self) consciousness; but that this confusing first step is only temporary. It passes, and there are other, more pleasant feelings that may occur as one continues to practice meditation.

Meditation is a technique that involves learning how to pay attention. There are many different techniques of meditation; however, as will be described later, the major differences between them involve two variables: (1) *what* one pays attention to, and (2) *how* one pays attention.³

Zen Breath Meditation

Let us look at Zen breath meditation as an example of meditation. In Zen breath meditation, an individual is instructed to focus his attention on breathing. In the words of Walpole Rahula,

Let your mind watch and observe your breathing in and out . . . forget all other things: your surroundings, your environment; do not raise your eyes and look at anything so that eventually you can be fully conscious of your breathing . . . when you will not even hear sounds nearby, when no external world exists for you . . . you are so fully concentrating on your breathing.⁴

What happens when we initially focus on our breathing? Let's look at the five different steps involved in breath meditation.⁵ Steps One and Two describe meditation and *ordinary awareness*; steps Three and Four describe meditation as a *self-regulation strategy*; and step Five describes meditation as an *altered state of consciousness*.⁶

Meditation and Ordinary Awareness

Step One: Difficulty in Breathing. Often, when individuals first focus on their breathing, they complain that they are not getting enough air, that their breath comes more quickly than normal. Some have said that they felt as though they were drowning.

Notice the similarity between this first step of meditation and the awkward (self) consciousness described earlier. From the vantage point of step one it seems that meditation, rather than bringing a higher, or altered state of consciousness, rather than allowing one to experience a feeling of calmness and relaxation, merely makes breathing more difficult. That is particularly frustrating since before practicing meditation, all of us had been doing a superb job of breathing naturally, effortlessly, and without awareness. The first step of meditation, which involves becoming more aware, causes us nothing but trouble.

Step Two: Wandering Mind. In the second step, one's attention wanders from the task at hand—one forgets to focus on breathing, the mind wanders, thoughts arise, and one begins to enter into conversations with the thoughts, ruminating about them,

having a dialogue with them. In psychological terms, this may be referred to as *habituation* to the task. An example of this second stage occurred for me during one of my early meditation sessions in the Zen monastery Daitoku-ji in Kyoto. I was practicing in the meditation room and I heard a car honk. I said to myself, "This is ridiculous—I'm in a peaceful, quiet monastery setting, and what kind of nonsense is this to hear a car honk!" A dialogue then began in my "mind" about the way civilization was encroaching upon nature. I began to feel sorry for the Zen master whose peaceful retreat was being invaded. It was only several minutes later that I realized that I was no longer focusing on the breathing.

When this nonattentive dialogue occurs, and when the individual becomes aware of it, he is asked to bring his attention back to the act of breathing. In Japan, the meditator is aided in this task by the Master, who walks around the meditation hall, literally carrying a big stick. The Master watches each of the meditators to make sure they are alert and receptive. Since sleepiness (*kanchin*) is not desirable in Zen training, when the Master sees one of the students sagging, or not concentrating, he approaches that person and bows. (The meditator, aware of his wandering mind, can also initiate the bow.) The Master then raises the stick and gives a blow (called a *kwat*, after the Zen Master Rinzai) which, I can assure you from personal experience, returns the individual to conscious alertness in a very immediate manner:

. . . his diaphanous white robe quivered as his arm raised the stick above the closely shaved head. The candle next to me magnified his shadow on the ceiling of the meditation hall. After he hit my shoulder, we both bowed.

All was then still in the hall except for the sound of raindrops striking the roof. Before my closed eyes I saw the white sand of the rock garden which lay outside the meditation hall. The sands were carefully raked to appear like the ocean. The rain mixed with the ocean of sand, and out of the union of the two bodies of water, an embryo was formed.⁷

When there is no Master present, the beginning meditator is told to be his own master: he is told to learn to identify when his attention wanders from the task of breathing and to bring it back to that task.

Meditation as a Self-regulation Strategy

Step Three: Relaxation. With practice, the individual learns to focus on his breathing without the self-conscious stumbling effect of step one, and without habituating to the task as in step two. At this point, he has learned to breathe effortlessly. His air comes in and goes out. People have described this as a "sense of floating," as "air coming through my pores effortlessly." This is referred to as the third step of meditation. It is this aspect of meditation Benson refers to when he discusses the relaxation response. This step of meditation seems to be effective in reducing blood pressure (hypertension), stress and tension, and insomnia.⁸

Step Four: Detached Observation. In the fourth step of meditation, the individual maintains the kind of effortless breathing of the third step, and yet new thoughts do occur. However, when these new thoughts occur, the meditator does not enter into a dialogue with them, as I did with the honking horn; rather, the individual is instructed to "just observe them . . . and let them flow down the river."

Therefore, in the fourth step, an individual does not enter into dialogue with a thought, but merely watches it, and lets it go, while maintaining the effortless breathing of the third step. This fourth step seems to have an important effect in helping an individual overcome anxieties, phobias, and other concerns. The assumption is that whatever is important to a person at the time will come into awareness; and, since the person is in a relaxed, physically comfortable posture, whatever does come into awareness will not be seen as threatening.

An illustration from some of my research with heroin addicts vividly illustrates this fourth step.⁹ One of the subjects noted that while he was meditating he saw a movie screen. On this screen flashed pictures of his life and questions such as, "Hey man, what are you doing with your life? You're really blowing it. What are you going to do with yourself?" He said that normally these questions would cause him a great deal of anxiety and turmoil, and would be the kind of thoughts that would lead him to use heroin again. However, when he became aware of these questions while meditating, there was none of the anxiety, none of the

guilt: "I could merely be an observer of my own life." In other words, the fourth step of meditation serves to present whatever is of concern to the person at that time in a calming, nonemotional manner.

This observing oneself without feeling threatened is referred to as *detached observation*. This detached observation helps us obtain a perspective on our own lives. We have been told, at some time or another, that it is important to stand back and get a perspective. Yet we also know how difficult it is to get a perspective when we are in the middle of events.

The *Maitrayana-Brahmana Upanishad*, an Indian religious text, describes this state of detached observation as follows: The

ART'S GALLERY "Art Fussy"



Temper, temper

person of wisdom "seeming to be filled with desires, and seeming to be overcome by bright or dark fruits of action, . . . seeming to be changing, [is] in reality unchanging, free from desire, *remaining a spectator, resting in himself*" (italics mine).¹⁰ This person of wisdom is able to act, yet always retains a perspective. This ability to remain a "spectator, resting in himself" has been called an "immovable wisdom" by Alan Watts. It is a means by which individuals practicing meditation can learn to observe without comment everything that is happening to them in their internal and external environment. This wisdom allows meditators to regard themselves dispassionately and nonjudgmentally, to detach themselves from the "self" until they realize that this self is no more than any other thing in the material world. Meditators in this step are able to stand back from their lives, their thoughts, their feelings, and merely watch them flow past, without making evaluations and judgments. As Eugen Herrigel noted in *Zen in the Art of Archery*,

As though sprung from nowhere, moods, feelings, desires, worries, and even thoughts incontinently rise up in a meaningless jumble . . . the only successful way of rendering the disturbances inoperative is to . . . enter into friendly relations with whatever appears on the scene, to accustom oneself to it, to look at it equitably, and at last grow weary of looking.¹¹

Meditation as an Altered State

Step Five: Higher State of Consciousness. Finally, there is the fifth step of meditation. This is the step that has been referred to in various Eastern literatures as *satori*, *nirvana*, *kensho*, *samadhi*. In the West it has been referred to as an *altered state* or *higher state* of consciousness. Research on this step of meditation, although quite difficult, is provocative and exciting. It consists primarily of understanding the relationship between meditation, self-actualization, and an altered state of consciousness. Although the altered state is often spoken of as something ineffable, something that cannot be understood by words, it is important to give at least an experiential hint of what this step is like, and how it differs from

our ordinary ways of seeing the world. I would like to illustrate this step with a poem by the Japanese *haiku* poet Basho. Basho's poem translates as follows:

*Over the darkened sea
Only the shrill voice of a flying duck
Is visible —
In soft white*¹²

Close your eyes now and listen to the poem again in your mind. Perhaps if a friend is close, you may ask him or her to read it to you. "Over the darkened sea only the shrill voice of a flying duck is visible in soft white." Note the images that come to mind as you listen. Let me pause briefly and let you think through the images.

Often this is a very difficult poem for the Western-educated person to understand. The reason this poem is used here is to focus on the relationship between the different ways we perceive the world. For example, if it is dark, how can a voice be visible? Even if it is not dark, how can a voice be visible? How can it be visible in soft white? What this poem suggests is an openness to experience. Basho, as he walks beside the sea, is keenly aware; all his senses are open. The kinds of distinctions that we make in ordinary awareness between an eye seeing and an ear hearing are not made by Basho. He is living totally in the moment, without goals, without thought, with nothing but an openness, a present-centeredness, to what is around and within him. This nonthinking, nonlabeling openness is characteristic of the fifth step of meditation.

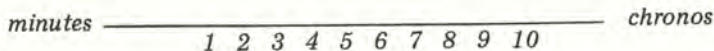
THE ALTERED STATE

How Does the Altered State Differ from Ordinary Awareness?

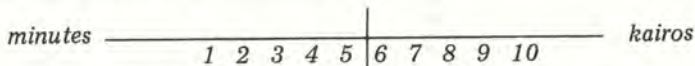
There are several important differences between the altered state and ordinary awareness. Some of these differences have been briefly mentioned already.

Timelessness

First, there is an altered sense of time. The Greeks had two words for time: *kairos* and *chronos*. *Chronos* refers to chronological time—that is, time as we know it, with seconds, minutes, hours, days; past, present, future. *Kairos* is timelessness—when chronological time literally stands still. If chronological time is represented in a linear fashion,



kairos time may be represented vertically:



This represents a moment of timelessness, a present-centeredness, a sense of infinity. The fifth step of meditation is an example of *kairos*.

Goallessness

In the fifth step, there is also a sense of goallessness. There is no striving, no seeking, merely a receptivity and openness to what is occurring.

One of the main disadvantages to goal setting is that when an individual sets a goal for himself, he may become rigid about attaining that goal, even if the goal is inappropriate or unrealistic. Several studies on self-concept have shown that individuals who set unrealistically high goals for themselves have a low self-concept and increased feelings of depression because they can never obtain the goals they set. Thus, there may be a certain freedom in letting go of unrealistic goals.

A second disadvantage to goal setting is that once an individual has set a goal, he focuses on obtaining that goal and developing instrumental means for achieving it. This may cause that individual to put on a type of blinders such that other objects and events that do not help lead to the goal are ignored. *As long as we focus exclusively on the path, we may lose sight of the flowers that line the path.*

Third, one may become caught up in the competitiveness of

HERMAN



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"If you took my advice you'd throw away those bathroom scales. You're letting this weight-loss thing become an obsession."

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POT-SHOTS NO. 519

I FEEL MUCH BETTER,
NOW THAT I'VE
GIVEN UP HOPE.



*Adleigh
Brilliant*

goal setting, striving, and winning. Often this is done at the expense of interpersonal relationships or other values.

Fourth, as Dollard and Miller¹³ have pointed out in their personality studies, the closer we get to a reward, the more frustrated we become if we are blocked from that goal or reward. From an Eastern perspective, we need to learn to appreciate the *process* of working toward the goal.

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POT-SHOTS NO. 572

*Ashleigh
Brilliant*

TO BE SURE OF HITTING THE TARGET,



SHOOT FIRST

AND, WHATEVER YOU HIT, CALL IT THE TARGET.

Absence of Concepts, Labels, Thinking

In the fifth step of meditation, there is an absence of language and images. The individual does not think or analyze.

Socrates noted that it was through reason, through intellect, that human beings had achieved and would continue to achieve wisdom. Beginning with the Socratic doctrine "know thyself," the history of Western science has involved using the intellect in order to gain a better understanding of human nature. This philosophy was especially evident during the period of enlightenment, when it was assumed that human beings were capable of understanding through reason and intellect whatever was necessary for their welfare. This is a viewpoint reflected in Descartes' statement, "I think, therefore I am." Education in Western society has primarily emphasized the cognitive mode, and placed a high value on the ability to think.

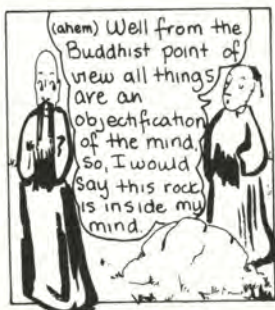


There are many disadvantages to labeling and intellectualizing. Part of these disadvantages are suggested by Lao'tse's student, the Chinese philosopher Chuang Tzu, who was concerned with the futility of language and consciousness. Chuang Tzu wrote,

If there is existence, there must have been nonexistence. And if there was a time when nothing existed, there must have been a time when even nothing did not exist. All of a sudden nothing came into existence. Could one then really say whether it belongs to a category of existence or nonexistence? Even the words which I have just now uttered, I cannot say whether they say something or not.¹⁴

Chuang Tzu's view of the absurdity of words is echoed in Gandhi's opinion of the futility of words: "We are frail human beings. We do not know very often what we say. If we want to listen to the 'still small voice' that is always speaking within us, it will not be heard if we continually speak." This view of the limitation of words and intellect is one of the fundamental principles of Zen. The spirit of Zen, notes D. T. Suzuki, is "A special transmission outside the scriptures; [involving] No dependence on words or letters."¹⁵ It is believed in Zen that for individuals to have true understanding, they must understand not by reason, not by intellect, but by intuition and a holistic grasp of the subject.

This *holistic mode of perceiving* may be related primarily to the right hemisphere of our brain. Research suggests that our brain may have two specialized hemispheres¹⁶; the left hemisphere involves the use of verbal, logical deductions and a sequential processing of information. The right hemisphere seems to grasp the relationship between parts directly, rather than by a sequence



of deductions. Meditation may involve a holistic mode of knowing primarily specialized in the right brain.

What Are the Advantages of the Altered State?

Advantages of this holistic perception of the world may be seen in our *relationship to nature, to other people, and to ourselves.*

Improved Relationship with Nature

This nonintellectual openness and receptivity may enhance our experience in nature, whereas words and labels may diminish our experience in nature. The Eastern approach emphasizes a relationship with nature that doesn't analyze, and doesn't use concepts.

This openness to nature is important in Eastern thought, especially as a way of learning about ourselves. For example, Hindu doctrines suggest that the way to be at peace with oneself is through living in concert with the natural environment. In Zen,

the self is explained and understood through nature. For example, there is a Japanese poem entitled "Self" which speaks of the *cherry blossoms* in spring, the *moon* in autumn, the *snow* on Mount Fuji in winter. In the West, because of the importance of believing that the individual is in control and master of his own destiny, there has been less of an effort to look toward the environment as a way to understand ourselves and more of an emphasis on human beings conquering nature, which is considered to be an opponent. Nature is seen to exist as something to be explained, something outside oneself, and something to be overcome. As one means of understanding the difference between Eastern and Western thought let's take a look at the following two poems, the first by the Japanese *haiku* poet Basho and the second by the English poet Tennyson.¹⁷

When I look carefully,
I see the nazunia blooming
By the hedge!

Flower in the crannied wall
I pluck you out of the crannies
Hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
Little flower — but if I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and man is.

In Basho's poem, the last syllable (*kana* in Japanese) is translated by an exclamation point. *Kana* conveys a feeling of admiration, praise, sorrow. Tennyson's poem also expresses these same feelings. But Tennyson, as representative of the Western tradition, conveys the feelings by intellectualizing them. Further, he plucks the flower, he tries to capture its essence both physically and symbolically. Basho simply sees the flower. There is no need for him to think about the flower. Unlike Tennyson, he feels no need to possess it by plucking it, because he acknowledges no separation between himself and the flower.

In Zen it is believed that nature produces man out of itself. As D. T. Suzuki noted, "Man came from nature in order to see nature in himself."¹⁸ And Alan Watts said, "The individual is a nerve ending through which the universe is taking a peek at itself."¹⁹

Therefore, the environment (*kyogai*) is very important in Zen. A Confucian scholar asks a Zen Master, "What is the ultimate secret of Zen?" The Master replies, "Do you hear the murmuring sound of the mountain stream?" The Scholar responds, "Yes, I do." "Then," declares the master, "I have hidden nothing from you."²⁰

The openness of the fifth step of meditation helps an individual relate more fully and directly to nature, without the intervention of intellect and reason. A study by two Japanese researchers, Kasamatsu and Hirai,²¹ is relevant to this point. These researchers attached experienced Zen meditators to biofeedback equipment to record their brain waves. Alpha waves (brain waves that have been subjectively correlated with a state of relaxation) were recorded in all brain regions. When a click sound was made, however, there was alpha blockage of 2 or 3 seconds. Then the alpha resumed. This click sound was repeated twenty times, and each time there was alpha blockage for 2 to 3 seconds followed by a resumption of alpha waves. This illustrates what might be called an "opening-up" meditation; that is, each time there was a sound in the external environment, the monk heard the sound as evidenced by the blockage of the alpha waves. *In opening-up meditation, the individual attempts to remain open to all stimuli in the external and internal environment.* By contrast, when the control subjects in this study heard the click, they initially had a longer alpha blockage time in response to the click. However, the third and fourth time the click occurred, their alpha blockage was much shorter. And from the fifth to the twentieth time there was no alpha blockage; that is, they did not hear the click. In psychological terms, the control subjects of the experiment "habituated" to the sounds in the external environment.

This experiment suggests an explanation for the Zen saying that one should learn to perceive a flower the five hundredth time as one perceives it the first time. In other words, the goal of opening-up meditation is to teach us to see the environment in a fresh and new way every single time. In ordinary awareness, we discriminate an object, like a flower. Once we've given the flower a label, "flower," we've put it in a category so that the next time we see it we say, "Yeah, that's a flower. I know what it is." Further, in ordinary awareness we don't *experience* the flower, but rather evaluate it and ask questions about it: e.g., Is it good, bad, pretty, ugly, etc.? Buddha taught that it was our sixth sense (the sense

that is conscious of the five senses of taste, touch, smell, sight, and hearing) that formulated the categorizations, labels, and analyses involved in ordinary awareness. Meditation teaches us to see things directly — without labels, without categories, without analysis. It enables us to perceive afresh every time. Thus, the monks in this experiment perceived the clicks each time, whereas the control group habituated to the click sound.

Martin Buber has poetically illustrated this ability to see and experience the world in a fresh and altered way. He refers to this experience as an I-Thou relationship. Buber notes that the world of I-it consists of labels and categories; although these may be necessary for survival, the person who only uses labels, analysis, evaluation, who only sees people and nature as objects, "is not fully human." He illustrates poetically the experience of Thou-ness:

I contemplate a tree. I can accept it as a picture: rigid pillar in a flood of light, or splashes of green traversed by the gentleness of blue-silver ground.

I can feel it as movement: the flowing veins around the sturdy, striving core, the sucking of the roots, the breathing of the leaves, the infinite commerce with earth and air; and the growing itself in the darkness.

I can assign it to a species and observe it as an instance, with an eye to its construction and its way of life.

I can overcome its uniqueness and form so rigorously that I recognize it only as an expression of a law . . .

Throughout all this the tree remains my object, and has its place in time and space, its kind and construction.

But it can also happen . . . that as I contemplate the tree that I am drawn into a relation, and the tree ceases to be an it . . .

This does not require me to forego any of the modes of contemplation. There is nothing that I must not see in order to see, and there is no knowledge that I must forget. Everything, picture and movement, law and number, species and instance are included and inseparably fused.²²

This openness to nature is reflected in the painting below. Take a look at the painting and notice what strikes your eye first: Normally, when we first look at this painting, we see a waterfall, or



a tree, or fog going up the mountain. Do you see the two people? Notice in this picture of the Chinese landscape that the human figures are quite small. This is in contrast to the Greek concept, represented by Phidias and Praxiteles, who sculpted deities in perfect human form. Their sculpture reflected the Socratic disposition to reduce the world to the dimensions and laws of human reason, which, as noted earlier, became the basis for our Western tradition of science. Chinese painting is opposed to this anthropomorphism. Human beings disappear before nature—nature is

mysterious and omnipresent and not to be understood by our intellect. At first we may feel awe when confronted by this seemingly overpowering nature. Soon, however, the awesomeness turns into a harmonious feeling that can't be understood rationally.

Let me share one more painting, one of my favorites. Look particularly at the bridge in the lower right-hand corner. There is a man crossing it and he seems to have a bundle over his shoulder. What would you guess is just to the right of the bridge?

In some ways, this painting represents life: for all our knowledge, intellect, and reason, we don't know exactly where we have come from, nor, if we look off into the mist and fog and mountains at the left, do we know where we are going. Here on earth we seem to be on a bridge, in transition, knowing neither where we have come from nor where we are going. Note the way the water and the land and the mountains all seem to merge with the fog. We don't exactly know where the land ends and the water begins. This intermingling of space and senses is an important aspect of the fifth step of meditation.

When was the last time you were alone in nature? Spend a



moment recalling the experience. You may wish to jot down a few lines describing how you felt about that time.

Improved Interpersonal Relationships

A holistic perception of the world, brought about by the altered state, may enable us to have deeper, more open interpersonal relationships. Words, categories, and labels often keep us from experiencing other individuals in all their wholeness. These tools of ordinary awareness straightjacket our perceptions, biasing the way we experience the world, limiting our freedom to experience directly.

A study was made by T. Lesh attempting to determine whether counselors who meditated were more empathetic than those who didn't. All the counselors were shown a videotape of a client telling about his or her problem. They were then told to formulate what they thought the client's problem was. Those counselors who had practiced Zen meditation for a half-hour per day for one month were found to be significantly more empathetic than those who had not practiced meditation. The meditating counselors did not project their own feelings and judgments onto what the client said, and thereby were able to hear the client's concern as it really was.²³

Ordinary awareness, with its categories, labels, and words, causes us to have preconceptions and make projections about other people. According to Zen, this ordinary awareness not only hides reality from us, but also keeps us from experiencing reality. As Zen states, there is a danger that words may come to take the place of interpersonal experiencing. We may become more interested in analyzing, thinking, and reading about reality than living it. Therefore, the Zen way suggests that we first need to learn to

be comfortable on a nonverbal, intuitive, holistic level of awareness in order ever to be able to function properly on a verbal level of abstraction.

In ordinary awareness, we make dichotomies: teacher/student;



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"Knock it off! Can't you see I'm reading?"

doctor/patient; or we use labels like "waitress," "gas station attendant," "engineer." We fit people into our preconceptions of the labels and roles they fill. For example, think of the last time you looked at a grocery clerk or a gas station attendant or a teacher or a student as a *person*, quite apart from his or her role. When was the last time you looked at your spouse, or a child, in all his/her wholeness and humanness? Or caught a fresh glimpse of someone you thought you had always known well?

Just as labeling other people makes it more difficult to relate to them fully as human beings, labeling ourselves has a similar effect of removing us even further from experiencing others directly.* Thinking of ourselves in terms of the label "I" leads us to need to defend this "I" from others who might injure our prestige or lessen our reputation. Through the acquisition of wealth, credentials, social role, power, prestige, we try to build up the "I," this "ego," as a separate, fortified, indestructible "thing." In Martin Buber's terms, we come to see ourselves as an "it." We examine ourselves in terms of our property, our power, our status, our intellect. We come to see the world of nature as an "it," something to be manipulated and conquered; and we begin to see other people as objects that can either hinder us or advance us in our position, or aggrandize our ego. Thus we become incapable of allowing ourselves to see other people in all their fullness, their "Thou-ness." But the type of altered awareness experienced in the fifth step of meditation helps teach us an openness to others—a nonjudgmental, nonlabeling openness that lets us see them not as "its" but as "thous." Hence we improve our interpersonal relationships—we *live* and *experience* the reality of others.

In summary, meditation may help improve our interpersonal relationships by (1) removing our projections about others; (2) helping us see "beneath" the traits, roles, and labels we give other people; (3) allowing us to see the illusory nature of our self-label

*Buddhist tradition suggests that the formation of this self-concept "I" is a developmental process that proceeds as follows: (a) We have five senses—sight, taste, smell, hearing, and touch. With these senses we experience the world directly. (b) Soon we begin to label the world of our senses: bird, flower, song, music, soft, salty, etc. Buddha imputed this labeling of the inputs of the five senses, to the *sixth sense*. (c) Once we become aware of the sixth sense, we believe that there must be something within us—some *self*—which causes this labeling. We call this self "I," which Buddha said was the *seventh sense*.

"I," thereby freeing us from the need to defend this illusion of self from others; and (4) giving us the ability to experience reality on a direct, nonverbal level, rather than merely an analytical, thing-oriented one. Life cannot be quantified, for life, as William James suggested, is like a stream of consciousness. A stream flows and is one.

Improved Relationship with Oneself

Finally, the altered state of consciousness we can attain through meditation can help open us up to what Zen calls "direct pointing to the soul of man; seeing into one's nature . . .,"²⁴ the true reality of ourselves. As we have just discussed, all of us have a self-concept, which consists of a series of labels that we give to ourselves. These concepts that we have of ourselves are long-enduring and highly resistant to change.



"Do you think yours is really necessary?"

It is often difficult for us to experience emotions and feelings that are not consistent with that self-concept. One of the goals of the

fifth step of meditation is to allow ourselves to experience ourselves without any labels, and to tune into all of our emotions, experiences, sensations. In doing so, we open ourselves to the possibility of rich and rewarding *internal experiences* and we increase the chance of attaining what are called "*peak*" and "*mystical*" experiences.

Openness to Internal Experiences. Zen and yoga Masters are able to hear their internal signals clearly. They have removed the normal kinds of "internal chatter" that go on inside all of us most of the time; thus other signals that are generally drowned out may come into awareness. This has important implications for us in learning about ourselves and our bodies—for example, becoming aware of times when we are tense; when we are hungry, when we need to tune in to our bodies and our minds.

If we go back to the Charlie Brown cartoon, we realize that meditation has the effect of turning down our "radios," so that we can tune in to what is happening within us. This tuning in is crucial in the maintenance of physical and emotional health, for it allows us to see when our internal engines need to be cared for.

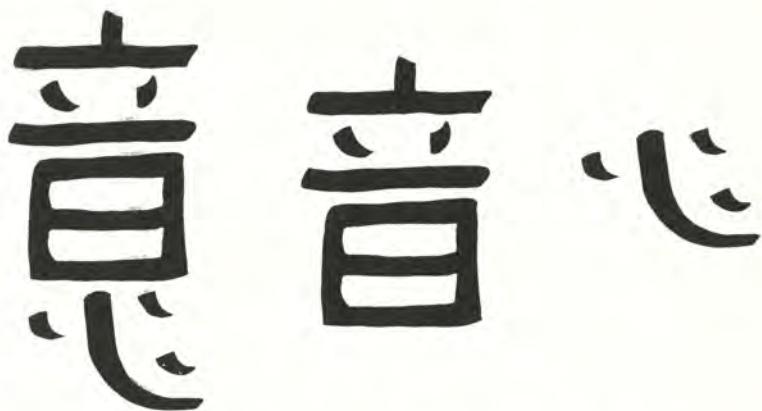
Openness to Peak and Mystical Experiences. During an altered state of consciousness, the individual is simultaneously acutely aware of and unable to describe what he or she is feeling.²⁵ Arthur Deikman has suggested that the mystic experience is brought about by what he calls the "deautomatization" of our ordinary ways of perceiving.²⁶ Deautomatization refers to the *process by which our perception of reality loses its automatic, reflex quality*. This involves opening ourselves to experiences that cannot be described with words, and to which we are not attuned in our daily routines.

An exercise will show how difficult it is to use words to describe even the simplest experience. Let me ask you to eat (or imagine eating) a banana. Now, with words, try to describe what it tastes like to someone who has never before eaten a banana.

The Eastern tradition suggests that words, labels, *cannot take the place of even the most ordinary experiences*; evaluation and analysis can even make experiences less enjoyable. For example, as long as we are *analyzing* the taste and texture of a banana, we are not giving ourselves the opportunity to relax, let go, and *enjoy* the

banana. According to Buddha, in order to become free, in order to understand our true self, we need to develop an *eighth sense* (see the footnote in the preceding section.) This eighth sense allows us to realize the illusory nature of the labels and intellectual analyses of the sixth sense and the concept of "I" of the seventh sense.

When we achieve *satori*, or enlightenment, we gain the wisdom (*prajna*) to hear our true self, "the sound of the heart." In Chinese the word "mind" or "self-nature" is composed of two characters:



The top part of character means "sound" (literally, the sun rising). The bottom character stands for "heart." When we can hear the sun rising in our heart, we will be free. We will be able to join Siddhartha in hearing the bird in our breast sing—and following it.

Meditation Instructions

It should be clear from our preceding discussion that the effects of meditation have to be experienced, they can't just be talked about. When Shinru Suzuki was asked to give a talk on meditation at Stanford, he illustrated this point effectively. He told the audience that in Zen meditation it is necessary to cross your legs in the lotus position, put your hands over your belly (*mudra* position), keep your shoulders straight but not erect, your ears in line with

the shoulders, and your eyes half-closed, looking about three feet ahead. He then proceeded to take the meditation posture.

An hour later he got up and left.

As a first step in experiencing some of the concepts we've been discussing, you may wish to follow the instructions below describing Zen breath meditation.

There are four aspects of meditating: choosing a setting, choosing a position, the process of meditation, and the end of the meditation session. (At the end of the chapter is a list of books for those interested in pursuing the practice further.)

1. *Choosing a Setting.* It is best to pick a quiet room, where there will be few distractions. Let the other members in your house know that you would like a few moments to yourself, and ask them to please pick up the phone for you. You may also want to meditate outside in one of your special places in nature. The natural setting provides a way of further reducing the distractions of our daily routine.

2. *Choosing a Position.* Find a comfortable position — probably in a chair, or on a pillow on the floor. Loosen your clothing. Unbuckle your belt if you'd like, take your shoes off, and just let yourself relax. It's best not to lie down because in meditation you don't want to go to sleep; you want to be relaxed but alert. Just settle in for a second. Let go. Feel the floor or the chair holding you up. Put your legs in a comfortable position; if you are sitting on a chair, let them dangle uncrossed over the sides of the chair. If you are sitting on the floor, you may want to sit cross-legged. Put your hands in your lap so they, too, feel comfortable. Your back should be straight, but not tightly erect. The important thing is to find a posture that is comfortable for you. Although the research suggests that the full- or half-lotus position is the posture with the least muscle tension for experienced Zen Masters, it is usually not the most comfortable for those in the West who are beginning to practice meditation.

Further, the studies of Akishige²⁷ and his colleagues have suggested that the attitude of the meditator is more important than the actual physical posture or the environment. Alpha brain waves occurred in subjects who had the "right" attitude, even if they

weren't in the lotus position. Conversely, those who were in the lotus position, but without the right attitude, didn't evidence alpha brain waves.

3. *The Process of Meditation: Attaining the Right Attitude.* Take a deep breath. Feel yourself controlling your breathing. In meditation, *you don't want to control your breathing*; you want to let it go—very naturally, just like you've been breathing all day. The only difference between the way you've always breathed and the way you're breathing now is that now you are focusing on your breathing. Yet, at the same time, you continue to breathe naturally. Breathe through your nose, letting the air come in by extending your diaphragm. Don't draw it in, don't try to control it, rather allow it to come to you—slowly—letting your diaphragm expand naturally, letting the breath in as much as you need. Then, allow the breath to go out slowly, letting all the air out of your lungs. As you exhale slowly, count 1. Now inhale again, just letting the air come to you. Then exhale and count 2. Continue focusing on your breathing, letting the air come in, letting the air go out. Take a few minutes to focus on the breathing, letting the air come naturally, exhaling, and as you exhale counting from 1 to 10. Do this up to 10, and then begin at 1 again. Don't pay attention to anything but your breathing. If your attention begins to wander, or thoughts arise, just watch the thoughts, let go of them, and return to observing your breathing. If you get lost and lose count of breaths, just return to your breathing and the count of 1 again. If you begin to feel anxious, watch this anxiousness. If you feel pleasant, watch this feeling also, while continuing to focus on your breathing. Eventually you will be able to be quiet in both mind and body. There is no goal in meditation, there's nothing you have to do except be in the moment, and let yourself relax.

4. *The End of Meditation Sessions.* As you feel comfortable doing so, gradually begin to open your eyes. Don't rush to do anything, just sit quietly for a bit and notice what you are feeling.

You may want to stop and practice a brief ten- or fifteen-minute meditation before reading any further. Following is a checklist that may be helpful.

Checklist for Meditation

1. Find a quiet setting with few distractions.
2. Sit comfortably, with your back erect, but not taut, hands in your lap, legs in a comfortable position and with your eyes closed.
3. Breathe through your nose, letting the air come to you; don't draw it in; exhale slowly and completely, and as you exhale, count 1; inhale; exhale slowly to the count of 2—up to 10, then start at 1 again.
4. Keep your mind on the breath and numbers, and do not count absentmindedly or mechanically.
5. If your mind wanders, let thoughts rise and vanish; do not become involved with them; merely watch them, relax, let go, and continue to focus on your breathing.
6. At the end, gradually and gently open your eyes, and sit quietly for a few moments.

After you have practiced a brief meditation, notice what you are feeling. Notice what you thought about, the images you had. There is a space below in which you may want to record your feelings and thoughts. Just quickly jot down a few words or phrases to describe your reactions to your first meditation experience.

At first it may be best to practice meditation for not more than forty minutes a day. Twenty minutes in the morning and twenty minutes in the evening is usually suggested. If you are interested in practicing meditation, it might be worthwhile to take a

minute or two to write down where (i.e., home, office, specific site in nature, etc.) and when would be a good place and time to do so.

First Meditation

Where: _____ When: from _____ to _____

Second Meditation

Where: _____ When: from _____ to _____

It may seem somewhat arbitrary and formal to put down precise times and places to practice obtaining a state of awareness that is not time-oriented. However, my personal experiences, as well as those of clients and students to whom I've taught meditation, suggest that this is important for two reasons. First, it helps us arrange our schedule, thereby *preparing* us ahead of time for the practice. Second, we often place doing something nice for ourselves, like meditation, low on our priority list. Therefore, if we aren't careful, it may become the first thing to be omitted in our busy schedules. Usually schedules that are filled with pressing external demands do not provide the time or the reinforcement for our internal demands. This planning time for ourselves suggests the interrelationship between the two modes of awareness: precise chronological time is used to structure experiences that can help us attain a non-time-oriented altered state.

**Additional Formal
Zen Meditation Techniques**

Counting 1 While Breathing

We have just described the meditation technique of counting from 1 to 10. After you have practiced and are comfortable with that, try counting just 1 during several of your sessions. This will help you get away from goal-orientedness (reaching 10) and will focus you more in the moment.

Shikan-Taza: Just Sitting

Eventually there is a technique for advanced meditators in Soto Zen, called a *Shikan-taza*. *Shikan* means nothing but, or just; *ta*

means to hit; and *za* means to sit. Shikan-taza is a practice in which the focus is on neither breaths nor counting, and in which the mind is intensely involved in just sitting.

The Koan

The Zen *koan* is a means of tuning out the external environment by concentrating on a covert (internal; inside the head) verbal riddle. In terms of the psychology of awareness, Ornstein has pointed out that the *koan* "is an extreme and compelling method of forcing intense concentration on one single thought."²⁸

As noted previously, Zen believes that in the search for enlightenment, our worst enemy is often the intellect, which insists on discriminating between subject and object. Zen Masters of the eleventh century noticed that their monks spent increasing amounts of time in intellectual argumentation. They also observed a growing tendency toward quietism and passivity during meditation. Therefore, it was necessary to develop a technique that would create a psychological impasse challenging the supremacy of reason and at the same time keep the monks alert. The *koan* satisfied both criteria: as the reason of unreason, it used intellect to show the limits of intellect; also, it engaged the monks more actively in the process of meditation. Suzuki observed that "the *koan* was the natural development of Zen consciousness in the history of human strivings to reach the ultimate."²⁹

During formal meditation, the individual concentrates on such *koans* as the following:

- Feel your yearning for your mother before your conception.
- What is the sound of one hand clapping?

At first we attempt to find cognitive, rational answers for the questions which koans raise. But the puzzle of a koan cannot be assembled by conventional logic. The Master repeatedly rejects each solution until the disciple realizes that enlightenment can occur only when we go beyond words and reason. When this happens, we are freed from the bondage of intellect. As Watts observed, "You can still use ideas, but you no longer take them seriously."³⁰

Chanting

*ku fu i shiki shiki soku
ze ku ku soku ze shiki*

This is an excerpt from an Indian Buddhist *sutra*,* written in Chinese pictographs, chanted with Japanese words. Literally translated it reads, "Emptiness is not different from form. Form is the emptiness, emptiness is the form." Form, which involves the normal, automatic way of labeling and looking at the world, is empty. Emptiness and clarity, the nature of the mirror, are full of form and meaning. Because of its emptiness, a mirror can accept everything into itself. Its emptiness gives it the form in which to accept the world.

However, the significance of the chant is not found in the meaning of the words, but in the motion of the sounds. The above chant, called the Heart Sutra, is composed of sonorous consonants: s, z, f, k; and many vowels.³¹ The meaning comes from our ability to concentrate on the sound and motion of these vowels and consonants. Again, what is important is the attitude — the capacity to give the total attention to the repetition of sound on sound. Other chants, such as the two-syllable *om*, can also be used. Chanting, like the *koan*, should completely fill the individual's mind, so that there is no room for extraneous stimuli. As a student noted about chanting:

It was as though the essence of my head circled from deep inside and out of my mouth, first ballooning up to block out everything else, and so it became the chant.

Opening-up and Concentrative Meditation

The formal Zen meditation techniques discussed above may be classified into two types: *opening-up meditation* and *concentrative meditation*. We discussed opening-up meditation earlier, and

*A *sutra* is a discourse of the Buddha.

defined it as meditation in which the individual remains open to all stimuli in the external and internal environment. It will be helpful at this point to define concentrative meditation and then compare the two types.

Concentrative Meditation

There are almost as many different types of concentrative meditation as there are spiritual disciplines: e.g., the Taoist focuses on the abdomen; the Zen follower focuses on the koan; the Christian focuses on the cross; the Sufi focuses on the dervish call. However, there are certain elements which all types of concentrative meditation have in common. In all types of concentrative meditation, there is a *restriction of awareness by focusing attention on a single object*. Other stimuli in the environment are ignored, and complete attention is focused on the stimulus labeled "object of meditation." During the act of meditation, the object is to be perceived in a nonanalytic manner. For example, in his instructions to people focusing on a blue vase, Deikman stated:

By concentration I do not mean analyzing the different parts of the vase, or thinking a series of thoughts about the vase, or associating ideas to the vase, but rather, trying to see the vase as it exists in itself, without any connections to other things. Exclude all other feelings or sounds or body sensations. Do not let them distract you but keep them out so that you can concentrate all your attention, all your awareness on the vase itself. Let the perception of the vase fill your entire mind.³²

The "object" of meditation can be located in either the external or internal environment. Examples of objects in the external environment include the abdomen (Taoism), the cross (Christianity), or a vase. The meditator can also focus on internal stimuli, such as visual images: the third eye, the vault of the skull (e.g., as done by Raj yogis); or internally generated sounds, such as a mantra; a sutra; a prayer; a sentence (e.g., the Zen koan).

The element in common in all these types of concentrative meditation is the restriction of awareness to a single object, and the focus of awareness on that object over a long period of time. Here are some examples of concentrative meditation:

Overt, External Environment

<i>Auditory</i>	<i>Visual</i>	<i>Tactile</i>
verbal — sufi dervish call mantra	mandala cross vase abdomen	touching thumb to each of four fingers

Internal Environment

<i>Auditory</i>	<i>Visual</i>	<i>Tactile</i>
verbal — mantra koan	third eye vault of skull symbol of guru (image)	heart beat breathing

The focusing in concentrative meditation is different from that of ordinary awareness; meditative focus involves pinpointed awareness without evaluation, and without analysis. Further, it involves focusing so intensely that other stimuli in the environment are excluded.

Ornstein has suggested that concentrative meditation is like taking a vacation, leaving a situation, turning off one's routine way of dealing with the external world for a period, later to return (after meditation) to find the world fresh and different. In the philosophy of Zen, concentrative meditation helps the person see the flower the five-hundredth time the same as he saw it the first time.

A Comparison. The difference between concentrative and opening-up meditation is best explained by comparing the results of two experiments: one involving Raj yogis practicing concentrative meditation and the other, the Kasamatsu and Hirai experiment involving Zen monks practicing opening-up meditation that we discussed earlier in "The Altered State" under "Improved Relationship with Nature."

Raj yogis practiced concentrative meditation by "pinpointing consciousness" on the back of their skulls, a third eye, or the tip of the nose. During meditation, their eyes were closed. The experimenters administered the following external stimuli to the yogis: photic (strong light); auditory (loud banging noise); thermal

(touching with a hot glass tube); and vibration (tuning fork). "None of these stimuli produced any blockage of alpha rhythm when the yogis were in meditation."³³ When the yogis' hands were immersed in cold water (4° centigrade) for 45 to 55 minutes, there was persistent alpha activity both before and during the period in which their hands were immersed. In other words, the yogis did not see, hear, or feel the stimuli presented to them.

The Zen subjects of Kasamatsu and Hirai's study meditated with their eyes open. As with the Raj yogis, soon after the onset of meditation (50 seconds), alpha waves were recorded in all brain regions: frontal, central, parietal, and occipital. The longer the monk had been in training, the more pronounced the changes in his alpha activity. However, when a click sound was made, there was alpha blockage of 2 to 3 seconds. This click sound was repeated twenty times, and each time there was an alpha blocking for 2 to 3 seconds, followed by a resumption of alpha waves. This presents a marked contrast to the results of the experiment with the Raj yogis, whose alpha waves showed no blockage, even though very strong stimuli were presented.

It can be seen from the two studies that during concentrative meditation there is an effort made to reduce awareness of the environment to one specific object; in opening-up meditation, a deliberate attempt is made to remain aware of all aspects of the internal and external environment. The difference lies in tuning out within meditation in the former and opening up within meditation in the latter. Theoretically, however, both types of meditation have the same goal: to remove the automatism and selectivity of ordinary awareness.

In concentrative meditation, the individual shuts off external stimuli so that when he returns to them, he once again sees them afresh. In opening-up meditation, an attempt is made to be aware of the environment, both during and after meditation. Thus, although the techniques are different, the consequences after the person has finished meditating should be the same.

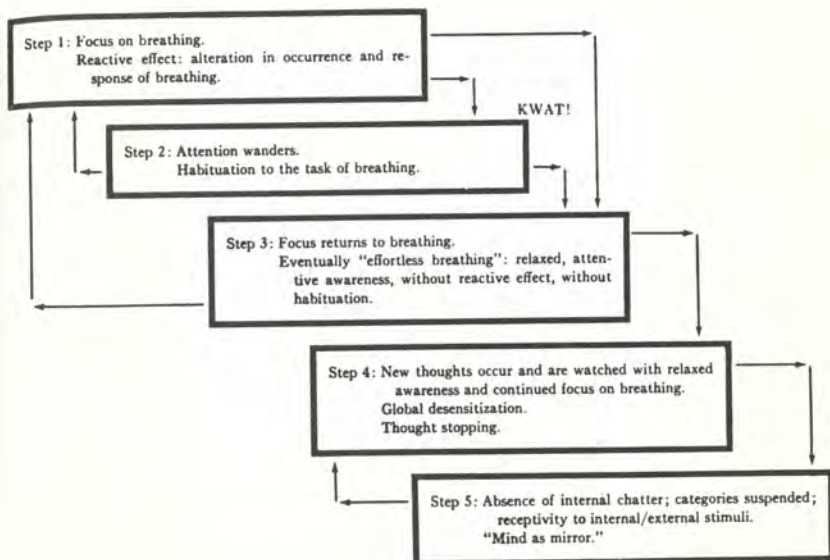
There may be some confusion about whether Zen breath meditation should be referred to as a concentrative or opening-up meditation. For example, to repeat Rahula's instructions for Zen meditation:

Let your mind watch and observe your breathing in and out . . . forget all other things: your surroundings, your environment; do

not raise your eyes and look at anything so that eventually you can be fully conscious of your breathing . . . when you will not even hear sounds nearby, when no external world exists for you . . . you are so fully concentrating on your breathing.³⁴

However, the sitting meditation (*Zazen*) practiced by the Zen monks in Kasamatsu and Hirai's study would not fit into Rahula's paradigm. Nor would Rahula's concept of breath meditation fit into Watts' view of Zen meditation as "watching everything that is happening, including your own thoughts and your breathing."³⁵ In these last two examples, it is apparent that Zen breath meditation is being conceptualized and practiced as an "opening-up meditation" in which the meditator not only sees each breath afresh but also maintains receptivity to environmental stimuli (e.g., the clicks in Kasamatsu and Hirai's study).

The apparent confusion between the Rahula paradigm of concentrative Zen meditation and Watts' and Kasamatsu-Hirai's definitions of "opening-up" Zen meditation can be clarified by the analysis of Zen meditation in the diagram below.³⁶ At first, the beginning meditator has to learn to shut out external stimuli in order to maintain focus on his/her breathing (Steps 1 and 2;



compare with Rahula). However, once he/she has learned to focus on his/her breathing (Step 3), he/she is then able to open up to *both* internal and external stimuli (Steps 4, 5; compare with Watts and Kasamatsu and Hirai). Zen meditation on breath *begins* as concentrative meditation (Steps 1 and 2) and *ends* as opening-up meditation (Steps 4 and 5). Thus, while Zen breath meditation includes concentrative meditation, its emphasis is different.

Informal Meditation

Thus far we have talked only of *formal* meditation: that is, meditation practiced at specific times during the day. Meditation may also be practiced informally throughout the day.

Informal meditation requires only that one be conscious of everything one does, to attend very closely to one's everyday actions:

Be aware and mindful of whatever you do, physically or verbally, during the daily routine of your work in your life. Whether you walk, stand, sit, lie down, or sleep, whether you stretch or bend your legs, whether you look around, whether you put your clothes on, whether you talk or keep silent, whether you eat or drink, whether you answer the calls of nature — in these and other activities you should be fully aware and mindful of the act performed at the moment, that is to say, that you should live in the present moment, in the present action.³⁷

Thus, in informal meditation, also referred to as *mindfulness meditation*, the individual merely observes all actions that he does throughout the day, without judging or evaluating. This is similar to the detached observation effected by step four of formal meditation. In the words of Alan Watts: "Listen. Listen to the sound of your own complaint when the world gets you down, when you are angry, when you are filling out income tax forms. Above all, just listen."³⁸

Informal meditation may be practiced at any time and in any place. The activity is not as important as the way we observe that activity. However, in Zen, several different types of specific activities may be used as a means of ensuring proper practice of in-

formal meditation. Two such activities are the *tea ceremony* and the *mondo*.

The Tea Ceremony

Historically, the tea ceremony was used by *samurai* warriors as a refuge from the constant strain of battle. The ceremony took place in a quiet room, apart from the outside world, to help remove the adverse stimuli of the battleground. Literally and symbolically, the warriors removed their weapons and washed themselves before entering the tea house.

Although the location of the tea house was physically different from that of the battlefield, to further assist the samurai in eliminating mental images of war, the ceremony itself was highly disciplined and ritualized. For example, the act of sipping tea was prescribed to the last detail, and did not vary from day to day. Ritualized actions induced a state of intense involvement in the moment to the exclusion of all distractions of the outside world. A contemporary reflection of this experience is Paul Repts' poem:

*drinking
a bowl of green tea
I stopped the war³⁹*



By removing the images of the battlefield, the warrior was able to open each of his five senses to the ongoing moment: he heard the whistle of the tea kettle, smelled the incense, tasted the slightly bitter tea, and rested his eyes on the scrolls, flower arrangements, and surrounding garden. The tea garden was designed to contribute to this feeling of expansiveness and openness. The small twigs were beautiful as small twigs, and at the same time were the embodiment of mighty trees. Hillocks had meaning both as mounds of dirt and as lofty mountains. The sand, raked to give the appearance of water, was both a still lake and a vast ocean.



The entire ceremony created a feeling of the infinite by means of the finite, a feeling of eternity in the midst of time: a quiet moment of timelessness at once apart from and part of the everyday world.

In Japan, tea is a way of life, an embodiment of the Zen philosophy: a belief in the uniqueness and beauty of the moment. Its ritual and discipline are means for an individual to center and "return to the starting point."

Tea Ceremony Instructions. Although few of us will want or be able to gather together all thirty-four instruments for the tea

ceremony, let me suggest that you observe yourself informally the next time you drink a hot beverage. See how closely you can stay in the moment, investing attention in the task at hand. At first, it may help to give yourself specific instructions, such as: "Let's put aside the cares of today for a while. This is a time for quiet." It may also help to pick a quiet place in the house, and a quiet time, when there will be a minimum of distractions. Tell yourself to open all your senses to what is going on—hear the whistling of the kettle, note the smell of the tea, observe your immediate surroundings.

The Mondo

Mondos are a series of questions and answers which, in their intent, are very similar to the *koan*. Because *mondos* appear to be ridiculous exchanges between Master and monk, they have the effect of removing the individual from the confines of conventional, logical, intellectual constructs. However, *mondos* are not used in the formal posture; instead they are the result of spontaneous interaction between Master and pupil. Whereas the *koan* is a technique of formal meditation, the *mondo* embodies the essence of informal meditation. Some examples follow:⁴⁰

Joshu, when asked about Zen, said, "Have you had your breakfast?"

Monk: Yes.

Joshu: Then go wash your dishes.

Pupil: How can I escape the bondage of birth and death?

Master: Where are you?

A monk came to Shuzan and asked him to play a tune on a stringless harp. The Master was quiet for some while, then said, "Do you hear it?"

Monk: No, I do not hear it.

Master: Why did you not ask me to play louder?

Pupil: Whenever appeal is made to words, Master, there is a taint. What is the truth of the highest order?

Master: Whenever appeal is made to words, there is a taint.

Pupil: Where is the one solitary road to being oneself?

Master: Why trouble yourself to ask about it?

Pupil: Before my parents gave birth to me, where was my nose?

Master: When you are already born of your parents, where are you?

When Ungan was making tea, Dago asked, "To whom are you serving tea?"

Ungan: There is one who wants it.

Dago: Why don't you make him serve himself?

Ungan: Fortunately, I am here.

These questions and answers are teachings that attempt to point directly to the spirit of Zen. Since in Zen belief enlightenment does not come through rational discourse, but rather through direct action, "whenever appeal is made to words, there is a taint." Direct action takes place in everyday activities: eating breakfast, or washing dishes. Metaphysical speculation is seen as worthless. As Buddha wrote in his first sermon:

[Regarding] Questions which tend not to edification: The religious life does not depend on the dogma that the world is eternal, or not eternal, or whether the saint exists after death or does not exist after death. For . . . there still remain birth, old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, misery, grief, and despair.⁴¹

In other words, in Zen the emphasis is not on breaking the bondage of birth and death; rather it is on "where you are now." The moment is all that is important, and in this moment, time has no relevance; neither does birth or death. In this timeless moment, subject-object dichotomies disappear. When Ungan serves himself the tea, he is both subject and object. They are one. And this one is seen, upon awakening, to be egoless. There is no path for discovering the self, for it is already within. This egoless, empty

nature, however, is simultaneously rich and full: emptiness is fullness, and the stringless harp, like one hand clapping, makes sound.

Mondo Instructions. Although *mondo* has a certain logic of its own, its primary purpose is to demonstrate to us the futility of our everyday Western logic. Try pasting an appropriate *mondo* where you can read it frequently: on the bathroom mirror, above your office desk, to a clock. Note how you feel when you read it. What impact does it have when you are stuck on a business problem? Worrying about groceries? Arguing with your spouse? Hopefully, as with other kinds of informal meditation, the *mondo* will give you a perspective, a centered feeling from which to continue your everyday actions.

Additional Zen Techniques

In Zen, according to D. T. Suzuki, every person has the potential to become an "artist" of life.⁴² Meditation is one means of getting in touch with this creative potential which all of us have. There are two additional Zen techniques associated with meditation which I would like to describe here—*sumi-e* and *haiku*. These techniques illustrate ways all of us can further express the creative potential within us.

Sumi-e

Sumi-e is brush-stroke painting. Initially, the artist makes the paint by stroking hard charcoal in a circular motion on a piece of stone. This process is a type of concentrative meditation in which the artist focuses on a repetitive motion over a period of time. This concentrative meditation empties his mind so that subsequently he is able to see afresh the environment he is going to paint. Then, through an informal opening-up meditation, the artist tries to penetrate, to see the spirit of the environment he is about to paint. When he executes the painting, his strokes are quick, yet deliberate, embodying both perfect spontaneity and perfect self-control.

The painting does not attempt accurate representation, but rather to capture the moving spirit, for nothing is static except that which is dead. *Sumi-e* therefore involves the unexpected. In looking at a picture of the Chinese or Japanese masters, when one

expects a line, it isn't there. Whiteness (emptiness) becomes a lake, or a waterfall.

If the artist is truly like a mirror when he is painting, then the picture will reflect his spirit as well as the spirit of the object. If he allows logic or reflection to come between the brush and the paper, the whole work is spoiled. Suzuki has compared Zen and *Sumi-e* to Western philosophy and oil painting. In oil painting, there is layer upon layer of paint, reflective construction, as in Western philosophy. In Zen, "life is a *sumi-e* painting, which must be executed once for all time, without hesitation, without intellectualization. In this painting, all corrections show when the ink dries; Zen seeks to show the fleeting, unrepeatable, ungraspable character of life."⁴³ No corrections, erasures, or improvements are allowed: as in life, actions are irrevocable.

Sumi-e Instructions. There are several good books for instruction in *sumi-e*. The basic equipment you need is the brush, a stone, and the chalk, as well as some paper. Regarding technique, there are two schools of thought on how to hold the brush: one says you absolutely do not hold the brush like a pencil, but rather hold it upright. The second school says to hold it exactly like a pencil. Sound like a Zen koan? Let's interpret these contradictory instructions as giving us permission to hold the brush exactly as we wish. Our goal is a free-flowing stroke that allows us to catch a glimpse of the spirit of nature . . . of our spirit.

The illustrations on the following pages are paintings done by Johanna, two of my students, and myself.

Haiku

Bradford Smith⁴⁴ has conceptualized *haiku* as a form of meditation. As in *sumi-e*, the poet opens all his senses to the surrounding environment. He tries to be aware of everything, to accept all inputs without discrimination or differentiation.

In its form, the haiku is a simple, concise style of poetry, consisting of only seventeen syllables, grouped in a 5-7-5 pattern.* Its subject matter is generally derived from nature. In its tone, it is characterized by *sabi-wabi* (the spirit of eternal loneliness). As Suzuki writes, "A certain loneliness engendered by traveling leads

*These Haiku poems are not in the 5-7-5 pattern because they have been translated into English.

one to reflect upon the meaning of life, for life is, after all, a traveling from one unknown to another."⁴⁵ Let me repeat the example we have already given from Basho:

*Over the darkened sea
Only the shrill voice of a flying duck
Is visible
In soft white*

In addition to illustrating an intermingling of senses, this poem also illustrates a quality of egolessness. Basho never says "I." We never see him, yet he is everywhere in the poem. Although he is concealed by the dark night, we hear him, feel him, see him, "in soft white," within us.

The following haiku, again by Basho, also shares this absence of "I":

*Breaking the silence
Of an ancient pond
A frog jumped into the water —
A deep resonance*⁴⁶

Where is Basho? On the surface this poem is an objective description of observable reality: a pond and a frog that sends vibrations rippling through the pond. But the pond is also a mirror held up to internally reflect the author's mind. The resonance in the ancient pond is Basho writing the poem.

In meditation, the goal is to become empty, like a mirror. To write poetry, the artist must also be like a mirror, so that "he and the object become one. If he and the object are separate, then his poetry is not true poetry, but subjective counterfeit."⁴⁷ The mirror accurately reflects and is not associated with such subjective counterfeits as "I" or ego. To meditate (action in inaction) is to write a poem (inaction in action). Creativity is an attitude, and can exist even when nothing new is created in the world of things. The person of enlightenment creates a poem by watching a sunset, even though he or she writes no words and makes no movement.*

*It may be important to note the way a literary poem seems to integrate the two brain hemispheres: the open receptivity to nature (right) with the poetic rendering of that receptivity in words (left). For further discus-





Haiku Instructions. When we write haiku we are not trying to get the exact 5-7-5 syllables but merely to see poetry as an expression of ourself; another way of interacting and relating with nature and the environment. In workshops I have people arise before dawn and go to a favorite natural spot. I instruct them to relax, enjoy, and *be* in that spot. They may just want to breathe in nature, or they may want to jot down a few lines. Let me ask you to do the same. Find a place that you particularly like in nature, whether it be by the ocean or a lake, some trees, a stream, or a particular tree or a small garden, whatever is important to you. Practice meditation there and if you'd like to write a few lines about the experience, either about meditation or about the setting in which you are, do so. Don't be worried about trying to write a poem. Here are some of the poems my students have written for workshops and classes,⁴⁸ as well as some by myself (D.) and my wife (J.).⁴⁹

*On the stark limbs
of a winter tree:
a bluebird eating
an orange persimmon*
—D.

*Many haiku poems
really are no more profound
than a blade of grass*

*Whiteness of birch
in a crystal wind
disturbing the silver
fragility of dusk*
—J.

*Noiselessly, the bicycle's wheel
runs over the bird's shadow*
—D.

*Blue sky, cloud wisps
in calm misty water*

sion of this integration, see the section in the Epilogue on the care and maintenance of the mind.

*The tree limb's shadows
sway on the dirt, revealing
the wind's quiet preserve*

—D.

*The puddle mirrors
rain drops dissolving in the
image they contain*

—J.

*A bubble rising
from below the surface
ripples, ripples . . .
calms*

*Death's wing
makes life's moment
into a soaring flight
of intensity*

—D.

*On the underside of opaque leaves
the sun reveals tiny veins
facing earthward*

—D.

Another form of poetry called *linked verse* is a Chinese poetry form in which each stanza adds to the one preceding. You may wish to practice writing a linked verse poem with a friend — a rewarding shared experience.

Frozen snow encloses the night

—D.

*The white candle wax cries
as the spiraling red flame
causes the wick to decay into ashes*

—J.

*The hardened remains of a
cold silent puddle lie unseen*

—D.

SUMMARY

When we first observe ourselves or our behavior, an awkwardness occurs. This awkwardness, which may range from confusion to pain, is one of the reasons we seem to have an initial reluctance to tune in to ourselves. In the first step of meditation, there is a similar self-conscious awkwardness. However, by continuing to practice meditation, we soon learn to overcome this awkwardness. With further practice we learn to maintain an effortless breathing, to be calm when faced with fears and concerns, and eventually to have an empty mind. This empty mind, in which there is no internal chatter, is a different state of consciousness than our ordinary awareness, and has several advantages. It provides us with an openness and receptivity to the world of nature, to other people, and to our own internal world.

Several different meditative techniques were discussed, and a comparison was made between concentrative and opening-up techniques. Informal meditation was also discussed, including the tea ceremony and the *mondo*.

Finally, the techniques of *sumi-e* and *haiku* were illustrated so that we could learn to relate to and express ourselves creatively through writing or painting, as well as through our breathing.

All these techniques involve a different mode of awareness than we are used to; and provide us with a certain type of knowledge about ourselves and the world around us. This new mode of awareness can help us, like Siddhartha, clearly hear the bird in our breast sing.