

5

A New Alternative: The Path of Heart

*Does this path have a heart?
If it does, the path is good; if it
doesn't, it is of no use. Both paths
lead nowhere; but one has a heart,
the other doesn't. One makes for
a joyful journey; as long as you
follow it, you are one with it.
The other will make you curse
your life. One makes you strong;
the other weakens you.*

Anything is one of a million paths. . . . Therefore you must always keep in mind that a path is only a path; if you feel you should not follow it, you must not stay with it under any conditions. To have such clarity you must lead a disciplined life. Only then will you know that any path is only a path, and there is no affront, to oneself or to others, in dropping it if that is what your heart tells you to do. But your decision to keep on the path or to leave it must be free of fear or ambition. I warn you. Look at every path closely and deliberately. Try it as many times as you think necessary. This question is one that only a very old man asks. My benefactor told me about it once when I was young, and my blood was too vigorous for me to understand it. Now I do understand it. I will tell you what it is: Does this path have a heart? All paths are the same: they lead nowhere. They are paths going through the bush, or into the bush. In my own life I could say I have traversed long, long paths, but I am not anywhere. My benefactor's question has meaning now. Does this path have a heart? If it does, the path is good; if it doesn't it is of no use. Both paths lead nowhere; but one has a heart, the other doesn't. One makes for a joyful journey; as long as you follow it, you are one with it. The other will make you curse your life. One makes you strong; the other weakens you.¹

In a real sense, the crisis discussed in Chapter 3 may be like a death — the death of an old lifestyle. In Hesse's book *Siddhartha*, the protagonist goes through many symbolic deaths *during* his lifetime. He dies when he leaves his father to live with the ascetics; he dies when he leaves the ascetics to search on his own; he dies when

he leaves the city, and the ways of the businessman Kawaswami and the ways of the goddess of sensual pleasure, Kamala.

Yet each time Siddhartha dies, each time there is a death of an old lifestyle, there is an opportunity for re-choosing himself, an affirmation of a new lifestyle. Siddhartha literally has the opportunity to be reborn within the context of life.

As was suggested in Chapter 4, we too have the opportunity for choosing a new life, a new vision of ourselves. In this chapter we will examine the ways in which the Eastern and the Western visions of the human potential may be integrated.

We begin the creation of this integrated vision — this path of heart — at a time of confusion. As in the second stanza of the poem that began Chapter 4, things are not as they should be. We are literally searching for a third stanza, a new alternative.

Let us now turn to a discussion of the Zen and the social learning theory concepts of the “self” and see how these two views may be combined to help us formulate a new alternative.

THE SEARCH FOR THE “REAL ME”



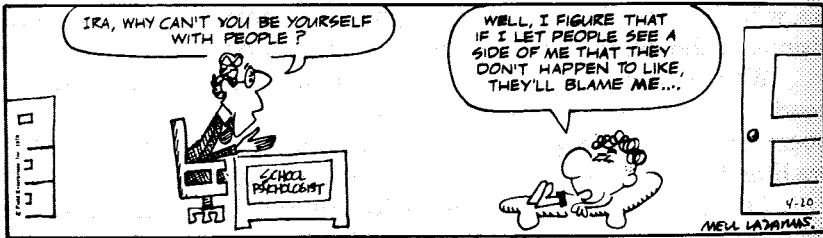
We may laugh at Irwin’s belief that Uncle Vilo may be found in close proximity to the location of Gaylord’s “real me.” But what is the “real me”? All of us have said, or heard someone say, “He’s not acting like himself,” “I didn’t feel true to myself when I did that,” “She’s doing that for others, not because she really wants to,” “Relax, be yourself.” All these statements suggest the existence of a real me, a “real self,” which is often covered by a facade. As noted in Chapter 4, the Jungians have called this facade

ZEN BEHAVIORISM

the *persona*.² Carl Rogers has referred to it in terms of *not acting congruently with oneself*.³ David Reisman referred to this phenomenon as *other-directedness*: that is, having one's direction in life determined by people and events outside oneself.⁴ Many of us, like Ira below, have a fear of exposing this real me to the outside world:

MISS PEACH

By Mell Lazarus



Ira is distinguishing between “a side of me” and the “real me.” Although intuitively we understand what Ira and Gaylord in the above cartoons mean by “a side of me” and the “real me,” most of us would have difficulty explaining this precisely in words. Although we believe in the existence of a “real me,” many of us would have difficulty saying where to turn in order to look for it, and would not be certain we could recognize it, even if we could find it. In the following material we will discuss both the Eastern and Western approaches to finding this “real me.”

Removing Preconceptions and Trait Descriptions

Removing Preconceptions

As we noted in Chapter 3, as long as we are trapped in our conception of ourselves, we don't allow ourselves the freedom to experiment outside the bounds of this conception. Removing preconceptions gives us the freedom to see who we are in the here and now, and also gives us the freedom to begin to choose (or re-choose) a vision of ourselves — who we would like to become.

A parable from the tea master, Nan-in, is instructive in illustrating this point:

Nan-in, a Japanese tea master during the Meiji era, received a university professor who came to inquire about Zen. Nan-in served tea. He poured the visitor's cup full, and then kept on pouring. The professor watched the overflow until he could restrain himself no longer: "It is overfull, no more will go in."

"Like this cup," Nan-in responded, "you are full of your own opinions and speculations. How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup?"⁵

Just as the professor couldn't see Zen until he removed his preconceptions, so too, we can't begin to find our real me's until we remove our own preconceptions.

Yet it is extremely difficult to perceive our own preconceptions because we are not aware that we have any. To help in learning to see your own preconceptions, let me ask you to do three quick exercises. First, think of the worst person you are actually acquainted with and see occasionally. Quickly think of the two worst characteristics of this person, and write them below. Don't think too hard — write down the first two that come to mind.

1. _____

2. _____

Now, just as quickly, think of and write down two of your own positive characteristics.

1. _____

2. _____

Finally, write down two of your negative characteristics.

1. _____
2. _____

Please do the above exercises before proceeding, because we will refer back to them.

Trait Descriptions

In psychological terms, a *trait* is a verbal label that is used to describe an individual's behavior across a variety of situations: e.g., "He's a hyperactive child," "John is a sensitive man," "Jeannie is an aggressive woman," "Zed is a self-actualized human being." Psychologists (e.g., Allport, Cattell, Jung) study traits in order to determine whether individuals have consistent patterns of behavior, whether all people have certain basic traits, and whether certain traits are healthier than others. Normally these traits are thought to be innate (Freud's *aggression*, ego psychologists' *self-actualization*), although some theorists (e.g., Allport) talk of *acquired traits*.

All of us, whether psychologists or not, use trait terms when describing ourselves and others. See, for example, the words you used to describe your worst enemy and yourself above. It is very difficult not to use trait descriptions. For example, try describing a mutual acquaintance without referring to personal traits.

Psychologists attempt to be more scientific and objective in their assessment of traits by using a variety of diagnostic tests and instruments. The assumption is made that, when a person has a particular trait, this trait appears "across situations." For example, an "aggressive" person is someone who is aggressive with parents, spouse, siblings, peers — at home, at school, and in the office. The "hyperactive" child is hyperactive in all situations with many different types of people.

However, although psychologists claim to be objective in assessing traits, research is showing that the characteristics people "assess" in others are more related to the way they themselves see the world than to the actual behavior of the individual(s) involved. This seems to be true for laypeople as well as psychologists. For example, research results indicate that once stimuli are grouped, the perceiver tends to retain the category even in the face of contradictory evidence. He pays less attention to new evidence and

focuses on confirming information.⁶ In one study it was found that psychotherapists categorized patients in the initial two to four hours, and that this categorization was enduring after twenty-four sessions. Additional information that didn't confirm the initial conceptualization was ignored.⁷ A very important study showing the way traits are (mis)used was done by David Rosenhan of Stanford University.⁸ In this study eight "normal" individuals had themselves admitted to different psychiatric hospitals. They gained entrance by telling the admission officers that they heard voices (of the same sex), saying "empty, thud, hollow." Beyond alleging the symptoms and changing their names, vocations, and employment, no other changes in life history, personal relationships, etc. were made. Immediately upon gaining admission to the hospital, the pseudo-patients were given diagnostic labels. Seven were classified as schizophrenic and one was classified as manic-depressive. During the course of their hospital stay, the "pseudo-patients" were given nearly 2,100 different pills, ranging from tranquilizers to anti-depressants. As Rosenhan noted, this range of medication is itself remarkable, since the "pseudo-patients" presented identical symptoms. All the "pseudo-patients" took copious notes during their stays, and this was identified by the staff as "compulsive writing behavior."

A psychiatrist pointed to a group of patients standing in line a half-hour before lunchtime, and noted that such behavior was characteristic of the oral-acquisitive nature of the syndrome. "It seemed not to occur to him that there were very few things to anticipate in a psychiatric hospital besides eating."⁹

When the "pseudo-patients" were finally discharged from the hospital, they were diagnosed as being "in remission." In other words, the hospital staff felt that even though the person was no longer disturbed enough to remain in the hospital, he was still a "schizophrenic" and his illness was likely to recur.

The relationship between behavior and trait descriptions illustrated by this study may be described as follows:

| <i>Behavior before Diagnosis</i> | <i>Diagnostic Label Assessment</i> | <i>Behavior after Diagnosis</i> | <i>Interpretation of Behavior after Diagnosis</i> |
|--------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|---|
| claims of internal voices heard | schizophrenic | writing; waiting in line to eat | compulsive, oral-acquisitive |

ZEN BEHAVIORISM

The behavior before diagnosis was seen as a symptom; the label "schizophrenic" was diagnosed as the disease causing the symptom, and subsequent behaviors were re-interpreted by the staff in ways that were consistent with the diagnostic label given to the patient.

Skinner has called this line of reasoning a *middle way station*.¹⁰ The middle way station refers to the step of interpreting a person's behavior due to a state of mind (anxious person; oral-acquisitive nature) rather than to the situation (important interview; nothing to look forward to in a hospital but meals). For example, let's imagine that an individual is about to go for a very important job interview. We observe this person and notice how anxious and tense he is (behavior before diagnosis). We describe that person's behavior by saying "He's an anxious person." In so doing, we give that person a trait (anxiety) which, in addition to describing his behavior, we assume also *explains* and *predicts* his behavior.

Behavior before Diagnosis/Label

Label

Assumption

Person acting
anxious before
interview

Anxious person

Anxiety is that person's state of mind and he will act that way across situations; if he doesn't appear anxious, he is only "in remission"

Social learning theorists, such as Mischel, point out that it is more useful to limit our discussion to a person's *behaviors*, the situations that provoke them, and their ramifications, rather than to the labels we attach to those behaviors. In that way, we are able to remove some of the limitations of ordinary awareness, and allow ourselves to remain more open to the total range of an individual's skills and capabilities. As Mischel noted after reviewing the literature on personality traits, "Traits are categories of the observer to describe behavior, and not necessarily the property of the observed behavior itself."¹¹

Just as we apply trait descriptions to other people, we also apply them to ourselves. These trait descriptions make up our "self-concept." Social learning theorists are among those who hold

that these self-descriptions do not explain behavior, and therefore, as Skinner stresses, are nothing but an "explanatory fiction."

This social learning theory view is similar to the existential view, which likewise rejects trait labels (essence) and focuses on a person's behavior (existence).¹² It is also similar to the Zen view, as we saw in Chapter 1. For example, throughout the Zen literature there are stories, *koans* and *mondos*, which point out the limitations of words to describe experience and, in the case of our current discussion, the limits of words in describing people.

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

Master: Whenever appeal is made to words, there is a taint.¹³

The Zen way suggests that trait descriptions remove us further from the reality of experience and behavior, thereby removing us from the truth of the "highest order." As related to Rosenhan's study, Zen believers realize that we come to see people in terms of trait descriptions rather than as they "really are." Therefore, the Zen way suggests that we need to learn to remove labels or stop labeling in order to see people in all their humanness. As we discussed in Chapter 1, this involves seeing the flower the five hundredth time as we saw it the first time: that is, to see the flower with all the freshness of a new experience, unencumbered by words and labels. In psychological terms, the Zen way suggests that people learn to see without forming trait descriptions, and to observe nature, self, and other people without using categorization and trait labeling.

Thus, both Zen and social learning theorists agree that traits are, at best, not useful; and, at worst, they can be quite harmful. However, traits are very much a part of our language, our way of thinking, and are not easy to give up.

It might be worthwhile to try this experiment to give yourself a bit more freedom to see yourself. Take one of the two negative traits which you wrote down about yourself. For example, let's consider a label "hyperanxiety." Now take one of the

data charts from the second chapter, and follow the steps of self-observation. First, define what you mean by "hyperanxiety." Then observe this behavior for a few days. Note particularly if you are hyperanxious twenty-four hours a day. If not, are there certain times of the day when you are more anxious than at other times? Are there certain people around whom you are more anxious? Are there certain physical places in which you are more anxious or less anxious? Are there certain situations (e.g., large party, alone with a friend) which cause more anxiety than others?

Observe this trait of yours for a couple of days. I think you will begin to find that, to a certain extent, a trait description is meaningless. There are many, many variations in the way a trait manifests itself each day, depending on the circumstances. Give yourself the freedom to see how you *really* act, rather than simply your conceptualization of how you act.

Now let's try another experiment. Go back to the two words you used to describe your worst enemy. Let's say they were "uncaring" and "selfish." Rather than use these words as trait labels—"he's an uncaring and selfish person"—let's try to rephrase them in terms of behavior: "He *acted* selfishly and uncaringly toward me in the following situations." This involves much more than making a semantic distinction for, in fact, we now give our enemy the freedom to be *who he really is*. We may find that this person also can be generous and caring toward other people. He may even be caring toward us at times. As long as we maintain trait labels, we blind ourselves to the very real nuances of behavior. We also blind ourselves to the possibility of change. Traits are seen as long-enduring, part of a person's "real me." They nearly preclude the possibility of an individual's learning new ways of acting. However, as social learning theorists stress, just as our behavior is learned, it can be unlearned and relearned. We can act in different ways if we so choose, and if we give ourself the freedom to *not* be bound by trait descriptions.

Thus, we can see that Zen, existentialist, and social learning theorists suggest that the concept of "self" is a fiction. We begin to know more about our "real me's" not by conceptualizing ourselves, but by *acting, experiencing, and observing* our behaviors as they really are.

Finding Out What's Left Once We Remove Preconceptions

The Zen View of the Real Me: The Artist of Life

According to the Zen view, once we remove our preconceptions, we will see our true self, and this "real me" is positive, unifying, and innately good. In D. T. Suzuki's words, every human being is "so constituted by nature that he can become an artist of life,"¹⁴ and "Zen, in its essence, is the art of seeing into the nature of one's being—giving free play to all the creative and benevolent impulses inherently lying in our heart."¹⁵ This basic, good, and real self is quite different from Freud's warring, aggressive id; rather, it is similar to the Jungian integrated, *individuated self*¹⁶; to Buckes' *cosmic consciousness*¹⁷; to Rogers', Maslow's, and Goldstein's *self-actualizing ego*.¹⁸

However, within the Zen framework, if we conceptualize these potentials in terms of positive traits, we are distorting reality. Traits, even positive traits, are but *descriptions* of reality, and not reality itself. Thus, in Zen, the "real me" is often referred to as "no-self" or "egolessness" or the Tao: that which is beyond words.

But what are some of the qualities of this Zen "no-self"? How will we recognize it when we find it? If the real me in Zen is not describable in words; and if even certain aspects of the discovery of this real me cannot be described, is there any information that can help guide us in our search? Or are we to be left empty-handed?

There are certain guideposts that may be helpful in the search for the real me. However, guideposts must be thought of in Zen terms as the finger pointing to the moon: once the moon has been seen, the finger is no longer necessary.

The guideposts we will use here consist of a parable and an analogy.

Finding The Real Me: A Parable

Strivata stood in front of the oak panel door, waiting for Naciketas to come with the key. Strivata waited anxiously at first, looking quickly over both shoulders for Naciketas' arrival. Several

ZEN BEHAVIORISM

minutes passed, and still there was no sign of Naciketas. Realizing the anxiety within, Strivata decided to sit at the base of the door, wait patiently, and meditate on the intricate carvings which extended in coiled fashion from the upper right-hand corner. Naciketas approached from behind, and his shadow climbed over Strivata's and ascended the door.

"I am glad you have come," said Strivata. "There is no way for me to enter without the key."

Naciketas laughed.

"Do not laugh," Strivata responded angrily. "The sun is setting, I am becoming cold, and I have waited long for you."

"I thought you would return before me, so I left the door unlatched," Naciketas replied.

Strivata entered the unlocked door. The sun went down, casting all in dark shadows. Yet, even before the fire was built, Strivata saw more clearly.

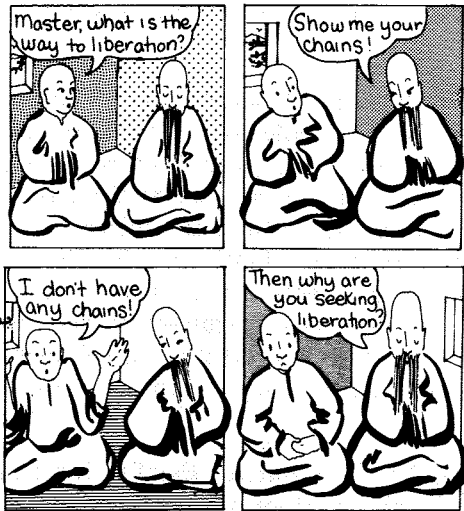
There are several points worth noticing in this parable. For example, notice that the door (symbolizing Strivata's true self) was unlocked and Strivata could have opened it without help; the "key" (to enter the door, to enter the self) was within all the time. However, although Strivata needed no teacher to open the door, to find his "real self," it seemed that a teacher was, in fact, needed, if only to point out no teacher was needed. Once Strivata realized this lesson, even though the room was becoming dark, he "saw more clearly."

Finding The Real Me: An Analogy

The second guidepost we will use is the analogy of a mirror representing the Zen concept of the real me. There are four qualities of the mirror which are applicable.

1. *Quality of Emptiness.* When a mirror is clean and free from dust, dirt, and stains, it is empty. In psychological terms, when our minds are empty (that is, free of verbal statements and images), there is an absence of preconceptions, strivings, and thoughts. Since, as was pointed out earlier, preconceptions in-

fluence the way we interpret ordinary reality, the “emptiness” of the mind allows us to see “what is” without the ordinary cognitive chatter and constructs.



According to the Zen way we are born with this wisdom of emptiness, and are thus able to interact fully and “clearly” with whatever is around. Thus, in the words of the *Prajna Paramita Sutra*, “the emptiness [of the mirror] is actually [its] fullness.” Our mirror-like nature becomes “stained” by words, labels, strivings, ambitions, and soon reality becomes distorted to meet one’s preconceptions of it. Therefore, one aspect of finding the real me is to return to a state of emptiness by wiping the preconceptions from the face of the mirror.

2. *Quality of Acceptance.* The second quality of a mirror might be referred to as acceptance, or nonevaluation. The mirror accepts everything into itself without making any distinctions or judgments (wisdom of equalness). Any object put in front of the mirror—a big ball, a red cat, a poor person, a rich person—is

reflected by the mirror without distinction. The mirror does not comment on whatever is around it: it merely accepts it into itself.

In psychological terms, the mirror reflects in a manner what Carl Rogers would call *nonjudgmental*; what social learning theorists would call *without evaluation*.¹⁹ A person who has this "mirror nature" would be able, in Paul Tillich's words, to "accept that you are accepted."²⁰

3. *Quality of Accurate Discrimination.* The third quality of a clean mirror is that it is able to differentiate and discriminate: for example, large from small, green from red, a happy face from a sad face. This has been referred to as the *wisdom of accurate reflection*. Thus, at the same time the mirror accepts everything into itself (quality of nonevaluation) it is also able to tell the difference between the objects that it is reflecting (quality of discrimination). In other words, our true selves, according to Zen, are both able to see and accept everything into themselves equally, while at the same time making discriminations about different objects.

4. *Quality of Nonattachment.* Finally, the clean mirror may be characterized by the wisdom of nonclinging or nonattachment. When an object is put in front of a mirror, the mirror reflects that object instantly without any distortion or projection (quality of nondiscrimination). Further, as soon as the object is taken away, the mirror is able to "yield" or let go of the subject. Thus, the real me, according to Zen, fully and completely interacts with whatever is in front of it, and yet does so in a nonpossessive, nonclinging manner.

Naranjo and Ornstein have elaborated on the concept of consciousness as a mirror as follows:

The mirror allows every input to enter equally, reflects each equally, and cannot be tuned to receive a special kind of input. It does not add anything to the input and does not turn off receptivity to stimuli. It does not focus on any particular aspect of input and retune back and forth but continuously admits all inputs equally. . . .²¹

Thus we see that our true nature, according to Zen belief, is like the empty mirror: it interacts fully with the environment,

accepts all into itself without evaluation; is able to discriminate; and is yielding and nonpossessive. As Shinru Suzuki Roshi noted, "The perfect man employs his mind as a mirror: it grasps nothing, it receives but does not keep."²²

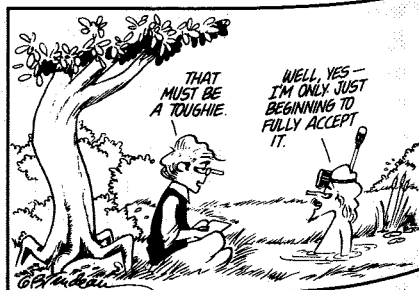
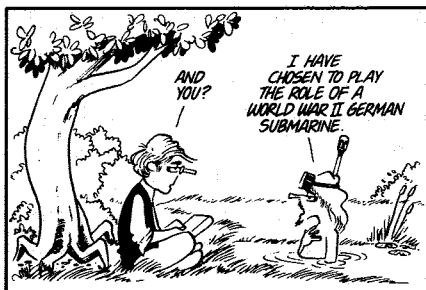
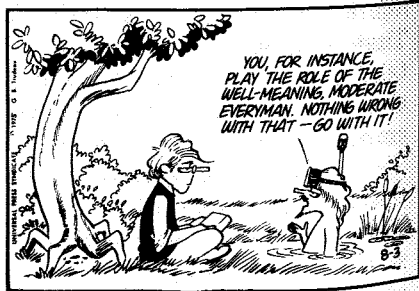
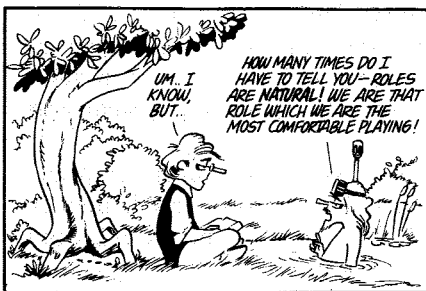
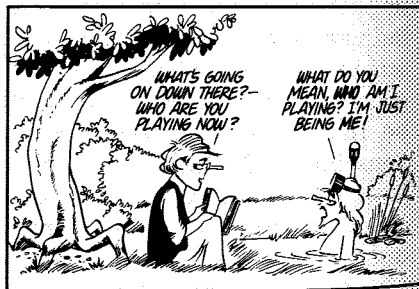
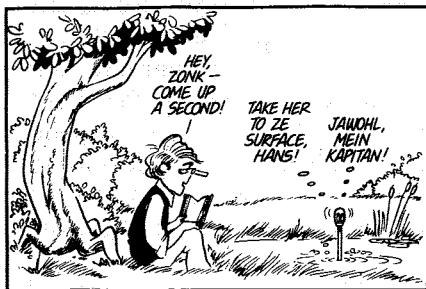
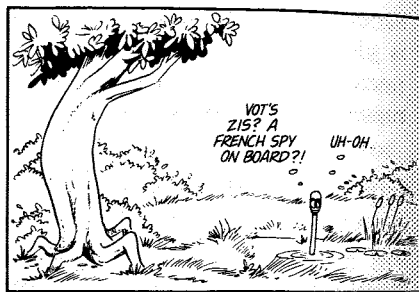
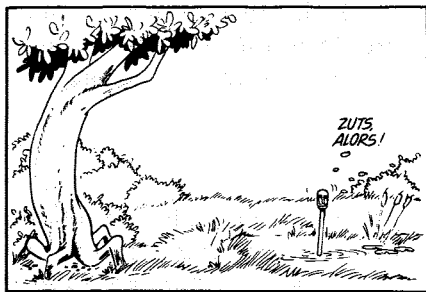
Implications of the Zen View

As we have seen, the Zen way posits that the mirrorlike nature of our *self* is innately good and positive. Further, this real self is within all of us, if only we are willing to see it. There are three important implications of this view of personality. First, the individual who is searching for the "real me" is able to *trust himself* in the very act of searching. Believing that our inner nature is good, we are "content to let behavior bring out a self which cannot be fully conceptualized. One trusts this self enough to suspend conscious reflective control over it."²³ This allows us not only to trust ourselves more but also to be more open, willing to see the spark of goodness within ourselves, and therefore able to be more open and sensitive to other people.

Secondly, this Zen view of the self implies a possible *causal relationship between the individual and his/her subsequent actions*. That is, if we believe in ourselves, we are more likely to engage in taking risks, try new paths, let ourselves be free to act creatively, and listen to and trust our body signals regarding physical and emotional health and healing.

Finally, this Zen view of the person has important implications for the therapist and educator. If these professionals believe and trust in the innate ability and goodness of the individual, they will be more likely to allow their students/clients *room for personal exploration and latitude for acting creatively*. For example, within the ego psychology model of therapy practiced by Carl Rogers, the client is treated as a person competent to direct his/her own actions. Likewise, a physician "healer" of psychosomatic complaints who believes in innate abilities will be more likely to encourage the patient to take an active role in healing him/herself.

Thus, the relationship between mind and body, between our view of ourselves and our subsequent behavior, and between the educator/therapist's view of the individual and his/her subsequent style of healing and teaching are all areas that may be affected by the Zen view of the "real me."



CHOOSING THE "REAL ME"

The Zen concept of self emphasizes that our "real me" is within us already, and will unfold naturally once we clear away our preconceptions. As we have seen, social learning theorists agree that we need to clear away the preconceptions (trait labels); however, they suggest that there is no innate essence within us. Rather, like existentialists, they emphasize the role of *choice*, stressing that the kinds of choices we make help determine our real selves. Existentialists such as Brentano and Husserl,²⁴ have talked of *Verstellung*—intentionality—and its importance in determining who we in fact become. Action and choice are essential to the vision of the self. According to the social learning theory model and existential view, the real me is what I *choose* to do.

In the last frame of the Doonesbury cartoon (opposite), Zonk points out the difficulties of choosing a new role. Zonk notes, however (in the fourth frame), that this new role is *not* just *playing* at a role, it is in fact *being* me.

How does this model of choosing a "real me" relate to the Zen view that the real self is already within us? According to Eastern philosophy, we will naturally unfold in a "self-actualizing" manner, and that evolution moves toward what de Chardin²⁵ described as an "omega point of consciousness." Social learning theorists emphasize the *interaction between individuals and their environment*²⁶; and, since they believe that evolution is random, they stress the need to learn techniques by which we can take more control over our own behavior.

In the social learning theory/existential model, we have to decide what role we want for ourselves, and then use certain techniques (described in Chapter 2) such as self-management skills, in order to attain that role. In the Zen model, we also use certain techniques (described in Chapter 1). The primary difference, however, is that the East believes the techniques only help us recover what is already there, whereas the West believes that we become what we choose to become.

Perhaps Western personality theory and research will never empirically prove whether the true Zen Master merely uncovers

ZEN BEHAVIORISM

what is already there, or learns, through diligent practice, to make himself into a truly exceptional person. Perhaps the question itself is unanswerable, just as is the question of whether or not Michelangelo's sculptures were in fact encased in the rough marble, waiting to be freed by him. What is important is that Michelangelo believed "as if" the sculptures were waiting to be freed, that he had a vision of what the sculpture would look like, and that he had the necessary skills and techniques to reach his vision.

If we believe the Zen model is worth attaining, and if we attempt to act "as if"²⁷ we have Zen's real me within us, and "as if" other people are also "divine beings" who should be respected, this will influence our behavior toward ourselves and others. Acting as if we are this way may turn into a positive self-fulfilling prophecy, so that we become what we believe we are. As the Japanese scientist Tomio Hirai noted, "although the start of the study [personality theory] is different in East and West, the results are the same."²⁸

INTEGRATING THE EAST-WEST VISION TO FIND THE PATH OF HEART

Some people turn to the East for the spiritual values that seem so lacking in an increasingly materialistic and impersonal society. Others turn to the East for the relaxation and tranquility provided by self-regulation techniques such as meditation and yoga.²⁹

Yet we live in the ways of the world. And much of the Eastern philosophy, though it sounds appealing, doesn't quite seem to make sense within the context of our Western socialization. In the West, we are taught to stand up for ourselves, to be assertive. Yet the East says to yield.

In the West, we are taught that it is important to have a strong, healthy self-concept, yet the East says we should be egoless.

In the West, we are taught to be productive, to plan for the future, to set goals, to accomplish tasks; yet the East says to let go, enjoy the here and now, remain calm and centered in the present moment.

In the West, we are taught the importance of commitment and relationship, yet the East says we should be nonattached and indifferent.

The chart that follows gives a complete listing of all the concepts to be discussed in this chapter, how they differ from East to West, and their negative and positive ramifications. In this section I would like to deal with some of these contradictions; by the end of the chapter, you will know how they can be integrated and how, paradoxically, such an integrated Eastern and Western vision may provide a model of the "path of heart."

Productivity (Becoming) and Centeredness (Being)

A few years ago I gave a workshop on meditation to high-risk coronary disease-prone business executives. I had them free-associate to the qualities of a "good businessperson." Their responses included the following words:

- aggressive
- motivated
- ambitious
- hard-working
- productive

I then had them free-associate regarding qualities they felt meditation had, and they responded with the following words:

- passive
- quiet
- tranquil
- unconcerned

I asked them to compare the two lists, and asked why they were here — wouldn't becoming a good meditator preclude their being a good businessperson?

EAST

| <i>Concept</i> | <i>Negative Aspects</i> | <i>Positive Aspects</i> |
|--|---|--|
| Egolessness | don't believe in oneself; passive; not willing to make decisions and choose a direction; not taking responsibility for one's actions; overdependence on others: lose oneself in trying to please them | ability to take risks more fully without fear of being judged by others; ability to experience oneself in a variety of situations without self-concept being threatened; ability to be with other people without gameplaying and without being threatened by them; ability to adapt to a wide variety of situations; ability to be nonself-conscious, and therefore more open to others; ability to engage in a variety of actions without attachment to rewards for actions |
| Naturalness, spontaneity; centeredness | not able to set goals for oneself; living only in the moment; no planning or future direction; lack of vigor | willing to trust oneself, to let go, trusting intuition; openness to experience, creativity; relaxation, peace of mind, living in moment, seeing action in inaction |
| Yielding | mushiness, lack of standards, flaccid, giving up; not willing to stand up for oneself | flexibility, ability to let go, gentleness, softness, accepting helplessness; openness to others' ideas and inputs |
| Nonattachment (acceptance) | noncaring, numbness; withdrawn, no feelings | nonpossessive, able to see more clearly and objectively; broad perspective; nonjudgmental |
| Consciousness (altered states) | nonfocused; goalless; useless in the ways of the world | living in moment; nongoal-oriented; noncognitive openness to others, to nature, to experience |

WEST

| <i>Concept</i> | <i>Negative Aspects</i> | <i>Positive Aspects</i> |
|------------------------------------|---|--|
| Strong ego | development of mask to hide behind; fear of letting "true self" show; fear of fallibility, of being incompetent; trying to impress others to build a sense of self-worth; seeing others as a threat to identity; needing status/possessions to bolster identity; less willing to listen to others, less caring about others' opinions | personal sense of identity; sense of uniqueness; feelings of self-control (attribution theory); positive feelings about oneself, and willing to work hard to keep those positive feelings; feeling of competence, and willing to act on that feeling |
| Self-control, productivity | not living in the moment; constantly goal setting, evaluating, categorizing; overly aroused, maladaptive interpersonally, and from health standpoint, type A behavior | skills to set goals, evaluate one's progress; willingness to strive for personal vigor, excellence, perfection |
| Assertiveness | nonyielding, pushy, bully | willingness to stand up for one's rights; firm in one's beliefs; trusting of one's judgments |
| Attachment (caring love) | fear of losing others, objects, oneself (death); possessiveness; resentment | cares strongly about certain ideas, people; willing to commit oneself for those one is attached to |
| Consciousness (ordinary awareness) | ignores certain inputs; insensitive to delicate stimuli; words take place of experience | precise awareness; thinking, labeling, evaluating, goal setting; makes order out of sensory inputs |

Productive individuals are those who can set goals and accomplish tasks. In terms of our discussion of attribution theory, such people believe they are in control of their own lives; they make things happen; they don't feel themselves passively determined by their environment. They accept new challenges, take risks, and strive for excellence.

So far so good. Certainly all of us who have lived in the West would not disagree with the utility of these qualities.

However, there are some potential drawbacks to these qualities. From a health standpoint, this type of behavior may lead to heart attacks, ulcers, migraine headaches, and psychosomatic problems. From an interpersonal standpoint, it may be difficult for competitive and ambitious people to get close to others to be able to share and work cooperatively. And finally, from a personal standpoint, it may be difficult for this type of person to enjoy the quietness of a moment, for fear of wasting time and not conquering a new problem.

Again, most of us in the West would agree that these are real or potential drawbacks to the productive, fast-paced life. Yet we would also have some reservations about the consequences of giving up our ambitiousness and goal-orientedness for an Eastern mode emphasizing yielding, egolessness, and letting go. Let me see if I can state some of the concerns that may be going through our minds. First, we would be afraid that our productivity might decrease, and that the quality of our work would be less excellent. There is a common belief in our society that we need to have a certain amount of tension and anxiety to perform optimally. Heidegger,³⁰ for example, felt that the anxiety of facing death caused us to deal with life more honestly and fully. It is thought useful for athletes to have butterflies in their stomachs to give them a "keen edge." Dancer-actress Donna McKechnie, star of *Chorus Line*, said when she was asked how she prepared for the show after more than a year in the same role, "I'm terrified each time. It's a condition I create for myself—it's a life or death situation. I'm auditioning each time—in order to keep my performance fresh."³¹ A similar view was reported in a national news magazine:

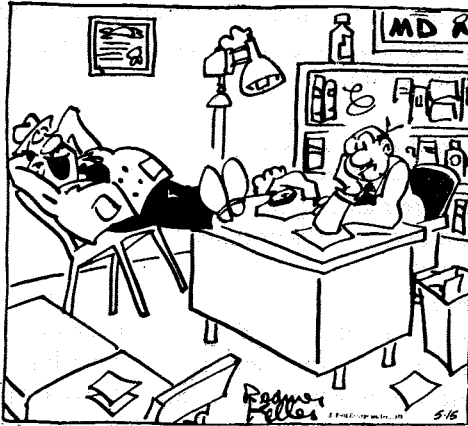
Newsmen and newspapers, goes one rather convincing theory, should stay out of the limelight, should remain a little insecure and run scared to do their best.

Thus, the first concern would be that yielding could cause a loss of a certain self-centered drive, an ambition that leads to personal achievement.

A second and related concern about yielding is that it may cause us to be seen by others (or by ourselves) as passive, powerless, helpless, and ineffectual. We may fear losing all sense of pride and self-esteem, and becoming so noncaring, so calm and relaxed, that nothing bothers us, and we become unmotivated, listless, apathetic.

MEDICARE

By Reamer Keller



"Your tranquilizers must be working, Doc. Now I don't give a hang if I ever pay you."

We may fear that yielding and egolessness will become an excuse, a copout that keeps us from facing our responsibilities, for not standing up for our beliefs and asserting our rights.* We may fall

*This may be a real concern, as evidenced by the Milgram experiment in which individuals followed the orders of a "scientist" even when those orders involved the (seeming) punishment of another individual. This "yielding to authority" is a serious problem. However, it may be *only* when we realize how susceptible we actually are to external influence that we can develop personal standards that would prevent this from occurring (see footnote in this chapter and Chapter 7, footnote 2; see also S. Milgram discussion, Chapter 3, footnote in section entitled "The Effects of a Crisis on Our Self-concept.")

ZEN BEHAVIORISM

prey to and be crushed by others. As former Olympic miler Glen Cunningham expressed it:

It would be a shame to get rid of anthems and the ceremonies, as some people suggest. God created nations. The "One World" idea is baloney. I tell my kids, "You stand for something or fall for anything."³²

We have now laid out our concerns about yielding and letting go. We have also seen some very real problems that may occur if we are overly productive and ambitious. Let's now look at a vision which suggests we can learn to perform optimally, be productive in the ways of the world, and at the same time, have the ability to yield, let go, and maintain a centeredness, a tranquility, and a peacefulness in our actions.

*Who sees inaction in action
and action in inaction
He is enlightened among men
He does all actions, disciplined.*³³

Inaction in Action

The *Gita's* person of wisdom realizes that activity is not only legitimate, but necessary. As the Zen Master Po-Chang wrote in 814 A.D., "A day of no working is a day of no eating." The *Gita* acknowledges that we need to set goals and strive for excellence and perfection. However, we need to learn to do these actions with the calmness and acceptance of inaction. Thus, the wise person acts, he seeks to make changes in the world, but he remains centered and unattached to the results of the actions.

*Actions do not stain me
Because I have no yearning for the
fruits of action.*³⁴

In social learning terms, the man of wisdom has learned to do behaviors without a need for reinforcement, peer approval, or rewards. He does not strive to enhance his self-image, to gain

prestige for himself. In this way Zen “substitutes an atmosphere of relaxation, serenity, and simplicity for the tensions created by our strivings to become, to possess, and to dominate.”³⁵

An example of this combination of centeredness and productivity is poetically illustrated in the book *Siddhartha*. The businessman for whom Siddhartha worked, Kawaswami, was astounded at Siddhartha's attitude: Siddhartha “always seems to be playing at business, it never makes an impression on him, it never masters him, he never fears failure, he is never worried about a loss. . . .”

Yet at the same time Siddhartha seemed unattached to his goals, he was also very productive. He explained this to the goddess of sensual pleasures, Kamala:

Listen, Kamala, when you throw a stone into water, it finds the quickest way to the bottom of the water. It is the same when Siddhartha has an aim, a goal. Siddhartha does nothing, he waits, he thinks, he fasts, but he goes through the affairs of the world like the stone through the water, without doing anything, without bestirring himself. He is drawn and lets himself fall. He is drawn by his goal, for he does not allow anything to enter his mind which opposes his goal. That is what Siddhartha learned from the Samanas [ascetics]. It is what fools call magic and what they think is caused by demons. Everyman can perform magic; everyman can reach his goal, if he can think, wait, fast.³⁶

Thus, Siddhartha was suggesting that centeredness — thinking, waiting, fasting — gave him a singlemindedness that allowed him to achieve goals more quickly, to be more productive. If we look back at the picture of the monkeys in the last chapter, we see that the monkey in the foreground is quite anxious, whereas the monkey in the background is not. I would suggest that, no matter what the particular situation is that these two monkeys are observing, the monkey in the background will deal more effectively with it. He appears ready to act. For all of us there will always be stress situations each day; the important variable is how we react. An attitude of calm, centered equanimity gives us an advantage in dealing with such situations, and helps us waste less energy and be more productive.

In summary, therefore, it seems we can learn to act without

anxiety, and can learn to be productive while remaining centered and calm. As the old Samurai saying puts it, we can be

*Swift as the wind
Quiet as a forest
Fierce as fire and
Immovable as a mountain.*

Action in Inaction

The *Gita* suggests that just as individuals can learn to be productive while staying calm and centered (inaction in action), they likewise can learn to discover great beauty and productivity in seemingly doing nothing (action in inaction).

In stillness, man discovers unexpected activity. At one level, doing nothing means becoming aware of the basic, most fundamental actions of the body. For example, even as the individual sits perfectly quiet, the heart still beats, the lungs still breathe. Without these actions, no other action is possible. To be aware of breath and heartbeat is therefore to be aware of the beauty and wonder of two fundamental actions of existence. And as we sit quietly and listen to our hearts beating, firmly and steadily, we know that one day we are going to die, and it is beyond our power to stop our death. Through the calmness of inaction we may learn a kind of acceptance. Herrigel has described this state of action in inaction as one "in which nothing definite is thought, planned, striven for, desired, or expected; which aims in no particular direction and yet knows itself capable alike of the possible and impossible, so unswerving is its power—this state, which is at bottom purposeless and egoless, was called by the master truly 'spiritual.'"³⁷

This doing nothing, as Erich Fromm noted, may be seen as a type of creativity, even though no visible "things" are produced. For example, it may be suggested that a true Zen Master writes a poem—wordlessly—when (s)he watches the sunrise. Creativity may be a method of perceiving even though no actions have occurred.

To learn to see action in inaction allows us to cease striving for future goals, and to live in the moment, to see the beauty in

the here and now, to have a present-centeredness. Life becomes its own end. As D. T. Suzuki observed,

The Chinese love life as it is lived, and do not wish to turn it into a means of accomplishing something else. They like work for its own sake. The machine, on the other hand, hurries on to finish the work and reach the objective for which it is made. The work or labor in itself has no value except as means.³⁸

Integrating Action in Inaction and Inaction in Action

The combination of action in inaction and inaction in action was vividly illustrated for me while taking yoga training from the Chinese master from Tibet. He was teaching hatha yoga postures. Before we began, there was a brief meditation in which we practiced "centering" ourselves (action in inaction). We then proceeded to do an exercise (inaction in action). At the end of an exercise, he would have us lie down and "surrender" (a return to action in inaction). I was quite stiff at first, and decided to practice hard because I was anxious to show the teacher my limberness and proficiency.

One day, during a particularly complex posture, the Master walked by me as I sighed, took a deep breath, groaned, and twisted my limbs into the correct posture. I looked up, ready for his smile of praise. There was none. Although the teacher spoke almost no English, he looked at me, said "Too fast," and walked on. I fell over. I lay on the floor, quietly breathing, and thinking over his words. When I opened my eyes, the teacher was looking at me, smiling: "Good surrender."

The goal of hatha yoga is not to be able to do a complex, twisted contortion of the body, but rather to perform the exercise with calmness and acceptance (inaction in action). The individual should not be inflexible in his goal setting, therefore he is able to stop his actions at any moment and return to the supine position (action in inaction). If equanimity and balance are sacrificed to accomplish a specific posture, although the posture may be reached, the exercise has lost its purpose.

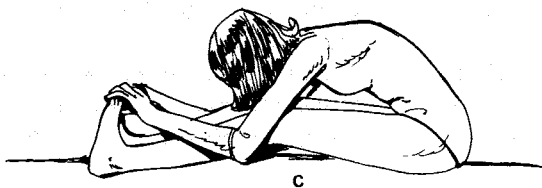
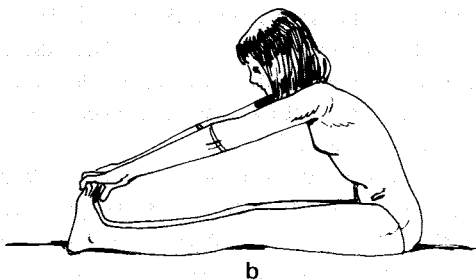
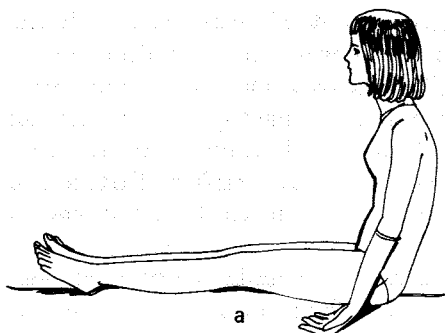
Zen acknowledges that man wants to know his limits, and that once he has achieved basic sustenance, he will search beyond, to learn who he can further become. However, this learning must

ZEN BEHAVIORISM

begin with the basic action of inaction, so that the learner doesn't become like Icarus, soaring beyond on wax wings without a base (action without inaction).

Let me illustrate this with the following toe-touching exercise. Before actually trying the exercise, read through the instructions. Then you may wish to return and practice.

1. Before beginning the exercise, practice a brief breath meditation. Pay attention to the action of your breathing, even as you sit motionless.



2. After meditating, sit with legs straight, arms hanging at your side (a). Put your fingers around your toes, breathe in, and bend forward, keeping your legs straight (b). Try to touch your head to your knees and your elbows to the ground (c). Then return to position (a) while exhaling.

3. Surrender: lie down, close your eyes and let go. Note: in this exercise the goal is *not* to touch your knees to your head or your elbows to the ground. The goal is to learn awareness of your limbs—how far they can stretch—without losing balance and equanimity. The action must be done slowly and methodically, for to do it too fast is to pull a muscle or bruise a joint. The exercise teaches you to do actions with calmness. After completion of the exercise (inaction in action) one surrenders by returning to a lying-down position (action in inaction).

If during the exercise you feel yourself getting frustrated because your limbs don't stretch as far or as much as you want them to, don't continue to push and struggle harder. *Stop and surrender.* Keep the calmness and acceptance of inaction. Lie on the floor and surrender. Breathe slowly several times.

Thus, while we continue to grow and stretch ourselves, we also maintain our balance and tranquility. We learn to set goals, to try to achieve perfection, and we also learn how to yield and surrender.* Each day the individual tests his limits, tries to go a

*Meditation and yoga would seem to provide a useful combination of *setting goals and acting* (exploring new directions) and *not acting* (reducing stimulation). As Hebb Berlyne suggested, if a person's routine is boring, lifeless, then he/she does not function optimally. However, if there is too much stimulation, the individual likewise may function poorly, being overwhelmed and distracted. (D. Hebb, *The Motivating Effects of Exteroceptive Stimulation. American Psychologist*, 1958, 13, 109-113. D. Berlyne, *Conflict and Arousal, Scientific American*, 15 (1966) 82-88.

Another interesting point about yoga is made by Laurence E. Morehouse, a physiologist at the State University of Iowa and currently professor of exercise physiology and director of the human performance laboratory at UCLA. He suggests that exercising three times a day for ten minutes at a time is sufficient to keep anyone in excellent shape. He suggests also that the first exercise is the most important and then the second, and that the last is least important. He notes that more exercise and harder work does not result in greater improvement. One gets the biggest response from the first ten minutes and the increment of improvement after ten minutes is not too great. Perspiring is not necessary for effective exercise.

bit beyond, and then surrenders to the supine position. In this way perfection is seen as a playful game of becoming which has no relevance to ego or fame. We are able to act productively in the ways of the world without losing our equanimity, and without being consumed by the need to reach a goal. Thus, we become disciplined: in trying to set goals, to make changes in our lives, to perfect ourselves; and also in learning to let go, yield, and flow with the moment—a “good surrender.”

EGOLESSNESS AND STRONG SENSE OF SELF

Turning from External to Internal Reinforcement*

Initially our reinforcement or praise comes from other people. How we feel about ourselves depends how others feel about us. However, at some point, our search for approval from others may become a problem, and we may need to turn inward and find out what our own standards are, what we believe in, how we want to act.

If we compare the slow, methodical quality of a yoga exercise with the type of exercise—e.g., quick push-ups and sit-ups—taught in most Western physical education classes, we see that this is an especially interesting hypothesis.

*To clear up any possible semantic problems, let me state the distinction I am making here between external and internal reinforcement. *External reinforcement* refers to praise we receive from others (e.g., an A for a good class paper). As noted, we “internalize” the standards we are taught, and soon we “feel good” when we get an A. What I mean by *internal standards* can be illustrated in the following way: (1) we realize and evaluate *how* we have been taught to feel good—e.g., an A for a paper; (2) we look for alternatives—e.g., perhaps the content of the paper should also interest me; (3) we choose our own criteria and standards of excellence—e.g., I want to still perform excellently, but I should define for myself what an A is; I should choose for myself the areas in which I feel it is worth performing well.

These new standards will be the result of a combination of our past conditioning and current models (whether living or dead) whom we admire. The difference, however, is that now we are choosing how we would like ourselves to be conditioned (the path of heart), rather than continuing to respond passively to prior training. Thus, by seeing how we are determined, by learning to perceive increased alternatives, by learning the skills of decision making and self-management, we increase our personal freedom, and move from external reinforcement to internal standards of reinforcement.



A particularly vivid example of this is illustrated by a client I saw who was addicted to heroin. As part of therapy, we spent several sessions practicing meditation. At the end of one of the sessions, he told me: "In the last couple weeks I notice that I don't need people and can be alone . . . and I can also be with people and enjoy them . . . this is different than I used to be; always before I needed lots of people around me . . . drifted from group to group." He said that meditation seemed to give him what he called an "inner self-confidence." For this particular person, there was a great deal of peer pressure to use heroin. Only when he had time to himself, only when he could gain a sense of "inner self-reliance," was he able to choose more freely how he wanted to behave.

Almost all Western psychotherapeutic systems³⁹ stress that this switch from external to internal reinforcement is one of their primary goals. A person who can be reinforcing to himself can set his own standards, will show less reliance on group mores, and will be more able to determine and fashion his own system of morality. He will be less swayed by group pressure, and not as likely to accede to it; and he will probably be less likely to do things just because of societal expectations—shoulds and oughts. Finally, writers such as Erich Fromm have suggested that it is only when we have a sense of personal identity that we are able to enter into a true long-term love relationship.⁴⁰ As Gibran noted in *The Prophet*,

*And the oak and the cypress grow
Not in each other's shadows.*⁴¹

Going Beyond Self-reinforcement

Initially we need to turn from an other-directed search for approval to an inner-directed search. Yet there may be disadvantages to self-reinforcement. First, if we focus too much on ourselves, we may become narcissistic, self-aggrandizing, without a willingness to share or give to others. Second, we may believe that we have all the answers, and thus close ourselves off from the advice of others. We may become unreceptive, pompous, unfeeling of others. There are several writers in both the Eastern and Western tradition who believe it is to our advantage to go *beyond* self-reinforcement, and to no longer need either the reinforcement of others or ourselves. As Abraham Maslow, in the *Psychology of Being* noted, "The greatest attainment of identity, autonomy, selfhood is itself simultaneously a transcending of itself, a going beyond and above selfhood. The person can then become relatively egoless."⁴² The Maitri Upanishad stated that "he who has seen this highest self becomes selfless"; and in the New Testament, Jesus says, "He who loses himself will find himself."

Let us look at what some of the advantages of this "egoless" state might be. First, if we see our "self" as an illusion, we will be less concerned about seeking social reinforcement, possessions, and self-aggrandizement. Therefore, as Erich Fromm noted, we will be able to "drop our ego, give up greed, and cease chasing after the preservation and aggrandizement of the ego, to be and to experience ourselves in the act of being, not in having, preserving, coveting, using."⁴³ We will be able to live and experience without the need for being praised, positively evaluated, and labeled and singled out as unique. As Karen Horney suggested in *Neurosis and Human Growth*, ambition and striving because of pride "prevents the potential of the real self from developing."⁴⁴

Egoless individuals, in social learning terms, would be less concerned with receiving external reinforcement and would feel positive enough about themselves across situations that they would no longer need to reinforce themselves. Thus, such a person's mind would not be filled with positive self-statements; nor would this person be searching for positive statements from others. The mind would be "free" to be like a mirror, to be open and receptive to the world around and within. The egoless person has no "hidden agenda" of trying to win points, play games; no need

to put others down. This may make the person not only more open to others, but concomitantly, less self-conscious. That is, there would be less need for the egoless individual to reflect upon himself, to evaluate and be preoccupied with himself. He (or she) would have learned to value himself, and could therefore let go and trust his actions. In social learning terms, the egoless person has desensitized himself to himself (removed affective connotations of his image of himself), and can thus act fully and spontaneously, without inhibition and fear of looking awkward.*



"You know what my ambition is? To one day be conspicuous by my absence."

Second, an egoless individual would be free to engage in a variety of behaviors and tasks. Since there is no self, and since in the words of the *Bhagavad Gita*, the person of wisdom is not attached to the fruits of his action (i.e., not looking for reinforcement for task performance), he can perform all actions or no

*This ability to act without "self" consciousness or a focus on "I" is strongly emphasized in the Eastern martial arts. In swordplay, for example, the swordsman must do away with thoughts of winning the contest or displaying his skill in technique. [See Takano Shigeyoshi, "Essay on the Psychology of Swordplay," in N. W. Ross, *The World of Zen* (NY: Random House, 1960), p. 293.] He must maintain the mental attitude called *muga*—an attitude characterized by absence of the feeling "I am doing it." Alan Watts has observed that this "noninterfering attitude of mind constitutes the most vital element in the art of fencing as well as in Zen" [quoted from his *The Spirit of Zen* (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 108].

actions. This should expand the repertoire of behaviors an individual is willing to engage in, as well as his or her willingness to take risks in new, unexplored fields; to dare for creative synthesis; to attempt to chart new areas; and, in Nietzsche's words, to "live dangerously."

Finally, if as Carl Rogers noted, the person who has a flexible self-image can assimilate many experiences into awareness without feeling threatened, the person who is relatively egoless — who has no self-image, the ego of non-ego, the mirror — would be freest, and be able to assimilate the most experience.

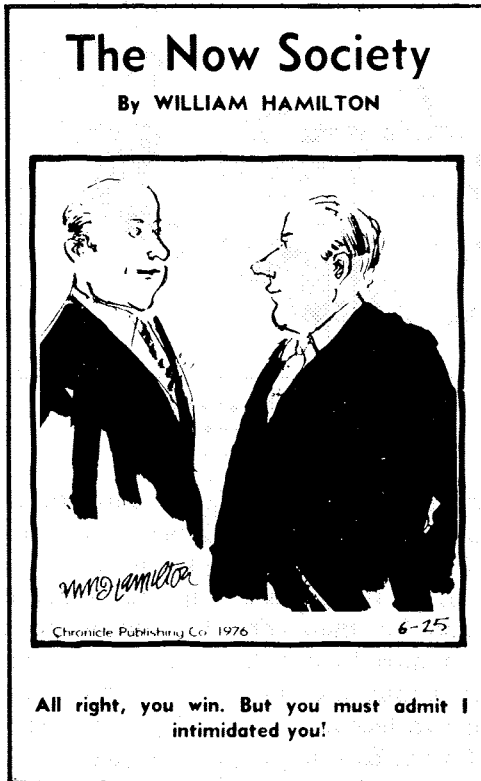
The quality of egolessness may be especially important in the rapidly changing "future shock" society. Since the concept of a self is an illusion, as long as we attempt to have a high sense of self in a fluctuating society, our "self-esteem will be subject to alterations in models, available satisfactions, environmental demands, and other features associated with our rapid culture change."⁴⁵

The so-called egoless person, not having to worry about enhancing his "self" through the societal role he performs or the possessions he accumulates, has the flexibility to adapt to a wide variety of situations. He is able to act without fear, for he is not worried about whether his actions will be judged by others. Further, as Claudio Naranjo noted, the nonattachment that comes with egolessness is the source of the healthy person's ability to stand on his own, not mistaking his identity for that of an owner of things or a performer of a certain role. "It is also the source of the basic independence from others which is, in turn, the prerequisite for true relationships."⁴⁶

Finally, the egoless person realizes the limits of believing we can take control of our own lives. As we have stressed, on the one hand it is important for us to believe "as if" we can take responsibility for and control of our actions (i.e., make self-attributions). However, we may fall into the trap of believing too strongly in our own fiction. We can't in fact control everything in our lives. We are, in many ways, small, delicate, fragile creatures. There are many events we are helpless to change. If we live only in a paradigm of "my will be done," we will never learn the ability to let go, to yield, to surrender ourselves, to accept helplessness, to gain what may be called a transpersonal or spiritual awareness. The spiritual teachers don't say, "my will be done," but "thy will be done."

YIELDING, ASSERTIVENESS, SELF-CONTROL AND SPONTANEITY

Yielding and Assertiveness



Yielding is not an easy skill for those of us brought up in the Western competitive mode. Yet competition and assertiveness, which are not necessary for basic sustenance, and often represent unchanneled, overlearned aggression, often over trivial ego games, no longer serve the productive survival function they once did, and may be destructive.

Although there is no question that it is important for individuals to learn to stand up for themselves, to assert their rights, it may also be important for people (both males and females) to

HERMAN



"Listen, I gotta go. There's a guy waiting to use the phone."

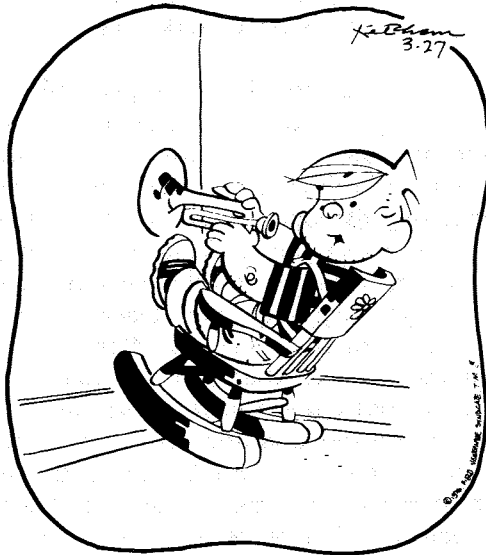
know how to yield, to be soft and compassionate. Further, it may be important to have a broad enough perspective on life to realize that one doesn't have to assert oneself over trivial points. Once we have decided what are the issues of importance in our lives, we can then "let go" and be unconcerned about more trivial matters.

As a way of introducing the advantages of yielding, let me tell you a story about the supposed origins of the martial art, jujitsu. According to legend, the art of jujitsu originated during a cold winter in China. Several people were watching the snow fall on two trees in the middle of a wide field. The larger tree stood firm and rigid as the snow piled up on its limbs. Finally, the accumulated snow became so heavy that its branches could no longer bear the weight, and they cracked. The smaller, less rigid tree also accumulated snow on its branches. However, its branches were limber enough to bend toward the ground, casting the snow off, and returning to their original position. Thus the smaller, more flexible branches lasted throughout the winter; the tree that yielded survived.

This yielding (*wu-wei*) was characterized by Lao-tse as the "watercourse way." If we watch water flow down a stream toward

a rock, we note that the water divides and goes around the rock. It yields to the rock's presence. Yet, although the water yields, it survives in the long term, and it is the rock that is worn away. Lao-tse's watercourse way is much the same evolutionary self-protection measure as the chameleon changing its colors so it cannot be recognized.

Secondly, the ability to yield should help us to let go of goals that are too high or too rigid, and to "flow" with circumstances over which we have no control.



"I'M BRIGHTENIN' THE CORNER WHERE I **AM!**"

This "letting go" may give us a greater conceptual flexibility, not only in terms of changing our goals, but in finding alternative and creative ways to attain them — a *cognitive flexibility*.

An interesting example of yielding occurred when we first went to visit my parents with our new daughter. My father rushed up to see Shauna, and said, "Oh, let me see her throw her arms around me." Rather than throw her arms around him, she recoiled in fright and began crying. Instead of becoming upset at this, he said, "Terrific, I really wanted to hear her cry and it sounds beau-

tiful." What he had done was to flow with her crying rather than feel sad that he was rejected, or get angry at her for rejecting him.

Another example of conceptual flexibility produced by yielding was beautifully illustrated by Reed Martin in his book on legal and ethical issues in behavior modification.⁴⁷ He told the story of some prisoners who were taunting their guards. This made the guards angry and caused them to provoke the prisoners, who then further taunted the guards. How would you have broken this cycle? In this case, the psychologist consultant, rather than punish the prisoners for their provocations, taught the guards to not be bothered by the prisoners' remarks (i.e., he *desensitized* the guards).

Both of these vignettes illustrate principles similar to the techniques of yielding in *aikido*, a Japanese martial art. In aikido ("way of harmony"), rather than confront someone head-on, one perceives where the other's energy is, and merely tries to flow with it. As in the case of jujitsu and the snow on the trees, this yielding can often be a power technique.* Thus, the yielding way of water may often provide the most powerful means of reaching goals.

Further, the yielding way may teach us to appreciate the moment more, to learn that there is often more satisfaction in expectation, in the process, than in the actual attainment of the goal. For example, both the Tantric literature of India and the "sensate focus" of Masters and Johnson's sex therapy techniques emphasize yielding, letting go, and flowing with the sensuality of the moment, rather than focusing on the goal of achieving orgasm.

Thus we can see that there may be several advantages to yielding: it has survival value; it provides the ability to *not* get irritated over trivia; provides the ability to be soft and compassionate; allows us to avoid becoming trapped by goals; enables us to find alternative paths to our goals; and makes us capable of enjoying the process of reaching our goals.

*The principle of "yielding" is illustrated in a communication skill called *paraphrasing* (a skill often used in client-centered therapy). When someone is upset at you for something, rather than become defensive or make a counterattack, you can instead take their statement, acknowledge it, and paraphrase it back to them: e.g., "It seems you're upset at me because I did X." Once they acknowledge that you hear them, you are both then placed in a position to deal more calmly with the issue.

Yielding and Self-control

Many of us, if we were to free-associate to the term "self-control," would conjure up images that are rigid, mechanical, unspontaneous, unplayful, robotlike, overly controlled. And if we were to compare self-control skills to yielding skills, we would, more than likely, conceptualize them as polar opposites. I would like to suggest, however, that self-control and yielding may be two sides of the same coin. This idea became clear to me during a meditation training session with a student. I was having the student meditate on a mirror. After the session she commented, with frustration,

I felt myself just about to give up control, and fall into the mirror, but I didn't have enough self-control to let go. . . .

The letting-go can be a conscious choice. It doesn't happen automatically, but needs to be learned. The learning involves an ability to take risks, give up control. For a lot of us, this is quite frightening. It takes a great deal of self-control to give up this control. Thus, *conscious yielding may be seen as the ultimate self-control*. It is this yielding, I believe, which is integrally related to the concept of egolessness; to an ability to share oneself with others; to work cooperatively and to relax and be centered.

Without control, there is no freedom.

Self-Control and Spontaneity (Naturalness)

A related issue involves the relationship between self-control and spontaneity. For example, the main prerequisite for self-control is awareness of how we are conditioned. In this way, we can "uncondition" ourselves, and not be compelled to act by nonconscious reflex. The term "reflex" needs to be thought of in its broadest sense—ranging from a knee-jerk response, to salivating when we smell or see good food, to the expectation that we will obtain praise for doing "what we ought to do."

When we have the awareness and self-control to no longer be bound by reflex, when we have *unconditioned* ourselves to ego

games, then we have the freedom to be spontaneous. As Alan Watts observed, it is at this time that "the mind reaches the highest point of alacrity, ready to direct its attention anywhere it is needed. . . . There is something immovable within [the mind] which [at the same time], moves along spontaneously with things presenting themselves before it. The mirror of wisdom reflects them instantaneously one after another, keeping itself intact and undisturbed."⁴⁸

Thus, one may argue that awareness is necessary so that we can learn how we are conditioned. Then self-control and practice are necessary so that we can learn to keep from acting with reflex responses. Self-discipline is further necessary so that we can let go of our "selves": that is, so we can risk not being in control, trusting ourselves. For example, as mentioned earlier, to meditate effectively, we have to be willing to give up voluntary control of our breathing. In other words, to breathe spontaneously—that is, with awareness and without voluntary control—we need to develop a self-control to *relinquish* control. This does not mean acting nonconsciously; rather, the goal is to breathe effortlessly and to maintain total awareness of the process of breathing. In meditation, the individual is no longer breathing: rather, *breathing is*. Further, the individual *knows* that breathing is. Such breathing may be called spontaneous. In this way it may be possible to reconcile the apparent contradiction between self-discipline, immovable wisdom, and spontaneity. The meditator, self-disciplined and exceedingly aware of himself, simultaneously is able to breathe fully in the moment with the spontaneity and nonconscious naturalness of a small child.

Does trying to maintain at every moment an awareness of our ongoing actions, trying to be controlled every moment in our behavior, keep us from "letting go" and flowing? Does self-control become a kind of rigidity? Terms like "immovable wisdom," "detached observation," "self-discipline," and "self-control" suggest a stiffness and withdrawing that would make spontaneous action cumbersome, if not impossible. How can this be reconciled with the story of the Zen Master who, when asked by the monk about the secret of Zen, shouted "Kwat" and hit the monk with a stick? Is there a difference between spontaneity and control or is it merely a semantic distinction?

What is the meaning of spontaneity? First, there is an impli-

cation of an immediacy of action without the encumbering interference of self-conscious thought. However, this immediacy of action is the exact opposite of a conditioned reflex which, though it occurs immediately, occurs without choice on the part of the individual. Spontaneity seems to be a behavioral response so well-learned that it no longer requires conscious cognitive mediation; the nature of the response, however, is not narrow like a conditioned reflex, but subject to various alternatives. Further, perhaps reflecting the Zen emphasis on living in the moment, the response appears to have no regard for consequences. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, a disciplined man is spoken of as one who has not a hair's breadth between his will and his action: He speaks exactly what he wants to say, he stops eating at the moment he is no longer hungry. His every action or nonaction is an intentional doing, wholly within his control. He has learned the ways through which he was conditioned and therefore never responds by mechanical conditioned reflex. Rather, at every moment he *chooses* whether or not he wishes to respond. This seems to suggest a balance of spontaneity and self-control.

Some Final Thoughts

Naciketas, the seeker after knowledge, came rushing up to the Master, who was sitting quietly meditating. "Master," he shouted, out of breath and quite anxious, "let me see you be spontaneous." Whereupon the master bowed politely and said "I am."

There is an old adage that power perfected becomes grace; in our terms, self-control perfected becomes spontaneity. This may be seen in the delicate flower arranging of Japanese *ikebana*, in the graceful and swift finger movements of violinist Yehudi Menuhin. The delicacy and grace come only through (1) practice, diligence, and awareness on a daily consistent basis; and (2) ability to believe in oneself so that it is possible to let go, and trust the effects of our practice without holding back — to let the results of our practice flow forth naturally.

But self-control becomes rigidity and nonspontaneity unless we learn to also "let go" and yield. On the other hand, yielding can become passivity, noncaring, a giving up. Therefore, we need

ZEN BEHAVIORISM

to learn the skills both for taking control of our lives and for giving up and yielding: skills for building a strong ego and for being egoless; skills for learning to set goals, to live intentionally, and then ability to let go and not be bound and limited by our own vision. We need a combination of trusting our instincts (i.e., past learning) and continuing to practice new skills and behaviors so that we don't become rigid.

An example of this relationship between self-control (strong ego) and yielding (egolessness) was illustrated by the development of our daughter Jena's legs. At first, Jena's legs were soft and undeveloped. She could not stand (analogue of weak self-concept, undisciplined, chaotic, passive life). Soon, however, she learned to stand. Her legs became firm and powerful and supported her weight (analogue of strong ego, willpower). However, she then went through a stage in which once she stood up, she was unable to seat herself from that position (rigidity, unyielding). The firm legs were useful (to stand up) but their rigidity kept them from yielding and letting her sit. Only later did the skill of yielding come, as her legs bent at the knees, and she could finally sit down by herself (egolessness, letting go). Thus, letting go on one side of self-control may be passive, a giving up. Letting go on the other side of self-control (i.e., with self-control skills, a conscious decision) is both necessary and useful.

LIVING IN THE MOMENT: INTEGRATING ORDINARY AWARENESS AND THE ALTERED STATE

All of us have experienced the problem of intruding thoughts and images which seem to distract us from the task at hand. We may be trying to relate to our family, yet thinking of business problems. We may be talking to a friend, yet thinking of the lawn that needs to be mowed, or a drop in the stockmarket. We may be trying to concentrate on a specific task, yet thinking of going sailing, or the date we have on the coming weekend. For example, how many times have you interrupted yourself singing a jingle you didn't know you were singing, caught yourself chattering to yourself

without listening, or going to do one thing, becoming sidetracked, and ending up involved in something entirely different?

An example of holding thoughts in our head is illustrated in the following Zen parable "Muddy Road":

Tanzan and Ekido were once traveling together down a muddy road. A heavy rain was still falling.

Coming around a bend they met a lovely girl in a silk kimono and sash, unable to cross the intersection.

"Come on, girl," said Tanzan at once. Lifting her in his arms he carried her over the mud, and set her down on the other side of the intersection.

Ekido did not speak again until that night when they reached a lodging temple. Then he no longer could restrain himself. "We monks don't go near females," he told Tanzan, "especially not young and lovely ones. It is dangerous. Why did you do that?"

"I left the girl there," said Tanzan. "Are you still carrying her?"⁴⁹

Ekido was involved in internal ruminations and evaluations. Like Ekido, when we become preoccupied in a world of internal thoughts and analysis, we may be less receptive to the realities of the ongoing moment. According to Zen belief, as long as we are analyzing reality, we are not living it; therefore, we need to move beyond thinking about experience to the immediacy of direct experience. As Alan Watts has noted, "To think over what is past, to wonder what is about to come, or to analyze the effect upon oneself is to interrupt the symphony and lose the reality."⁵⁰

In Chapter 1, we described how, in the fifth step of meditation, we learn to develop a present-centeredness, without goals, without evaluation. We would all agree that this fifth step of meditation involves living in the moment. Similarly, in Buddhist informal meditation, as described by Rahula, we are also living in the moment. In yoga, this type of self-observation is practiced as if one were a "witness": one tries to notice exactly what one is doing—to invest ordinary activities with attention. The witness does not judge or initiate action, he simply observes. In the words of Frederick Spiegelberg, "Meditation deals with the daily task of the meditator. The street cleaner has to take his task of sweeping as the starting point for meditation. So, likewise, must the potter

ZEN BEHAVIORISM

take his task of producing clay utensils on the potter's wheel. . . . One may do what he will so long as he is clearly aware of what he is doing. . . ."⁵¹

However, from here on in, it gets more complex. For example, let's look at a story used in the Zen literature to illustrate living in the moment:

A man was fleeing, pursued by a tiger. He came to the edge of a precipice, the tiger right behind. In desperation he climbed over the edge down a long vine. Above him the tiger roared. Below him lay a thousand-foot drop into raging rapids. Further, two mice, one white and one black, had begun gnawing through the vine. Suddenly, the man noticed a luscious strawberry growing just within reach. Holding onto the vine with one hand, with the other he plucked the strawberry. How delicious it tasted.⁵²

At first glance, it seems to meet the criteria: here, amidst death on all sides, he enjoys the strawberry in the here and now. Yet, note how the man lives in the moment. He *decides*, amidst all the other stimuli, to pick the strawberry. He *focuses* on the strawberry. He *evaluates* how it tastes. Couldn't he also have focused on the tiger or the mice and evaluated how it would feel to be devoured or the feel of the air as he fell toward the rapids below? Couldn't he even have focused on the texture of the gnawed vine he was clinging to? He chose, instead, to focus on a positive external object: a strawberry. Thus, although living in the moment may involve nonevaluation (as in meditation), it may also involve focusing, evaluation, decision making, and covert statements (e.g., "Well, it looks like this is the end — stay calm — is there a last bit of pleasure possible? Ah, a strawberry! Why not!"). Thus, the man, through selectively focusing his attention, chooses his reality for the moment.

All of us are constantly choosing our realities of the moment, whether we realize it or not. As we saw in Chapter 4, research on ordinary awareness suggests that often our choices are not conscious, but are determined by our previous learning, and by the stimuli at hand. Most of the time we are ignoring a multitude of

stimuli around us. Sometimes we ignore things that we really should focus on. For example, *Playboy* notes:

We understand that bird-watching was classified as a "hazardous" hobby by the British medical magazine *Practitioner*, after an enthusiastic ornithologist — intent on watching a bird — was eaten by a crocodile that he failed to notice.⁵³

Yet, if we spend our entire life looking for the crocodiles, we may never see the delicate beauty of the bird.

How do we decide what to focus on? How do we decide whether to evaluate, or not evaluate what we focus on?

Let us turn to a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of different types of awareness. We will look at two areas: What we focus on (internal versus external focusing) and how we focus (with evaluation, without evaluation).

What We Focus On

External Focus: Advantages

Sometimes there is an advantage in focusing externally so that one doesn't turn inward too much, become too self-conscious, or worry excessively about one's own problems. In certain cases therefore, external focusing, with a concomitant decrease in internal ruminations, may be very appropriate. An example of this may be seen in one of the sexual therapy techniques used by Masters and Johnson. They instruct the couple in what is termed "sensate focus." Each partner zeroes in on what gives the *other person* pleasure. Thus, there is less internal reflection or self-evaluation on one's own competence (e.g., Am I performing correctly? Am I adequate to the situation?) Focusing on the other seems to take the pressure off the individual and aids his/her performance.

Another advantage to external focusing is that it facilitates avoidance of aversive stimuli. For example, Kanfer and Goldfoot noted that a person, with his hand submerged in cold water, could withstand pain longer by focusing on external stimuli.⁵⁴

Similarly, there is a certain healthiness in not being excessively preoccupied with focus on ourselves. The story is told of Noel Coward going to the Tomorrow Club, an exclusive club of famous literary personalities. He wore full evening regalia, and, when he entered the club, realized that everyone else was dressed very casually. As the eminent heads turned toward him, he said, "Now I don't want anyone to be embarrassed. . . ." ⁵⁵

External Focus: Disadvantages

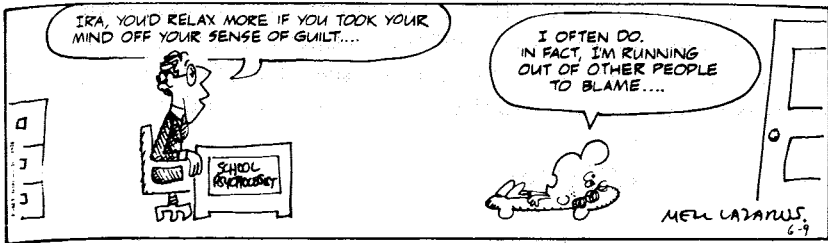
On the other hand, Freudians, social learning theorists, and existentialists have pointed out the *dangers* of external focus.* Existentialists describe the way we may often hide behind things—food, others, daily activities—to keep from facing important questions about our place in the world, a sense of ultimate loneliness, and fear of our own death. Freudians discuss the use of dynamic projection in which we may focus on something external to avoid having to focus internally on what is bothering us. For example, we may focus on how lonely other people appear in an attempt to keep from facing our own loneliness. Similarly, if we are feeling insecure and unsure of ourselves, we may focus on how the clothes we wear appear shabby, as opposed to feeling our own "shabbiness." The short-term advantage of this external focus is that it is not as painful to describe our clothes as shabby as it is to admit feelings of pain and lack of esteem about ourselves. The problem, however, is that there are many stimuli associated with the "self." Therefore, if we don't deal directly with our problems, we will be constantly searching for external focuses. This leaves a large gap in our everyday ability to be as open and responsive to as many situations as possible.

What we need to determine is whether or not there are times when it might be appropriate to divert our attention from a particular object or thought and to focus either internally or externally. Is cognitive avoidance of something *necessarily* an appropri-

*Psychodynamic theorists refer to avoiding important issues in our lives as *repression*. Repression occurs when an individual is unwilling to face certain events and thus places them in the unconscious. Social learning theorists refer to such a process as *cognitive avoidance*. As in Freudian theory, cognitive avoidance refers to ignoring or avoiding a particular response. Skinner has noticed that cognitive avoidance is "extremely powerful" because it is negatively reinforced (i.e., aversive stimuli are removed). B. F. Skinner, *Science and Human Behavior* [New York: Macmillan, 1953].

MISS PEACH

By Mell Lazarus



ate escape or avoiding device? How can we learn to choose what is most appropriate to focus on, so that on the one hand we don't avoid reality (as Charlie Brown's father did in the cartoon in Chapter 1) and yet on the other hand, we don't dwell excessively on the negative, thereby denying ourselves the pleasure of enjoying a luscious strawberry?

Internal Focus: Advantages

We have noted that if we only focus on ourselves, we may ignore others. However, there are some situations in which it is helpful to put the focus of attention on ourselves, especially in our interaction with others.*

Internal Focus (I-Statement): I'm having trouble understanding you.

External Focus: You're not being clear.

Internal Focus: I feel hurt when you do that.

External Focus: You're inconsiderate to do that.

In the above examples, making I-statements takes responsibility for a problem rather than laying blame on another.

Internal Focus: Disadvantages

If our focus is primarily internal—egocentric—we may be less able to relate to and be concerned with the problems of others. Further, we live in the world. To focus exclusively on ourselves

*Other advantages of internal focusing—such as being aware of our body signals, becoming more aware of our thoughts, etc.—have already been dealt with in Chapters 1, 2, and 4.

ZEN BEHAVIORISM

may not be beneficial in a survival sense. We may ignore or miss certain important cues in the environment—a thunderstorm, a red light—because of excessive self-preoccupation. In addition, such preoccupation with ourselves may be seen by others as a type of narcissism, which decreases their desire to be around us.

HERMAN



"That's a relief. I thought I'd gone deaf!"

How We Focus: The Nature of the Evaluation

Just as we may select whether we would like to focus internally or externally, we may also choose *how* we would like to focus. We have pointed out that the type of focusing in behavioral self-observation strategies involves evaluation, analysis, goal setting, determining antecedents and consequences, whereas the type of focusing in meditative technique does not involve any of these processes. What effects do different types of focusing have on experiencing? As we saw earlier, altered and mystical states of consciousness, different types of meditative strategies, and ordinary awareness are different in only two respects: *what* one focuses on, and *how* one focuses. In this focus with or without evaluation; with a pinpointing of attention on one subject; with a selective

awareness of certain aspects of an object; with an “unfocused” awareness? The way we focus will influence what is perceived, how it is perceived, and thus will affect the nature of the experience.

Let us now turn to specific examples illustrating how the nature of our evaluation may effect our behavior. We will consider four different areas: positive evaluation, nonevaluation, negative evaluation, and negative thoughts.

Positive Evaluation. Imagine for a moment that you are riding a bicycle up a steep hill. As you are riding, there are several things you may be saying to yourself. You may be making a *positive evaluation* about (1) your progress: “I’m making steady progress up this hill,” (2) your physical health: “I’m sure feeling good and in good shape,” and (3) your goal: “I’m getting close to the top—I’m almost there.” All of these statements may serve as self-reinforcement, and thereby increase the likelihood of a “second wind,” a renewed effort, and the possibility that you will continue to bike up the hill, have pleasant feelings about yourself, and reach the top.

Positive evaluation is the simple technique of saying positive things about what we are doing and who we are. It is a useful technique because it increases self-confidence and improves our self-image. However, it may have drawbacks as well.

Let’s take another example: Imagine yourself using a screwdriver to turn a screw into the wall. As you focus completely on the task and notice that the screw begins to turn, you may say to yourself, “Ah, it’s beginning to work.” Two things may happen: first, you may feel more confident, get renewed energy, and continue to turn very appropriately. However, something else may happen: the screwdriver may slip. This may happen for two reasons: (1) you may let up and relax, because you think you’re succeeding, and/or (2) your attention may shift from the task at hand to yourself: “I’m doing well.” Thus, in some cases, it may be that we perform better in a task if we continue to focus on the task, without any kind of evaluation.

Nonevaluation. The advantages of nonevaluation have been discussed at length by Eastern writers, particularly with regard to martial arts such as fencing and archery. It is suggested by these

writers that any kind of evaluation, even positive evaluation, diverts attention from the task at hand. Therefore, an individual is told to try to become "egoless": i.e., without focus on himself, and without any type of self-evaluation — not even positive. This has also been discussed by Western writers in books such as Galloway's *Inner Game of Tennis* and Adam Smith's *Powers of Mind*.

Let us return to our biking example. It is possible, when riding the bike up the hill, not to evaluate, but simply to ride. One may perform this nonevaluation by a meditative focus on a specific object (e.g., a pinpointed visual focus on the road in front of one's tire) or by an opening-up informal meditation: (e.g., a nonspecific, all-senses-attentive focus).

Negative Evaluation. Imagine biking up the same hill, but this time saying to yourself, "Ugh, what a long way to go!" This statement may have several possible consequences: (1) it may make you say, "Oh, come on, let's try harder," or (2) it may make you feel tired, so that you get off the bike and walk it up the hill, or (3) you may give up, turn around, and go home.

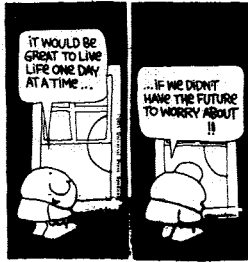
In our screwdriver example, we may evaluate that the screw is quite tight and we are not having much success. As a result of that evaluation, we may say, "It is important for me to focus harder — this is a tough task." This may improve the subsequent performance. However, it is also possible that our attention may shift from external negative evaluation (a tight screw, a steep hill) to internal negative evaluation (I'm not competent, I can't do this task well). In the latter case, the negative evaluation is nonproductive and a negative thought.

Negative Thoughts. Negative thoughts occur when we make a negative evaluation, but don't change our behavior as a result of this evaluation. The following is one example of a negative thought: You and a friend decide to go to a movie. On the way to the movie, you say, "You know, going to a movie really doesn't sound like very much fun, but let's go anyway." Similarly, in our biking example, you may make a negative evaluation: "Ugh, what a long way to go," and yet continue to bike up the hill, groaning and complaining. More than likely, a negative thought would cause your progress to be slower, cause you to feel more tired and to

have fewer pleasant associations about the ride. Negative thoughts are, by their very definition, worthless. They put you, or whom-ever you're with in a no-win situation.

Focusing on the Past and the Future

Living in the moment may involve using imagery and focusing with one's mind to either project future goals for oneself, or, perhaps, relive past experiences.



"I DON'T DRINK TO FORGET THE PAST.
I DRINK TO FORGET THE FUTURE."

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Past Focus: Constructive or Destructive?

We can review the past in a nonconstructive way. We may call up unpleasant memories about which we feel bad, and yet about which we are helpless to make any changes. However, it is possible to review past accomplishments and past experiences in a constructive way. For example, we may call up pleasant experiences

ZEN BEHAVIORISM

such as shared memories. Reviewing past accomplishments may show us how much progress we've made toward our goals. Reviewing past mistakes may give us important feedback so we don't make the same errors again.

Future Focus: Constructive or Destructive?

If we think about the future and merely worry uselessly about it, then we are engaging in worthless negative thinking. However, it is possible to review the future in a constructive way: planning, evaluating, making careful choices. Further, we may observe our desired self in the future to see how we would like to become. This focusing on a future desired self may be reinforcing and make us feel good, particularly if we think our present actions will help lead to that future desired self. Further, the future desired self may provide a model and vision of what we would like to become, and thereby help us change our present behavior in order to facilitate reaching that goal.

Some Final Thoughts on Living in the Moment

We have talked about living in the moment as focusing completely on the here and now. But we have also suggested that there may be several ways of focusing on the here and now, each with advantages and disadvantages. Depending on the goal of our "living in the moment," sometimes Western strategies, involving evaluations, attributions, images, and selective awareness may be more effective; sometimes Eastern strategies, involving nonevaluation and either a pinpointed or opening-up awareness, may be more effective. For example, there are times when positive evaluations may be quite effective (covert self-statements as self-reinforcement), times when they may not be so effective (as when they take our attention from a task). For certain tasks, it seems that nonevaluation may be the most effective focusing strategy. Here is a chart that may be helpful in pinpointing the specific strategies, their advantages and disadvantages:

A New Alternative: The Path of Heart

| <i>Where We Focus</i> | <i>Advantages</i> | <i>Disadvantages</i> |
|-----------------------|--|--|
| external | survival, reducing inputs, keeping from self-ruminating, avoiding pain, giving attention to others | avoiding important self problems, limited view and "repression," "cognitive avoidance" |
| internal | awareness of internal cares, hearing body signals, taking responsibility for actions | excessive self-rumination, avoidance of others |
| past | constructive: learning from mistakes, seeing past accomplishments, getting perspective on progress | destructive: useless dwelling and self-castigation |
| future | constructive: goal setting, planning | destructive: useless worrying without taking any action |
| <i>How We Focus</i> | <i>Advantages</i> | <i>Disadvantages</i> |
| nonevaluation | allows us to direct total attention to task | does not provide opportunity for feedback |
| positive evaluation | may serve as reinforcement, encouragement | may divert attention from task |
| negative evaluation | gives feedback, may be cue for looking for alternative response | if no action is taken, becomes a useless, negative thought |

Negative evaluations may be helpful as a means of giving us feedback about our performance. However, these evaluations should be precise, specific, and related to the task. They should not be self-referential, and they should not be statements we can't act on — i.e., negative thoughts.

Further, we may focus on the past and the future as one way of living in the here and now. Focusing on the past and future removes our attention from the environment at hand, and takes us into our internal environment. This focusing can either be advantageous and enjoyable, or unpleasant and worthless. When we do focus on the past or future, we should be conscious of having made a decision to do so, and should make it a constructive

ZEN BEHAVIORISM

experience. Further, we should try to ensure that we don't dwell excessively in the past or future at the expense of the present situation. For example, even though some delay of gratification (delaying present wants for future goals) is necessary, it would be a mistake to continually postpone present enjoyment for the sake of attaining some future goal. We perform an enormous number of behaviors during a day. It is to our advantage to become more aware of *what* we focus on throughout the day, and *how* we focus. In this way we can learn the best technique, or combination of techniques, depending upon the nature of what we are doing. As the dialogue between the monk and master suggests, we may learn much truth from living in the moment (especially those of us who can recall a time when we did not realize we had eaten until we found our plates empty):

Monk: Do you ever make an effort to get disciplined in the truth?

Master: Yes, I do. When I am hungry, I eat; when I am tired, I sleep.

Monk: This is what everybody does.

Master: No.

Monk: Why not?

Master: Because when they eat, they do not eat; they are thinking of various other things, thereby allowing themselves to be disturbed.⁵⁶

DETACHED OBSERVATION (NONATTACHMENT) AND CARING LOVE

*But if in your fear you would seek only
love's peace and love's pleasure,
then it is better for you that
you cover your nakedness and pass out
of love's threshing floor
into the seasonless void,
where you shall laugh
but not all your laughter, and weep
but not all your tears.⁵⁷*

Many of us can probably recall experiences in which we felt overwhelmed by an event, or events. At those times, we may have felt too sensitive, too fragile to cope and may have tried to pull ourselves back, to gain a perspective, to become "re-centered." On the other hand, many of us may have felt the numbness, the total withdrawal and detachment by which we build an island of protection around ourselves.

Is there a middle ground? Can we learn to maintain the emotional involvement that Gibran talks about, *and* maintain a perspective, keeping ourselves "centered"?

The following story entitled "Is That So?" raises this question:

The Zen Master Hakuin was praised by his neighbors as one living a pure life.

A beautiful Japanese girl whose parents owned a food store lived near him. Suddenly, without any warning, her parents discovered she was with child.

This made her parents angry. She would not confess who the man was but, after much harassment, named Hakuin.

In great anger, the parents went to the Master. "Is that so?" was all he would say.

After the child was born it was brought to Hakuin. By this time, he had lost his reputation, which did not trouble him, but he took very good care of the child. He obtained milk from his neighbors and everything else the little one needed.

A year later the girl-mother could stand it no longer. She told her parents the truth—that the real father of the child was the young man who worked in the fish market.

The mother and father of the girl at once went to Hakuin to ask his forgiveness, to apologize at length, and to get the child back again.

Hakuin was willing. In yielding the child all he said was, "Is that so?"⁵⁸

Can Hakuin really love the child *and* give the child up so easily, or is he really acting from numbness and noncaring? In order to try to answer that question, it is necessary to further

examine detached observation. This discussion will illustrate how Eastern concepts such as nonattachment, nonpossessiveness, indifference, and acceptance can be related to caring love.

Detached Observation: Its Uses

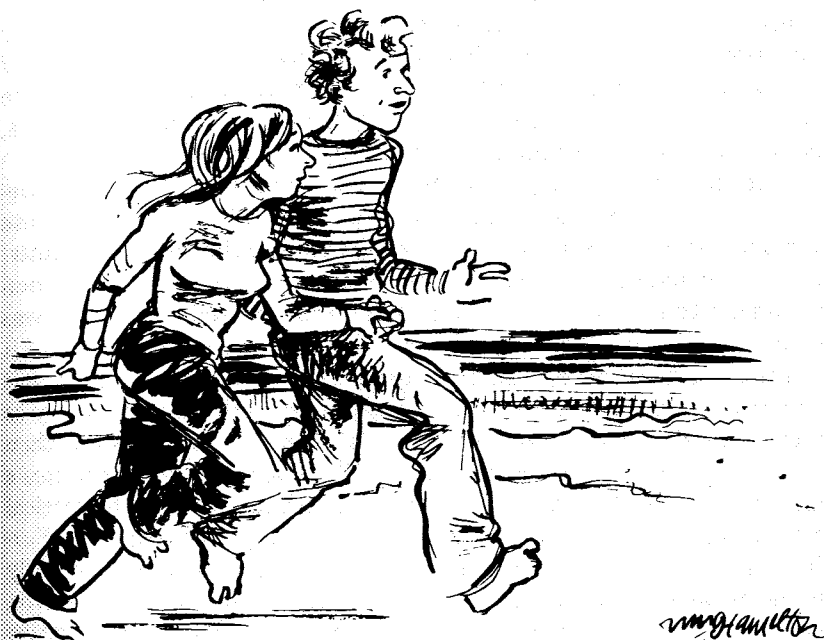
As we saw in Chapter 1, the East places an important emphasis on being able to obtain a perspective on our actions: an "immovable wisdom; a spectator resting in ourselves." Western writers have noted the importance of a similar kind of detached observation. Allport, for example, notes that the healthy person (religious individual) is one who "exercises his capacity for self-objectification, viewing with detachment his reason and unreason, seeing the limitations of both. He holds in perspective both his self-image and his ideal self-image."⁵⁹ This self-objectification, Allport added, includes a touch of humor,⁶⁰ the ability to laugh at ourselves.

Most Western psychotherapeutic schools also attempt to teach the client or patient a type of detached self-observation. It is felt that when we learn to see ourselves "objectively," we are able to look more honestly at ourselves to see both our strengths and our weaknesses.⁶¹ In Rogerian therapy, for example, the therapist, by accurately reflecting the client to himself in a nonjudgmental way, teaches that person to "see his own attitudes, confusions, ambivalences, and perceptions accurately expressed by another but stripped away of the complications of emotion."⁶² Sigmund Freud noted the importance of "this detached observation" in his work with Breuer, *Studies On Hysteria*. Freud stated that to help the patient overcome resistance, the therapist must help the patient assume an objectivity to his own dilemma, "a crystal ball attitude by the patient toward himself."⁶³ In this way, Freud noted, the patient learned to see that he had nothing to fear by revealing his true memories and "his customary defenses are shown to be unnecessary." In social learning theory, this detached observation may be effected by *systematic desensitization* (see Chapter 2), a process which Ferster and Staats have suggested is the functional equivalent of the dynamic and client-centered relationship process.⁶⁴ In effect, systematic desensitization allows the aversive stimulus to become less threatening, so that it can simply be observed, without any emotional overlay. And, as Jacobsen noted in relation to progressive relaxation,⁶⁵ by learning

to see objectively the difference between our problems and our emotional reactions to our problems, we are in a position to deal much more constructively with the problems themselves. Thus, one aspect of detached observation is the *removal or cessation of emotional overlay*. This observation allows us to view ourself as an event "out there," as if we were merely part of the environment.

Detached Observation as a Continuum

At one end of the continuum of detached observation is behavioral self-observation. In behavioral self-observation, when an individual is asked to observe a specific set of experiences (e.g., weight) there is likely to be a high degree of emotional, critical evaluation associated with the observation. An example further along on the continuum is illustrated by the following cartoon:



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Oh, I know you *like* me — but if you *loved* me, this would be in slow motion with lots of backlighting.

In this cartoon, the man observes himself running on the beach. As he implies, if this observation coincides with previous expectations, models, and visions of what love is—"if there is the appropriate backlighting"—then one knows it is love; otherwise it is only liking. However, even though his observation is "more" detached than our normal ordinary awareness, it still exists along a continuum, and has many elements of normal self-observation with the accompanying critical self-evaluation.

Abraham Maslow has described the process of "more detached self-observation as a type of transcendence": "The ability to transcend [in psychotherapy] parallels the process of experiencing and of self-observing one's self-experiences in a kind of critical or editorial or detached and removed way so that one can criticize it, approve or disapprove of it and assume control."⁶⁶ An even more detached observation than Maslow describes would involve having the person observe how he reacts to the *process* of self-observation. Consider, for example, this patient who had a history of violent behavior. After several weeks of meditation and self-observation of "angry behavior" he told me, "One evening I got God-damned pissed when my roommate began to play the electric guitar late at night. But then I "listened" to my pissedness, listened to the guitar and laughed. Then I fell asleep."

Roger Walsh has illustrated this process of increasing detached observation, acceptance, and humor: "The more complete this acceptance, the more effective it was in deflating this negativity. If, for example, I became anxious about something and then got angry that I was scared, and then got depressed that here I was again getting angry at being scared, then it became apparent that it was necessary to accept all the layers of this emotional onion and effectively say that it was okay to be depressed, that I'm angry at being scared. As soon as the outer onion ring was accepted, then the inner ones also collapsed with it."⁶⁷ Each stimulus becomes a cue to stand back further and observe, and accept. As the critical evaluations decrease in intensity, there is more acceptance. Further, this detached observation may help us to cope better in daily living by keeping things in perspective. As we acquire perspective, we realize life is filled with ups and downs, positive and negative events. By observing the variety of these events, we realize the cyclical nature of emotions, and may thus learn to maintain a distance, to become less dependent and less in flux with each

individual situation. This may also teach us an ability to tolerate ambiguity better, as we flow with the ups and downs, learning a patience and calmness in dealing with and observing each new event.

As we move along the continuum, not only does the nature of the observation change (less self-critical evaluation) but the content becomes less narrow (e.g., observing weight, positive self-statements) and more encompassing (observing one's self and all one's behavior).

Later on in the continuum, detached observation seems to involve merely *observing, without any editorial comment*. This is often most effectively done with images, and without words. As Staats and other social learning theorists have pointed out, the words we use have been conditioned to have certain positive or negative meanings.⁶⁸ Therefore, the very act of labeling when we self-observe or self-evaluate causes, to a certain extent, some affective connotation of the event.



Oh, our first argument! I'm going to get the camera!

Through detached observation, we learn to become *less attached to any of our actions*, or the fruits of our actions, *less*

need of social reinforcement. A Western means of achieving nonattachment may be by having so many different “irons in the fire,” so many people around, so many jobs, that no one action takes on too much importance. The Eastern way would be to remain nonattached to the fruits of *any* of one’s actions, like the mirror—merely to perform the actions and observe the performance.

The highest state of detached observation—the immovable wisdom described in Chapter 1—seems to come when an individual has focused on himself for so long, and has received so much self- and other reinforcement, that he overcomes the need to focus on himself. This may be referred to as a kind of “self-saturation,” a desensitization of one’s self to the self. At first, even though we may be observing ourselves objectively without emotion, we would probably be most likely, given a variety of stimuli, to focus on the “self.” However, soon we may *habituate* to the self: it truly loses its affective value, and becomes just another object. At this end of the continuum, we enter the realm of *egolessness*, where an individual no longer has a stumbling self-conscious reaction to himself and events because, paradoxically, he is so “self”-conscious. In other words, he knows himself so well that he no longer need worry about knowing himself, there is no longer any strong affect associated with the “self.” Through meditation and other techniques we have discussed, we may learn this type of detached observation—to be detached even from our “selves.”

One final point needs to be made about this detached observation continuum. As we have seen, detached observation involves the absence of self-evaluation and self-judgment; therefore, according to Zen, it in no way interferes with spontaneity: e.g., “beyond assertion and denial show me the truth of Zen. Quick, quick, or thirty blows for you.”⁶⁹ Life is the ongoing present, and according to Zen belief we should respond directly, spontaneously, and without conscious mentation and evaluation.

Integrating Nonattachment and Caring Love

But there is evaluation in Zen. For example, the evaluation that we are evaluating too much, or that we have not been aware enough both occur, as in the story “Every Minute Zen” (see

the section on "Developing a New Awareness" in Chapter 4.) However, at the same time there is evaluation, there is also a *simultaneous detached observation of that evaluation*. This is the important point, for the detached observation influences the nature of the evaluativeness by allowing it to be seen dispassionately and accepted nonjudgmentally. Finally, in terms of self-reinforcement, it seems that initially the "Master-to-be" covertly prides himself in his/her self-awareness and self-discipline. Although attachment to one's nonattachment still "stains the mirror," this seems a stage through which we must go before being able to truly be free of attachment and the need for reinforcement, either from others or from our selves. It would seem that this attachment to reinforcement *would also be observed*: e.g., perhaps the Master would say "Oh, see how silly I am, still enjoying an occasional pat on the back."

Now, let us return to the story of Hakuin. Given the above model of detached observation, it is possible to see that Hakuin really cared intensely about the child. He took good care of the child, and obtained everything it needed. Yet, though Hakuin loved the child, he was able to yield and not to be possessive.

Thus, we see that we can be nonattached and at the same time intimately involved. This nonattachment is different from numbness. It is not a closing off. Rather, it is an acceptance — similar to the way that the mirror accepts all into itself.



The Hindu word from the *Gita* which is translated as *indifference* (*aksano*) means nondifferentiation: seeing all as the same. The mirror accepts all: it accepts red/green, pain/pleasure as one; yet it likewise can differentiate between and participate in both. I once had an astrology reading which illustrated this point: "On the personal side, emotions may rise and fall, so maintain equilibrium and poise." If equilibrium and poise are translated as centeredness, nonattachment, acceptance, then we see that one can remain indifferent and participate fully in the rising and falling of emotions.

The story is told of a Zen Master who came back to the monastery to find the place strewn with the bodies of his colleagues and students who had been slain by bandits. He sat down and meditated for a long period; then, at the end of meditation, he cried.

*Rather than numb the pain
of parting, he sat straight
with an elfish smile*

According to the model suggested here, nonattachment may help us to be more open and receptive, more willing to feel and express our emotions. For example, Ornstein and Naranjo suggest that when we desire something, we tune out other stimuli that are not related to that want. Therefore, the "practice of psychological nonattachment can be considered an additional way to remove the normal restrictions on inputs. If there are no desires there is less of a bias at any one moment to tune in perception, our awareness of the external environment becomes less restricted, less of an interaction, and more like a mirror."⁷⁰

Further, in terms of task efficiency, it is often better to be nonattached. A veterinarian operating on a dog, for example, is more effective if he doesn't have a squeamish emotional reaction, but rather sees the dog's pain, and then concernedly and calmly performs the necessary techniques.

In summary, we see that attachment is useful in getting us to take care of that in which we are invested (find reinforcing). The danger of attachment, however, is a possessiveness, an unwillingness to let go. A poetic example of the pain of attachment is illustrated by Siddhartha and his son. The son left his father to go into the woods. Siddhartha was distraught at losing his son and ran after

him. He said to himself that his son was still young and needed his protection. In truth, he was hurt at losing possession of his son.

As in the case of Siddhartha, our attachment may keep others from experiencing their own personal freedom; it may also keep us from experiencing ours—we become bound up in possessing and fear of losing, rather than experiencing and living. By learning detached observation, we realize that although we may choose to increase our caring love, choose to decrease our anger over trivia, we ultimately need to see the importance of being nonattached to, and accepting all.

Nonattachment plus caring love allows us the advantage of experiencing the stream of life to the fullest, without the disadvantage of clinging to that which cannot be held.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, we saw that finding the path of heart by combining the East-West vision involves a delicate balance among several different abilities, including the abilities to

- Stay centered, relaxed, rested without being passive; to maintain a keen edge, stay alert, to be without useless tension and competitiveness
- Balance our own self-interest with an awareness and sensitivity to the rights and needs of others
- Be rigorous, goal-oriented, instrumental, and productive; and also to remain present-centered, nonstriving, receptive (action in inaction and inaction in action)
- Accept ourselves as we are, without guilt, without putting ourselves down; and, at the same time be able to work on changing ourselves, creating, growing toward our ideal vision
- Stand up for ourselves, maintain a sense of uniqueness while also being able to yield, to be gentle, to flow with events.
- Use words and analysis when they can be productive and poetic; and to *not* use words when they hide and distort reality

ZEN BEHAVIORISM

- Choose how we want to live, to have the self-control to achieve our goals; and also the spontaneity to let go of goals, the flexibility to choose new goals, and the creativity to *perceive* both new goals and alternative means to those goals

Thus, the model of health suggests the integration of productivity and centeredness; a strong ego and egolessness; assertiveness and yielding; self-control and yielding; self-control and spontaneity; and nonattachment and caring love.