

6

Techniques: Following the Path of Heart

*If you have the wisdom to perceive
a truth but not the manhood
to keep it, you will lose it again,
even though you have discovered it.*

~ Confucius

*I commend you Siddhartha,
for you have once again heard
the bird in your breast sing,
and followed it.*

~ Siddhartha

I'm sure many of us have had the experience of having a sudden insight, a moment of understanding, only to have that insight slowly fade away amidst daily habits and routines. As Confucius noted, the wisdom to perceive a truth (developing a new awareness; perceiving a new alternative) is necessary. But insight is not enough. We also need to be able to *keep* that truth (the commitment, the affirmation, the skills to follow through). As Siddhartha suggests, we need both the skills to hear the bird in our breast sing and the skills to follow it.

The goal of this book has been to develop both skills. In the first chapter we presented an overview of the different Eastern techniques and goals: the way of the Zen Master. In the second chapter we presented an overview of the Western techniques and goals of health: the way of the Grand Conditioner. In the third, fourth, and fifth chapters we described how Eastern and Western skills could be combined to develop a new awareness and how Eastern and Western visions could be combined to provide a new alternative, a path of heart.

In this chapter, we turn our attention to the specific ways in which different Eastern and Western techniques may be combined to reach and follow our path of heart.

Where to Begin

Each of us has our own hurts, loneliness, joys. Each of us has our own goals and visions. The bird in each of our breasts is unique,

with its own distinctive melody. Our first step is to try to get in touch with this, to choose what we would like to commit to—to find our personal vision, our own particular melody. The area you choose to work on may be related to your ideal self (as conceptualized in Chapter 2); or you may wish to work on some area suggested in the integrated vision in Chapter 4. The format of this book is just as useful for working on reducing weight, stopping smoking, becoming more affectionate with a spouse, as it is for working on committing to an intense spiritual and personal journey. The vision can be anything, large or small, as long as it is important to you.

A Word of Caution

A word of caution may be in order here. All the areas of the vision may seem exciting to work toward, just as all aspects of your ideal self may seem worth attaining. However, my suggestion is that you not try to work on several areas of concern at the same time, but rather pick one area that seems most appropriate, and focus specifically on that area. Otherwise, there is a likelihood that you will try to do everything—try to cover too much too quickly, and feel frustrated in each part of the task. (You may wish, at this point, to refer to the frustration and difficulty involved in making a decision in Chapter 4.

A second word of caution is that self-change is not an instant process, much as we would like it to be. Most habits or patterns of living and acting have developed over a long period of time. Acting in a new way may at first be quite difficult. Therefore, we have to be willing to commit to and affirm our willingness to work toward our own self-chosen goals. In thinking about making such an affirmation, it may be worthwhile to return to Chapter 4, where you were asked to look into your own motivation and commitment.

. . . And a Word of Hope

The assumption made in both the Eastern and Western schools of thought is that *these skills can be learned. People do change. We can make progress toward attaining our vision.*

COMBINING EASTERN AND WESTERN TECHNIQUES: CASE EXAMPLES

What I would like to do in this section is to show, through case examples, how the Eastern and Western techniques may be combined. At the end of each case, I give a general framework that you the reader may use if the technique seems applicable to your area of concern.

Case One: Overcoming Low Self-esteem

The client was referred because of a long history of what she called "low self-esteem." She was an Englishwoman in her middle 40's who stated that she often felt on the verge of becoming an alcoholic because of her "binge drinking." She described how she would spend long periods of time in a day thinking about acting, but not acting. Every time she decided to do something, she would pull back, from fear of failure. This extended to large behaviors—like job hunting, or going out to meet new people—to smaller, seemingly trivial behaviors—like brushing her teeth, or taking a shower.

After a certain period of time, she would become upset at her lack of accomplishment, her passivity, and feel a need to perform a great action to make up for lost time. She would then go on a drinking spree, and try to live out an unrealistic fantasy. For example, she once actually flew to London to present a plan on television to save the world.

This woman noted that she never gave herself the opportunity to feel or experience any pleasure. She was afraid of feeling guilty for "wasting" her time in this manner instead of accomplishing something really "worthwhile." She also said that she felt she could only be loved or valued as worthwhile if she could accomplish a large, significant task. Therefore, she spent most of her time putting herself down, telling herself she was worthless, incapable of being loved. She was obviously a very sensitive person who felt a lot of pain at being caught between wanting to perform a significant action and feeling she couldn't do anything at all.

One of the cooperative tasks we worked out during the course of therapy was to try to help her get more in touch with what we called the "reasonable voice" within her. This reasonable voice didn't constantly put her down; this reasonable voice told her she was worthwhile just as she was; it tried to help her structure her time so she could begin to accomplish some of her goals. This reasonable voice gave her permission to relax, let go, and experience the pleasure of the here and now; and it gave her guidance on how to practice interpersonal approach skills with other people, both male and female.

Our task was to increase the frequency of statements from the reasonable voice, and to decrease, or eliminate statements of the unreasonable voice: shoulds, oughts, putdowns, etc. She was taught breath meditation, as outlined in Chapter 1. She was told to watch her thoughts, and whenever the unreasonable voice was heard, to just let it go, and continue focusing on breathing. She was similarly instructed to watch her thoughts during the day, and whenever the unreasonable voice appeared, to just let it flow away.

However, we didn't want to let the *reasonable* voice flow away. We wanted to increase its frequency. Therefore, following the Premack Principle, we hypothesized that we could increase the frequency of the low-probability behavior (reasonable statements) by making them occur just before a high-probability behavior. Since smoking was a high-probability behavior,¹ the client was asked to put reasonable statements on 3 × 5 index cards and attach these to her cigarette carton. Before she smoked a cigarette (high-probability behavior) she was instructed to read and enjoy one of the note cards (low-probability behavior). During the six months of treatment, the client found a job (her first in five years); she began to date men, including one with whom she had "the most meaningful relationship I have ever had," and which gave her hope that she could in fact learn to relate to men.

Below are the statements that she compiled as statements from her "reasonable voice."

On validating her "core self" and self-acceptance she listed:

- It's OK to do small things without feeling I'm a small person.
- I am accepting myself more and more as I am, as I feel.

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- I am getting better-looking every day because the way I look is subjective.
- I don't have to prove that I'm OK. I *am* OK because I exist.
- Every day in every way I am getting better and better, more OK.
- I am more and more aware of, willing and able to be my own best friend.
- I don't have to become a star to accept myself or get acceptance from others.
- Look, I don't have to set the world on fire. I can gradually listen to the inner voice. I can listen to the reasonable voice, not the one that's always telling me *should*, putting me down.
- More and more I seek, and believe that I am OK after all.
- More and more I'm exposing myself as I *am* instead of as what I'd like to be seen as.

On planning and structuring her time in the here and now to accomplish future goals, she listed:

- I don't have to have instant gratification of each and every desire or impulse that arises.
- More and more I am (*in a relaxed way*) thinking about planning what to do tomorrow — one day at a time.
- I am learning more and more to distinguish reality from fantasy, wishful thinking, and mania.
- I am taking one step at a time, and no step is too small.
- More and more I am willing and able to recognize and manage my problems.
- I don't have to immediately say anything or everything that comes into my mind.
- I can increasingly be here now without escaping into fantasies, obstructions, illusions, nightmares.
- More and more I am learning how to structure my own time.
- Doing something is better than doing nothing at all: I am learn-

ing to quit the habit of not acting from fear of failing. More and more I am looking for what *I* want to do and see.

On letting go, she listed:

- Gradually I am opening myself to more pleasure and good feelings.
- I am feeling more positive about myself, other people, and life every day.
- I am easy with good feelings.
- I am gradually increasing my tolerance of reasonable amounts of tension, uncertainty, ambiguity.
- I am gradually becoming more and more flexible.
- Life begins when I let go and give up. I must quit trying to control everything.
- I will not constantly defer here-and-now enjoyment for that "big payoff."
- I am more and more aware of, willing, and able to let go, enjoy myself, and have fun.

On relaxing, she listed:

- I will *practice* holding still, slowing down.
- I am more and more aware of, willing, and able to relax.
- I am willing and able and aware of breathing deeply and easily.

On practicing social skills (increasing the probability of effective performance of overt behavior), she listed:

- More and more I am seeing people as they are, without labels.
- I am appreciating and enjoying and understanding men as people more and more.
- I am gradually increasing my eye contacts — with practice.

Finding Our "Self"

As the above case illustrates, by learning to precisely pinpoint the nature and content of our thoughts, we can turn them from destructive, self-defeating patterns to useful, constructive aids. The images and self-statements will be different for each of us, depending upon the nature of the concern, and the nature of what is reinforcing.

What follows is a general framework integrating several Eastern and Western strategies, which may serve as a useful guideline in areas involving our "self." These areas include developing a more positive self-concept, overcoming self-consciousness, and striving to become egoless. A related framework, involving assertiveness and yielding, is also included.

One of the first steps in any self-change project we undertake is to observe our "area of concern." Below are several possible areas related to the self and phrased in such a way they can be observed (refer back to self-observation instructions). Pay special attention to:

- times when you use negative traits about yourself, or make negative self-statements
- number of positive things you say to yourself and do for yourself (self-reinforcement)
- times when you play petty, trivial, ego games: i.e., times when your "self-esteem" gets in the way
- times when you act egolessly, flow with a situation, and feel good about it
- times when you feel put down and don't stand up for yourself
- times when you stand up for yourself and feel good about it
- negative trait feedback that you have received in the past from others (Go over this list and check what you yourself believe to be true, then monitor the items on the checklist for a week to find out the specifics of when in fact you find yourself engaging in these behaviors.)

Increasing Positive Self-statements and Pleasurable Time for "Self"

As a result of your monitoring, you may decide to increase the amount of reinforcement you give yourself. For example, you

may wish to reinforce yourself more liberally for the tasks you perform — complimenting yourself on your competence, productivity, uniqueness, ability to control events. You may also want to take time from task-oriented activities for pleasure, events you enjoy. For example, here's a list of enjoyable events I made for myself:

Behaviors by Myself

Playing music
Paint
Write poetry
Nature hikes
Walking on beach

Behaviors with Others

Dinner with spouse
Going to movie
Playing tennis
Massages
Playing in park with daughter

You may wish to increase the frequency and duration of activities that are reinforcing for you — both external activities and internal activities.

It may be helpful to put up pictures around the house or office to encourage you to take that extra time to be with yourself or others (this is environmental planning). These pictures may serve as cues, reminding you to step back from your tasks, to take a *kairos* break during your hectic daily schedule.

In addition to increasing the amount of reinforcement you give yourself for the tasks you perform, you may also wish to increase the frequency of global positive statements about yourself — that is, to accept, to love your “self” without regard to the task you perform, or the actions you accomplish: “the big cuddle.” By increasing the amount of specific and global reinforcement you give to yourself, you will build a strong, more positive self-identity.

Overcoming Self-consciousness

List situations or memories in which you have felt self-conscious. For example, do you remember as an adolescent when one of your parents asked you to perform on a musical instrument for invited guests?

Think of other situations — e.g., trying to decide whether to contribute to a group discussion; public speaking; walking into a party. I remember that once while I was playing tennis, my wife — then girlfriend — came to watch me play, and although up until

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that time I had been playing well, I began to have difficulty. I soon realized that the problem was that I was focusing on me — not on tennis — making covert statements such as, “If I play well, will that look as though I am showing off?”, “What if I miss a shot, will she think I’m less wonderful?”, and so forth. When we get those feelings of self-consciousness, we should remember the following:

1. They are normal. They are part of ordinary awareness. Therefore, we should instruct ourselves as follows: Don’t worry; this awkwardness is normal/natural. Stick with it, it will pass.
2. We should note where our attention is focused. If we are focusing on ourselves in an unproductive way (e.g., feeling awkward at a party), we should choose to redirect our focus:
 - to the task at hand: “Come on, let’s go meet some people at the party.”
 - to more productive evaluations: “This should be fun.”
 - in a nonevaluative way, like a mirror: “Let’s just be, enjoy, experience; let go of thoughts.”

Below are listed some possible ways for overcoming self-conscious behavior (or negative statements) and giving ourselves the freedom to take risks:

1. Assess the reasons for hesitancy (e.g., consequences, such as fear of failure, etc.)
2. Decide to take the risk (decision making: existential choice)
3. Rehearse your behavior (imagine through covert modeling of yourself performing the risk-taking behavior), prepare through imagery and self-statements
4. Give appropriate self-instructions: e.g., “Don’t think about it, you’ve made your decision; do it”; “Let go, trust yourself”
5. Use thought stopping to eliminate hesitancy statements
6. Make your mind empty like a mirror; let go of self-statements altogether, and trust yourself

Developing Egolessness

Finally, we have also suggested the need to let go of our concept of self, not to be self-preoccupied, not to feel we need to control all events, or constantly evaluate our own uniqueness.

If you have monitored this area, and would like to decrease the frequency of self-preoccupying thoughts, ego games, etc., it may be worthwhile to practice making self-statements such as "yield, let go, don't let it hassle you," and, in addition, to practice techniques, such as meditation, to reduce all thoughts.

We have discussed several different techniques for areas of concern dealing with self. These areas are summarized in the following table:

<i>Positive Self-focus: Adding Pleasure to the "Self"</i>	<i>Decreasing Self-consciousness</i>	<i>Becoming Egoless</i>
self-observation	self-observation	self-observation
commitment to increase	self-instruction to let go	meditation
set goal	change evaluations	self-instruction to let go, realize trivia
list reinforcing behaviors	be nonevaluative	
list global and specific self- reinforcing statements		
environmental planning		

Closely related to issues of positive self-image and egolessness is the area of assertiveness and yielding. The following list gives a six-step procedure which integrates both assertiveness and yielding.

1. Self-observe situations in which you feel you should be more assertive (e.g., waiter bringing burnt food; someone taking your parking place; standing in line waiting for a movie ticket and someone cuts in front of you; your co-equal at work was just given a promotion and you weren't).
2. Note what you're saying to yourself. Do you feel slighted? Put down? Do you feel the other person is being inconsiderate of your feelings?
3. Try to assess the importance of the issue in the larger scheme of things. Is it really that important? What difference does it

actually make if someone took your parking place? stepped in line in front of you? Are you merely playing a trivial ego game?

4. Take a few breaths; relax. Practice a few cosmic chuckle exercises (see detached observation techniques at the end of this chapter).
5. If you still bothered, buy an assertive training book and deal with the issue calmly and directly.
6. If you're not bothered, and have put things in perspective, deal with the issue calmly and directly.

Don't pretend you're not bothered when you are. We can't force our "egos" away. Keep practicing step four, and be patient. Soon the cosmic chuckle perspective will win out.

Developing Thought-stopping Techniques

In the first case example, we mentioned the importance of thought stopping. Both the East and West would agree that unreasonable negative thoughts are not productive. However, Western philosophy would advocate trying to *stop the thoughts, substituting* more positive ones. This was the method used in case number one. Eastern philosophy, however, would suggest that thoughts, by their very nature, are bad, and we should let go of them, thereby stopping all thoughts, even the positive ones.

Without the proper techniques, it is not easy to stop thoughts. For example, let me ask you to try the following exercise.

Stop thinking of elephants.

Well, what went through your mind? Elephants! There are many difficulties involved in *trying not to think*. Our first reaction is to block out the image, which only makes us think about it more.

Below are several different techniques that have been developed in Eastern and Western settings for stopping thoughts:

1. Meditation, in which we just let thoughts "flow away" down the river (see Chapter 1).
2. Behavioral thought stopping, in which every time you become aware that you are having an aversive, unwanted thought, you yell "stop!" (at first overtly, later covertly).

3. Relaxation of the vocal cords (see relaxation instructions for throat, Chapter 2).
4. Focus on an alternative response, such as a specific object (e.g., meditation; alternative focus); or you can imagine a big light switch which you click off to tell your mind you will no longer accept negative, unproductive thoughts. After you switch off the light switch, imagine a favorite natural scene and imagine yourself magically transported there.

These techniques may be used to stop several different types of thoughts. First, they may be used to stop useless rumination (e.g., taking our business home; perseverating about a past occurrence; putting ourselves down). Second, they may be used to interrupt thoughts that will lead to maladaptive actions (e.g., an overweight person after dinner having the thought that there is some delicious ice cream in the freezer). Third, they may be used when we are having two sets of ideas going on at the same time: e.g., trying to work on a task that we need to finish, yet wishing we were sailing.*

Case Two: Overcoming Anxiety

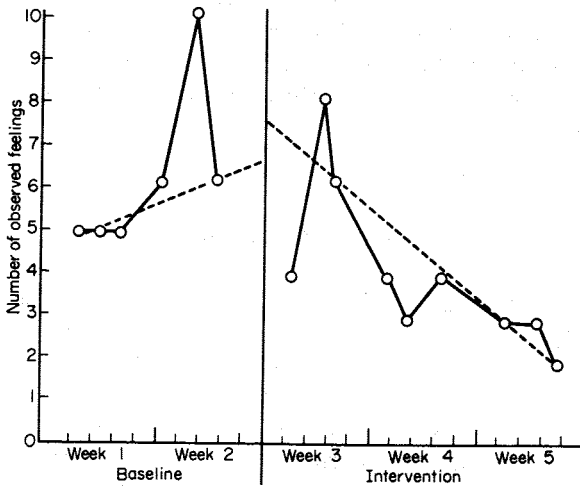
In Chapter 2, we discussed the case of a man who had “free-floating” anxiety. He described this anxiety as “overpowering feelings of being bounced around by some sort of all powerful forces, themselves neurotic.” He was instructed to observe his own anxiety for two weeks, in order to pinpoint what might be causing it and when it was occurring. After reviewing the information gathered from *self-observation*, we devised an intervention strategy to help him deal with the anxiety.

*In the sailing/task dilemma, we may realize that images of sailing are pleasant and rewarding (high-probability behavior), whereas the task seems tedious (low-probability behavior). Rather than doing two things at once and neither one well (e.g., trying to perform a task and thinking about sailing), you may choose to do them separately. Following the Premack principle, you can let the more enjoyable behavior (high-probability behavior—sailing) be the reinforcer for the low-probability behavior (a certain quantity or amount of time of task completion). Covert strategies may also be facilitated by environmental planning. For example, every time an off-task thought occurs (e.g., sailing, etc.) you may get up, leave the desk (work environment). Thus, the desk becomes a cue for on-target attention.

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First, he was instructed to practice *formal meditation* two times a day regardless of whether or not he was feeling anxious at that particular moment. Second, he was instructed to practice what we called "contingent informal meditation." This contingent informal meditation involved the following: (a) doing an "opening-up" *informal meditation* throughout the day; (b) paying particular attention to internal cues that told him that he was anxious; (c) bringing his attention to his breathing as soon as he recognized any internal anxiety; (d) closing his eyes and imagining himself feeling calm and relaxed (self-modeling); and (e) giving himself instructions to relax, stay calm (self-instructions).

The results of this intervention are noted on the following graph. Particularly informative is the description of progress in the anecdotal data.



Daily self-observation of anxious feelings.

ANECDOTAL DATA:

- 1st Week: ...overpowering feelings of being bounced around by some sort of all powerful forces, themselves neurotic. (sic)
- 2nd Week: I find the anxious periods can be timed-upon awakening and before English class in the evening. As if I'm conditioned to be anxious at those times. (sic)
- 3rd Week: By focusing on breathing, I realize the trivia of my anxiety.
- 4th Week: Self-control is growing as I feel I am starting to beat anxiety. I fall into breathing meditation much more automatically. At first informal meditation involved concentration on my breathing, but I don't even need to do this anymore. Just the recognition that I am anxious is a signal to dismiss my thoughts and worries. It's something like just recognizing that I am becoming anxious is a signal for calm.
- 5th Week: I can direct myself out of anxiety very well now. Enormous improvement.

Managing Stress and Reducing Anxiety: Becoming "Centered" and "In Flow"

Case two illustrated the usefulness of integrating meditation and behavioral self-control techniques. We present here a general "how-to" plan for combining these two strategies. (The theoretical rationale for combining these techniques is described in Appendix 3.)

Step One: Self-observation

As in almost any self-change project, the first thing we must do is gain a greater awareness about the area of concern. The following concern times related to anxiety and centeredness which you may wish to observe in yourself:

- times when I feel centered, relaxed, "in flow with things"
- times when I feel "off-center": anxious, upset, tense in a non-productive way
- times when I feel helpless, out of control: when I feel my "willpower" slipping away
- times when I feel myself "overly controlled," too programmed
- times when I feel myself acting spontaneously and joyously: self-celebrating

If reducing anxiety (become more centered, more relaxed) is an area that you would like to work on, first you need to gain additional information about what *you* mean by your terms. In order to do this, follow the instructions on self-observation. There is a data collection chart specifically related to the area of centeredness and anxiety on which you may record information about your self-observation. At the end of each day, it is worthwhile to count up the frequency with which the behavior occurred (e.g., frequency of anxious feelings; frequency of relaxed feelings) and record that information on the chart. This will give you a graphic visual picture of what is occurring, similar to the anxiety graph. It is also worthwhile at the end of the day to spend some time thinking about what you learned from the self-observation: e.g., what are some of the situations that increase the likelihood of your becoming tense and off-center? What are some of the ways

NAME _____ DATE _____
 BEHAVIOR RECORDED* _____

*Times when I feel centered, relaxed (X)
 Times when I feel anxious, tense (O)

BEFORE		AFTER							TOTAL PER TIME SLOT
Where? Who was present? Doing what?	How did situation change as a result?	SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	
		7-9							
		9-11							
		11-1							
		1-3							
		3-5							
		5-7							
		7-9							
		9-11							
		11-7							
	TOTAL PER DAY								

RECORD OF DAILY SELF-OBSERVATION

FREQUENCY OF OBSERVED BEHAVIORS	DAYS OF OBSERVATION																																																																																																																																																				
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BEHAVIOR RECORDED
 When I feel anxious, tense (O)
 When I feel calm, relaxed (X)

GOAL SET
 (After seven to fourteen days of self-observation):

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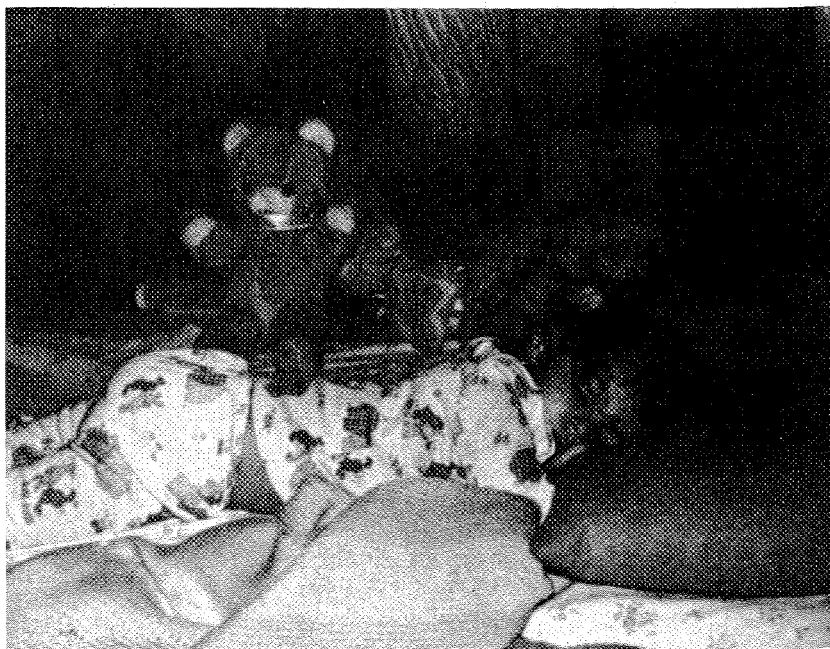
you react when you get tense? What are situations that increase the likelihood of your feeling calm, relaxed?

Step Two: Self-evaluation and Goal Setting

After you have sufficient information from your self-observation, look at this information, evaluate it, and set a goal.

Step Three: Techniques for Reaching the Goal

Environmental Planning. In order to individually tailor techniques to our own particular situation, we have to know what that particular situation is. Once we gain this information through self-observation, we can begin to look for how best to deal with the area of concern. For example, we may decide to use environmental planning to deal with the area of centeredness and tension. We may avoid situations that make us tense, and seek out situations in which we feel relaxed. We can put cues around our home and office to remind us to check ourselves for feelings of relaxation (e.g., are my shoulders hunched? Do I feel calm in my stomach? Am I engaging in a positive, accepting dialogue?). Below is a picture I often use as a cue to relax.



We can let these cues remind us to take a relaxation break: a moment to pause and appreciate, to just let go and "feel good."

Meditation, Progressive Relaxation, Systematic Desensitization. Other strategies that may be useful to help us relax are meditation, progressive deep muscle relaxation, and systematic desensitization. Each of these may be practiced twice a day for about fifteen to twenty minutes. These three strategies are similar in that they occur at certain fixed points throughout the day, regardless of the amount of tension or anxiety that you may be feeling at that particular time.

Time-out; Informal Relaxation. There are other strategies, however, that can be used informally throughout the day when we recognize that we are tense and anxious. One of the easiest ways for dealing with a tense situation is to leave the situation, a self-imposed "time out." Another strategy involves trying to interrupt the situation and practice a quick, informal relaxation exercise, which may be referred to as contingent informal meditation.

Contingent Informal Meditation. As a way of illustrating contingent informal meditation, let me ask you to think of a current personal situation which causes you to be somewhat tense. Take the situation and see if you can make it as specific as possible. Who is present? Where are you? What kinds of things are you doing, saying, thinking? Now close your eyes and imagine yourself in that situation, and allow yourself to experience the tension that you normally feel. Observe your tension. It's all right to let yourself feel anxious. You're in a safe place here, and the tense scene is not actually happening. Continue to observe your tension, noting where in your body you feel tense: Is your heart beating faster? Is your breathing more rapid? How does your stomach feel? What kinds of images do you have in your head? What sort of things are you saying to yourself? Are you saying things like: "I am helpless; I am not competent to handle this situation"? Let yourself go and just experience all that is happening to you.

Interruption of Sequence and Alternative Response. Once you have observed these thoughts and actions, say "stop" as you

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clench your fist and tighten your jaw. Then relax your fingers and your jaw and imagine yourself beginning to do an informal breath meditation: You are closing your eyes and beginning to focus on your breathing. Now, actually take two deep breaths through your nose, and, as you exhale, let your "center" of attention sink into your stomach. Say to yourself:

1. "I am (your name) ."
2. "I am breath" (and take another deep breath).
3. "I am calm and relaxed and am in control" (and take two more deep breaths, letting your "center" sink to your stomach as you exhale).

Now imagine yourself becoming more and more relaxed; imagine yourself meditating, feeling calm, and in control. After a few more seconds, open your eyes, and just let yourself enjoy the calm, relaxed, and wide-awake feeling.

We're focusing on breath meditation because breathing is the simplest and most basic action we do. If we didn't breathe, we wouldn't be alive. If we weren't breathing, we wouldn't be able to get angry or upset or tense. As a rule, when you get anxious, all you have to do is remember that you are "just breath" and return to that simple behavior.

Some Final Thoughts on Relaxation and Centeredness

Centeredness may be seen as an attitude, a way of perceiving the world. We may learn, through several detached observation techniques, what things are important to us, and what things are not. In addition to this discrimination, we may learn to keep a perspective about all aspects of living.

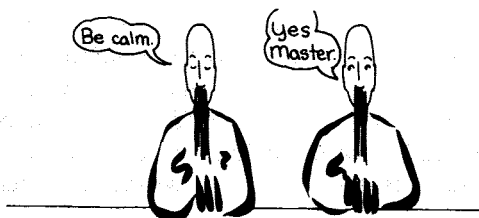
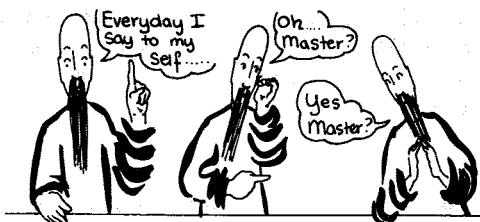
When we catch ourselves becoming off-center, we must be accepting in our reaction, even if how we feel is a result of our own imperfection. Otherwise, we may commit a second fault, that of overreacting to our own imperfect humanness.

When you have a feeling you don't like, don't argue with the feeling. It exists. It is a true feeling: *you* are having it. Try to become aware of it. Accept your imperfections. Don't fight them, as in karate; flow with them, as in *aikido*.

As Gandhi noted, to cease being an angry man takes only two things: patience and hard work. Let's remember that Zen suggests we shouldn't become upset at our imperfections, but rather be

able to accept them and, at the same time, work on changing them. The Zen way also advises that we should only do one thing at a time; and when we do it, *We Do It*.

If you catch yourself getting upset over trivia, and then getting angry at this lack of centeredness tell yourself to "let go, ease up, breathe deeply."



To stay centered and relaxed, you can:

1. Observe the times you get off-center—behavioral self-observation, informal meditation.
2. Make decisions about whether the issue is worth being upset about—detached observation, obtaining a perspective.
3. Use formal strategies for change—meditation twice a day, progressive relaxation twice a day (general relaxation), systematic desensitization (specific concern).
4. Use informal strategies for change—environmental planning (staying away from the situation, putting up cues as a signal to relax), interrupting sequence (leaving the environment, thought stopping, informal relaxation strategies [cognitive refocusing on breathing, covert self-modeling and self-instructions to be calm and let go and obtain a perspective]).

You can also:

1. Use mental aikido—practice flowing with an unpleasant situation, look for positive aspects.
2. Cut out relaxing pictures, images that make you feel good, and paste them up where you will see them frequently.
3. Make up a double-column self-instruction form so you can learn from your mistakes, one column listing the situation and how you acted, the other column listing your self-instructions and model for next time.

Case Three: Overcoming Depression

The third case we are going to discuss involves a male high-school adolescent who was described by his counselors and teachers as frequently listless, unmotivated, and uninvolved with any of the school's activities. When I talked to the student, he told me that he felt depressed all the time, and that there were only negative things around him—the smog, the traffic, the noise of the city. He also said that he had a lot of feelings inside himself, but whenever he tried to express these emotions in words, he became confused and frustrated.

I decided to develop two complementary strategies in working with this student. First, I wanted to help show him that he was selectively perceiving the negative things around him, and ignoring the positive; and second, I wanted to provide him with the means for communicating and expressing his internal feelings. He was a sensitive and warm person, and it seemed important for him to find ways of sharing this warmth with others.

Let me briefly describe the different types of structured experiences which I used with this student.

Realizing Selective Perception. To get him to practice self-observation of the “positive” in the external environment, I asked him to go to a park, and write down everything that made him feel good. He was instructed to also write down things that made him feel bad, but for every bad thing he noticed he was to list one good thing in a column next to it.

He returned with the list below:

benches	shrubs trimmed in columns
tables	the shades of greens and yellows
fences	people seeming as if they're enjoying themselves; child playing with her mother
the willow trees not being allowed to grow naturally, trimmed so they can't hang to the ground	yellow and pink flowers
the cement creek that runs through the park	the small creatures that, surprisingly enough, still roam between the blades of grass
the hazy shades of gray within the sky	birds

He didn't like the fact that men *clipped* the willows and didn't allow them to grow naturally. He also didn't like tables, fences: the human intervention. However, he was surprised to find how many things he did like: the green and yellow shades of grass; the living creatures hidden in the grass; a young child playing. Also he liked the columns of bushes even though they were artificially shaped by man.

The assignment (goal) for the next week was for him to write down, *each day*, at least three positive things that made him feel good. When he came in the next week, he brought the following list:

- camping, full moon, much wildlife
- the leaves seeming to be getting brighter, yellowish, and reddish
- very clear and colorful sunset
- day went very slowly
- a very illuminated rainbow, wind, stars exceptionally bright
- clouds, wind, rain
- camping, sunset, noises of the wind

He told me he had felt much better that week. "I know I'm feeling better—I went camping . . . just haven't wanted to go camping this year because I've been feeling so down. . . ."

During subsequent weeks, we talked and experienced many different modes of perceiving the positive things around us. We

practiced meditating on our breathing and on the beauty of our internal body. As he noted, "I became more aware of the rhythmic processes and actions within me."

We practiced ear meditation on silence, on the sounds of a flute. We practiced eye meditation on inner visual imagery. We practiced opening-up eye meditation, in which he enjoyed "the intensity of color, like seeing for the first time." Toward the end of our sessions together, we practiced *mindfulness meditation* during a shared meal. This mindfulness meditation included being aware and observant of everything we were doing during the preparations of the meal: cutting carrots, celery, tofu, bean sprouts. Afterwards we tried a sensory awareness exercise with an orange, to practice living in the moment. We each took an orange, and focused on its texture, feel, form, spending several moments "getting to know" this orange. At the end of this experiment, he commented "Far out. I've only *eaten* oranges before." (He'd lived most of his life in Florida where they'd eaten oranges every day. But this was the first time he felt he'd ever really *seen* and experienced one.) This exercise helped make him aware and appreciative of the intricacy and beauty of everyday "objects."

Learning Different Modes of Self-expression. He had told me he had difficulty using words to express his feelings, so we also focused on this problem. First, I taught him brush-stroke painting (*sumi-e*) as one outlet for his emotions, one way for him to express his feelings without words.

His first painting was the face opposite.

We talked about this gloomy "Sun-Face." He said it felt good for him to get that out of his system.

He then proceeded to paint some other pictures, two of which follow. These pictures showed him the delicacy and sensitivity he also had inside him.

We also spent some time learning to label emotions. We cut pictures out of magazines and described how the people felt. This was done as a means of teaching him to correctly label his own internal cues. This successive approximation technique was used because it is often easier to label someone else's emotions than one's own.

Finally, we worked on having him describe and express his



own internal feelings in words, through the use of writing *haiku*. He wrote down his feelings and thoughts in quick sentences, not worrying about exact form.

*Green leaves
Inhale sunlight
let me breathe*

*Red bottle brush blossoms
dancing to the whistling wind
always thought winter changes were heavy on me
but not so, as to a yellow tree*

*Leaves falling down
Only to be swept up by the wind
and scattered throughout*



*Caught a glimpse of sunset
as I turned to follow it disappeared
Listening to the silence and crickets
Darkness and stars*

At the end of two months, this student had learned many things:

1. He had learned to precisely label and express his internal feelings.
2. He had learned many different modes of expressing himself—through words, through his breathing, through painting.
3. He had learned how he was selectively focusing on the negative, and was now able to use this habit as a cue for looking at what was positive and beautiful around him.

Through Eastern techniques (*sumi-e*, *haiku*, meditation), and Western techniques (self-observation, precise labeling), and combination techniques (sensate focus, selective perception), he had learned to once again enjoy himself and his environment. He was no longer depressed, apathetic. The school commented on how motivated he was. He noted how personally good he felt, especially with his renewed interest in camping, "where I can be in nature and have so many ways to play creatively."

Different Focus for Different Folks

In case three, several different types of awareness exercises were used.

Let me ask you to do a little experiment to illustrate the way in which different types of focus affect our experiencing. Next time you eat an ice cream cone, practice the following: (1) First, lick the ice cream as you normally would—e.g., while talking to a friend, walking, looking for a place to sit, looking at clothes in windows (ordinary awareness—many random stimuli). (2) Stop and *focus* on the ice cream; feel the texture, note the coldness (selective awareness). (3) Then focus on the ice cream and say to yourself, "This tastes good, I'm sure having fun eating this ice cream" (selective awareness with positive evaluation). (4) Focus on the ice cream, lick it, and say nothing, evaluate nothing, just experience (pinpoint meditation). (5) Finally, focus on everything

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around you—hand, ice cream, people, floor, ceiling, shops, cars, smells (opening-up meditation). Are some combinations more effective than others? Which do you prefer when you are eating ice cream? As can be seen, the effectiveness of a particular combination depends on your goals. It may be that certain combinations are more effective, depending upon the behavior being engaged in, and the goals of the behavior.

For example, sometimes we may find ourselves in a situation in which there is too much stimulation. We may be in a noisy city, with a lot of traffic and pushy crowds. We may be taking an exam and trying to concentrate while someone else is tapping a pencil on a desk. At these times, when we feel “too sensitive” it may be useful to try a type of selective awareness, in which we learn to tune out distracting stimuli. At other times, such as when we are out in a beautiful natural setting, we may wish to practice an opening-up awareness, in which we let ourselves tune in to all the stimuli around us.

Below are some additional exercises that you may wish to practice, and which you may find enjoyable. These exercises involve different types of focusing procedures, and may help you learn more about which focusing procedures are most enjoyable and effective for you in different kinds of situations.

Eyes: Selective Awareness. Try pinpointing your focus amidst the plethora of stimuli around you: watch a bird flying, an ant crawling, the eyes of a child.

Eyes: Opening-up Awareness. Don't focus on any one thing. Rather, try to see everything simultaneously, like a mirror.

Eyes: Twinkle. Look at yourself in the mirror. Note your eyes. Note your mouth. Now twinkle your eyes. Really let them shine. Note what happens to your mouth; note what kinds of thoughts occur when you twinkle your eyes.

Ears: Selective Awareness. Try to selectively perceive: tune in to the notes of a flute or the song of a bird. Choose what you want to focus on, and concentrate your entire attention on it.

Ears: Opening-up Awareness. Listen. Make your ears like a

mirror. Try this in nature. Even try it in noisy traffic. Hear everything, but become attached to and bothered by nothing. In traffic, listen to the different car sounds, the tire squeaks, the honking; hear it all; don't dwell on any sound — let them all merge and pass. In nature, hear the birds, crickets, rustling leaves — merge and pass.

Smell. Note the smells when you next walk into a kitchen before dinner, or into a flower shop. Note also how long the smells last before you habituate to them.

Touch: External. Focus externally on various objects: use your hands, tongue, feet, and spend some time appreciating textures, sizes, shapes. What are you touching right now? With what? How does it feel?

Touch: Internal. Practice tensing and relaxing different muscles.

Touch: Combination. Have a good friend massage you. Try to make your body into a mirror so you can feel the hands massaging the inner surface of your skin.

You may play with any number of senses: smell, taste, touch; either with an opening-up or a selective awareness. The goal of these exercises is to develop the type of awareness you want, to teach your senses to focus selectively when you want them to, and to be open like a mirror, when you choose that.

Law of Reverse Effects²

As we tune into different types of focusing, we realize that awareness sometimes plays funny tricks on us. For example, here is an exercise to try. Stand on one leg. Imagine a canyon on your right side, and say to yourself "Don't fall into the canyon on the right side."

Well, what happened? Where is your "center" of gravity now? Watch how you fall.

Similarly, when a person focuses on something he/she doesn't want to do (e.g., eat), (s)he often seems to engage in that behavior more frequently (e.g., eats more).

This can be easily explained by the variety of the different

types of modes of awareness that are possible. For example, try the above example of the canyon again, only this time focus your attention inwardly, right above the navel, "on your center," and practice breathing easily. Note your increased stability. *Where* we focus may have a pronounced effect on our behavior.

Similarly, *how* we focus may have a pronounced effect on our behavior. If, in the above food example, we say to ourselves, "I'm sure suffering a lot; I'm being deprived; that food sure looks good," then focusing on food will cause us to eat more. However, if we focus on food and tell ourselves how healthy we are for not eating, how the excess food is not good for us, then we will be more likely to resist. The effects of how we focus was illustrated in a study by Walter Mischel and his colleagues at Stanford University.³ Students were asked to look at pretzels, and told that if they didn't eat the pretzel now, they could have a larger, better treat later. One group of students was told to imagine the pretzel's salty good taste. The other group was told to describe the pretzel to themselves as a piece of wood that was rotten and not edible. The second group was able to wait significantly longer for the pretzel. Even though both groups were focusing on the pretzel, the *manner in which they were focusing* determined the degree of self-control they evidenced.⁴

Focus Well!

Sometimes how we focus, or what we focus on, is not as important as the fact that we do it "wholeheartedly," and don't jump back and forth between strategies. This is illustrated by the different ways in which we can learn to increase our tolerance of pain.

One method was illustrated in a case study of a Latin American who was able to pass sharpened bicycle spokes through his body.⁵ During the time the spokes entered his skin, he maintained a Zenlike attitude: *unfocused, without evaluation*. His EEG registered alpha both before and during the time the spikes were in his body. He had learned to disassociate himself from the pain; that is, he gave no evaluative commands, but simply observed everything in his internal and external environment, without comment.*

*Frontal lobotomy patients register the same amount of pain physiologically before as after the operation; however, after the operation, they *evaluate* the pain as less.

Another method of reducing pain is illustrated by a case study describing a karate expert who was able to hold a twenty-five-pound pole tied to a spike stuck into the fleshy part of the skin of his forearm below the elbow. He explained that he was able to do this by taking his *ki* (center) and focusing total energy on the point at which the spike went through his flesh. This involved a very active concentration, a selective focus on the single point of pain. The karate expert's EEG remained at beta (active brain wave); he was pinpointing his attention totally on the pain, with no evaluation.⁶

Still another method of pain reduction and pain tolerance involves having subjects focus on a competing response in either the external or internal environment. In Western settings this has been demonstrated by Kanfer and Goldfoot,⁷ who showed that an individual who had his hand submerged in cold water was able to withstand pain longer if he was allowed to focus on external slides that he presented to himself. This method has also been demonstrated with the use of hypnosis as an analgesic.⁸ In the LaMaze childbirth technique, the stimuli (contractions) are relabeled from "pain" (internal process) to "beauty of a child about to be born" (external goal). Simultaneously there is a focus on breathing as a means of shifting attention (from the pain stimulus to breath). In Eastern settings, the effects of focusing on a competing response were tested with Raj yogis who pinpointed attention on the tip of their nose, or a point on the back of their skull. These yogis did not react to cold water, bright lights shining in their eyes, or a tuning fork presented to their ears.⁹

Thus, there are three possible models (with accompanying techniques) to achieve pain reduction and tolerance: (1) cognitive focusing on objects other than those which are causing the pain (competing response); (2) a nonfocused awareness on no particular object, with no evaluations; and (3) pinpointed attention on the stimulus that is affecting one, but without any evaluations.

The important point we make here is that there may be no one right type of awareness. Several different models may work equally well. The element which each of these methods of focusing has in common, however, is that the effectiveness of the focus in the studies was related to the disciplined awareness and concentration of the practitioner. Therefore no matter where or how you focus, focus well!

Detached Observation: Obtaining a Perspective

I would now like to turn to several techniques which may be helpful in teaching us to achieve a perspective. These techniques are related to the section in Chapter 5 concerning detached observation (nonattachment) and caring love.

We talked in Chapter 1 about how meditation could help us attain a detached observation of ourselves. We may also use covert self-statements to effect a similar type of focus:



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Lucy, though not perhaps with the status of a Zen Master, is moving along the continuum toward “immovable wisdom.” By observing herself in the third person, as merely an object in the environment, she achieves a type of detached observation, a perspective on herself. Describing our behavior in the ongoing present may help us step back from the action, and gain a perspective. This is similar in certain respects to a “mindfulness” meditation, in which we maintain a perspective on all our actions and label all events that come into awareness. Mindfulness meditation focuses our attention on the act and the sensations. For example, Lucy, if she were doing a mindfulness meditation, might be saying: “Anger, anger, fluttering in stomach, tightness in throat, frustration, tension in neck, vocal cords beginning to vibrate, yelling. . .”

Mindfulness meditation, which involves a process of noticing (discriminating) and labeling all cues that come into awareness, may help detach us from the sensations themselves, and let us see them “out there.” Lucy, in the cartoon, observes “herself”: the composite of the sensations. She observes her entire self in a detached way, as if she were a third-party narrator.

To facilitate our developing and maintaining this detached observation, we may find it useful to instruct ourselves to keep a perspective; stand back; notice what’s happening, etc.

An individual may also gain a measure of detached observa-

tion by forming a covert image of him/herself performing an action in the ongoing present.

In addition to meditation, self-instructions, and covert imagery, there are several additional techniques that may be useful in obtaining a perspective.

Writing About Ourselves in the Third Person: The Novel

Lucy, in the last cartoon uses verbal self-statements as if she were a narrator: "She knew not how to suffer in silence." Many authors have pointed out the potential therapeutic benefit of actually writing about personal experiences in the third person. Rilke, in the *Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*,¹⁰ only begins to recover his sanity and physical health when he can begin to detach himself enough from his experiences to gain a perspective. In so doing, he shifts his literary style from first-person "I" to third-person "he." Sartre's character, Rastignac, decides to fight the nausea he is feeling by writing a book about "nausea." Perhaps the most dramatic example occurs in Albert Camus' *Plague*. The narrator of the book describes in vivid detail how a plague attacks a small town, killing many inhabitants. The narrator is like a reporter, maintaining an objective distance from the story. Later, however, we discover that the narrator is Dr. Rieux, who lived in the town and fought valiantly against the plague. Rieux was both an actor within the drama *and* the narrator of the book. In order to be intensely involved in the life-and-death struggle against the plague, in order to be able to see his friends and loved ones die and still be able to continue to fight, Rieux needed to simultaneously stand back and maintain a distance from his actions, to observe "objectively" what was happening. Rieux wrote his book in order to fight the plague. In this book both the artist and his art were revealed. He both fought the plague and watched himself fighting the plague, living intensely in the here and now, *and* maintaining a detachedness, an "immovable wisdom."¹¹

Similarly, reading about or hearing of others who face similar problems can help give a perspective. As Rastignac noted, his purpose in sharing his encounter with nothingness was to show others they were not alone.

Writing About Ourselves in the First Person: The Personal Journal

One of the reasons a journal or diary may be therapeutic is that

when we write about events, we may gain a certain kind of objectivity, a certain removal of the emotional intensity of day-to-day events. Daily events, which may be confusing, are put on paper, outside our heads. We may begin to at least organize the confusion in black and white. Further, as Ira Progoff suggests,¹² the journal may give us a sense of continuity about our life. In the journal, we write freely, without censure or judgment.

The One-Year-After Technique. It is also important to reread one's journal. This can show that events which at one point were of great importance and intensely emotional become, with the passage of time, less emotionally laden. Things go on, things end, and new things take their place. Rereading our journal may also help us discover a progress, "flow" to our lives, which might not otherwise be apparent on a day-to-day basis.

Writing Your Obituary

Awareness of our own death may help us live our lives more fully, and obtain a perspective on what is truly important to us in this life. One way to do this is to write our own obituary. Put down how you would like to be remembered — personally, professionally, in human terms — and see how your goals relate to how you are currently living and acting.

Writing our obituary may help put many of our goals and life plans into perspective. There is a related technique, involving death, which has also been frequently used in the East: *Pretend that you are going to die the following moment.* Imagine that you have only a few more minutes to live. Note which things become important to you and which become insignificant. Look around

you and see if you don't experience a freshness of vision. (Increase the time: a few minutes, a few hours, a few weeks, a few months, a few years. What changes do you notice in your priorities?)

Poetry

Similarly, many people use poetry as a means of expressing painful emotion in a constructive and creative way. As Rastignac noted about literature, so too may poetry be a vehicle for sharing common emotions and feelings with other individuals. This may help us as writers, by putting feelings on paper; it may help us as readers, by seeing we're not alone and that others have also felt our joys and sorrows. For example:

*When he realized the past was nothing
more than this photograph of his daughter,
he sang softly with tears.*

*Once soon her new child's face,
unborn yet, would be the song of the past,
With fresh tears.*

Let the images of your life flow past, and write a poem:

"Oh, How Lucky I Am" Experiences

Often, through some event, we realize what good and lucky lives we lead. This realization is the source of the old adage: "I cried because I had no shoes until I met a man who had no feet." Even though it may sound trite, looking at our advantages, which we usually take for granted, is quite helpful in gaining perspective.

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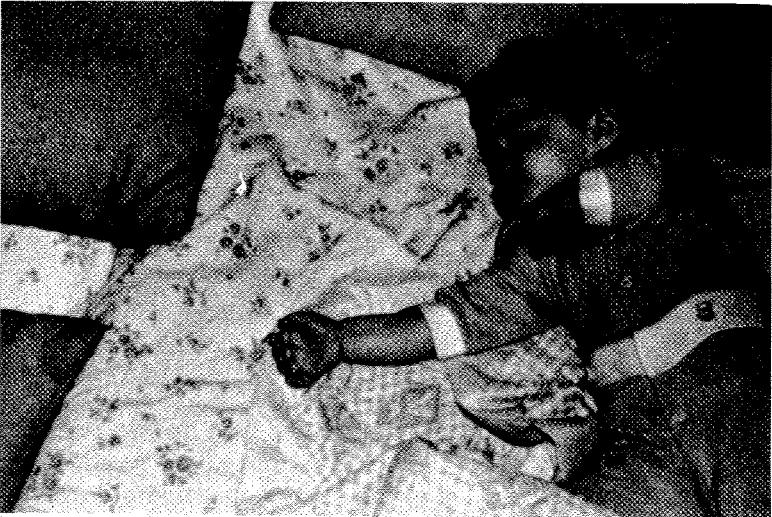
Spend a few minutes listening and appreciating some of your “oh how lucky . . .” experiences.

Appreciation of Small Things

There are a myriad of examples of delicate, quiet, small events that help give perspective and joy. Try listing a few, like the following:

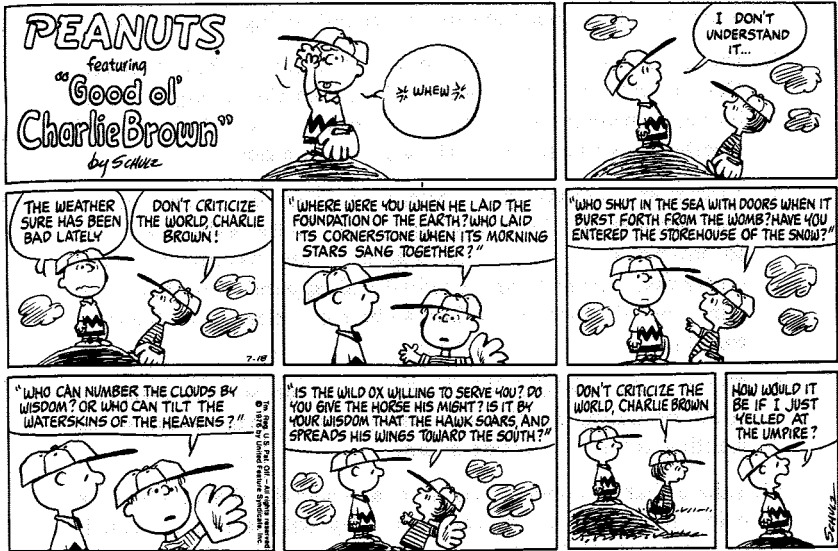
- The fine threads of a spiderweb
- Water dripping from a freshly watered plant
- My older daughter sharing a donut with her sister
- An ant crawling
- The warm touch of a friend

Here is an example of a small thing to appreciate.



Where Did We Come From; Where Are We Going?

In the first chapter there is a picture of a man on a bridge. In our discussion of that picture, we noted that we don't know what is to the right of the bridge (where he's come from); nor do we know what is ahead, in the mist. Often certain events, or thoughts, may "jolt" us into this larger perspective, this realization that in many ways our world is like a bridge. We neither know where we have come from. . .



. . . nor are we sure where we are going.

And where does the bridge lead? Ronald Bracewell suggests that 300 years from now we may be able to put voyagers into interplanetary space. "After the planets are mined and space near the sun is crowded with orbiting societies, a few will shove off for nearby stars. It will take several generations."¹³ What would life be like in a self-contained capsule? In terms of life's meaning? What goals will these travelers have? How are we on earth different from people in a space capsule cut off from everything? Where are we heading?

The Role of Humor: A Part of Detached Observation

Often humor helps give us a perspective on events. I'd like to share several ideas and stories that may be useful:

1. Keep a picture of the earth from the moon. When you get angry, find where you would be located on planet earth, U.S.A., state, county, city, building, room. Make a dot, and caption the entire picture in bold letters, stating your complaint.
2. Irreverence: Imagine yourself acting subtly inappropriate in a social situation to make sure you're not taking it too seriously.
3. During an afternoon lecture at Stanford, Rabbi Abraham Heschel reported there was to be an earth-shaking event of immense proportions within an hour. Everybody wondered whether he was a prophet. He was. The sun set.
4. Next time you have an important interview or conference, and feel nervous, try the following: when you meet those who are to interview you, imagine that they are wearing long red underwear under their "professional apparel" (to help you remember that we are all human beings under our clothes and roles).
5. *The day the sun didn't set*: Watch the sun set. However, instead of imagining the sun going down, imagine the earth rotating as you flip upside down.
6. Take a fear or concern you have, and give it a shape, a form, a color. Put it out on the table and play with it, pat it, scrunch it, bounce it. Get to know your concerns, play with them . . . make friends with them.

Additional Areas to Observe

Below are listed some additional areas and exercises related to focusing and detached observation (nonattachment) that you may wish to make use of.

1. Choosing awareness
 - Note when you catch yourself doing two things at once, (e.g., trying to work on a task and thinking of sailing).

- Note when you catch yourself dwelling in a future-oriented way on things that you can't really act upon or didn't intend to act upon, and so worry needlessly.
2. Detached observation and caring love — possessions
- List times when you have felt pain at the loss of a possession.
 - List times when you have felt nonattachment (in a positive sense) to a possession.
 - List times when you have felt nonattachment (in a negative sense) to a possession, a kind of indifference or numbness.
 - List times when you have been attached to a possession, and as a result, have taken exceptionally good care of it.
 - Do any of these past examples suggest areas worth monitoring in the present?
3. Detached observation and caring love — other people
- Note when you use negative trait descriptions about other people.
 - Note times when you relate to only a part of a person (i.e., fitting them into preconceived categories).
 - Note times when you feel you are relating fully to somebody.
 - Note the positive statements you make to a spouse or close friend.

We live in the ways of the world, yet sometimes become so caught in them that we lose the broad perspective and the momentary beauty. We have described several techniques by which we can gain a broader perspective on our life. It may be worthwhile to set up cues to remind yourself to "get a perspective." Think of things that give you a perspective, specific examples to call up, when you see a cue. Perhaps you could monitor the amount of times you experience "detached humor," and try to increase the number. Enjoy the perspective. Learn to watch and to participate with humor, and with wisdom.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, case studies of three individuals were presented. These three cases respectively involved problems of low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression. Techniques that integrated Eastern and Western strategies were discussed as they applied to each case. In addition, information was presented for ways in which the reader could apply these integrated techniques to their own lives. Specific areas discussed included (1) those related to the "Self": increasing positive self-statements and pleasurable time for the self; overcoming self-consciousness; developing egolessness; balancing assertiveness and yielding; (2) those related to reducing anxiety and becoming "centered" and "in flow"; and (3) those showing the relationship between different types of focusing strategies—selective awareness, opening up awareness, detached observation—and our experience of reality.