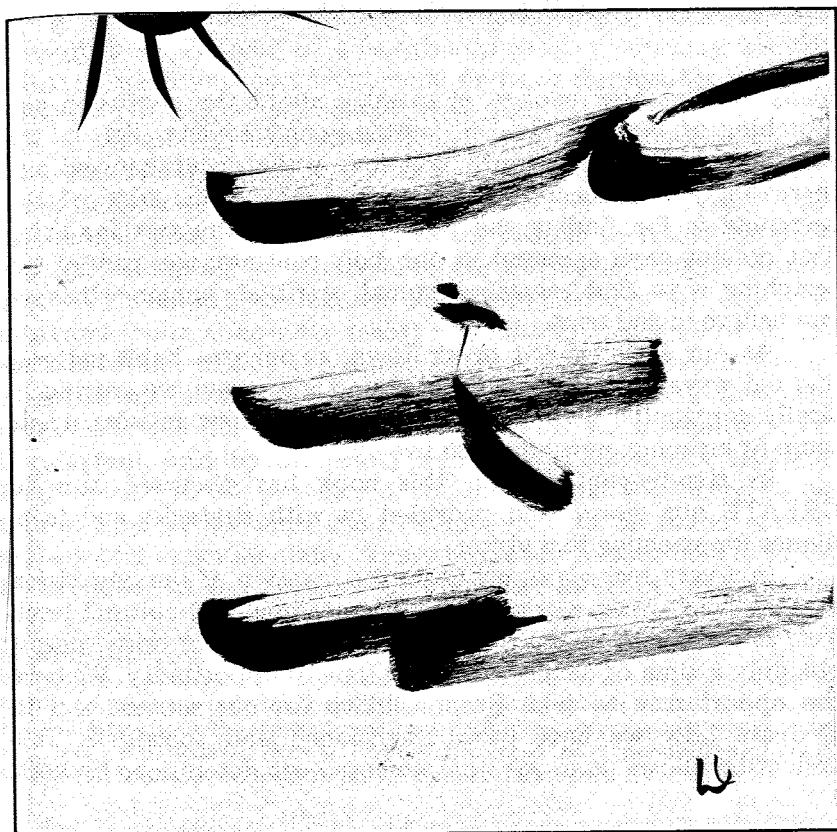


7

Education: Having the Self-soar



LETTING YOURSELF SOAR

Many writers have spoken eloquently about the confusion and searching of the individual in contemporary society. Part of the searching is for the warmth and love which a mechanized and increasingly bureaucratic society does not offer; part of the searching is for finding the poetry, the joy, the zest for living that do not seem apparent in our daily routines; and part of the searching is to find values—personal, spiritual, human—that we can believe in and trust.

As our social myths break down, as our past habit patterns and old ways of acting no longer seem appropriate, we are dramatically confronted with the need to search for new answers, a new sense of meaning, new myths to live by.

In step-by-step fashion this book has discussed how to **CREATE** our vision, and provided us with strategies and techniques for attaining that vision.

In a very real sense, we begin the creation of our new vision at a time of Crisis, a crisis on both a personal and cultural level. Yet, as we saw in Chapter 3, the two characters for crisis suggest not only a time of danger but also a time of opportunity. We have the opportunity to take Responsibility for our actions, and to Evaluate how we have been conditioned and socialized. This evaluation allows us to see how we have been determined by both

our heredity and our social environment, the two characters which make up the Chinese word for fate.

By taking responsibility, and by evaluating our reflex responses and habit patterns, we have an opportunity for a new awareness. As suggested in Chapter 4, this awareness, this mode of knowing, can and should "bridge the hemispheres" and encompass both an Eastern intuitive holistic approach and a Western scientific analytical approach. For example, at the start of Chapter 3, I asked you to do an informal self-observation of times you felt free, and times when you did not feel free. Behavioral self-observation provides a precise, causal, sequential relationship between our behavior and the environment. We can see that certain situations (antecedents) are facilitative of freedom, and certain others are not. Look at that self-observation again and reread what you wrote on page 123 in your lists of antecedents, behavior, and consequences. As part of a self-change project you may wish to think of ways you could alter one or all of the feelings in those columns to increase your personal freedom.

A second skill that allows us to gain a new awareness about our conditioning is meditation. As we pointed out in both Chapter 1 and Chapter 4, meditation helps us to uncondition ourselves to our normal modes of awareness, to the normal socialization process, and to reprogram ourselves to our own inner-directed drummer.* By helping us remove the preconceptions of ordinary awareness—our consensus reality—meditation may allow us to experience and realize the much wider and greater depth of our potential capabilities. For, we need to remember that in the creation of our cultural myths and belief systems, we are limited, to a large extent, only by the reality we create in our minds. As John Lilly noted, "In the province of the mind, what is believed to be true is true, or becomes true, within limits to be found experientially and experimentally. These limits are further beliefs to be transcended. In the province of the mind, there are no limits."¹

*Meditation teaches a method of unconditioning ourselves to societal mores in two ways. First, during meditation, the individual practices spending time alone, apart from society. Second, the process of detached observation may help teach an individual about the process by which he is conditioned: i.e., learning about the ways our culturally acquired language may cause us to act, feel, and believe. (For a further discussion of "unconditioning" see Chapter 5, footnote on internal and external reinforcement.)

With our new awareness, we are able to look for new Alternatives. We have the opportunity to choose and affirm our newly created vision, our path of heart. Part of this new vision comes from the knowledge and wisdom of the Eastern esoteric and mystical traditions; part of the vision comes from the knowledge and wisdom of Western psychology. As we suggested in Chapter 5, each of these traditions makes certain assumptions about human nature, our capabilities, and the best way to obtain knowledge about ourselves. A new vision of human potential, of holistic health and healing, combines the best of both of these traditions.

Once we have created the vision, we have to deal with the questions of how to achieve it. Can we actually develop the skills to enhance our willpower, our sensitivity, and openness to ourselves, to nature, to other people? The answer is yes. By using a combination of self-regulation techniques from the Eastern spiritual disciplines and Western psychology we can learn to achieve our self-chosen goals. In Chapter 6, we discussed the Techniques that may be used to help us reach our path of heart. We illustrated the way these techniques could be integrated by means of three case studies: on low self-esteem, on anxiety, and on depression.

However, the possibility of reaching our vision brings us to a seeming paradox involving the question of free will, fate, and determinism. As noted above, the Chinese word for fate consists of two characters, one meaning heredity, one meaning social environment. The Chinese believed that we were bound by the limits of fate, determined by our heredity and social environment. This is similar to the view suggested by B. F. Skinner in *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, in which our determinism by environmental conditions is strongly underscored.

Yet if we are determined by fate, what hope is there for developing the freedom, the responsibility, and the skills to take control of our own lives?*

*One of the primary disadvantages of belief in a deterministic world is that if we give up our sense of control we may feel like helpless, passive creatures. We may ask ourselves, "Why act, why try to change, if everything is determined?" However, this is not a necessary result of a belief in a deterministic world. I would like to suggest that once we can give up the illusion of freedom, once we can accept that we live in a deterministic world, there may be several positive consequences that will, paradoxically, give us *increased* freedom. First, by letting go of our illusory sense of freedom, we can learn to *honestly* evaluate how the environment influences us. This will allow us to

This paradox can be resolved by reference to the Chinese concept of Education (learning). The Chinese word for “to learn” consists of two characters. One character is the picture of a nose, meaning self. The other character is a pair of wings, which rests above the self. To the Chinese, education was to have the self soar. By learning about our habit patterns and conditioning, by learning how the environment affects our behavior, by learning how to choose a vision for ourselves, and by learning the skills to reach our vision, we educate and **CREATE** ourselves—literally and figuratively, to soar beyond our fate, to become an “artist of life.”

HOW TO CREATE YOURSELF

Both the Eastern and Western schools tell you that you are a creature of habit, bound by fate. You have no control over your life, even though you may think you do. You are merely living in an illusion of freedom.

1. Have a Crisis. (It may be a small concern, a large problem or an area in which you would like to grow and develop your human potential more fully.) If you have already had one, go on to step 2. If you haven't had one yet, look at chapter 3 to get an idea of what you have to look forward to.
2. Responsibility and Evaluation — you may have a choice at this point. You may choose to decide not to learn from your crisis, thereby deciding for the time being that it is simpler to return to your ordinary habit patterns. If this is your choice, return to the beginning and wait for your next crisis. (You may also

deal creatively with what *is*, rather than what we would like to believe is. Second, I believe that without control (determinism), there is no freedom. (For example, let us look at the sport of skiing. To let go, to be free going down the slope, you need knowledge of the *skills* of skiing (e.g., gravity, balance, how to distribute your weight, etc.) It is only by acknowledging and working within the limits of these determinants that we can truly let go and be free. A third advantage of acknowledging a deterministic world is, when we choose to act, we realize the *illusory nature* of our choice. Therefore, we may be willing to hold “our” ideas more loosely, cling to them less tenaciously as ours. This may help bring us closer to attain the Eastern goals of yielding, nonattachment, nonpossessiveness, and egolessness.

ZEN BEHAVIORISM

wish to peek at Chapter 5, and the Epilogue to see what fun you're missing).

You also have the opportunity for rebirth, for a new awareness, a new alternative. If this is your choice, and you are willing to take responsibility for your actions, go on to number 3.

3. A new awareness and a new Alternative—good choice! But not an easy one. To help see how you are conditioned, practice both modes of awareness: meditation and behavioral self-observation.

But what to self-observe? What is the new alternative. Good question! On the next three pages, we list every area of the vision discussed in the book. You may also want to look back at your own goals, your own ideal self, times when you haven't felt free. Don't let yourself be limited in your vision—let yourself believe in the possibilities of your mind.

Having trouble making a decision? That's part of it.

Affirmation? You can do it if you want to. Do you want to? After choosing, you've got to be honest with yourself about whether it's really worth it to you to commit to attaining your "path of heart." As part of your affirmation, you may wish to make a contract with yourself. In this contract, put down what you're going to get out of this effort. For the techniques to put down in the contract, go to number 4.

4. But before going on to techniques, here's a word about acceptance: as Zen suggests (Chapter 5), we are a gift and a blessing just by being. We need to accept and love ourselves just as we are, with all our imperfections, all our not yet developed possibilities. As Tillich wrote "Accept that you are accepted." We don't need to prove anything; we don't have to chastise ourselves for failure, or compare and evaluate ourselves with others who are "succeeding more"; we don't need to type or categorize ourselves, or give ourselves trait labels. There is nothing to prove. We are unique and of worth just as we are.

Stop and appreciate the beauty of you, just as you are. Just the way you are now. Not your role in life, or your job or your achievements. Just you. Stop. Just appreciate you as you. Let yourself feel loved for the unique gift and blessing you are just as you are. Use what you have learned about stopping negative thoughts and increasing the amount of self-accepting statements you make to yourself.

Okay, now you may go on to techniques. Within the framework of acceptance and being, learn the joy of striving for excellence, reaching beyond your grasp, daring to be great — the joy of becoming.

4. Techniques — we've presented some of the most powerful self-change strategies from East and West. They're yours for the asking. Take whatever is appropriate for your needs and your own personal goals. They work. (P.S. remember, if your new way of acting feels awkward at first, that's okay, and even expected. Keep at it; soon it will feel natural.)
5. And now we're at the E of create. We have learned to Educate ourselves to reach our vision. We have begun the process of becoming our own Zen masters, our own Grand Conditioners. We have chosen how we want to live. We have begun the process of learning to have the self-soar, of becoming an "artist of life." Much deserved congratulations. Let's don't ever stop "creating ourselves."

You may wish to pull out certain sections of the book referred to in the above 5 steps that are particularly appropriate for you, thereby making your own individualized "Owner's Manual." This smaller owner's manual can become a foundation for your own personal journal. The larger book, *Precision Nirvana*, can then serve as a reference guide, offering elaboration on certain instructions, concepts, areas of the vision.

SUMMARY

Areas of the Vision

<i>East</i> (Chapter 1)	<i>West</i> (Chapter 2)
overcoming awkward self-consciousness	becoming aware of our conditioning: social environment, physical environment, internal environment
self-regulation: stress and tension management; overcoming fears and phobias; reduced blood pressure;	setting goals for ourselves

Areas of the Vision (continued)

East

(Chapter 1)

reduced dependence on drugs,
cigarettes, alcohol

obtaining a perspective

sense of timelessness; kairos
moments

lack of goals; living in the moment

lack of language/analysis; openness
to nature, to others, to ourselves —
hearing the bird in our breast sing

(Chapter 5)

nonjudgmentalness; acceptance

nonattachment; yielding

West

(Chapter 2)

learning self-regulation skills for
anxiety, for fears and phobias, for
strong sense of self, for positive
attribution of control

(Chapter 5)

learning to obtain a perspective

learning to see peoples' behavior
without the need for traits

(Chapter 6)

pain reduction

thought stopping

Integration

(Chapter 5)

egolessness and strong sense of
self

naturalness, spontaneity, and
self-control

centeredness and productivity

yielding and assertiveness

nonattachment (acceptance) and
caring love

living in the moment:

ordinary awareness and altered state

Techniques

East

(Chapter 1)

formal meditation instructions:
Zen breath meditation;
counting 1-10; shikan-taza;
koan; chant

concentrative meditation:
internal focus; external
focus

West

(Chapter 2)

behavioral self-observation: data
collection sheets

self-evaluation

goal setting

environmental planning: rearranging
stimuli

Techniques (continued)

East

(Chapter 1)

informal meditation:
just listening/watching;
tea ceremony; mondo
additional techniques:
sumi-e; haiku; mindfulness
meditation; hatha yoga;
kwat

(Epilogue)

Zen laughing meditation

West

(Chapter 2)

preprogramming: time out;
contracting

learning skills: progressive relaxa-
tion; systematic desensitization —
fear survey schedule

behavioral programming: reinforce-
ment — successive approximation,
Premack Principle, big cuddle;
punishment (negative feedback) —
the sandwich

self-instructions; self-modeling

(Chapter 5)

communication skills

Combinations and Additional Techniques

(Chapter 6)

Case One: overcoming low self-esteem and self-consciousness; developing a strong self of self, self-acceptance and egolessness; assertiveness and yielding; thought stopping

Case Two: reducing anxiety; becoming centered, relaxed, "in flow;" contingent informal meditation

Case Three: overcoming depression; learning different modes of self-expression

Selective Perception

eyes: opening-up awareness; selective awareness; twinkling

ears: opening-up awareness; selective awareness on silence, on flute

tactile: external; internal;
combination — massage as mirror

Detached Observation

the personal journal

writing obituary

poetry

"Oh, how I lucky I am"
experiences

humor

SUMMARY OF A SUMMARY

All books should be able to be summarized in one sentence. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, the wise person is said to be one who has not a hair's breadth between will (what (s)he decides to do) and action (what (s)he does). The essence of this book may be summarized similarly:

*Decide what you want to do,
and do it.**

*There are many skills necessary to make this decision a reality. To *decide what you want to do* (a) it is necessary to be aware of when you are acting by habit and reflex (see Chapter 5), so that you can become aware of the many choice points that exist at every moment; (b) you also have to be willing to take responsibility for your actions and choices; (c) you have to develop the skills to perceive increased alternatives; and (4) you have to acquire the skills of decision making (including the skill of affirming and getting behind your decision 100 percent). To *do it*, you need the self-regulation and self-management skills to carry through with your decision.

It should be added that this is not meant to be an amoral sentence. Quite the opposite. The assumption is made that the person of wisdom has a highly developed sensitivity toward all forms of life. Therefore, decisions would be made within the framework of values that place a high respect on the rights and freedom of others.