

VI

EPILOGUE

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Deane H. Shapiro, Jr. and Roger N. Walsh

He looked at de Gier, but de Gier was still studying the display.

There were several small cartons filled with incense and a gilded Buddhist statue sitting on a pedestal, staring and smiling, with the headgear tapering off into a sharp point.

"A pointed head," Grijpstra said. "Is that what you get when you meditate?"

"That isn't known as a pointed head," said de Geir, using the voice of his lecture evening, once a month when he taught young constables at the emergency squad the art of crime detection.

"Not a pointed head," de Gier repeated, "But a heaven head. The point points at heaven. Heaven is the goal of meditation. Heaven is thin air. Heaven is upstairs."

"Ah," said Grijpstra. "Are you sure?"

"No," said de Gier.

Outsider in Amsterdam
Janwillem von de Watering

This collection of readings was intended for scientists, scholars, and academicians. By gathering in one source the major seminal articles on meditation theory, research, and practice, it is our hope to begin to develop a true science of meditation. Clearly, as is true of the beginning of any new field of inquiry, questions seem to beget questions, and simple hopes give way to complex multiple interpretations.

As a spiritual discipline, meditation is an ancient and revered practice, and its most outstanding practitioners have been ranked among the wisest people in history. Unfortunately, that history and tradition is sometimes lost and/or forgotten by those who unquestioningly and evangelically embrace a particular meditation technique or path, and try to convince all around them of its absolute truth. On the other hand, it may also be lost to us as Western scientists if we are not careful of our own biases and views as we study meditation. What seems needed on both sides, is an openmindedness and willingness to explore, as unencumbered as possible by rigid preconceptions. This exploration may include not only the content of the technique itself, but also an openness to the process by which this exploration might be undertaken—including not only the use of highly sophisticated technological equipment, but also experiential practice and understanding. Although this throwback to the "introspectionistic" school of the late 19th century may seem distasteful to some, at this point in the state of our art, we should allow ourselves the freedom to keep an openness to as many approaches as possible.

Reflecting this is the statement by SanSaNein, patriarch of Zen in Korea who, in somewhat broken English, extols his Western students to practice their Zen and meditation as intensively as possible and to "keep don't know mind, only keep don't know mind":

One day as the Rabbi was crossing his village square to go to the temple to pray he was accosted by the village Cossack.
"Where are you going." "Don't know," said the Rabbi.

"What do you mean you don't know," exploded the Cossack. "For 20 years every morning you've gotten up and crossed this square to go to the temple and now you're telling me you don't know where you're going." So saying he grabbed the Rabbi and hauled him off to the village jail and just as he was about to throw him into the cell the Rabbi turned to him and said, "See you just don't know!"

Although we as Western scientists bring with us highly sophisticated technologies of a like never before applied to meditation, in many ways, as we begin to investigate meditation, we need to acknowledge that we just do not know. Within the meditation traditions such recognition of one's ignorance and a corresponding humility are recognized as essential prerequisites for learning.

With our equipment we are capable of investigating phenomena associated with meditation which were not even known to exist only a few years ago. Clearly there is the potential for exploring vast new realms of knowledge associated with the meditative discipline. But what we scientists have only recently come to recognize, and what is important for us to remember as we begin this exploration of meditation, is that any and every method of investigation, any concept, hypothesis, or theory, only affords us a partial and elective picture of reality. From the vastness of "what is," our chosen technologies and concepts dissect nature along corresponding lines and provide a selective and limited perspective on the whole. Thus what we observe is ultimately a function not only of the reality we wish to know, but of the tools and concepts by which we seek to know it, and ultimately ourselves. No where is this recognition more important than in the investigation of meditation which, as a discipline, traditionally aimed at the deepest and most fundamental types of knowing. This knowing aims at developing greater and greater degrees of experiential sensitivity to more and more subtle realms called perception, consciousness, and being. Therefore, the scientist who expects that the corresponding psychobiological changes should be large and easily detectable may be disappointed.

In addition the meditative disciplines recognize a range of states of consciousness which is far broader than that of traditional Western psychology. The latter views our usual state as "normal" and optimal and views others as limited in number and usually necessarily dysfunctional, psychosis, delirium, etc. For the meditator the states recognized by Western psychology are complimented by a range of functionally specific states, so called "higher" states. What may often be involved here is no less than a paradigm clash and as with any paradigm clash there is a grave danger of misunderstanding and miscommunication between the two camps. Thus, for the traditionally Western trained scientist whose paradigm contains no "higher" states such claims must necessarily sound nonsensical, and the fact that subtle shifts in consciousness do not register on his/her instrument will seem to add support to this belief.

Thus there is a real danger that if we as Western scientists coming out of our own paradigm, employing physical empirical approaches and cartographic knowledge (by inference), do not recognize the possibility of other types and modes of knowledge, states of consciousness and heightened subtlety than we are likely to end up with an (unknown to us) reductionistic and nihilistic picture of reality which denies the possibility of the picture obtained by the meditator and misses the opportunity for a broader complimentary prospective.

We therefore may need to be aware not only of our own research methods and literature, but also the experiential knowledge and wisdom of a classical literature which describes those aspects of meditation for which our current paradigms and technologies are least designed to examine. Ideally both the scientist and meditator might wish to combine the goals and aims of both disciplines: (a) employing rigorous relevant problem-oriented experiments which are designed with an awareness of the complex multidimensional interactional nature of meditative outcome; and (b) combining this with a service oriented, sensitive, intuitive, open wisdom which looks without preconception freshly on each experience and finding. The ultimate aim of both approaches and of this complimentary approach is the same, namely as is stated in the meditative disciplines, "to see things just as they are."

Whether we utilize meditation as a spiritual path, consciousness discipline, therapeutic tool, clinical self-regulation strategy, or research interest, it is clear that it can be approached by many different paths, modes, and types of knowledge each of which is necessarily partial but may also be complimentary. Whatever our viewpoint, our contributions and personal gains may be greater the more multifaceted our approach. And, as in the story of the Rabbi, if we can also "only keep don't know mind," we may soon develop a truly, broad, encompassing, precise, rigorous, and integrated science of meditation. This approach, drawing from the best wisdom of both classic and contemporary perspectives of meditation, may ultimately provide the greatest scientific contribution, as well as the greatest contribution to the betterment of our human species.