

## MEDITATION I

*A man approached a spiritual Teacher seated by a stream, sat down, then asked, "What must I do to reach enlightenment?"*

*The Teacher said, "Look into the stream."*

*As the man did, the Teacher grabbed him by the back of the neck and forced his head under the water, holding it there for a very long time. Finally, with the man's arms frantically flailing about, the Teacher released him and he came up gasping for breath.*

*"When you want enlightenment as badly as you wanted that breath," said the Teacher, "then you will make way for its coming."*

*Why is enlightenment something that so few attain? Because the child-self in most of us is neither ready nor willing to take the step.*

*Why is that? (Haven't you been listening?) Because the child-self within is neither ready nor willing to take the step.*

*commentary from an Indian sage*

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Reincarnation is an appealing, intellectually sound philosophic tenet in which many Americans believe (a Gallup poll pegs 40% of the American population accepting the idea). Furthermore, it is not uncommon for people who believe in reincarnation to maintain that they are not afraid to die. After all, if human beings are really Consciousnesses beyond the body, then death is not an end of anything. Death is just a transition from one state to another.

The idea that you and I are Awarenesses that experience through these expendable vehicles called *bodies* is all fairly easy to accept . . . until the tests come back from the medical lab saying your cancer (or whatever) is terminal and it's time to die. Then, if you're normal, everything changes. The intellect turns off and the gut turns on. "Jesus H. Christ," the child thinks, "it really *is* going to happen . . ."

For those who have never come face to face with their own personal death, it is hard to visualize how this feels. I, with my melanomic nose, have had the thrill and have lived to tell about it. It was quite an education in the ways of the child. I remember my child's initial reaction was a lot like the reaction I used to have when I was a kid and my mom would take me to the doctor to get a shot. We'd walk through that door, I'd smell that alcohol, and every instinctual fiber of my self would scream, "Run."

That's the way the lesser-side of the child feels when it is time for a normal person to die (assuming there is time to think about it beforehand). The only difference is that when the time comes, there *is* no place to run. It's like riding a high-speed, brakeless bobsled right over a cliff--there is absolutely nothing you can do about it except go.

To the child-self, this kind of helplessness is absolutely terrifying.

Why? Life is a known quantity. Even when it's uncomfortable or hard, it is a familiar. A wife who stays with a husband who beats her; a mother who will not release the memory of a dead child; a man who stays in a job he hates: these are all examples of the instinct-driven side of the child-self scrambling for security *through familiarity*. Lose that security and the child often reverts to sucking its metaphoric thumb. For the child-self, losing a body is about the biggest calamity it can imagine.

Psychologists tell us that the terminally ill go through several stages: The first is a denial that something is happening that cannot be "fixed." Then comes anger, then acceptance. These are relatively common responses of the child whenever it runs into anything it is powerless to affect.

Assuming the personal self isn't so undone that it goes into a stupor (i.e., stays stuck in one of the first two stages), the third stage is the most important from the standpoint of the evolving self. Why? Because the prospect of *death within my lifetime* provides the child with the opportunity and motivation to consider things it to that point had only peripherally thought about during its tenure in body.

This is true no matter what the individual's philosophic leanings. Questions like, "What is going to happen to me?" and "What have I done with my life?" come to mind. If the individual has a strong religious affiliation, the child often clings even more strenuously to that affiliation in hopes of salvation and a happy ending. If the individual is an atheist, he or she may reconsider the possibility that there is more to existence than meets the eye. In all cases, it is not unusual for an individual to begin to look appreciatively at the good things he or she has thoughtlessly taken for granted in life (again, assuming the individual

is not completely mired in self-pity or anger). Maybe it's the love and devotion of a wife (or husband) and family; maybe it's the amusement of having dinner with close friends, or going out on a frosty December night to see the Christmas and Hanukkah lights decorating the neighborhood, or enjoying a baseball game, or sitting quietly reading a good book, or working in the yard, or walking through a living forest, or going skiing, or simply taking the time to admire a flower.

In short, the prospect of imminent death reorders one's thinking entirely. While the lesser side feels oppressed by the magnitude of the change that is about to occur, the higher side of the child finds itself open to a view of reality that is otherwise normally obscured by the trivia of life.<sup>1</sup>

From that meditative perspective, tiny enlightenments can come. For example, the self may begin to consider all the actions it has taken in this life that will determine where it goes next (a Jehovah's Witness, for instance, may hope that he or she has converted enough sinners to end up in the top one-hundred and forty-four-thousand;<sup>2</sup> a Protestant may hope that his or her acts and faith will be found worthy enough to allow the self to go to heaven; and a Moslem may hope the same as the Protestants--that his or her acts and faith will be found worthy).

People who believe in reincarnation, at least the Buddhist's version, might begin to think about the *qualities* they have built into themselves. After all, if your actions in previous lives have helped to form the kinds of experiences you have been drawn into in this life, how you live *this* life and how you choose to think *now* must be intimately related to what you will become in the future. What you visualize and focus on now becomes a temporary part of the fabric of your self.

What that means is that the more you visualize, say, mayhem toward someone or something you are angry at, the more you make that kind of thinking a part of yourself. There are Western psychologists who maintain that it is OK to be angry, to let your mind

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<sup>1</sup> Understand that for simplicity sake, I have made this entirely too clear-cut to match up with reality. Even if an individual is fortunate enough to begin to see life more clearly as a consequence of imminent death, the lesser side of the child-self doesn't just go to sleep. It is still there, being depressed and angry and generally debilitated. When the higher-side ends its pondering, the mind falls back into the normally slack state that characterizes most of one's life, giving the lesser-side the opportunity to complain and chafe about the awfulness of it all.

<sup>2</sup> The Jehovah's Witness faith believes that only a certain number--144,000--will be allowed to enter heaven. Where you stand in line depends upon how many people you have converted.

experience rage when you feel you have been wronged. Better to *think* mayhem than to do mayhem, or so they say.

The Eastern view we have been examining doesn't agree with this. Thinking in this mode is like mentally practicing the taking of actions that the higher side of yourself would normally never agree to. When you visualize mayhem, no matter how righteous you feel about it, you are steeping yourself in thoughtforms that are negative, heavy, and gross. By pouring energy into visualizations that are spiritually violent, you are making those images a prominent part of your mental world. As you do so, the qualities inherent within those images attach themselves to you, sooner or later showing themselves in your actions.<sup>3</sup>

You may think, "So what? I don't mind having a little negativity in my life. It gives me an edge."

The chances are good that you won't continue to think so when you are drawn into contact with others who are like-minded. How would you like being a small child in war torn Bosnia, for instance? Not fun!<sup>4</sup>

You *are* what you *think*. Where you "go" next, if reincarnation and karma are a reality, is intimately related to what you are building into yourself right now.

In short, *you are your own parent*.

Most people don't think about things like this until death is staring them in the face (and some don't even then). For that reason, the prospect of imminent death can bring considerable enlightenment if the individual is able to accept it.

There are those, though, who have chosen not to wait for the draw of impending death to motivate them toward a deeper understanding of themselves and life. For them, among other possibilities, there is meditation.

Meditation is one of the Eastern concepts that most enthralls westerners. Aside from the possibility that *the universe in general* and *life in particular* may be the consequence of a great meditation going on within the One Self, there seem to be two

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<sup>3</sup> I have always wondered how television executives rationalize their work. On the one hand, they steadfastly maintain that negative imagery on TV (i.e., the constant exploitation of woman and sex and violence, etc.) doesn't affect the behavior of those who view it. On the other hand, they charge hundreds of thousands of dollars for merchants to advertise their products claiming that advertising *can* affect the way people think.

The dichotomy is striking.

<sup>4</sup> Note that there are lots of other possible reasons why you might be drawn into a life in a war torn country besides being negative in the way you deal with life this time (or last time) around.

general forms of meditation occupying human-kind these days: self-oriented meditations and self-less meditations. A brief run-down of a few of each follows:

--In the self-oriented category:

Not surprisingly, some of the most popular forms of meditation are "feel good" meditations. Meditations in this class have one thing in common: for a short time they give the practitioner the illusion of peacefulness.

Probably the best known example of this is Transcendental Meditation. T.M., as it is known to its followers, was brought to the west by a guru who originally billed himself "the Glory of the Himalayas." He later changed this carnival-style moniker to Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. One of his greatest coups was attracting the Beatles to his ashram in India. That infatuation didn't last long, but it did give him world-wide press.<sup>5</sup> After the Maharishi brought this style of meditation to the U.S., T.M. spread through college campuses in the 1960's like wildfire.

The meditation was easy. Upon entering the fold, each new disciple was given his or her special *mantra* (a mantra is a word, phrase, or series of phrases that embody spiritual significance). The mantra was suppose to be tailored to the individual *vibration* and *spiritual quality* of the disciple and, as a consequence, was never to be shared with other individuals. According to the guru, telling one's mantra would diminish its spiritual effectiveness.<sup>6</sup>

In any case, the disciple was instructed to silently repeat his or her mantra over and over again. In doing so, assuming the individual was concentrated enough, inner tensions would be replaced by a kind of peacefulness. Having become peaceful, one could then begin to help others (or so the line went).

That was the hook used to make the technique appear less selfish (i.e., when you feel good, you can then help others). Of course, that reasoning conveniently ignored the fact that an individual with a true spiritual bent will help others no matter how they feel

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<sup>5</sup> In fact, the Beatles stayed with the guru several months, leaving only after he made what appeared to be unseemly advances toward one of the female members of their entourage. According to a recent "History of the Beatles" movie aired on public TV, their final analysis of the man was that he was an OK guy who had some knowledge about spiritual matters but who wasn't a whole lot different as far as wants and desires goes than anyone else. In short, he wasn't the spiritual teacher they originally thought him to be.

<sup>6</sup> It turned out to be more than that. When dropouts began talking to each other, it became evident that almost everyone had the *same* mantra. According to one highly placed defector, mantra assignment was governed by age: if you were 20 to 30 years old you got one mantra; people 30 to 40 years old got another; etc.

(that is part of what it *means* to be spiritual), but it was nevertheless the rationale behind the discipline.

In short, T.M. was and still is really nothing more than a technique designed to make its user temporarily feel good, and it works.<sup>7</sup> What wasn't evident to anybody when it first arrived was that focusing on *anything* to the exclusion of all else will do the same thing. Why do you suppose executives play golf? They don't do it because they *like* being aggravated and frustrated to the point of distraction. They do it because it takes their minds off the *real* problems they have at the office or at home. T.M. does the same thing.

Another feel-good meditation that people, mainly kids, seem to be attracted to is *staring into a candle while blanking the mind*. This isn't really a *meditation*, but it is popular amongst dabblers. Because it has some potential for being dangerous, a few words are appropriate.

This kind of exercise is designed to draw the mind into a blank state. There are three points to note about the exercise: First, it is based on the same principle as T.M. with the exception that it requires the doer to focus intently on *nothing* instead of focusing intently on one's mantra.

Second, some believe it can be an avenue to extinction. That seemingly perverse thought is based on two ancient Eastern ideas that have gone awry. When an individual comes into enlightenment, the lesser side of the child-self is so changed that for all intents and purposes, that side becomes extinct. Extinction is also referred to when talking about Nirvana--an expansion of the self that is so profound that the doer literally becomes one with God.

Because nirvana is an experience that is far beyond normal human comprehension, talking about it in regular language is impossible. As such, its nature is characterized in ancient Eastern dialogue in the form of a paradox--as the *negation* of what it really is (it is sometimes described as "a blowing out into nothingness"). In relatively recent times, both of these ideas and the language used to present them have been misinterpreted, hence the belief of some that blanking into extinction has some spiritual significance.

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<sup>7</sup> I should probably note that there are a lot of very nice people who do T.M., and that there has been research done that suggests that it can help people with high blood pressure and other stress related problems (then again, lovingly stroking a cat can also lower blood pressure).

The final point is more practical. If the Eastern metaphysical views are accurate, staring into a candle can be dangerous. Why? It defocuses the mind and, in doing so, can open up the individual to the astral.<sup>8</sup>

--In the self-less category:

A popular form of group meditation is the *healing meditation*. Never meant to replace medical intervention (if you have a cracked spleen, you aren't going to ask a meditation group to fix it), a healing meditation is designed to coherently project thought-energy in an effort to harmonize the flows of energy in a person who is suffering. Although it can affect physical ailments, it is primarily used on behalf of people who are having psychological problems.

We have already talked about a meditation like this, though at the time it probably wasn't obvious. If you will remember the "I'm one of the bad guys" story, my mom's friend (Marianne) was having serious psychic problems. What was it that the woman from Jess Stern's book did that helped her out of her predicament? It was a healing meditation. The woman and her friends worked to project *thought* and *energy* around Marianne to help her close out the astral entities. I can't say for sure that they actually succeeded. What is important here is that this is an example of one type of healing meditation.<sup>9</sup>

This is not a beginner's meditation. We are discussing it here because there are two things one should be careful about when dealing with healing meditations. As far as the East is concerned, healings fail because it is not karmically correct for the individual to be relieved of the teachings involved with the problem. In this light, approaching a healing from a personal, ego-bound standpoint can be a disaster if the healer refuses to do his or her best, then let karma run its course. A healer can provide energy and a certain amount of temporary auric order upon which the infirmed individual can build, but from there the individual must take responsibility for him or herself.

The other point people aren't generally aware of is that when a person goes into a meditation designed to project *thought-energy*, there is said to be a considerable amount of

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<sup>8</sup> This is not to say you can't sit next to a roaring fire and enjoy the flames as they leap and cavort. What we've been talking about here is a concentrated effort to blank the mind, using a flame as the focal point for that effort. That is, as my mother used to say, a whole other kettle of fish.

<sup>9</sup> Assuming such things are possible, and assuming the woman's group really did effect a change in Marianne's porous aura, etc., the individuals in this group must have been relatively powerful in their focus. If the East is right about such things, attempting a meditation like this without considerable training and very solid motivation can get one into BIG TIME TROUBLE. Challenging earth-bound and astral entities is not a trivial matter--it can be a deadly affair.

auric activity--energy flows--within the personal complex of the individual. Doing this in consonance with others adds another dimension because it is not unusual for a resonance of sorts to be set up between the people within the group. If one is well tuned to the other group members, this is not a problem. If one is not, the effect can be aurically and psychologically unsettling. In general, doing group meditations with strangers, people who are highly emotional, or people with questionable motives, is not a good idea.

A useful meditation for one who is just starting out is broadly associated with introspection. An example is the attempt to understand a possibly painful situation by asking the highest within the self the question, "What is it in the way I'm dealing with life that has drawn me into this situation and motivated me to react as I have? What does karma want me to see?" In other words, examining friction within one's life can lead to a better understanding of one's self.<sup>10</sup>

The approach is good in a spiritual sense because it allows the individual to see the self more clearly. You can't change inappropriate habits if you don't know they're there. This meditation gives the self a tool for getting to know the lesser-side of the child more intimately. But there is more to the situation . . .

When a not-so-good habit pattern is just beginning to form within the self (example: my fledgling assumption at North Hollywood High that I was due respect, not because I was respectable but because I was a teacher), simply identifying the out-of-line beliefs is often enough to overcome it. Why? *New* habits haven't had the time to build around themselves the thought-energy needed to really entrench themselves deeply into the self. When one is trying to move in a benevolent, spiritual sense, simply identifying such patterns is usually enough for the self to shake them loose.

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<sup>10</sup> It is interesting how the child can sense the improprieties of others but is oblivious to its own. It is even more interesting how the child tends to be almost hyper-sensitive to negative characteristics in others *that it also animates*. When you are driving on the freeway, for instance, you probably don't like being cut off by another car. It makes you mad because the other guy is thoughtlessly putting you at risk. But when was the last time you put other people in jeopardy due to your own thoughtlessness?

Most people are usually tolerant of their own shortcomings (assuming they are observant enough to see them), but they are fiercely intolerant whenever they see mirrored in another's actions their own shortcomings.

Bottom line: Look at the actions others take that send you ballistic--it can tell you volumes about qualities that reside within your own child-self.



Deeply seated, long-standing patterns are not so easy to deal with. In such a case, there needs to be an active effort to understand why the child shelters these patterns within the self. Only after one sees to the heart of the matter can the individual pull energy out of the old patterns while simultaneously directing energy into reinforcing new, constructive responses.

Unfortunately, this takes a not-so-easily-acquired ingredient to work. It takes *attention*.<sup>11</sup>

There is absolutely no way you can find yourself in an emotionally tense situation, have your buttons pushed, get mad (or petulant, or whiny, or whatever), then think "OOPS" and pull out of the emotion in mid-flight. When mental energy flows into a response like that, it almost always has to run its course before sanity returns and you can look at the happening with anything close to a clear mind.

What this means is that to effect change within the child-self, one cannot be mentally scattered. There has to be a constant attention-to-the-moment. Only in that way will you be awake enough to direct the child's response into constructive channels when something irritating happens (versus having the self respond by mindlessly funneling itself into the old patterns).

Holding this kind of attention is an example of what is called *a walking meditation*.<sup>12 †</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> There is an interesting story out of India about this: A woman went to a guru known for his compassion and wisdom and said, "I wish to move upon my spiritual path more quickly. Is there something you could tell me that would help?"

The teacher replied, "Certainly: ATTENTION."

After a short silence, the woman said, "Thank you for that insight, but I am still a little confused. Could you say a little more?"

The teacher replied, "Certainly: ATTENTION, ATTENTION."

The woman bowed reverently, then said, "Thank you for your time and your teachings, but could you expand on what you have said just a little more?"

The teacher replied, "Certainly: ATTENTION, ATTENTION, ATTENTION."

<sup>12</sup> A *walking meditation* requires the aspirant to be constantly tuned to some attitude or discipline (in the case of *attention*, the focus is in being completely aware of what one is doing and what is going on around one's self AT ALL TIMES). Another powerful *walking meditation* is that of *gratitude*. *Walking meditations* are quite common in Bhakti yoga (the yoga of devotion).

† Note from 2019: I was listening to NPR on the radio on my way to Whole Foods a few Sundays ago (I am *such* a yuppie) when I heard something that made me smile. A woman was talking about a book she had just written about research she had just done that concluded that the best way to deal with obstreperous kids was not to try to correct them while they were in full throat but to wait until things had quieted down, then have them visualize *not* responding as they did but, rather, responding to the situation in a better way . . . exactly what I'd been telling my EPhil students forty years earlier with respect to dealing with an obstreperous child-self.

There is another side to the idea of meditation that needs to be examined before we finish. It has to do with the nature of *thought*.

Is there a difference between my thinking the thought, "Love thy neighbor as thyself," and Christ thinking the same thought? As far as the East is concerned, the answer is, "Yes."

*Thought* has within its structure many subtle levels. As you attempt to envelop the idea of, say, a flower, you will certainly notice its beauty and, possibly, delicate structure. But you are also liable to find yourself musing about the flower's relationship to the plant--how the flower attracts insects which, in turn, allow for pollination. That, in turn, might send you into contemplation about how interrelated things are--how plants need insects to procreate; how interconnected nature is in general.

On top of that (or underlying it, depending upon how you look at it), you might notice that there is emotional content there. For you, flowers might embody romance, or they could be associated with unhappiness (maybe there was a lily on your grandpa's chest during his funeral).

Along with all this, there could be a tone of superiority around all of your mental activity. Your child may be terribly impressed with itself for the very fact that it is contemplating the question at all. "How very spiritual," it might well think.

In short, within the *living thought* you have created around the relatively benign idea of *flower*, there will be layered threads upon layered threads of mental energy coming from all sorts of seemingly extraneous sources.

My set of threads will be different from yours. I've been different places, seen different things, had different experiences. The thought-patterns that I animate are spiced to my specifications.

So back to our quote about loving thy neighbor. When I think, "Love thy neighbor as thyself," the thoughts I generate have all sorts of motives and extraneous mental chatter randomly interwoven into them. The thoughts of a Christ, on the other hand, will have within them a fabric of purity.

What this means is that if one could meditate around a precept that had been animated by a truly evolved spiritual teacher, one should be able to selectively touch the purity and power and experience of that Teacher by touching his or her *living thought*.

More on a lark than anything else, I decided to try just such an exercise a number of years ago. The meditation I chose was, "What did Christ mean when he said, 'Love thy neighbor as thyself.'"

I chose that phrase because the words seemed self-explanatory (there was no reason to choose something that was outwardly obscure). My approach was straightforward: I sat down for five minutes every night just before bed and quietly considered the admonition.

During the first few nights I looked to see how the words were related to the way I was living my life. Each night thereafter, I would quickly review what I had seen the nights before, then attempt to push into the idea more deeply. I did this for almost four weeks. Then one night, something unusual happened.

Two minutes into the meditation, my mind just elevated, rotated, and suddenly I was seeing the words from an entirely different perspective. It took me completely by surprise. One moment I was looking at the same old phrase, the next moment I found myself staring into a meaning and significance that was as different from the old as night is from day.

Just after it happened, I remember thinking, "My God, Christ didn't mean *that*, he meant *THAT!*"

I continued with the discipline. Each night I would re-consider the superficial meaning of the words (that interpretation was still there should I choose to select it), then I would move into the more expanded perception and continue to delve from there.

Three weeks later, I was still more befuddled to find it happen again. In the blink of an eye, everything changed. From looking at the quote from what I thought was a terribly insightful perspective, I went to an even more expanded view. "I'll be damned," I thought in sheer amazement. "Christ didn't mean *THAT*, he meant *THAT!!!*"

All three perspectives were complete unto themselves, but each had an entirely different level of subtlety to it. Yet if I'd been asked to choose words that most completely embodied the wisdom cradled in each, I could not for the life of me have come up with a better phrase *for any one of them* than, "Love thy neighbor as thyself." That phrase said it perfectly for each very different case.

When a highly evolved spiritual Being puts a complex idea into the stream of human thinking, that Being builds into that subtle form wisdom and power that is beyond anything you or I could create. It isn't evident on the surface: my "Love thy neighbor," uses the same words as Christ's "Love thy neighbor." But the two are as different as apples

and oranges. Why? Because a complex train of thought that is an *idea* carries within it the motives and intentions of the thinker.<sup>13</sup>

In short, ideas carry a kind of signature with them.

You can now understand why meditation upon the principles laid down by the Avatars is considered to be such an important thing for a spiritually motivated individual to do. Successfully carrying out such a meditation quite literally touches the nature of the great Beings who put the thoughtforms into motion. This is not an intellectual process; the Truth and profound reality embodied within true spiritual teachings can only scantily be approached using words. The key is meditation and intuition. As expressed in the Hindu *Upandishads*:

There the eye goes not,  
Speech goes not, nor the mind (i.e., intellect).  
We know not, we understand not  
How one would teach it.

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<sup>13</sup> In fact, if you take the time to look at your own thoughts, you will find that there are motives under motives in everything you do (hence, in everything you think).