

The Organized Systems: Changing Consciousness

The Man Who Walked on Water

A conventionally minded dervish, from an austere pious school, was walking one day along a river bank. He was absorbed in concentration on moralistic and scholastic problems, for this was the form which Sufi teaching had taken in the community to which he belonged. He equated emotional religion with the search for ultimate Truth.

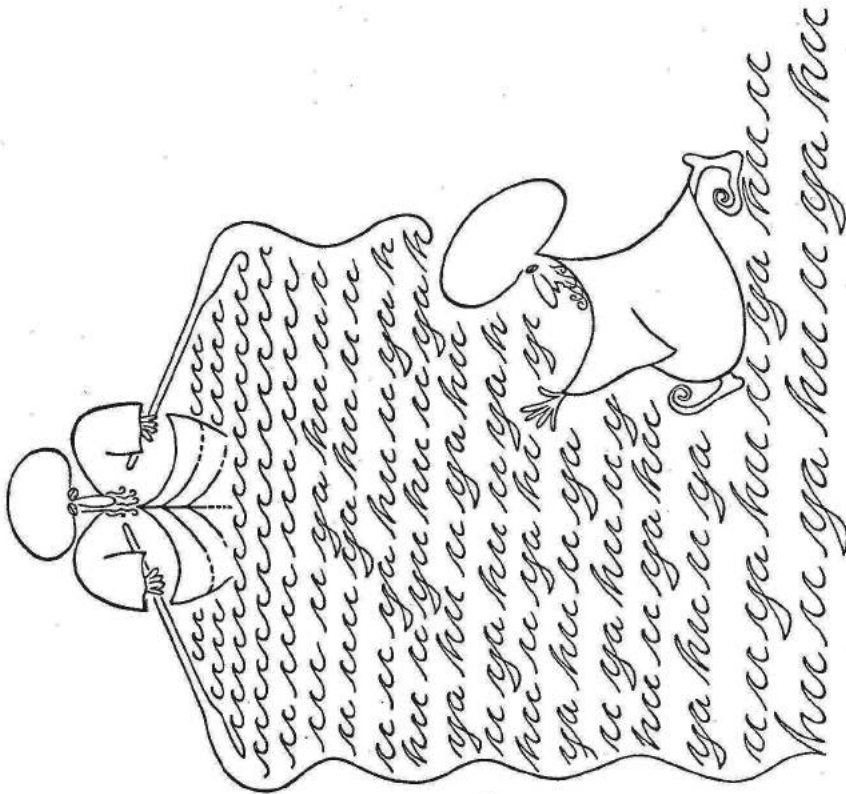
Suddenly his thoughts were interrupted by a loud shout: Someone was repeating the dervish call. "There is no point in that," he said to himself, "because the man is mispronouncing the syllables. Instead of intoning YA HU, he is saying U YA HU."

Then he realized that he had a duty, as a more careful student, to correct this unfortunate person, who might have no opportunity to be rightly guided, and was therefore probably only doing his best to attune himself to the idea behind the sounds.

So he hired a boat, and made his way to the island in midstream from which the sound appeared to come. There he found a man sitting in a reed hut, dressed in a dervish robe, moving in time to his own repetition of the initiatory phrase. "My friend," said the first dervish, "you are mispronouncing the phrase. It is incumbent on me to tell you this, because there is merit for him who gives and for him who takes advice. This is the way in which you speak it," and he told him.

"Thank you," said the other dervish humbly.

The first dervish entered his boat again, full of satisfaction at having done a good deed. After all, it was said that a man who could repeat the sacred



formula correctly could even walk on the waves: something that he had never seen, but had always hoped—for some reason—to be able to achieve.

Now he could hear nothing from the reed hut, but he was sure that his lesson had been well taken. Then he heard a faltering U YA as the second dervish started to repeat the phrase in his old way.

While the first dervish was thinking about this, reflecting on the perversity of humanity and its persistence in error, he suddenly saw a strange sight. From the island, the other dervish was coming toward him, walking on the surface of the water.

Amazed, he stopped rowing. The second dervish walked up to him, and said, "Brother, I am sorry to trouble you, but I have come out to ask you again the standard method of making the repetition you were telling me, because I find it difficult to remember it."

Those who are intrigued by questions about the mind, consciousness, or evolution often become psychologists, philosophers, physicians, or psychiatrists. In the cultures of the Middle and Far East, those similarly intrigued by consciousness and the questions that surround it have generally entered the relevant disciplines of their society, such as Sufism. Until quite recently, the culture of the West has lacked the basic premises that could allow us to appreciate the intent and application of these kinds of psychologies, as the rugseller could not comprehend the numbers above 100.

An impersonal scientific approach, with emphasis on logic and analysis, makes it difficult for most of us even to conceive of a psychology that could be based on the existence of another mode of thought. But our normal, stable consciousness is a somewhat arbitrary personal construction. Although this construction has been a success, it is not the only way in which an external "reality" can be approached. How can anyone be thought to walk on water?

Consciousness changes through the day, is radically different at night, and can be altered quite easily in content and mode. It should not be too surprising, then, that another major mode of consciousness can appear, in each of us at times, and could be the basis for a different cultural approach to external reality. It is a mode of consciousness that is arational, predominantly spatial rather than temporal, and receptive as opposed to active, and it is this "mode of experience" that is predominantly cultivated within the esoteric traditions.

Since the unusual experiences and frames of mind that are often cultivated (and discussed in this chapter) are, by their very mode of

operation, not readily accessible to causal explanation or even to linguistic exploration, many psychologists and other students of the mind have been tempted to ignore them or even to deny their existence. These traditional psychologies have been relegated to the "esoteric," or even to the "occult," the realm of the mysterious—the word most often employed is *mysticism*.

One meaning of *esoteric* is "deeply hidden, inaccessible, needing special training." There is, of course, much esotericism in modern science as well. In the past century, many scholars and researchers have become exceedingly specialized, devoting their careers to the exploration of "one approach to a part of a part of a problem." Most psychologists can no longer be fully conversant with all the research currently in the field, since it includes everything from electrochemical analyses of single cells on the retina to demographic analyses of voting patterns.

Inaccessibility, difficulty, and an elitist "professionalism" enrust the traditional psychologies as well as the modern. In each area of inquiry, a certain parochialism has tended to creep in. A scientific psychologist may be interested in the relationship of consciousness to the brain and may become an electroencephalographer, one who measures the tiny voltages that appear at the scalp and attempts to relate these signs to states of consciousness. In time, his vision may narrow to the complex problems of analysis of the EEG, and his interest may become focused on technique rather than content. A similar narrowing of vision has occurred in psychology as a discipline since the advent of behaviorism.

In the traditional psychologies, one group may find that a certain technique works well in a given situation, be it relaxation, concentration, or movement. Its members may tend to apply the technique in situations or with people for whom it is inappropriate. Because the technique works for them, they come to believe that it *ought* to work for everyone at all times. The technique becomes the end and may become an obsession.

Those who are involved in using such a technique—whether it is a particular meditation technique, a certain breathing exercise, or a training procedure—can become fixated and restricted to what the technique can offer. The adherents may set up schools to teach the "sacred" ritual, forgetting that each technique has its relevance only for a certain community at a certain time.

Instead of focusing on knowledge or human development, people often become mere adherents of an organization and do not experience the

ticism often come hysterical attacks on their idea of "materialism" and on the "world" of Western man as an "illusion."

On the one hand, many cultures seem unable to feed, clothe, and house their people adequately. They sometimes lack a full measure of the skills needed to organize and coordinate effort. The underdevelopment and training of a causal mode of analysis contributes to these problems. On the other hand, the development of a hyperanalytic, "rational" science, unchecked by a comprehensive understanding born of intuition, can develop into the destruction of all on the planet. This lack of an overall framework or perspective can lead to a certain sterility and irrelevance in the content of scientific inquiry. At worst, science can become the pursuit of technology for its own sake, the performance of experiments simply because they *can* be performed, or the building of a new highway simply because it *can* be built. In both cases, the imbalance contributes somewhat to major cultural problems.

For Western students of psychology and science, it is time to begin a new synthesis, to absorb some of the concepts and ideas of the traditional psychologies into modern psychological terms, to retain a lost balance. To do this, we must extend the conceptions of modern science, extend our concept of what is possible for man.

It is difficult for us to assume the correct viewpoint; the superheated and explosive economic, social, and scientific growth of the past two generations has left many who have grown up in this era convinced that a world without material limits is the norm. It has, for many, been their only experience of the world. The ideal of a perpetual and limitless expansion has shaped our marketplace, economic planning, and social life, and they inform the background of science and the humanities. Our politicians conventionally promise as much as is possible in the relief of the constancies of our condition; our scientific endeavor is unchecked by a traditional perspective; and our culture is the best-educated, wealthiest in history, and one of the most spiritually illiterate.

In an era devoted primarily to decreasing death rates, improving living conditions, and developing science, there is little time left for other considerations. Yet, in spite of this progress in our material welfare and health, we do not often note that the death rate is still 100 percent.

But there will be an end to the current "one-time" bonanza of growth and development, sooner or later; we are at a transition point. The lim-

benefits of the technique. Other difficulties exist: The virtue of humility is often taken as the "end point" in the esoteric traditions and may even become a moral imperative, but this personal characteristic is to be taken not as an end in itself, but as a *technique*. "It enables a person to function in a certain manner." Similarly, specific diets developed for a certain community at one stage may be promulgated across cultures and epochs—the style may remain but the original context is lost, and the diet remains as an empty ritual. Dress, other exercises such as postures and dance can also follow this process.

The negative aspects of meditation can become overimportant. Indulgence in these exercises may lead to permanent withdrawal from life, regression from and a devaluation of intellectuality. It is certainly true that, devoid of a proper context, meditation can and has become an empty technique, food for the literal-minded who insist on the "proper" procedure but have forgotten its purpose. And yet it is the attitude and attention of the meditator that is important, rather than the specific form of the practice, as is emphasized in the story that begins this chapter.

As can happen with any scientific procedure that persists for too long, the original application and intent of the esoteric technique may become lost, although the surface appearance of the enterprise is well maintained. Religious organizations may construct elaborate cathedrals and design robes, just as scientists may well develop elaborate equipment and professional journals, but all too often the enterprise may be limited to a propagation of the means, with the original objective forgotten.

Within either the scientific or esoteric traditions, this sort of parochialism can lead to a disdain for those who employ another procedure, theory, or technique in an attempt to reach the same end. The very word *academic* has come to mean a distinction without significance. Within the esoteric traditions, religious arguments mirror the process. A small stylistic difference in a "sacred" prayer or a meditation may cause a schism that leads to lasting and sometimes violent disagreements. It has even been the cause of major wars.

The disdain is often greater between members of the two psychologies. Many Westerners see those of the Orient as following a path of self-indulgence, performing useless and ridiculous rituals and withdrawing from life while many starve around them. From the adherents of mys-

itless material progress, although certainly edifying to those who have it, is at a point of no real increase; we have reached the limits of our oil, and many of our natural resources are beginning to peter out. Our ideas of success, set up by the early postwar years, are beginning to fade a bit; we face blowing up the earth, we face overpopulating it.

In many areas people are beginning to feel that we have left *something* (without knowing what) out of our cultural upbringing, out of our science, medicine, education, and personal development. An alternative, more comprehensive and more secure approach is needed. Perhaps we base too many plans on the assumption of social and material progress, an assumption rooted in the seemingly limitless growth of the past two generations.

Scientists and humanist scholars are men and women of the times and share both the benefits of our culture's developments and the blindness of our collective shortsight. Their blindness and distortions render many of our otherwise most competent and educated people unequipped to judge ideas and developments in personal knowledge. Even those who are most interested often treat personal development as a less valuable side of themselves. Ideas in this area might seem "too old," associated too much with an old-fashioned, de-generated religious mysticism.

There is a large group of productive men and women who might draw from and contribute to an extended understanding of human nature, closed off from it by the strengths of their cultural training—and a second group all too eager to be told that "life is an illusion" and to join up here and climb aboard the next Kosmik Union Special, flying saucer, or Guru-of-the-Month Club.

An interested observer of the middle ground is in for some considerable discomfort, since those actively pursuing several interesting ideas have been drawn a bit over the edge. Parapsychology, to the receptive mind, is an area of research that is at least worth some serious, sober, and open-minded scientific investigation. However, one sometimes finds conversations with investigators sliding from a discussion of a single experiment to the Bermuda Triangle, unidentified flying objects, oddball encounters, or massage techniques.

People seeking "growth" find their needs for personal knowledge blunted and diverted to successful and rich institutions, with massage, sexual athletics, investment schemes, parties, incomprehensible doctrines such as those of Gurdjieff, Kahumism (a flying-saucer cult), "yoga tag," or simpleminded meditation offered as a substitute for transcendence. Such

"growth centers," I fear, are to be understood more in the sense of "growth stocks" and childish self-indulgence than as anything seriously concerned with human development.

While these systems and centers might be thought to be sent to try us, and to prey on misunderstandings, in truth *it is difficult to find the change-points in human consciousness*. Many that have been tried are the result of guesswork and not a thorough analysis of what *needs* to be changed, rather than what might be changed.

For instance, many of the classical "mystical" techniques work by going against bodily desires and needs. Why? The answer lies in the nature of the controls on consciousness and our mental system—as we have seen, our consciousness must "mind" all the functions of the body. This is probably what has been meant, in more archaic terminology, that consciousness is encased in a "coil of flesh." Thus many of the attempts to "break the bounds" of human consciousness do so by trying to break the controlling links to the body. This is the basis of the almost uncountable mystical attempts to rid us of sensual or bodily desires.

For centuries, people have tried to "mortify the flesh": to free the brain from the bodily restraints on its operation. It has been done by thousands of methods—by flagellation, torture, vision walks, fasts, lotus positions, sitting on nails, denial or denigration of sexuality, power, sensuality, food, or almost anything nice!

There have countless regimes designed, in their idealistic and well-meaning way: monasteries that feature a release from all "worldly" desires, often regimes that force a restriction of diet and stimulation, all for the purpose of "freeing the conscious mind" to go elsewhere. It is indeed unfortunate that so many have had to suffer for so long, often for so little.

The systems that develop consciousness at their best, do serve to hasten the process of decentration, of awareness of a greater range of influence on us, of one's real role in life. But most of the time, their original goal becomes clouded in the search for a disconnected "higher awareness" somewhere, out there, in the wilds of experience.

The Traditional Psychologies: Some General Remarks

Any written account of these psychologies is limited. We can learn from such an account while granting that it may not be complete, just as a written description of ski lifts, bindings, equipment, and intermediate ski techniques does not substitute for the experience of skiing down the slope.

One distinguishing feature of the traditional psychologies is their practicality, almost "applied psychology." These disciplines cover many aspects of life that our Western educational process often omits—*how to breathe, how to care for the body, how to master bodily functions usually considered "involuntary."* These esoteric traditions approach psychology as a practical, personal discipline and emphasize techniques that effect alterations in body states and in consciousness to obtain knowledge other than, but additional to, the intellectual.

In esoteric traditions, human life is considered one part of a larger whole, reciprocally influencing and being influenced by the "environment," as in the story "Moment in Time," which begins chapter 5. The concept of the environment in these esoteric psychologies is also much more inclusive than the Western one. It includes the importance of subtle geophysical forces, for example, the rhythmic changes that daily occur on earth, the light-dark cycle, internal and external biological rhythms, and the effects of microclimatic conditions, such as the ionization of the air. Until quite recently, these forces have not been included within the Western scientific world view.

If we can keep a wary eye on the excesses of both types of psychology, we may achieve a synthesis of the highest elements in both types, rather than of their drawbacks.

Meditation Exercises

In attempting to understand meditation, the interested student immediately discovers a bizarre and seemingly unconnected variety of techniques. Turkish dervishes spin in a circle; Buddhists concentrate on breath; yogis may gaze at a mandala or at a vase and others contemplate

a meaningless phrase, such as "Show me your face before your father and mother met." What do these diverse exercises have in common in their manner of operation and in the experiences that they make possible?

Several aspects of meditation are even more confusing to the interested psychologist. What could be a state of "no mind" or of "mysterious darkness"?

People meditate to change consciousness, to bring about what is often called a mystic experience. But how do people describe this experience, and how do the meditation techniques bring it about? Is there any way that these techniques and these experiences can be integrated with a contemporary knowledge of the psychology of consciousness? What relevance do the techniques and the experiences have to contemporary psychology and to individuals?

Meditation is among the most common of the techniques of the traditional psychologies. Such techniques have been employed in almost every culture, from that of ancient Egypt to that of the contemporary Eskimo.

But remember "The Man Who Walked on Water"—these techniques are not what they seem, and the relationship between our mental attitude and what we can accomplish may surprise us!

There have been simple misinterpretations. Meditation is often considered to be a form of directed thinking, as when we say "I'll meditate on that," meaning, "I'll think about it, consider it, and come to a conclusion." If meditation is considered an exercise in reason or problem solving, then some of the statements and claims of its Indian and Japanese practitioners seem incomprehensible. But the exercises of meditation do not involve reason, and they cannot be understood by means of ordinary logic alone. They are, rather, techniques designed to cultivate a certain mode of operation of the nervous system, at a certain time, within a certain context. The mode of operation is hoped to be one beyond the ordinary biased consciousness. *This is the use of "thinking of nothing."*

A story in Philip Kapleau's *The Three Pillars of Zen* provides us with a useful point at which to begin a psychological consideration of the practices of meditation.

The importance of single-mindedness, of bare attention, is illustrated in the following anecdote:

One day a man of the people said to the Zen master Ikkyu: "Master, will you please write for me some maxims of the highest wisdom?"

Ikkyu immediately took his brush and wrote the word "Attention."

"Is that all?" asked the man. "Will you not add something more?" Ikkyu then wrote twice running: "Attention. Attention."

"Well," remarked the man rather irritably, "I really don't see much depth or subtlety in what you have just written."

Then Ikkyu wrote the same word three times running: "Attention. Attention. Attention."

Half angered, the man demanded: "What does that word Attention mean anyway?"

And Ikkyu answered, gently: "Attention means attention."

Meditation produces an alteration in consciousness—a shift away from the active, outward-oriented mode toward a receptive and quiescent mode, and, often, a shift from an external focus of attention to an internal one. If this alteration is isolated from the context needed to support it (as when Westerners try meditating), it can be meaningless, or even disruptive. But as a first step in many of the traditional psychologies, meditation is regarded as an extremely important preparation for a more comprehensive personal knowledge. For many, it may also demonstrate that ordinary consciousness is a personal construction and can be extended to a new mode of operation.

Meditation is a technique for turning down the "brilliance" of the conscious thought of the day, so that more subtle sources of information can be perceived. It constitutes a deliberate attempt to separate oneself for a short period from the flow of daily life and to "turn off" the active mode of normal consciousness in order to enter the complementary mode of "darkness" and receptivity.

Since reliable information about the various forms of meditation has so far been rather hard to come by in the Western world, we should perhaps first set the background and review some of the general similarities of meditation exercises. Most involve separating the practitioner from daily, ongoing activities. He or she usually sits alone or with a small group in a special place (perhaps constructed) in a naturally isolated area, sometimes near a waterfall.

Generally, the meditator attempts to keep all external sources of stim-

ulation to a minimum to avoid being distracted from the object of meditation. This isolation is felt especially necessary in modern cities, where random sounds, noises, and human voices can be distracting. In most forms of yoga and Zen, there is emphasis on the lotus position, in order to keep body movements to a minimum and therefore out of awareness during the meditation period. The straight back is said to lessen drowsiness in the reduced-stimulation setting.

Instructions for most beginning meditation exercises are similar: Attend closely and continuously to the meditation object (say, a vase). This exercise is more difficult than it sounds; most beginners lose awareness of the meditation object quite often. Each time one notices that awareness has shifted away from the object of meditation, one must return his or her attention to it. Each session of meditation lasts about half an hour and is practiced twice a day: in the morning before the day's major work and in the evening. As progress is made, more and more complicated exercises are usually given.

In terms of the psychology of consciousness, there are two general varieties of meditation: those exercises that involve restriction of awareness, focusing of attention on the object of meditation or on the repetition of a word (*concentrative meditation*); and those that involve a deliberate attempt to "open up" awareness of the external environment.

Concentrative Meditation

No matter the specific form or technique, the essence of meditation is the attempt to restrict awareness to a single unchanging source of stimulation for a definite period of time. In many traditions, the successful achievement of this is termed *one-pointedness of mind*.

If the exercise involves vision, the meditator gazes at the object of meditation continuously. If the meditation is auditory, the sound, chant, or prayer is repeated either aloud or silently. If the meditation consists in physical movement, the movement is continuously repeated. In all cases, awareness is focused on the movement or the visual object or the sound.

In Zen, as a first exercise the student is instructed to count his breaths from one to ten and repeat it. When the count is lost, as it will be by beginners, the instructions are that the count should be returned to one and begun again. After he is able to concentrate completely on his breaths, the student then begins a more advanced exercise and focuses

attention on the process of breathing itself. He thinks about nothing but the movement of the air within, the air reaching his nose, going down into the lungs, remaining in the lungs, and finally going out again. This is a convenient way to begin meditating, since breathing is a rhythmic activity that continues whether we will it or not.

In *What the Buddha Taught*, Walpola Rahula gives these instructions:

You breathe in and out all day and night, but you are never mindful of it, you never for a second concentrate your mind on it. Now you are going to do just this. Breathe in and out as usual, without any effort or strain. Now, bring your mind to concentrate on your breathing-in and breathing-out, let your mind watch and observe your breathing in and out; let your mind be aware and vigilant of your breathing in and out. When you breathe, you sometimes take deep breaths, sometimes not. This does not matter at all. Breathe normally and naturally. The only thing is that when you take deep breaths you should be aware of its movements and changes. Forget all other things, your surroundings, your environment; do not raise your eyes and look at anything. Try to do this for five or ten minutes.

At the beginning, you will find it extremely difficult to bring your mind to concentrate on your breathing. You will be astonished how your mind runs away. It does not stay. You begin to think of various things. You hear sounds outside. Your mind is disturbed and distracted. You may be dismayed and disappointed. But if you continue to practice this exercise twice a day, morning and evening, for about five or ten minutes at a time, you will gradually, by and by, begin to concentrate your mind on your breathing. After a certain period you will experience just that split second when your mind is fully concentrated on your breathing, when you will not hear even sounds nearby, when no external world exists for you.

As the student of Rinzai Zen progresses, he or she learns to remain motionless and to sit in the lotus position. As one learns to maintain awareness of the breath successfully, one is given a more advanced meditation exercise: a riddle or a paradox, called a *koan*, to meditate on.

To many commentators, at least to those who try to fit it into a linear framework, the koan has been the subject of much misunderstanding and confusion. The question-and-answer routine has seemed to be one

for the Marx Brothers. The "question" may be, "Show me your face before your mother and father met." The "answer" may be the student's slapping the questioner in the face. The master "asks" the student, "Move that boat on the lake right now with your mind"; the student stands up, runs over, and hits his head against the gong, turns a somersault, and lands in front of the master, "fully enlightened."

Since the student "answered" successfully, it is quite clear that the "answers" to the koan are not to be considered logically—as set answers to a rational problem that can be solved by the usual manner of thinking through various rational alternatives and choosing one. In fact, the lack of a rational solution is intended to demonstrate to the practitioner that the solutions in this new mode of experience are not those of the intellect. There is no text in which the meaning of life is to be found.

We might instead consider the koan exercise in the terms of the psychology of consciousness. In these terms, the koan is an extreme and compelling method of forcing intense concentration on one single thought. This is an early koan exercise:

In all seriousness, a monk asked Joshu, "Has the dog Buddha nature or not?" Joshu retorted, "Mu!"

This koan is to be taken not verbally and logically, not as something to be worked through like a problem, but as an extreme exercise in concentration. This is confirmed in instructions given in the lectures of a contemporary Zen master, Yasutani Roshi:

You must concentrate day and night, questioning yourself about Mu through every one of your 360 bones and 84,000 pores . . . what this refers to is your entire being. Let all of you become one mass of doubt and questioning. Concentrate on and penetrate fully into Mu. To penetrate into Mu means to achieve absolute unity with it. How can you achieve this unity? By holding to Mu tenaciously day and night! Do not separate yourself from it under any circumstances! Focus your mind on it constantly. Do not construe Mu as nothingness and do not conceive it in terms of existence or non-existence. You must not, in other words, think of Mu as a problem involving the existence or nonexistence of Buddha-nature. Then what do you do? You stop speculating and concentrate wholly on Mu—just Mu!

Later koan exercises involve other unanswerable questions, such as the ever-popular "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" and "What is the size of the real you?" A contemporary (Los Angeles) Zen master gives, "How can I attain enlightenment by driving on the freeway?"

Because no verbal-logical answer to the question can be found, the koan becomes a useful and demanding focus of attention over a very long period of time. The koan becomes a meditation object, day and night, a constant and compelling focusing of awareness on a single source. The lack of a rational, logical solution forces the student to go through and to discard all verbal associations, all thoughts, all solutions usually evoked by a question. He is then forced by the nature of the question itself to approach the condition known as *one-pointedness*—concentrating solely on one thing: the unanswerable koan. It is an attempt actively to destructure the ordinary lineal mode of consciousness.

The use of the koan is strongest in the Rinzai school of Zen, which emphasizes a sudden alteration of awareness (*satori*) brought about by this extreme concentration on one point over a long period of time while under stress.

Yoga

The practices of yoga are much more varied than those of Zen. Concentrative meditation in yoga is only one part of a totality of activity, each part of which contributes to alterations of consciousness. Many yoga practitioners devote their effort to attempts to regulate consciously many basic "involuntary" physiological processes—blood flow, heart rate, digestive and muscular activity, breathing, and so on. There are many popular reports of yoga masters being buried alive for long periods of time, stopping their blood flow, walking barefoot on hot coals. In a laboratory study, Anand and his associates found that some yogis could reduce oxygen consumption to levels far below normal.

A common form of yogic meditation practice involves the use of *mantra*. Mantra are often words of significance, such as names of the deity, but for the psychology of consciousness the important element is that the technique uses a word as the focus of awareness, just as the first Zen exercises make use of breathing.

The instructions are to repeat the mantra over and over again, either aloud or silently. The mantra is to be kept in awareness to the exclusion of all else; just as in the Zen breathing exercise, when awareness lapses

from the object of meditation, in this case the mantra, the attention is to be returned to it. Mantra are sonorous, flowing words, which repeat easily. An example is *Om*. This mantra is chanted aloud in groups or used individually in silent or voiced meditation. Another mantra is *Om mani padme hum*, a smooth, mellifluous chant. Similar mantras have analogous sounds such as *Ayn* or *Hum*, somewhat similar in sound to *Mu* in the first Zen koan.

A form of mantra yoga, Transcendental Meditation, has become fairly well known in the West, especially in the United States. In this form of meditation, too, the practitioner is given a specific mantra and is instructed to repeat it silently over and over for about half an hour twice a day, in the morning and again in the evening. No special posture is required for the exercise; rather, one is instructed to assume a comfortable posture, such as sitting erect in a chair. The thoughts that arise during the meditation are considered to be of no significance, and as soon as one is aware that one is no longer focused on the mantra, attention is to be returned to it.

The specific mantra used in Transcendental Meditation are not given publicly, since the devotees of this technique claim that there are special effects of each word, in addition to the general effects of the concentration. But it can be noted here that these mantras are also mellifluous and smooth. The devotees of Transcendental Meditation also claim that this technique presents the essence of meditation in a form suitable for Westerners.

There is no doubt that mantra yoga, including Transcendental Meditation, is a very convenient form of a concentrative meditation; it is quite easy to produce and attend to a silent word, anywhere, at any time. Since no special posture is required, the arduous training for sitting in a lotus position is unnecessary. If the essential component of meditation involves concentration on an unchanging stimulus, then Transcendental Meditation has it, but of course it has a lot of other associated ideas as well!

Mandalas are used much like mantra. The practitioner focuses his gaze on the mandala and restricts his awareness to the visual input. Any stray thought, association, or feeling that arises is ignored; attention is withheld from the stray thought or association and returned to the mandala. Simple mandalas often employ a circular motif in which awareness is drawn to the center as one continues to contemplate, fixing the gaze more and more closely on the center.

Another visual meditation technique in yoga involves a "steady gaze" (*tratakam*) on external objects. External objects are used in meditation as a focus for a fixed point of concentration, rather than for their physical characteristics; so one can use a stone, a vase, a light, a candle, and so on.

The repetitive processes of the body, such as breathing and the beating of the heart, can serve as similar focuses for concentration in yoga. These techniques are described in Mishra's manual and in many others. Internally generated sounds (*nadam*) can also be focuses for meditation. The sounds used in meditation can be internal, imaginary, or natural. Often the yogi sits near a source of repetitive sound, such as a waterfall, wind source, or beehive, and simply listens and concentrates. When these repetitive, monotonous sounds are imagined, the technique becomes quite similar to the silent repetition of a mantra.

The creation of a meditation image can extend to visual meditation as well. Frederic Spiegelberg, in *Spiritual Practices of India*, describes the *Dharana*, or fixation of consciousness procedures, in the *Kasina* exercises:

The point of primary importance is that one should really create such a meditation image to accompany him continuously; only as a secondary consideration does it matter what this particular image may be, that is, through which one of the Kasina exercises it has been produced. Instead of contemplating a disc of earth, for example, one can meditate on an evenly ploughed field seen from a distance.

Every image that remains permanently in one's consciousness and every enduring mood can be a help to this fixation of one's consciousness. As a matter of fact, every hallucination, every unappeasable hatred, every amorous attachment provides a certain power of concentration to him who cherishes it, and helps him direct the forces of his being towards a single goal. This is of course more the case with the man who has achieved self-control and freedom from his passions, and who after having mastered his sense impulses succeeds in giving to his consciousness a definite turn of his own choosing . . . Every activity is of equal value as a basis for a Dharana exercise. [Emphasis added.]

Spiegelberg provides the point of interest: Why would anyone bother with these meaningless exercises, when money can be made? Because most people's mental system is often uncontrolled and it is for the ultimate control of the mental operating system that all these exercises are done. All the fasting, prayer, renunciation are designed to defeat those well-developed schemata, designed for the purpose of survival. If "we" are running the system, rather than "them" (the desires), we may well be able to direct the mind to new directions, directions which are now called for in our survival as a race.

Religious and Mystical Experiences

When combined with other practices of traditional psychologies, meditation is intended to bring about a more "complete" consciousness. The full emergence of this experience is called the "mystical experience."

Upsets to Routine. A major precipitating event for many mystical experiences is a strong upset of normal routine: fasting; extreme physical exertion as in long-distance running; in more modern times, changes in jobs, in social situations, travel, and exposure to "shocks." It is in times of shocks and stresses that a person may be able to see himself for what he is, not what he hopes!

Deautomatization. One specific aim in both concentrative and opening-up meditation is to dismantle the automatic selectivity of ordinary awareness. One aim of the esoteric traditions is to remove "blindness," to awaken a fresh perception. The word *enlightenment* or *illumination* is often used for progress in these disciplines. The psychological term is *deautomatization*, an undoing of the normal automatization of consciousness.

The Mystical Experience. Many meditation and spiritual exercises result in what are called mystical or religious experiences. They have occurred in many cultures and religious disciplines.

In his classic *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James (1917) cites the analysis and description by a Canadian psychiatrist of a mystical experience, which James called "cosmic consciousness."

I was walking in a state of quiet, almost passive enjoyment, not actually thinking, but letting ideas, images, and emotions flow of

themselves, as it were, through my mind. All at once, without warning of any kind, I found myself wrapped in a flame-colored cloud. For an instant I thought of fire, an immense conflagration somewhere close by in the great city; the next, I knew that the fire was within myself. Directly afterward there came upon me a sense of exultation, an immense joyousness accompanied or immediately followed by an intellectual illumination impossible to describe. Among other things, I did not merely come to believe but I saw that the universe is not composed of dead matter, but is, on the contrary, a living Presence; I became conscious in myself of eternal life. It was not a conviction that I would have eternal life, but a consciousness that I possessed eternal life then; I saw that all men are immortal; that the cosmic order is such that without any peradventure all things work together for the good of each and all; that the foundation principle of the world, of all the worlds, is what we call love, and that the happiness of each and all is in the long run absolutely certain. The vision lasted a few seconds and was gone; but the memory of it and the sense of the reality of what it taught has remained during the quarter of a century which has since elapsed. I knew that what the vision showed was true. I attained to a point of view from which I saw that it must be true. That view, that conviction, I may say that consciousness, has never, even during periods of the deepest depression, been lost.

James (1890) defines four characteristics of the mystical experience.

1. *Unity or oneness.* Experience becomes comprehensive rather than fragmented; relationships between things normally separate are seen.
2. *A sense of "realness."* The person has the sensation that the relations between things he or she experiences are closer to truth than ordinary experiences.
3. *Ineffability.* The experience is said to be impossible to communicate in ordinary words.
4. *Vividness and richness.* Events take on a glow of freshness and clarity not present in ordinary consciousness.

Conclusion: Meditation and the Relevance of "Consciousness Development"

The practice of meditation—whirling, chanting, concentrating on a non-sensical question, thinking or speaking a "sacred" prayer over and over, visualizing a cross, gazing at a vase—are not quite so exotic as one might wish; but neither are they exercises in reason or problem solving. They are exercises in attentional deployment, both those that focus on one stimulus and those that are intended to actively deautomatize ordinary consciousness.

The "mystic" experience brought about by concentrative meditation, deautomatization exercises, and other techniques is, then, a shift from the normal, analytic world containing separate, discrete objects and persons to a second mode, an experience of "unity" and holistic perception. This experience is outside the province of language and rationality, since it is a mode of simultaneity, but it is a complementary dimension of consciousness that adds to and can give comprehension to the ordered sequence of "normal" thought.

But why have people sought to develop this mode, and what value is there in a "mystic" experience? The answers to these questions are not easy. Many of the traditional replies are well known; yet some brief interpretation and comment might be useful.

First, the normal mental system cannot encompass many aspects of life that many people want to experience and understand. That these phenomena have been "ruled out" of much of Western scientific inquiry does not lessen the need that many now feel to explore these areas personally. Meditation is but one of very many attempts to develop consciousness in such a way that certain relational aspects of reality become accessible to the practitioner.

Second, the analytic mode, in which there is separation of objects, and of the self from others (which the theologian Buber has termed the I-it relationship), has proved useful in individual biological survival; yet concentration on this mode may have evolved to fit the conditions of life many thousands of years ago. The evolution of culture proceeds much more slowly than biological evolution; so the analytic mode may not be as all-important a criterion for our contemporary Western society as it once was, and we may even be said to be biologically obsolete in these terms. The awareness of this separation was a great advantage when survival threats were to the individual; for instance, one could locate

and isolate an enemy animal and use it for food. This basic need for individual survival is no longer quite so basic for many in the West. Most of us now buy our food; we do not need to hunt for it. Few readers of this book are in any danger of imminent starvation.

The survival problems now facing us are *collective* rather than individual: They are problems of how to prevent a large nuclear war, pollution of the earth, overpopulation; how to relate and understand diverse and divergent ideas, doctrines, and people—all of which have constructed their own "reality." And note well that in these problems, an exclusive focus on individual consciousness and individual survival may work against, not for, a solution. A shift toward a comprehensive consciousness of the interconnectedness of life, toward a relinquishing of the "every man for himself" attitude inherent in our ordinary construction of consciousness, might enable us to take those "selfless" steps that could begin to solve our collective problems. Certainly our culture has too severely emphasized the development of only one way of organizing reality. Perhaps we can now begin to see that the complementary mode has survival value for our culture as a whole. (In a minor way, some recent cultural events can be seen in this light: I refer to the increasing awareness of the earth as one system that is part of the ecology movement and to interdisciplinary training and systems analysis, among others.)

DEAUTOMATIZATION AND THE MYSTIC EXPERIENCE

Arthur J. Deikman

To study the mystic experience one must turn initially to material that appears unscientific, is couched in religious terms, and seems completely subjective. Yet these religious writings are data and not to be dismissed as something divorced from the reality with which psychological science is concerned. The following passage from *The Cloud of Unknowing*, a fourteenth-century religious treatise, described a procedure to be followed in order to attain an intuitive knowledge of God. Such an intuitive experience is called mystical because it is considered beyond the scope of language to convey. However, a careful reading will show that these instructions contain within their religious idiom psychological ideas per-

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