

**Zen
Meditation**

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Introduction

Zen is unique and so is impossible to classify; it is neither a religion in a conventional sense, since it has no personal God, or form of worship, nor does it have a philosophy, since it eschews all verbal definitions. If it can be said to have an aim at all it is of a direct pointing to experience, leading to an acceptance of all that IS. Its very nature makes it a difficult subject to write about, or describe, so a book can do no more than be like a signpost, showing us the way to where we want to go, but leaving the description of our destination to our experience of it when we get there. How do we know if we have arrived? It is, simply, that we no longer have any need for signposts - we KNOW.

Historically it is linked to Buddhism and is said to have been initiated by Bodhidharma, who came to China from India in A.D. 520, but since he is a semi-legendary figure the foundation of Ch'an, or Zen Buddhism, as it now is, has been credited to Hui Neng (638 - 713) the Sixth Patriarch. However, it is the application of Zen to our everyday lives that is the purpose of this book, though its link with the wider picture of Buddhism becomes more apparent the deeper we go into the subject and this is dealt with in greater detail in later chapters, but some prior knowledge of the basic doctrines of Buddhism would be an advantage.

The difficulty Westerners have in studying Zen arises because it has no equivalent structure in any philosophical or religious tradition in the West, so it requires a really fundamental shift in perception to get to grips with it. Simply in order to get started it is necessary to clear one's mind of all preconceptions and be open to unfamiliar ideas. An open mind is not only a pre-condition of successful Zen meditation but one has to tackle an even bigger problem, that of dealing with the string of thoughts that persist in swamping the mind during all the time we are awake. Suggestions are made later as to how this can be managed; suffice it to say, now, that it is the quality of one's meditative experience that counts, not the amount of time devoted to meditation.

When Zen spread to Japan from China it received further developments, which were possibly more important than what had occurred earlier; certainly we owe a great deal to modern interpretations by scholars such as Dr. Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki and Professor Alan W. Watts, whose book, *The Way of Zen*, ranks among the best on the subject.

At the time when Zen flourished in the Far East there were numerous monasteries, some of them dominated by Zen Masters of such stature that their works are still highly regarded. Mention has been made of Hui Neng but we also have works by Huang Po and Hui Hai, as well as those of lesser known Masters. Today we have no such figures to guide us and so we depend very much on self-development. This is not necessarily a bad thing, since the final stages of Enlightenment (Satori) have always been a very personal journey; the Masters could take their pupils so far but the final step was entirely up to the individual pupil. If this book succeeds in taking its readers up to the point where they can carry on alone it will have achieved its aim.

Chapter 1

Language Limitations

Language, in order to make possible the attempt to communicate experience, must isolate one object from another and give each one a name; so that when we say we see a tree we do not mean that we see a table, or a combination of a tree and a table. As command of language develops these sub-divisions increase and become more precise, as words are added to our vocabulary until we have, stored in our memories, thousands of words that are available for assembly into sentences when we want to communicate with another person. For language to fulfill this function efficiently it is obvious that those doing the communicating must agree on the exact meaning of every word used. If one says “tree” and the other thinks he is referring to an object having a flat top, supported on four legs, then there is no communication between them. This is an exaggerated example yet most philosophical arguments have their origins in misconceptions of a similar kind.

Another aspect of communication to consider is that all experiences must be real - it is only our description of them that can be false. If you have a pain, not only is that pain very real to you, but its precise nature is known without the slightest margin of error. It is only when you come to describing it, say to your doctor, that the problem arises. Moreover, since he cannot feel the pain himself he has no way of relating your description to an objective truth. Even if he took an X-ray, and it revealed a bone fracture, this would tell him nothing about the pain - he would have to presume that you felt pain, because most people do under such circumstances. But this is not absolute knowledge, it is subjective knowledge, and even your complaint of feeling pain does not confirm that it exists, since you could be lying. If this seems preposterous think of an Indian fakir on his bed of nails, or an African fire-walker. If they said that they had not the slightest sensation of pain would you know whether they were telling the truth, or not? It is because our subjective knowledge does not tally with our objective knowledge in such cases that we find them so mystifying.

A similar situation can arise in a different form. Suppose someone tells you that he has seen a ghost (but has not made up the story to frighten or impress you) then he has had a real experience, the precise nature of which is known to him. But what does he mean by the word ‘ghost’? If pressed he might explain that a ghost is the spirit of one who is dead but has come back from another world for a particular reason. But this does not describe the experience, it is a verbal description of what he thinks a ghost is. The term ‘ghost’, like the term ‘God’, is meaningless as a description of an experience and relies on a complex series of preconceived ideas to have any meaning at all. An atheist, or a scientific humanist, could have precisely the same experiences as one who believes there is a God; the differences between them are due to the diversity of interpretations given to those experiences or, in the case of an agnostic, to a refusal to commit himself to any interpretation.

Another limitation of language is due to the fact that an object cannot be known to exist apart from an experience of it. A person who is colour-blind from birth cannot know that the colour red exists, and language is quite unable to convey the experience of redness to him, so language is limited to the range of common experiences. And even when a common experience exists errors in communication can occur due to words being

only a representation of an experience and not the experience itself - just as a photograph is a representation of a scene, not the actual scene. We may believe that the camera cannot lie and in a sense this is true, yet photographs often give a false impression of a scene as, for example, when a photograph taken with a wide-angle lens gives the impression that a room is more spacious than is actually the case.

Traditional Western philosophy is well acquainted with the defects of language as a means of communication but, due to its preoccupation with concepts, there is one aspect of language which escaped its attention altogether. This is the way language contributes to the falsification of the experience itself. On the face of it this appears to be a contradiction of the statement that all experiences must be real. How can an experience become unreal when we use language to describe it? We need to examine, in detail, the nature of an experience.

Chapter 2

Experience and Duality

If you are alone in the garden, looking at the lawn, you are experiencing the sight of green grass. Since you are alone the question of communicating this experience does not arise; nor do you have to use language to tell yourself that you are seeing green grass. But, is it green? The grass is receiving light from the sun and this is composed of a wide range of electro-magnetic waves. Chlorophyll in the grass absorbs all of these except a certain band of waves, which are reflected to your eyes. The retinas in your eyes convert these into minute electrical signals, which pass along nerve fibres to the brain; you then experience the sight of green grass. But the colour is not in the grass, it is in your mind! Grass merely has the capacity to absorb certain wavelengths of light and reflect others - it is not intrinsically green.

If you were colour-blind you would still see the grass, but it would not be green, and yet the experience would be just as real to you as if you had full colour vision. How is it, then, that we take it for granted that the greenness is in the grass or, to put it more broadly, that grass possesses all its qualities of colour, shape and texture?

But surely, you might say, the grass must be physically present? This requires a more methodical examination. Grass is made up of complex molecules and every molecule comprises a particular arrangement of atoms to give it its characteristic properties. Each atom has a nucleus and surrounding rings of electrons, similar to the planets round the Sun. The nucleus of an atom comprises a number of constituent parts, not all of which are fully understood, but none of these parts of the nucleus, nor the electrons revolving around it have independent physical properties. On their own they are merely charges; the electron being a negative charge and the nucleus a positive charge. Only when these opposing charges are in balance is the atom stable; when the atom is not in balance it is said to be an ion, with an overall positive or negative charge depending on whether it has a deficiency or surplus of electrons. The point that needs to be stressed is that none of these charges has any physical existence. Even the position of an electron at any given moment, unlike the Earth round the Sun, does not exist - physicists have termed it "a wave of probability". Without the benefit of modern scientific knowledge the Yogacara (Mind Only) School of Buddhism developed a philosophy to the effect that, just as without consciousness colour does not exist, so without consciousness there is no material existence either. The most we can say is that the potential for existence is there. This is where meditation comes into the equation, because it is during meditation that we get to the ONE without distinction, revealing the source of all that IS. In later chapters this aspect of existence is dealt with more fully.

What has been described, as far as words can be used to describe it, is the Void of Buddhism; it neither exists, nor does it not exist; it is the condition from which "we serenely observe the mysterious beginning of the Universe" (Tao Te Ching). However, this non-physical nature does not exclude the apparent greenness of grass, or its physical properties, because "These two are the same in source and become different when manifested". (Again quoting from the Tao Te Ching).

Why, then, do we take it for granted that the grass is intrinsically green and has physical presence independent of any mental construction? It is because we have become

conditioned by language into believing that there is a subject and an object - that there is a 'self' that has an experience and an object that is experienced. In this case, that 'I' (the subject) sees green grass (the object). This duality is the 'original sin' that separates us from 'God' (or from Nirvana in Buddhism).

The French philosopher, Descartes, said "I think, therefore I am", thereby stating the belief that the existence of thoughts (experiences) proved the existence of a thinker (experiencer). But we do not experience the experiencer, only experiences, and since we cannot know of the existence of anything that has never been experienced, the subject 'I' is a construction forced on us by the conventions of language. So the statement, "I think, therefore I am", is not proof of anything, but is simply a statement that there are thoughts. The difficulty we have in grasping this, even though the example of green grass may look convincing, is because language cannot escape from the bounds of subject and object - and almost every sentence used here is confirmation of this. We simply cannot avoid using words like 'you', 'me', 'it', 'yours', 'mine', and 'its' if we are to communicate with words. There is, perhaps, one small chink in the armour of language, enabling us to see through its duality - when we say, "It is raining", what is It that rains? Do we not mean that there is rain? When we say, "I think", could we not also mean simply that there are thoughts? This is not to deny the existence of the ego, which comes into being after birth, but the ego dies when the body dies. It is, therefore, a temporary phenomenon, brought about by the 'original sin' mentioned earlier. The idea that something that had no previous existence comes into being and then goes on forever is neither logical nor does it accord with the Buddhist doctrine of Anatta, that there is no immortal yet personal soul. (Anatta is one of the Three Signs of Conditional Existence).

Chapter 3

Eternity and Immortality

Later a chapter is devoted to a question and answer session, which attempts to deal with some of the problems someone nurtured in the Western tradition is likely to encounter when studying Zen Buddhism. In the West we are so ingrained with the belief in a subject and an object that the Eastern view that an object is not a 'thing' but an 'event' is hard to grasp. Moreover, Eastern languages, such as Chinese, developed without any formal grammatical structure, unlike in the West, where this belief in a subject and a separate object went hand in hand with formal grammar. The question of 'self', or the idea that the self has an existence independent of the body and consciousness, therefore warrants a chapter of its own.

To some extent we are supported in this investigation by the Christian mystic, Meister Eckhart, and more recently by Bishop Robinson (author of the book, *Honest to God*). During his meditations Eckhart lost all sense of a separate personal identity, or of contact with a personal being (i.e. a God 'out there') and in *Honest to God* the Bishop appeared to express a similar view. Nevertheless our cultural heritage and traditions strongly pull us in the opposite direction, so that even when we accept Buddhism as being the nearest mankind has got to understanding Absolute Reality we still confront the problem of what is 'It' that is re-born. Re-Birth is an essential part of the Buddha's message, yet how can there be re-birth if there is not a 'thing' (self) to be re-born?

Perhaps it may help by drawing a comparison between our 'selves' and the four Seasons, which follow a similar pattern to human existence - birth, growth, decay and death. The Spring that occurs this year is not the same Spring that occurred last year, but nor is it entirely different. Indeed, it is heavily dependent on what happened in the previous year. If there had been a hurricane, wiping out many years of growth, it would clearly take more than a year to make good the damage.

As far as human life is concerned does this then mean that we are utterly at the mercy of past events? If it were not for consciousness this would be so, but consciousness gives rise to Dukkha (awareness of the unsatisfactoriness of dependence on conditions) and it is Dukkha that prompts us to seek a way of deliverance.

The Buddha showed us not only the cause of Dukkha but also a way out of it. This teaching is embodied in the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, the completion of which is bound up with meditation. Thus, in all the major Schools of Buddhism, meditation plays a crucial role, since it enables us to concentrate on what it is that is eternal and intrinsically pure, as well as being void of any particularisation, so allowing us to break free from the burden of Karma. Of all the major Schools Zen is unique in not requiring an extensive study of religious literature - it is a direct pointing to the Essence of Life and all that exists, so an understanding of Buddhist terms used here may be postponed until later. (Some suggestions are given in the Bibliography at the end of this book).

Linked with the notion of Re-Birth are the imaginary problems of First Cause and Design. Clearly the Universe is not haphazard in the way it operates and life, itself, has an apparently miraculous intricacy. Surely none of this could have come about by mere chance - even Science recognizes a multitude of 'laws' governing everything that exists?

But these laws are not laws in the legal sense; they are simply descriptions of the way things happen or behave; in other words they are eternal laws outside time. If, for example, an object is dropped it is the law of Gravity that makes it fall to the ground. Had it been dropped yesterday, or a 100 years ago, or a million years ago, the same thing would have happened. Similarly, if it should be dropped tomorrow, or a 100 years hence, or a million years hence, it would fall in exactly the same way. There never has been a time when Gravity was non-existent; it is eternal and yet Void - it is like the centre of a circle, it has no material existence, yet without this non-existence there could be no circle. All other laws of Science are similar; for instance, the speed of light is 186,000 miles per second, but this was not 'invented' at a moment in time, it has always been and always will be the same, so the quest for a First Cause is unnecessary. Even if we have the notion of a God as the creator of the Universe we have merely pushed the First Cause back to something else we have to deem as being eternal - we might just as well have stayed where we were. What is more, should we go on to give other attributes to this notion of a God we are in even greater difficulties, but this is not the place to examine what these are.

So, if Re-Birth, First Cause and Design are all Void (in Buddhism, Sunyata) there is no independent 'I' to be re-born. The idea of an 'I' having an experience is therefore false, I am the experience. If 'my' experiences had been completely different 'I' would not be 'me' I would be someone else, both in terms of how I see myself and how others see me. Even my appearance would be different, because it partly depends on my experiences. Furthermore, if the science of bodily development is true 'my' body would also have been completely different, because every atom in our bodies is said to be changed over a seven year period and many new atoms are added to it from the moment of conception to adulthood and this development, also, is dependent on circumstances.

What, then, is there left to be a continuous 'me'? Nothing other than consciousness, but consciousness in the abstract is not a person, it is one of the means by which a person is said to exist (i.e. it is one of the five Skandhas). We are, therefore, back to experience as being the only characteristic that gives us knowledge of human existence, and this ceases at death. When drugs anaesthetize the brain there is no consciousness; when the brain stops functioning (at death) 'our' consciousness ceases. At this point the Buddha's doctrine of Anicca, Anatta and Dukkha converge into the Void (Sunyata). The Void is not nothing, it is no-thing and it is from the Void that all existence arises; it is the source of Re-Birth; it is the Essence of Mind as proclaimed by Huang Po and Hui Hai; and from the Tao Te Ching (as translated by Ch'u Ta-Kao) we get:-

From eternal non-existence, therefore, we serenely
observe the mysterious beginning of the Universe;
From eternal existence we clearly see the apparent
distinctions.
These two are the same in source and become different
when manifested.

Having experienced reality without concepts we are able to put all other mental activity into its proper place and this is what meditation does for us. Our greed for earthly goods and attainments; our hatred of perceived objects of hate and our delusions (concepts)

about what exists are now seen in their true perspective. Compared with the experience of Absolute Reality they are trivial. What is more, since it is the Essence of Mind that is the basis of Re-Birth, and is therefore limitless in time, even an entire human life-span shrinks to virtual insignificance. When one Zen Master was asked what the experience of Satori (Enlightenment) was like he replied that it was like walking with one's feet off the ground and another said that all that was left was to have a good laugh.

Chapter 4

Time and Timelessness

Our impression of time, as a sequence of events, arises from memory of past experiences, some of which have only just happened. We have not yet experienced the future, so this impression of time extends only into the past. We can, of course, anticipate an event that may happen tomorrow, or next year, and so extend time into the future, but this future event has no conscious reality until it actually happens - and there is no certainty that it will happen. Nevertheless, we are convinced that something will happen in the future, and since we cannot imagine a moment when nothing happened in the past, or nothing will happen in the future, our extrapolation of time has to extend from the present moment to infinity, both backwards into the past and forwards into the future.

Although we can have no conception of what infinity is like this view of time comfortably supports our theory of what existence involves. It enables some thing, or an event, to have a beginning and an end, and yet form part of a process that has no beginning and no end. Even the concept of God fits into this view of time - things, or events, that have a beginning and an end are not eternal but God, being part of the continuing process, or even being the continuing process itself, is eternal.

Some people have to make just one exception to this view of time - Man himself. They believe that there was a moment when they were born (or, if you like, conceived) and that before that moment they did not exist; but they cannot accept that there will be a moment when they cease to exist. For them the thought of dying is so hard to bear that in order to make it tolerable they have to believe that, for Man alone, there is a beginning but no end - that he has life after death that extends into the infinite future. (Clearly, there would be no point in believing in life after death if it did not extend to infinity, otherwise it would merely postpone, not eliminate, extinction). Others, finding this uniqueness of Man in relation to time too incredible, yet still wanting to preserve the idea of life after death, expand the exception to cover all sentient beings, and they may also introduce the concept of reincarnation, whereby the departed come back to Earth to live another life, in a continuing process of life and death. A still further development of this last concept envisages a kind of hierarchical scale, whereby the departed come back into a 'higher' or 'lower' grade of existence, according to how well they behaved in the previous life. (Mostly they do not bother to consider how animals, whose behaviour is presumably determined by natural instinct and not moral judgments, can move up the scale).

But, what is it these people want to preserve? Ask them what they consider to be the most important moment of their lives and the chances are that they will single out an event in the past that left the greatest impression on them, or was a major turning point, such that their lives took on a new meaning or direction. Some might say it was the moment they exchanged wedding vows; others, that it was when they started a career that settled their whole way of life, and a few might say it was the moment of "conversion", when they "accepted Christ into my life". Ask a hundred people this question and, although you may not get a hundred different answers, you certainly will not receive the same answer from them all. But, how many of them are likely to say, "Now - this very moment is the most important moment of my life"? Yet the Here and Now is not only the most important moment of our lives, it is the only moment of our lives!

We do not live in the past, nor do we live in the future, we live (experience) only the present moment, with all its complexities of sensations and memories - yet, even as we say "this present moment", it is gone. It is so elusive that we cannot pin it down to a moment in time at all. Time is measured in days, hours, minutes and seconds, but how long is the present moment? One second? A hundredth of a second? A millionth of a second? We cannot imagine a period short enough to give a firm answer - and yet the present moment is always with us!

In other words, we find that the present moment cannot be measured in time at all - it is timeless. But, if the only reality we know (experience) is timeless, does this not mean that time, itself, is an illusion, just as the impression that grass possesses greenness, is an illusion? And if the present moment is timeless, yet is the only reality we know, how can it be preserved when the very notion of preservation involves time?

Chapter 5

The Ego

The impression we have that grass possesses greenness is derived, not from the experience itself (reality), but from the concept arising from that experience - that there is an 'I' (the subject) which experiences seeing green grass (the object), so that the grass is 'out there' and 'I' am 'in here'. The impression we have of time is derived, not from experience (reality), which is timeless, but from the notion that there is an 'I' (the subject) which experiences an event (the object), so that 'I' am one thing and the event is another. But, if we know that experience is both absolutely real and timeless, are these not also the very qualities we attribute to 'God'? If this is so then, as Meister Eckhart put it, Man "need seek nothing, not even God", because there is nothing to seek - it is right here, now, at this very moment! We cannot find it, because there is no 'we' to find it; we cannot lose it, because there is no 'we' to lose it - we are it! Because we have become conditioned by language, and possibly through thousands of years of separation from 'God', we believe that 'God' is 'out there' and 'I' am 'in here'. This is the Original Sin of Christianity - it is the Karma of Buddhism - and it began when our level of awareness rose above that of the animal kingdom from which we evolved.

The Christian view is that this Original Sin is so powerful that only an 'Act of Grace' can overcome it. It is at this point that the principal divergence between Christianity and Buddhism emerges. If an 'Act of Grace' is necessary then this must come from 'out there', but this implies a duality between God and Man. The Buddha's answer is, "Look within, thou art Buddha" but this still poses the question as to how we are to realise the Buddha within. Had the Buddha nothing more to say on the matter he would have left us with the same insoluble problem that Christianity has done, but he also gave us the method whereby union with 'God' is achieved. Consideration of this method must wait until we have explored the problem in greater detail - we still have a long way to go in trying to think our way to 'God', or to Nirvana, because only when this is found to be impossible can the alternative be seen in its true perspective.

Starting from a point of certainty, we know that we are seeking 'God', or Nirvana, (because we are experiencing that desire and all experiences are real) but what does it involve? It involves a consciousness of an 'I' seeking something, whether it be 'out there' (the Christian view) or 'in here' (the Buddhist view). But the very act of seeking is trying to achieve contradictory aims; it is trying to unite the self with 'God' or realise Nirvana, but by requiring the self to do the seeking it reinforces the separation we are trying to overcome. If, therefore, it is the desire for the Goal which separates us from it then it is a self-perpetuating desire - and it is this that must be eliminated. It must be totally eliminated, because all that we desire creates the same situation - an 'I', or ego, desiring something, whether it be 'God' or anything else - so it is not simply a question of not seeking 'God', or Nirvana, we must seek nothing.

How can this be? If we were to have no desire at all how could we provide ourselves with a home, obtain food, know when to eat (hunger is a desire), have children (sex is a desire) and do the thousand and one things necessary for us to live? Surely, desiring is essential to life, since we cannot do anything unless we first have the desire to do it and, in any case, some of these desires have been given us by nature to ensure continuation of

life on Earth and cannot be dispensed with without life, itself, becoming extinct? Furthermore, desire must be real, because it is experienced, but how can it exist without someone to do the desiring? Before we give up, in despair, at trying to think our way out of this, let us pursue the matter of desire still further.

Assume that you want to go to a local shop for some eggs. If it was essential for you to have desire in order to complete this operation in its entirety then you would have to be conscious of desire at every stage of it. (We have just said that we cannot do anything unless we first have the desire to do it). Merely to desire some eggs is not enough, since you must first rise from your chair and this would require a desire to stand up; you must walk to the door and this would not happen without a desire to do it; you have to reach your destination and this would require a continuous desire, otherwise you would lose your way; you must bring the eggs home without dropping them and this would require a constant desire to be careful. But these desires are only a tiny fraction of those needed to complete the expedition - you could not even put one foot in front of another, or lift it from the floor, unless you first had the desire to do so. In fact, the desires required even for the act of walking would be so numerous as to be impossible to list.

Walking is such a complicated process that no computer controlled robot has yet got anywhere near simulating it. We have seen on television or film attempts to make robots walk, yet the result is always a ludicrous, clumsy caricature of walking. But we can do it without thinking how we do it and, since walking is beyond our ability to understand, if we had to think how to walk we would not be able to walk at all!

This is what happened to the centipede:-

The centipede was happy, quite
Until a toad in fun
Said, "Pray, which leg goes after which?"
This worked his mind to such a pitch,
He lay distracted in a ditch,
Considering how to run.

We have a reversed experience to the centipede when learning to ride a bicycle. In the early stages, when we feel that we must concentrate on every detail of balance and movement, it is very difficult; we wobble all over the place; we cannot steer straight, and after a few seconds the bicycle falls away from beneath us. As time goes by we improve, but why do we improve? Is it because we are concentrating more and more on the technique of cycling? Quite the contrary, we are thinking less and less about it, until there comes a moment when, miraculously, we can ride a bicycle as efficiently as we can walk. The transformation that has taken place is that we no longer say to ourselves "I must hold my balance", or "I must turn the pedals", or "I must steer the handlebars".

A psychologist might say that we have merely transferred the technique to our unconscious mind, but this is not good enough for the kind of enquiry we are making here, because we want to know. We can only infer that the unconscious mind exists, and it would be a contradiction of possibilities to say that we must be conscious of the unconscious before we are convinced. In any case, the psychologist would merely be expressing in psychological terms what we have already said, namely, that 'I' am no longer conscious of doing these things. But, if it is no longer necessary for us to believe

that 'I' am riding a bicycle for a bicycle to be used, do we have to believe that 'I' desire some eggs before they are bought from the shop, or that 'I' desire food before it is eaten? Could it not be that we know that there is hunger (because hunger is experienced) and that we know a meal is eaten (because the eating of it is experienced) but that there is no 'I' to have the experience - there is only the experience? It still seems impossible? Let us make a further attempt to comprehend Reality by following a different route.

Can you imagine what it would be like if you had been blind and deaf from birth and then, suddenly, were to receive normal sight and hearing? To see, for the first time, lush meadows surrounded by trees and, overhead, a bright blue sky; gardens containing flowers of great beauty and glowing with colour. And birds appear, as if by magic, out of the sky, to alight on the branches of a nearby tree. And to see the sea, in all its moods, with sometimes grey clouds overhead and with enormous waves crashing against the rocks; and at other times with blue sky overhead that causes the calm sea to mirror its colour.

To hear, for the first time, birds in the garden, wind in the trees and waves breaking on the shore. To hear a choir singing in a cathedral and even the sound of your own footsteps, as you walk along, admiring what you see and hear.

While you absorb the glory of it all into your very being you glance round and see a dustbin overflowing with filthy rubbish; and then you hear a jet airliner roaring overhead.

As you have not been blind and deaf from birth you take the fact of sight and hearing for granted, but you get more selective in what you want to see and hear. You desire to see the flowers, the birds, the sea and the sky, but you desire not to see the dustbin, overflowing with filthy rubbish. You desire to hear the birds, the choir and the sound of the sea, but you desire not to hear the jet airliner roaring overhead. Your life has become bound by desire which, in extreme cases, can even result in suicide or murder.

If your desire to pick and choose experiences were to end right now you would see and hear as if sight and hearing were given to you afresh. It is self-perpetuating desire and only self-perpetuating desire that holds us back from this union with the Goal. Buddhism agrees with Eckhart in maintaining that we must seek (desire) nothing, not even God (or Nirvana). But, even as we say this, language traps us in the world of subject and object; because even to think about God, or Enlightenment, binds us to duality, because we then have a concept of something we are trying not to seek.

Before we come to the way out of this trap the point must be made that there is a significant difference between Zen acceptance of all that IS and the philosophy of Stoicism and that of Marcus Aurelius, or the traditional British "stiff upper lip". These may start from the standpoint of accepting the inevitability of undesirable things happening but they do not reject desire itself; indeed, annoyance at the filthy dustbin and the noise of jet engines is regarded as laudable. Zen, on the other hand, follows the universal doctrine of Buddhism that desire, itself, is undesirable. In the Old Wisdom Schools it forms part of the Four Noble Truths on the origin of Dukkha (suffering).

Chapter 6

Free Will?

Examples have been given as to how language contributes to the delusion of a separate self, due to its requirement of a subject and an object. But language did not create Mind, it was Mind that created language, so the delusion must have preceded language.

This is not surprising because a dog, without having language to complicate its mental processes, can also get caught up in a similar situation although, since we cannot know what a dog thinks, we cannot say that it proves anything, only that it is a useful analogy.

When a dog is undivided in its mind it lives according to its nature and its life functions efficiently and uninhibited; but the moment it becomes conscious of its tail it has a problem - a desirable object that has to be chased and caught. But the tail cannot be caught - the faster the dog goes round in circles to catch it the faster the tail moves away. It is so tantalisingly close and yet forever out of reach! And what a ridiculous sight it is when a dog behaves in this way. We laugh and think that only a stupid animal could believe it possible to chase and catch itself. The dog had no problem when the tail functioned as part of the totality of existence; it never failed to wag when the dog was pleased, or droop when it was sad. Because the dog was not thinking, "I am pleased, therefore I must wag my tail" or, "I am sad, therefore I must let my tail droop", it did not prevent these actions. There was pleasure and the tail wagged; there was sadness and the tail drooped.

Yet we believe that unless 'I' want some eggs they will not be obtained from the shop, or unless 'I' steer that bicycle it will go off the road and into the ditch. What is even more worrying to us is that we believe that unless we keep a close watch on our 'tail' it will do all sorts of nasty things; and so we devise a list of instructions, or commandments, to tell it what to do, and if it does not carry them out it must be punished. And our fears are confirmed. The closer we scrutinise the activities of our 'tail' the more we find it disobeying the rules, until we can stand it no longer and can get relief only by doing penance (self-sacrifice). If we are monks in a monastery we might even take a whip and flagellate ourselves until blood flows from the wounds.

We find it hard to leave our 'tail' alone and let it function as part of the totality of existence; we identify it as a separate object and then chase round in circles trying to make it acceptable to 'God'. Until we achieve this aim we are unhappy and think that failure is due to lack of will, so we try still harder. Eventually we collapse through sheer exhaustion and cry out for a Saviour to make us whole. At this very moment of giving up the chase we 'miraculously' become whole - we have been Saved. Yet our 'tail' was with 'God' all the time - it was only our partial awareness that made it seem separate. Like the dog, we cannot stand outside ourselves and see why we are making such a mess of our lives, and so we continue to construct more and more concepts, which serve only to perpetuate the chase for our 'tail'.

For instance, we have the concept of goodness, meaning self-less behaviour; but if 'I' intend to do a self-less act this is a logical impossibility. The good person is one who is unaware of doing good; if he was aware of it we would not call him good at all, but a do-gooder, or a self-righteous hypocrite. But, if he is unaware of doing good, what is the point in him having rules of conduct, he would still behave the same way without them.

All the time we think about this problem it continues to haunt us. Even if we try to behave selflessly, by denying that there is a separate self, we have to be conscious of the self in order that there can be a denial. (It would be like telling ourselves that provided we do not think of bananas we would be 'good' - we would have to try so hard not to think of bananas that they would dominate our thoughts). Furthermore, to say that because the idea of a separate self is an illusion the self does not need rules of conduct only makes matters worse, because it implies that we are free to do anything. The dog is not free to do anything, whether it is conscious of its tail or not. If the dog is conscious of it, then the ridiculous gyrations occur; but if the dog is not conscious of it the tail wags when the dog is pleased and droops when it is sad. In neither case does the dog control what happens - it just happens! In the first case, he does not decide to go round in circles - it is the consequence of the desire to catch his tail - nor can he desire not to have the desire, since this would require an infinite series of desires, each one requiring a decision to decide. And, in the second case, he does not decide to wag his tail, or let it droop, since he is not conscious that the tail exists.

This is why the question as to whether our will is free, or determined, is so perplexing. If we look at it one way it appears to be free, but if we look at it another way it appears to be determined. We do not stop to ask ourselves whether the question, itself, makes sense, we presume that we have a will - yet without the delusion of a separate self we would understand that there is no will to act, there is only action. If we must have a concept to prepare ourselves for the first deliberate step to Enlightenment it might help if we visualise our 'True Self', or 'Greater Self', as being nothing more than consciousness, or experience, in which there is no differentiation between anything. The experience is not of anything, or by anything - it is just experience.

By doing this we start from a point of certainty - we know we have consciousness; we do not know anything else, since everything other than pure experience is inferred. Above all, we must not be fobbed off with any theory, no matter how appealing it is, since we must be satisfied with nothing short of absolute certainty - we must **KNOW**.

Chapter 7

On Meditation

The experimental experiences mentioned in previous chapters have pointed towards what is central to all Schools of Buddhism - meditation. It is only in recent years that meditation has been practised to any notable extent in the West and the vast majority of people are completely ignorant of what it entails. Even Christian so-called meditation is far removed from meditation as practised in Buddhism, since it invariably involves meditating upon concepts. However beneficial this may be to those of the Christian faith it is not much help as a means of gaining intuitive understanding. Christian mystics, like Meister Eckhart, appear to have broken through into a deeper form of meditation, akin to that of Buddhism, but they are few in number and did not find favour with the Holy See. Even now, in spite of Bishop Robinson's *Honest to God*, there must be very few Christians who can accept Eckhart's dictum that we must "seek nothing, not even God" - this must strike most Christians as being the very opposite of what Christianity is supposed to be about.

To most people in the West, therefore, the commencement of meditation is like entering unfamiliar territory. That many have been there before is no help if the signposts they have left behind are in Sanskrit, or Pali. Fortunately there are many books in English on the subject, some of them translations of Eastern texts, so there is no point in covering here ground already traversed by writers better qualified to teach meditation. However, all meditational practices within the various Schools of Buddhism are derived from certain basic principles. It is these fundamentals that must be understood before proceeding to any derived form.

Mostly the derivations have been developed to deal with specific circumstances, or to fit in with certain cultural traditions. Some of the specialised practices (such as the cemetery meditations) are dangerous, unless conducted under the direction of an experienced and qualified teacher, who is accepted as such by the Order to which he belongs. But the basic form is all that is needed initially and can be sufficient, if practised regularly, to give both insight into the nature of existence and the calm, peaceful mind which comes from that insight.

Let us try another experiment. Go out into the garden again and look at the lawn. Once more you have the vision of green grass, and you know that you see green grass; this is not a theory - you KNOW. But wait! - you are thinking, "the grass is green" or, "I see green grass" - you have slipped into theorising again, since you do not KNOW the grass is green, nor do you KNOW that there is a self that sees green grass. This is not the nature of your experience - your experience is purely that of seeing green grass. Of course, if you have wandered away from the experiment by constructing these concepts then you could bring yourself back to it by recognizing that there is an idea that the grass is green, or that there is an idea that 'I' see green grass, since the idea is experienced and therefore you KNOW it exists.

Put into words the technique of meditation seems terribly complicated and virtually impossible to accomplish successfully - yet a baby can do it! The baby finds it so easy to have a pure experience, because it has not reached the stage where its mind has been

corrupted by concepts, but we have to start by unravelling ideas from reality. In other words, we must try to overcome the 'original sin' of the mind.

As previously mentioned, meditation is central to all Schools of Buddhism; it is also the foundation of the Buddha's way to Enlightenment. To the Enlightened One the grass is still green, the birds still sing and that dustbin still overflows with filthy rubbish, but his experiences are detached from the kind of concepts we weave around the same experiences. He does not judge an experience to be either good or bad - it just IS. He does not have thoughts about love and hate, because such thoughts require a subject and an object, and to him there is no experience of a subject and an object. If he comes across a person in distress he helps that person naturally, efficiently and effectively, without thinking, "I am helping this person"; just as a bitch suckles its pups and protects them from danger, naturally, efficiently and effectively, without needing to think how or why it is being done.

"Aha!", you might say, "there is a difference here, because the bitch's behaviour is instinctive, whereas the Enlightened One has to choose to help the person in distress". If you believe this, even now, then before proceeding to the next chapter you should read the previous chapters again. If, having done this, you still come to the same conclusion then there is little point in reading further. Perhaps a different book would help.

Chapter 8

Practical Meditation (1)

Meditation, even at its highest level, begins with using the faculties of sight, hearing, smell, taste and feeling, so that there is a pure experience without concepts. It is not, as one psychologist claimed, simply a matter of achieving coherence ('coherence' is when the left and right sides of the brain function together) even though tests with the electroencephalograph have shown that this happens during meditation. This led him to the conclusion that meditation is no different to being half awake - the state we are in when we are just coming out of deep sleep but are not fully 'ourselves' - and yet there is a grain of truth in this.

Most of the dreams we have in deep sleep, if not all, are experiences without an ego consciousness. This is probably why sleep is so refreshing, even though some of the dreamed experiences may not be all that pleasant. If we awaken naturally (not by an alarm clock) the intermediate period can last a minute or so and our immediate reaction is akin to how a baby would view the same scene. But anyone who has truly meditated knows that it is very different to being half awake. Perhaps the best way to illustrate the difference is to take, as an example, a baby and a music-lover listening to a Beethoven symphony; they both hear the same sounds; neither is conscious of an 'I' hearing those sounds, yet would it be correct to say that they were having the same experience?

However, of greater interest to the would-be meditator than 'scientific' explanations of what meditation is are the practical ways of setting about it, what the experience is like and whether the benefits, if any, last beyond the session of meditation.

The first problem we encounter is that of time. Our everyday life is one of relativity and so, whatever we may think about meditation being the experience of the timeless, in practical terms it does take time. However, as mentioned in the Introduction, it is the quality of the meditative experience that matters, not the amount of time devoted to it. Initially about twenty minutes, twice daily, should suffice, although for much of these periods the mind will be wandering into thoughts about all sorts of things, instead of concentrating on the actuality of the moment. (A technique described later should help in this respect).

In theory, as the amount of leisure we have increases, so should the problem of finding time reduce but, unfortunately, the human mind does not work this way. We are so intent on escaping from reality that we create activity, or distractions, without realising why we are doing so; and although it fails to give us deep satisfaction this very dissatisfaction spurs us towards yet more escapism. Ultimately, we have to make the decision as to whether we really want to carry on in this way, or 'sacrifice' time in order to savour the timeless.

We also have to decide whether to meditate on all the experiences we have at a given moment or give our attention to just one of them. At a later stage it should be possible to cope with all experiences with equal facility but, initially, this presents considerable difficulty and the reason is not hard to understand. If we consider the totality of concepts we have constructed around our experiences it will be found that the great majority are concerned with vision. We have names and descriptive terms for a whole range of

objects - their colours, their shapes and purposes - whereas we have far fewer concepts for touch and sound.

Taking a clock as an example; there is only one sound we hear (that of its ticking) but, if we look at it, a multitude of concepts come to mind - its size, its shape, its colour, the type of clock it is and the numbers on the dial. We are also tempted to be aware of the passage of time, whereas we are trying to savour the timeless! Not only this but the clock may be surrounded by other objects which attract our attention - that souvenir from Devon, that photograph of Aunt Agatha, those brass candlesticks and, behind them all, the pattern on the wallpaper. Close your eyes and all these vanish, leaving just the sound of the clock ticking. There could be an occasional sound of a jet airliner passing overhead, or of a bird chirping in the garden, but even these extraneous sounds have a simplicity which does not apply to actually seeing the objects making the sound. Of course, we might be able to isolate a single visionary experience by careful arrangement but, generally speaking, this is not easily done and it also constricts meditating to within a narrow set of circumstances.

Since experiencing Reality (wholeness, or holiness) needs for its realisation timelessness and egolessness, it might be thought that listening to the ticking of a clock is hardly the best way of achieving the former. In practice, providing we concentrate on the sound of ticking as a pure experience, it is much easier than it seems in theory. By far the more difficult condition to realise is that of egolessness, because the ego is the prime source of 'original sin'. So long as the sound appears to be coming from 'out there' then the delusion of a separate self continues to exist. Similarly, when we looked at the lawn, if the grass appeared to be 'over there' then we had a self (the subject) seeing green grass (the object) and this, as we are already aware, is the condition of duality. It is not that sound and vision should seem to come from 'in here' either, since this pinpoints the source of Reality as being the individual mind, which is not the case - the grass would still be there even if no-one was looking at it! However perplexing this may be no further explanation can be given, because it would be attempting to describe Absolute Reality in conceptual terms, which is impossible.

The main problem with using sound for a meditational experience is the possibility it holds of causing drowsiness, or even sleep. With our eyes closed, and the fact that meditation does produce coherence in brain activity, drowsiness is an ever present hazard. However, it should not be overlooked that tiredness is often caused by accumulated worry and stress, which may have prevented us getting refreshing sleep at night. If meditation releases the mind from these conditions then sleep is a natural consequence. Meditation cannot give us more sleep than we need but, if we are to gain real advantage from it, then sleep should be reserved for a more appropriate time.

If drowsiness is found to be a persistent problem then it may be better to use sound as the object of meditation in the morning, when we have just had a long sleep, and a visual form of meditation in the evening. It may also help if meditation is undertaken after having had a mildly stimulating drink, such as tea or coffee, but on no account should amphetamines, or other powerful drugs, be taken. For reasons that will not be examined further here it can be said that the use of powerful drugs, either to keep one awake, or to enhance awareness, is certain to result in failure; even the need for tea or coffee can be regarded as a sign of stagnation if it persists. Should this happen then one should either try a different object for meditation (e.g. one that is visual if the present one is aural) or

seek guidance. Probably more people give up meditation altogether through stagnation than from any other cause.

Many statues of the Buddha depict him meditating in the lotus posture and in those countries of the Far East where meditating has been common practice for centuries even most adults can adopt this position without discomfort but, for most Westerners, accustomed to sitting in chairs, this is not so. Severe discomfort may be acceptable as a penance but it is not conducive to successful meditation. If the lotus posture cannot be adopted without it giving rise to acute backache and leg pains then it should be avoided. Some people make such a fetish of the lotus posture that they actually create problems where none exists and may make it more difficult for them to meditate. It is the state of mind that is all important, not the position of the body, and if we cannot empty our minds of thoughts (including thoughts about aches and pains) then we are not giving ourselves a chance to concentrate on a single, pure experience.

An alternative posture, suitable for the Westerner, is to sit in a comfortable chair with a cushion on one's lap. Place both elbows on the cushion and then with lightly clasped fists put both fists over the ears, so providing a supportive triangle, which can be maintained for a long period. Perhaps the most surprising outcome of this is that it will actually amplify the sound of the clock ticking, whilst at the same time reducing the apparent directional source of the sound.

Chapter 9

Practical Meditation (2)

In our everyday life we have what one advertiser for a 'mind training course' described as a "grasshopper mind" - our minds flit from one thought to another in rapid succession and we have great difficulty concentrating on a given subject for more than a few seconds at a time. Even during breakfast we do not concentrate on eating, but think about what we are going to do next, or worry about problems we will face several hours hence. Try, for example, eating a bowl of cornflakes, thinking of nothing but consuming the cornflakes until the bowl is empty - which should take no more than about three minutes - and you will almost certainly find it extremely difficult, if not impossible. You have a 'grasshopper mind'. It is not a question of failing to try hard enough, the greater the effort put into it, the harder it becomes to concentrate. If you are really determined to succeed the repeated failures may worry you so much that not only do you not enjoy your food but you get a feeling of inadequacy and hopelessness as well.

By far the greatest difficulty in meditating is this inability to concentrate for prolonged periods. Some Schools of Buddhism have a method of mind training involving counting exhalations of the breath up to ten and then repeating this over and over again, without allowing the mind to wander from the process of counting. At first, the meditator has difficulty reaching even a minute without his mind wandering. After a long time, which may be many months, he may find it possible to concentrate on counting exhalations for several minutes at a stretch, without having extraneous thoughts.

One should not be too dismissive of this method, because it has been shown to work, but it is like the toad telling the centipede that he will be able to run if he concentrates, first on moving one leg, then another, until he gets all going in the correct order, without the legs getting in the way of each other. No wonder this method takes a long time to master, because it is asking the mind to train the mind.

The problem of concentration in meditation arises because we lose sight of what meditation actually is. To understand this in greater detail we need to return to the matter of a pure experience. Pure experience is pure experience no matter what form it takes. If, whilst eating the cornflakes, we are thinking about the train we have to catch to get to work, then that thought is as much a pure experience as that of eating - we know we are thinking about the train! It is because we believe that we ought to choose one experience from another, and call one 'pure' and the other 'not pure', that we give ourselves the problem of concentration in meditation. We may well have the ticking of a clock as the initial object, but we delude ourselves if we believe that this is the only pure experience we should have. The mind is a marvellous instrument and can accommodate an infinite variety of experiences, all at the same time. An experienced meditator would have no difficulty meditating in a tube train.

We must examine further this apparent contradiction. In the first instance it was suggested that we give our attention to the ticking of a clock, in order to exclude extraneous thoughts - indeed, the very choice of sound was dictated by the fact that we have far more concepts associated with vision than with sound. But then it was said that, even if we have these extraneous thoughts (experiences) as well we should not worry about them but accept them, also, as being pure. So why bother to meditate? If all

experiences are pure, anyway, then our everyday life is composed of nothing else but pure experiences! Yes - and No!

The experience is pure provided there is no 'I' having that experience. The very moment the ego intrudes there is a subject having an experience and an object being experienced, a condition of duality that is unreal. But the ego cannot be excluded by intention, because the very act of intending the exclusion serves only to strengthen the ego - the belief that 'I' can choose 'my' experiences. All we need to understand is that we should be aware of experiences, without clinging to or rejecting any of them. To refuse to do even this until everything is explained is to be like the centipede, paralysed in the ditch because it wanted to understand every detail of walking before moving even one leg. Meditation is no more than a device for pointing our minds in the right direction; the rest must be left to 'God'.

Since meditation is an experience of the timeless moment - the Here and Now - it is not surprising that we lose all consciousness of time (even if we are listening to the ticking of a clock) but what may come as a surprise is that, if there was a decision to allow twenty minutes for the session, we open our eyes when twenty minutes has elapsed (or thereabouts). Why is this? Is it because our unconscious mind has been logging all those seconds as they ticked by? The psychologist would probably give this as an explanation. Yet it still happens if we use a sound other than one with a regular beat. But, if we can ride a bicycle without knowing how we do it, why should this mystify us? Does the dog marvel at the way its tail wags when it is pleased, or droops when it is sad, and would the psychologist say that it was the dog's unconscious mind that caused these actions? If the unconscious mind is the 'storehouse' of previously conscious experiences then the dog would, at some stage, have been conscious of its tail wagging, or drooping, for these actions to be controlled by the unconscious mind; so can we accept this as a plausible explanation?

The point this is leading up to is that there are no grounds for fearing that, if we experience timelessness with our eyes closed, we shall not be able to come out of the meditation without help from someone else (or an alarm clock). Meditation is most emphatically not a trance-like state to be in. On the contrary, it is a heightened awareness of the everyday world, but not as an observer or listener, we are that world!

At its most intense level it is a state of wholeness (holiness) which reveals the source of all things; it is Mind that is greater than our minds; it is Self that is greater than ourselves. And yet, there is no difference between our minds and Mind, or between ourselves and Self! It is ONE without distinction, and yet it contains all the myriad of forms in the Universe. The ONE is eternal and yet every part of it is subject to coming into being, decaying and passing out of existence! The Tao Te Ching expresses it thus:-

The Tao that can be expressed is not the eternal Tao;
The name that can be defined is not the unchanging Name,
Non-existence is called the mother of all things.
From eternal non-existence, therefore, we serenely
observe the mysterious beginning of the Universe;
From eternal existence we clearly see the apparent
distinctions.
These two are the same in source and become

different when manifested.
This sameness is called profundity. Infinite profundity is the gate whence comes the beginning of all parts of the Universe.

And the Buddhist scriptures express it thus:-

There is, O Bhikkhus, an Unborn, a Not-become, a Not-made, a Not-compounded. If there were not, O Bhikkhus, this Un-born, Not-become, Not-made, Not-compounded, there could not be any escape from what is born, become, made and compounded. But since, O Bhikkhus, there is this Unborn, therefore is made known an escape from what is born, become, made and compounded.

Now, perhaps, it can be appreciated why the ONE cannot be explained, but has to be experienced!

If attention is given to all the points mentioned, particularly the one concerning the need to be aware of experiences, without clinging to, or rejecting, any of them, then meditation should present few difficulties. But, there is one problem which is so important that it merits special consideration. Consider, for a moment, the reasons why we might want to take up meditation; perhaps it is because we want peace of mind, or perhaps it is because we want to be better able to cope with the problems of everyday life. But all these are self-ish.

The very desire to meditate is, itself, an obstacle to successful meditation! What is more, we shall have an urge to monitor the progress in meditation as it proceeds, day by day and week by week, by repeatedly asking ourselves, "Am I getting peace of mind" and, "Am I coping better with everyday problems" and so on, and this merely strengthens the ego concept. The result could well be that meditation does not have any beneficial effects at all and so would be a waste of time. And even if, during meditation, we had a joyful experience, it would not last, because the moment the session is over the monitoring would begin again. Yet without the desire to meditate we would not meditate at all, and without being aware of its benefits we would not continue!

So, what is to be done? Well, firstly we must accept that these desires are inevitable, since it is true that without them we would not start meditating, nor would we continue with it unless there was some appreciation of its benefits. But because these desires are inevitable it is illogical to feel guilty about them. A more positive response would be to recognise that there are two extremes. On the one hand the absorption in meditation can be so intense that there is no awareness of a self having peace of mind and communion with the Infinite and that this is carried over into everyday life, so that it amounts to a life of unbroken meditation. The lives of some Buddhist monks appear to be like this. On the other hand, our attitude can be so self-ish that meditation could do more harm than good. These extremes are probably very rare and most of us come somewhere in between.

One way to ease the situation is to make sure that we are in the right mood before commencing meditation. We are unlikely to be in the right mood if we have been

watching an hour of wrestling on television, or we decide to make a short session of it so as to leave us time to get to the betting shop before it closes. The benefits of meditation are not like water, dispensed from a tap, which we can turn on and off as we please, but are bound up with a whole range of attitudes and behaviour, inter-linked in a complex manner. A shepherd on a Scottish croft, leading a simple life, does not have the same influences to bear on him as someone living in an industrialised urban community - indeed, his everyday life is, itself, very close to the meditational experience. He would, quite naturally, be in the right mood to commence meditation at any time. But, for most of us, the right mood is more difficult to acquire and so a certain amount of preparation is necessary except, perhaps, for an early morning session, since sleep is an excellent preparation for meditation - even if a nightmare was experienced during the night. (A nightmare is to be expected if meditation has begun scything its way through psychological repressions).

How we prepare depends on individual temperaments and interests and so there can be no firm rules. In the case of a music lover a record of deeply religious music (religious in the widest sense) could be played beforehand. A lover of poetry might choose to read some poems that give him a similar response; whereas an amateur gardener might prefer to spend a little while in the garden, contemplating the flowers and the trees. ("One is nearer to God's heart in a garden than anywhere else on Earth").

Of almost universal use as a means of preparing for a session of meditation are readings from the Buddhist scriptures, although only a small proportion are suitable for this specific purpose. Some of the extracts given in a later chapter may be helpful in this respect, although they have been included primarily to strike a chord of recognition in those who have read this far.

Chapter 10

Practical Meditation (3)

The preceding chapter may not satisfy someone with very little knowledge of the Buddhist scriptures and therefore wants to approach the subject of meditation in a more direct manner.

Firstly, it is necessary to realise that what we are dealing with is the requirement for a pure experience, untarnished by concepts or, indeed, by any thoughts whatsoever. The ticking of a clock is as real an experience as the pain from a pricked finger and the only aim in meditation is to separate cause from effect (this being Karma at work) by concentrating on the effect and eschewing the cause. Bear in mind that we are so easily misled when thinking about causes as, for instance, when looking at green grass, in thinking that the greenness is actually in the grass. Zen sages over the centuries have stressed how simple this realisation is but, because of the huge mental blocks we have created in our minds, this realisation is by no means easy to achieve. Having attained it the only thing left, as one of them put it, is to have a good laugh.

Once the breakthrough to a pure experience occurs, even if it lasts for only a minute or so, we can become aware of the fundamental nature of what we are and what existence involves. Some Schools of Buddhism have attempted to put this experience into words, but to most people the ‘explanation’ can be confusing and not of much help. It is comforting to know that it is sufficient just to experience it, without attempting to analyse it, and so let the consequences happen naturally and unforced. This theme is developed more fully in other parts of this book.

Although we may not be able to analyse the meditational experience we can put it into the context of Western cultural tradition, because it is a genuine religious experience, which has been expressed in some of the greatest music and poetry produced in the West. It represents a spiritual dimension to our lives that is, at once, so real and yet so different from the materialistic and egotistic aspirations of everyday life. This is why in all religions, including Buddhism, there are those who withdraw from the conflict between the ego and the true Self and devote their lives to ‘purification’. The Buddha, in organising the Sangha (Order of Monks) charged this group with the “Yoke of Development”, whereas the other main group were required to perpetuate the Teaching. It was this “Yoke of Learning” group that kept alive the Dharma (Teaching) from which mankind has benefited right up to the present day.

Some further guidance on how to apply oneself to meditating on the ticking of a clock may be welcomed. At the start of each session it is helpful to spend a few moments contemplating on what actually happens. It should be realised that the sound is not coming from the clock itself; the clock is simply emitting pressure waves in the atmosphere. This is not sound, it is the means by which sound is created. There is no sound until these pressure waves are picked up by our ears, then translated into electrical signals that are passed by nerve cells to the brain. Only then does the conscious mind perceive sound; but this perception is not ‘in here’ either, since the mind does not have a spatial dimension. This is similar to the way we see objects, but involving sound waves instead of light waves.

After these moments of contemplation have prepared us for the next step it is important to concentrate on the ticking simply as sound, unaccompanied by a visual image of the clock. It would clearly be helpful to have ones eyes closed whilst meditating, although this does not guarantee the absence of visual images. There is no alternative but to keep trying until one gets this right.

Unless circumstances are unusually favourable it may prove impossible to exclude extraneous sounds, such as cars passing or aircraft flying overhead, but these should not be allowed to distract one from the ticking. These extraneous sounds are as much a part of everyday life, as is bird song in the garden, and should be accepted as such without discrimination. It cannot be stated too often that an experienced meditator would have no difficulty meditating in a tube train, or at London Airport. Whether a beginner gains benefit from meditation depends almost entirely on the degree of commitment and perseverance and this applies to meditation of any kind, including those of a more traditional form. However, it can be said that, unlike some forms of meditation, this one cannot do any harm, even without the supervision of a meditation master.

A practical problem is that very few clocks emit a sound loud enough to be heard from a comfortable distance. Anyone having a grandfather clock is ideally endowed, but others need to seek a way of amplifying the sound from the type of clock more widely found. A suitable solution is to record a clock with the microphone placed very close to the clock mechanism and this can then be played back at a suitable volume level. A high-tech solution, which is equivalent to having a grandfather clock in the room, is to obtain a copy of the B.B.C. effects record (BBCCD 792) which can be purchased, by special order, from any large record shop. Although the grandfather clock recording lasts only a minute this can be copied to a mini-disc recorder, which is then put into repeat mode for playback; there is then no limit to the length of time it plays. It will be necessary to use the editing facility of the mini-disc system to ensure that there is no obvious break in the sound. In other words, if the recording begins with a 'tick' it must end in a 'tock' to keep the sequence intact!

Meditation need not be restricted to the ticking of a clock. People have different propensities and it could well be that this is not the best starting point for everyone. The only criterion for choosing one of the five senses on which to meditate is whether it enables us to escape from the trap of duality, which might be described as the 'in here' and 'out there' syndrome. What we are seeking is the experience and realisation of reality as it really is, instead of how it appears to be. This "interfusion of all particulars", as it has been described elsewhere, is the unifying principle that has to be experienced to be understood.

Buddhist philosophy has attempted to go further than this by incorporating cause and effect into an overall conception of what existence involves. This is represented by the Ri and Ji of Jijimuge, formulated by the Kegon School. Christmas Humphreys regarded this as the climax of Buddhist thought, which has been developed in India, China and Japan; however, to most people it is a quagmire that is best avoided because, ultimately, reality extinguishes the world of duality, which is where a verbal explanation belongs and from which it cannot escape.

A very important point to understand about meditation is that, with most people and for most of the time, it will form only a small part of everyday life; only those who have chosen a monkish life under a "Yoke of Development" mantle can proceed beyond this.

Meditation must be seen in this context and there is no better way of doing so than to study a representative range of Buddhist, especially Zen, scriptures and writings (see the Bibliography for suggestions). However, without meditation, study on its own, being ego-centred, will achieve nothing, other than possibly intellectual arrogance, but a combination of the two could lead to a feeling of well-being, understanding and empathy with animals and fellow human beings. In arranging the Sangha in the way he did the Buddha did not intend that each part should operate independently of the other but that, by cross fertilisation and in combination, Buddhism as a whole should prosper.

Chapter 11

Convergence

So far very little reference has been made to the vast body of literature supporting Buddhist doctrine, but it is important that the preceding chapters should be seen in context. Although modern scientific knowledge has made a new approach possible this book has, in fact, revealed nothing not known about for many centuries, even though the mode of expression may be very different.

The probable founder of Taoism, Lao Tzu, gave us the Tao Te Ching, which deserves to be ranked as one of the great religious books of the World. In spite of its terse, epigrammatical style and difficulty in translation, anyone who has experienced, in meditation, the fundamental truths of Buddhism, will recognise the seeds that the Buddha brought to fruition.

At the other extreme in time the poets, philosophers and scientists of the recent past have struck many chords in harmony with Buddhism. In a book of this size it is clearly impossible to give more than a few examples of what the diligent reader can explore elsewhere, but the following extracts should help to complete the overall picture.

There are, however, dangers in making a study in depth too soon. Some of the scriptures are of doubtful authenticity; some are extremely esoteric in character and are little help to the newcomer, and some include special meditation techniques, such as the cemetery and body meditations, that are likely to be so distasteful to the novice that they could produce feelings of revulsion.

Of the New Wisdom Schools, the writings of Zen offer the prospect of either utter bewilderment, or ecstatic elation at the insights they reveal. Such is the paradox of Zen that the gap between these two states of mind is so small that it needs only the tiniest spark of intuition to bridge it - the problem is how to generate that spark! If, after much study, or tuition, it still eludes you, then Zen may not be the way for you, but the attempt is worth making.

Mention should be made of the epic poem by Sir Edwin Arnold, *The Light of Asia*, first published in 1879 and being an attempt to bring Buddhism to the notice of the general public in the West. These extracts are from Book the Eighth:-

Ye suffer from yourselves, None else compels,
None other holds you that ye live and die,
And whirl upon the wheel, and hug and kiss
Its spokes of agony,

Its tire of tears, its nave of nothingness,
Behold, I show you Truth! Lower than hell,
Higher than Heaven, outside the utmost stars,
Farther than Brahm doth dwell,

Before beginning, and without an end,
As space eternal and as surety sure,
Is fixed a Power divine which moves to good,

Only its laws endure.

And again:-

Pray not! the Darkness will not brighten! Ask
Nought from the helpless gods by gift and hymn,
Nor bribe with blood, nor feed with fruits and
cakes;
Within yourselves deliverance must be sought;
Each man his prison makes.

From the Tao Te Ching we get the first recorded insight into the nature of conceptual thought:-

Tao was always nameless
When for the first time applied to function, it was named.
Inasmuch as names are given, one should also know where to stop.
Knowing where to stop one can become imperishable.

.....and the way concepts create relativity by making distinctions, whereas the Tao is without distinction and is therefore indescribable:-

When all the world understands beauty to be beautiful,
then ugliness exists.
When all understand goodness to be good,
then evil exists.
Thus existence suggests non-existence;
Easy gives rise to difficult;
Short is derived from long by comparison;
Low is distinguished from high by position;
After follows before;
Resonance harmonizes sound;
Therefore, the Sage carries on his business
without action,
and gives his teaching without words.

(The Tao Te Ching was written on tablets which became separated over the centuries and so could be re-assembled in any order. The writer has taken the liberty of transposing lines 9 and 10 of the translation by Ch'u Ta-Kao).

The last three lines of the extract cannot be understood without some intuitive interpretation. The Sage may be likened to the dog, which wags its tail but is not conscious of doing so; as a consequence the Sage's life functions efficiently and virtually without effort. The last line is concerned with the Sage's exposition of the Tao by example and personal charisma, without falling foul of the language trap.

Dr. Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki takes up the point of duality, in its application to the idea of a separate self, in his book, The Essence of Buddhism:-

“What is wrong with intellection, or reasoning, is that by its dualism it sets up the idea of self as if it were a reality to which is to be given a specially honoured niche in the hall of human experience. As long as intellection is confined to its proper sphere of work, all is well, but the moment it steps out of it and invades a field which does not belong to it, the outcome is disastrous. For this stepping out means the setting up of the self as a reality, and this is sure to collide with our ethical and religious valuation of human life; it also runs contrary to our spiritual insight into the nature of things.”

Later, Suzuki goes more deeply into the question of duality than has been attempted in this book; however, his exposition may be difficult to understand without some insight derived from meditational experience.

“The fundamental idea of Buddhism is to pass beyond the world of opposites, a world built up by intellectual distinctions and emotional defilements, and to realise a spiritual world of non-distinction, which involves an absolute point of view. Yet the Absolute is in no way distinct from the world of discrimination, for to think so would be to place it opposite the discriminating mind and so create a new duality. When we speak of an absolute, we are apt to think that, being the denial of opposites, it must be placed in opposition to the discriminating mind. But to think so is in fact to lower the Absolute into the world of opposites, necessitating the conception of a greater or higher absolute which will contain both. The Absolute, in brief, is in the world of opposites and not apart from it. This is apparently a contradiction. To go beyond this world will not help, nor to stay in it either. Hence the intellectual dilemma from which we all struggle in vain to escape.”

For those who have difficulty grasping the gist of such profound thinking the story of the missionary and the Maori chief may help:-

An English missionary set out to convert the Maoris of New Zealand. He began with a Maori chief and drew a circle in the sand on the beach and said: “Inside that, you fella know”. The Maori nodded. The missionary then drew a larger circle round the first and said: “Inside that, I fella know”. The Maori nodded. He then drew a very large circle enclosing the other two and said: “Inside that, God fella know”. He stepped back and beamed at the Maori. The Maori chief nodded and said: “Outside that, God fella, he not know”.

No matter how large the missionary had made the outer circle there would always remain an area not bounded by it. If, on the other hand, he had told the Maori chief that the outer circle was infinite in size, and so could not be drawn, then neither he, nor the chief, could have had any conception as to its nature, or even whether it existed. This attempt to convey the idea of God to the Maori really amounted to a demonstration of the insoluble theological conundrum that if ‘All is God’, then there is no God (i.e. a duality between God and Man) but if ‘God is not All’, then God is not infinite. The Buddha is unique among all the great religious leaders in history in discovering the solution to this enigma.

From the Old Wisdom scriptures we find the true source of Enlightenment:-

“Within our mind is a Buddha, and the Buddha within is the real Buddha. If the Buddha is not to be sought within, where shall we find the real Buddha? Doubt not that a Buddha is within your mind, apart from which nothing can exist.

Avert thy face from world deceptions, mistrust thy senses, they are false. But within thy body, the shrine of thy sensations, seek in the impersonal for the ‘Eternal Man’, and having sought him out, look inward; thou art Buddha”.

As to mistrusting the senses - when you see green grass do not believe that the grass possesses greenness, since the greenness is the product of the mind and is not in the grass.

The desire for Enlightenment is doomed to failure unless this and all other self-perpetuating desires are eliminated by having a pure experience, devoid of concepts and without clinging to these experiences as if they belonged to us. The obstacle to Enlightenment cannot be conquered by increasing conceptual knowledge, or by intellection, and the Buddha was careful not to say anything that would divert his followers’ attention from the Goal. From the Theravada Scriptures we get:-

Once the Exalted One was staying at Kosambi, in the Sisu Grove. Then the Exalted One, taking up a handful of sisu leaves, said to the brethren:-

“Now what think ye, brethren? Which are more, these few sisu leaves that I hold in my hand, or those that are in the Sisu Grove above?”

“Few in number, Lord, are those sisu leaves that are in the hand of the Exalted One; far more in number are those in the Sisu Grove above“.

“Just so, brethren, those things that I know by my super-knowledge, but have not revealed, are greater by far in number than those things that I have revealed. And why, brethren, have I not revealed them?

Because, brethren, they do not conduce to profit, are not concerned with the holy life, they do not tend to repulsion, to cessation, to tranquillity, to the super-knowledge, to the perfect wisdom, to Nirvana. That is why I have not revealed them”.

Man’s obsession with the death of the body has resulted in craving for eternal life; this has led to theories and doctrines in all religions, and Buddhism is no exception. Before his Enlightenment the Buddha, as a wandering mendicant, pondered deeply about this ‘problem’ and the story of Kisagotami and the mustard seed, in *The Light of Asia*, deals with a mother’s futile search for a cure that would bring her dead child back to life:-

“My sister! thou hast found”, the Master said,
“Searching for what none finds - that bitter balm
I had to give thee. He thou lovedst slept
Dead on thy bosom yesterday, today
Thou know’st the whole wide world weeps with thy woe;

The grief which all hearts share grows less for one
Lo! I would pour my blood if it could stay

Thy tears and win the secret of that curse
Which makes sweet love our anguish, and which
drives -
O'er flowers and pastures to the sacrifice -
As these dumb beasts are driven - men their lords,
I seek that secret; bury thou thy child!"

Buddhist doctrines about the 'after life' range from the notion, in Zen, that since the Here and Now is the only reality, we are continuously being re-born from one moment to the next, to the doctrines in both the Old and New Wisdom Schools concerning re-birth. We should be wary of devoting too much time to these doctrines because:-

".....they do not conduce to profit, are not concerned with the holy life, they do not tend to repulsion, to cessation, to tranquillity, to the super-knowledge, to the perfect wisdom, to Nirvana."

And why do they not do this? Because they can be meaningful only when there is a concept of a separate self to be re-born - they cannot apply to the meditational experience.

The last extract is from the writings of the great scientist and humanitarian, Albert Einstein:-

"The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. It should transcend a personal God and avoid dogma and theology. Covering both the natural and spiritual, it should be based on a religious sense arising from experience of all things natural and spiritual as a meaningful unity. Buddhism answers this description If there is any religion that would cope with modern scientific needs it would be Buddhism".

Chapter 12

Synthesis

Efforts have been made by Christian theologians and others to circumvent some of the difficult problems posed by a theistic religion. On a different course Eckhart, through his mystical experiences, arrived at the extreme position, when he stated that Man “must seek nothing, not even God”. (No Zen Patriarch could have put it better). If this view were to become generally accepted then the gap between Christianity and Buddhism would be reduced to vanishing point.

There are, indeed, many instances in Western literature which point to an eventual synthesis along these lines. The works of T.S. Eliot are not widely regarded in this light yet, in his Four Quartets, we find this synthesis emerging. Perhaps his earlier commitment to traditional Christian belief blinded people to the trends that became evident in his later works. That he was greatly influenced by Buddhism and must have studied it in some depth was indicated when he equated the Buddha’s Fire Sermon with the Biblical Sermon on the Mount.

The Four Quartets, first published as a linked group of poems in 1944, reveal a remarkable similarity to the philosophy of Buddhism. Because Eliot is such a giant among the poets of the 20th century this work deserves deep investigation.

We have seen how concepts not only give rise to false beliefs about experiences, but can falsify the experience itself - as when looking at a lawn our experience seems to be that of looking at grass that is intrinsically green, whereas the colour is actually a mental construction and does not have an objective existence. In the poem, East Coker, Eliot expresses a similar view, and then presents the Buddhist doctrine that the ego (the view of one’s self) arises from the pattern formed by concepts. Here, Eliot clearly uses the word ‘knowledge’ in the sense of conceptual knowledge and not insight:-

In the knowledge derived from experience
The knowledge imposes a pattern and falsifies,
For the pattern is new in every moment
And every moment is a new and shocking
Valuation of all we have been.

The Buddha offered us a Path through conceptual thought, and although East Coker does not do this, Eliot warns us in this poem that we should “Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought”. Thinking about experience obscures the source of true knowledge and leads to egotistical desires which, in turn, are the cause of unsatisfactoriness in our lives (Dukkha). The poem, Burnt Norton, has this to say about desire:-

Desire itself is movement
Not in itself desirable;
Love is itself unmoving,
Only the cause and end of movement,
Timeless, and undesiring
Except in the aspect of time

Caught in the form of limitation
Between unbeing and being.

This introduces the aspect of timelessness (Timeless Reality) which is explored further in the same poem:-

Time past and time future
Allow but a little consciousness
To be conscious is not to be in time
But only in time can the moment in the rose garden,
The moment in the arbour where the rain beat,
The moment in the draughty church at smokefall
Be remembered; involved with past and future,
Only through time is time conquered.

Pure consciousness (awareness) is not in the dimension of time, and in meditation we experience the timeless quality of Reality, yet without the concept of time we would not seek to escape from it in this way; therefore, “Only through time is time conquered”. This points our minds to the Here and Now, which is always present:-

Time present and time past
Are both present in time future
And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable.
What might have been is an abstraction
Remaining a perpetual possibility
Only in a world of speculation.
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.

Inheritance from previous lives (Karma) limits our awareness of Ultimate Reality and, in the poem, The Dry Salvages, Eliot has this to say about such inheritance:-

We had the experience but missed the meaning,
And approach to the meaning restores the experience
In a different form, beyond any meaning
We can assign to happiness. I have said before
That the past experience revived in the meaning
Is not the experience of one life only
But of many generations

When Karma has been overcome we have reached the Buddha’s “oneness of mind”, which is still and unmoving. This centre point is the source from which all manifestations originate - it is the Mother of Existence, as expressed in the Tao Te Ching.

In *Burnt Norton*, Eliot approaches this centre point and, perhaps, goes as far as is possible within the limitations of language, even poetic language, to depict its actuality:-

Except for the point, the still point
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.
I can only say, there we have been; but cannot say
where.
And I cannot say, how long, for that is to place it in
time.
The inner freedom from the practical desire.
The release from action and suffering, release from
the inner
And outer compulsion, yet surrounded
By a grace of sense, a white light still moving,
Erhebung without motion, concentration
Without elimination, both a new world
And the old made explicit, understood
In the completion of its partial ecstasy.

In the poem, *Little Gidding*, Eliot expresses in his own inimitable way the sheer continuity of life, depicted in the Buddhist scriptures as the Wheel of Life and Death (Samsara):-

What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.

And in the poem, *East Coker*, he even reduces this to six words:-

In my end is my beginning.

Finally, what is Enlightenment? Eliot must be allowed the last word on this, too, because in *Little Gidding* he says, beautifully, all that needs to be said on the matter:-

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

Chapter 13

Questions and Answers

In addition to those readers who are new to Buddhist philosophy, and may now be tempted to study it further, there may be some who already have some familiarity with the subject, yet have difficulty resolving certain problems. This chapter, although limited in the range of questions it deals with, has been compiled to help both kinds of reader realise that no amount of study can provide all the answers. Having come from a mind that is not fully Enlightened it is to be hoped that it will be seen as an attempt to point the way ahead, rather than as a desire to assume the role of teacher.

There is a similarity between what follows and the Question and Answer technique used by some Zen Masters. Here, again, it must be stressed that this in no way implies a belief that it is on the same plane as their great works. Those Zen Masters, in their wisdom, knew what the mental obstructions of their pupils were and that the best way of breaking through to the Essence of Mind was to hammer at the same theme over and over again, but with subtle variations, and that a formal question and answer session was a good way of doing this. This has been attempted here in the hope that, at the very least, it will encourage the reader to go further along the Path.

Q: Is there a limit to the type of object we should use for meditation? Would it not be best to use only those which are beautiful, or give rise to pleasant associations?

A: There are only five objects suitable for meditation - our faculties of sight, hearing, smell, taste and feeling.

Q: You have just said that our faculties of sight, hearing, smell, taste and feeling are the only suitable objects for meditation, yet earlier you mentioned the ticking of a clock as being a suitable object. Does this not indicate some confusion as to which is subject and which is object?

A: The necessities of language compel us to speak of subject and object as if they were separate entities, but in reality this is not so. When our Buddha Mind is perceived there is no differentiation between subject and object and so there is no confusion.

Q: You mentioned five faculties as being the only suitable objects for meditation, but we have a sixth faculty, that of thought. Why has this been excluded?

A: The faculties of sight, hearing, smell, taste and feeling are intrinsically pure and cannot, of themselves, give rise to dualism. Thought is the source of the delusion of a separate self and is therefore unsuitable as an object of meditation. However, we cannot exclude thoughts from the mind by intention, since the very act of intending requires thought, and so it would be attempting to use the mind to cleanse the mind. Meditation is simply a device for pointing our minds in the right direction by bringing conceptual thought to an end.

Q: What is self-deception?

A: Idealism is self-deception. The belief that we can make ourselves 'good' by trying to be 'good' is self-deception. The belief that we can use the mind to cleanse the mind is self-deception. However, it is because we have so little faith in the Buddha within that we have to use the self in the process of destroying the self. Self-deception is an aid to liberation from the self because it turns the mind inwards and only if we look within can the Buddha Mind be found. But it is still only thinking about the Buddha Mind and so continues the state of duality; the final barrier can be broken down only by experiencing our Buddha nature in a condition of 'no-thought'. That is what meditation is.

Q: Surely the examples you gave of contemplation in preparation for meditation - listening to 'religious' music, reading poetry and looking at flowers in a garden - are really forms of meditation, since we are not conscious of the self when we do these things.

A: The Buddha Mind is not only self-less but is also timeless. When you listen to music you may not be conscious of the self but you are conscious of time, otherwise you would not be hearing music, only undifferentiated sound. All forms of contemplation omit at least one of the characteristics of the Buddha Mind and are therefore not meditation.

Q: If I listen to the ticking of a clock during meditation will I not also be conscious of the passage of time?

A: If you concentrate on the sequence of sounds, instead of on sound as a pure experience, you will be conscious of the passage of time. In practice this presents less difficulty than it does in theory but, if it does become a problem, then you should change to something else, using one of the other senses.

Q: Would it not be better to use a continuous tone as an object of meditation?

A: If you do you will find extraneous sounds having a time sequence (coming and going) more troublesome. Also, do not overlook the fact that the feeling of breathing in and out has a time sequence, and since it is a pure experience it must not be excluded from the mind by intention, so you cannot escape from time simply by changing the object used in meditation. Extraneous experiences are a problem only if they worry the meditator; as previously mentioned, an experienced meditator would have no difficulty meditating in a tube train.

Q: How do I know if I am meditating?

A: If you are conscious of time passing you are not meditating; a pure experience is of the Here and Now and is therefore timeless. If you are conscious of the ticking of a clock (or whatever is the object of meditation) as coming from 'over there' then you are not meditating; an object of meditation is not separate from the self but is the Self. However, you must not think that timelessness and selflessness will be experienced from the

moment you start to the end of each session - you cannot defeat 'original sin' as easily as that. If, after two or three sessions, you experience timelessness and selflessness for only a few moments this will be progress. Your greatest problem after that will be the tendency to wonder whether the period of timelessness and selflessness is increasing at each subsequent session, but this matter of monitoring meditation has been dealt with earlier.

Q: Why does sensory deprivation have strange effects on the mind?

A: Sensory deprivation has strange effects on the mind because the mind is virtually denied access to pure experiences and is left only with thoughts; but since thought is the source of all delusions the mind then has nothing to hold these in check. Sensory deprivation is therefore the opposite of meditation, where the aim is to have pure experiences without thoughts.

Q: In view of what you said earlier, what have you to say about The Noble Eightfold Path - which is fundamental to Buddhist doctrine - is this not a form of self-deception, because of its 'programme' for Enlightenment?

A: The Noble Eightfold Path is precisely what it is claimed to be - a Path - it is not the Goal. So long as we are conscious of being on the Path then the separate self exists. It is only when there is no differentiation between ourselves, the Path, and the Goal, that duality comes to an end and there is only the ONE. This is why we cannot think our way to Enlightenment.

Q: What is Truth?

A: Truth is Void, like the track of a bird in flight; it neither exists, nor does it not exist, but when you know Truth, you KNOW. You KNOW that you have the senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste and feeling; it is sufficient to start with these, because when you know one aspect of the Truth you recognise the Truth in all its manifestations. Truth is the Tao; it is formless and nameless and yet, as the Mother of Existence, it encompasses all forms and all names.

Q: Can you explain a miracle in Buddhist terms?

A: Whenever you walk, that is a miracle; whenever you see a flower, that is a miracle; whenever you hear a bird sing, that is a miracle. How many miracles do you want?

Q: You misunderstand me, I want to know what a real miracle is, defined in a dictionary as a supernatural event..

A: When subjective knowledge and objective knowledge are not in alignment then we call the happening a miracle; but when subjective knowledge and objective knowledge are in alignment an event is not seen as being a miracle. Logically, you should either see everything that happens as being a miracle, or nothing that happens as being a miracle.

Picking and choosing your evidence is no way to discover the Truth. You think that a miracle is an event that cannot be explained, but can you explain how you walk, see a flower, or hear a bird sing?

Q: It has been said that Wisdom and Compassion are the Twin Pillars of Buddhism. What is the foundation of these Pillars?

A: The Buddha Mind is the foundation of Wisdom and Compassion.

Q: You said that we are intent on escaping from reality, but if reality is the Buddha Mind why do we want to escape from it?

A: It is the self - the ego - that wants to escape from reality, because reality destroys the self as a separate entity, but our Buddha Mind will not let us escape. It is the conflict between the ego and the Buddha Mind that causes dissatisfaction, unhappiness and despair (Dukkha).

Q: You have only briefly mentioned the Buddhist doctrine of Karma. Why is this?

A: Karma is a marvellous and comprehensive doctrine, but even if understood in its entirety it would not bring you one step nearer to Enlightenment. However, some of its effects have been mentioned, as in answer to your last question.

Q: I can understand why a Christian has such mental torment, trying to incorporate the fact of suffering into his belief. Would it solve the problem if he no longer believed in the duality between God and Man?

A: Merely to believe in non-duality is not enough; it must be experienced. Suffering is a problem only if you distance yourself from it, which happens all the time you believe that there is an external cause or, to put it another way, that there is a separate self to which suffering occurs. So long as there is a delusion of a separate self pain will always be seen as a problem, distinct from its actual experience. When the Abbot Kwaisen allowed himself to be burned alive by the soldiers of Oda Nobunaga, sitting calmly in the posture of meditation, it showed that this is no idle speculation.

Similarly, unpleasant sights, unpleasant sounds and unpleasant smells and tastes all arise from the same cause. It helps to alleviate the problem if you realise that the faculty of feeling is an inevitable condition of existence. It helps even more if you relieve the sufferings of others, since by doing so you bring their suffering into your life, and this diminishes the condition of duality; but it must be non-selfconscious action, otherwise you will merely be a 'do-gooder', and this will not lessen the problem. However, there can be no final solution so long as you intellectualise about it and do not experience the real answer which, like the Tao, is beyond explanation.

Q: If I lose my sight, or hearing, would my Essence of Mind be diminished as a result?

A: No, the faculties of sight, hearing, smell, taste and feeling may be likened to access points, through which there is admittance to the Essence of Mind - which is the Buddha Mind - the manifestation of which is the Buddha nature. If sight, or hearing, is lost then this reduces the number of access points, but because the Essence of Mind stays unimpaired the remaining access points become enhanced as a result. Remember, also, as in answer to an earlier question, that when you know one aspect of the Truth you know the Truth in all its manifestations. This is why, in meditation, it is quite sufficient to concentrate on a single pure experience.

Q: If a person is born mentally impaired is that person's Essence of Mind impaired as well?

A: No - the Essence of Mind cannot be impaired. Such a person can still see, hear, smell, taste and feel, and these faculties are no different from those of one who is normal. It is only the ability to construct concepts about experiences that differ, but since all concepts are illusions, anyway, the distinction between normality and mental impairment is a matter of convention. Such a person can be more kind and loving than one who is normal, but convention does not take this into account.

Q: I am still uneasy about the idea of a separate self being an illusion. Surely, my body is separate from your body, and my mind is separate from your mind. How can I ever see this otherwise?

A: Never, if you continue trying to think your way to Enlightenment! Your immediate error is in supposing that, if a separate self is an illusion, then this is tantamount to saying that it does not exist; but since it clearly does exist, then it cannot be an illusion. But this is to confuse two forms of reality - the reality of appearances and the reality of the Absolute. The reality of appearances is that grass is green, but you should know by now that in Absolute terms this is not so. However, the Reality of the Absolute does not exclude the reality of appearances, since you know that grass is green. If you could only grasp the distinction between grass is green and grass is green you would understand, in a flash, the cause of dualism. You cannot err if you accept only that which you know for certain. You KNOW that you have the faculties of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and feeling - the very moment you step beyond this you are back in the world of duality. You must not even have the idea that there is nothing more to non-duality than having experiences without concepts, since that idea is, itself, a concept, and misses the Goal completely.

Q: I think I am now nearer to realising the distinction between grass is green and grass is green. If I do gain this insight will I be Enlightened?

A: Presumably only if that realisation is permanent, but the 'original sin' of the mind is so powerful that, to most of us, it does not last. The great Zen Masters called this flash of insight "Kensho", but it is only a stage on the way to Enlightenment (Satori). One thing

can be said for sure is that once you have had this experience your life will never be the same again. Outwardly, you will appear 'normal', but you will be happy under circumstances in which other people would be miserable, and calm in circumstances where others would be flustered. Inwardly, you will have gained insights into all manner of problems that most people find perplexing. Above all, you will have gained confidence in the Buddha Mind within and know that the Unshakeable Deliverance of the Mind is attainable, even if it is not attained in this life. If this answer ends with an enigma it is because you still do not grasp the distinction between grass is green and grass is green.

All profound religious truths are about integration, and the core of Buddhist integration is the coalescence of the 'in here' and 'out there' to make the ONE, but this condition will always elude you if all you do is to intellectualise about it. There is no answer other than to "Look within, thou art Buddha".

(N.B. Various interpretations have been given for the meanings of the terms 'Kensho' and 'Satori'. In this book the former is treated as being a flash of insight and the latter as a more permanent experience. In truth, of course, neither can be precisely defined, because they are beyond the scope of language, as is the term 'Nirvana'.)

A seven-page extension to this chapter is available from:-

<http://www.phirozmehtatrust.org.uk>

Bibliography

This little book, although covering the essence of Zen Buddhism, does not give an overall account of either the 'philosophy' or history of it. For reasons mentioned earlier I am loath to give an extensive list of books to read, but if the reader wishes to learn more about the subject the following few are recommended. To study further than this may widen your knowledge but would do little to deepen it, which is the purpose of meditation.

The Way of Zen, by Professor Alan. W. Watts, must be one of the best expositions of Zen ever written, but it contains virtually no guidance to help the reader to meditate. It was published by Penguin Books in 1957 and reprinted in 1965, but may now be available only from libraries and second-hand bookshops.

Some of the Zen Masters came from humble origins and had little formal education yet this could have been an advantage, just as was pointed out earlier about the lonely crofter living a life less complex than someone in an urban community and so having fewer obstacles to overcome.

The Zen Teaching of Hui Hai, translated by John Blofeld and published by Rider & Co. in 1962 is an important guide from one of these early Masters. It helps to dispel the misconceptions arising from dependence on language. Chapter One of this book is related to what Hui Hai expressed in these Teachings.

The Zen Teaching of Huang Po has also been translated by John Blofeld. This book was published by the Buddhist Society, London, in 1958.

The book by Eugen Herrigel, Zen in the Art of Archery, has become a classic of Zen literature. It has a Foreword by Dr. Suzuki, which gives it a powerful stamp of authority. It was first published by Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd. in 1953, but there have been several reprints up to at least 1964, so it could still be available from some bookshops.

Extracts have appeared in Chapter Eleven from The Light of Asia, by Sir Edwin Arnold. This, also, was published by Routledge & Kegan Paul, but there may not be a version later than 1959, so a copy could be difficult to track down.

A good comprehensive overview of Buddhism in general is given in the book, The Wisdom of Buddhism, edited by Christmas Humphreys and published by Michael Joseph in 1960.

The Tao Te Ching, translated by Ch'u Ta-Kao, was quoted from in Chapter Eleven. It was published by the Buddhist Society in 1937. There is a much earlier version, translated by Walter Gorn Old, M.R.A.S., and was first published by London, Rider & Co. in 1904, with the last edition being produced in 1939.

If you want to read something by Dr. Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki his book, The Essence of Buddhism (quoted from in Chapter Eleven) was published by the Buddhist Society in 1947.

Finally, I will mention the book that brought me to Buddhism in 1951; it was a Penguin Book of that year, entitled Buddhism, by Christmas Humphreys, and cost 2/6d. This paperback, its pages now coloured sepia with age, still has a place on my bookshelf.

R. E. Martin. May, 2003