

THE ROLE OF MEDITATION IN THE WORLD

I have provided you with sheets on your table that are an outline with images to help picture what is being conveyed. This morning I want to talk about six points in our dialogue on the role of meditation in the world:

- 1) Trapped in Thought; 2) The Role of Meditation; 3) The Process of Meditation;
- 4) The Fruits of Meditation; 5) The Three Escapes; and 6) The Three Principles.

Trapped in Thought

We have heard and repeated many times that one of the great gifts of our time is that we are conscious of our consciousness.

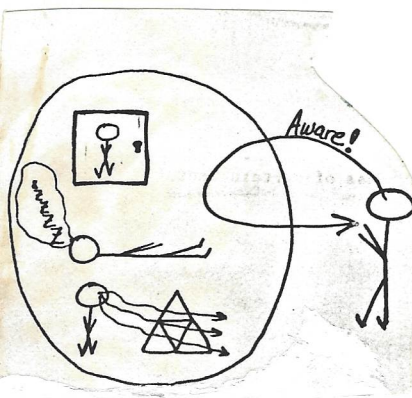
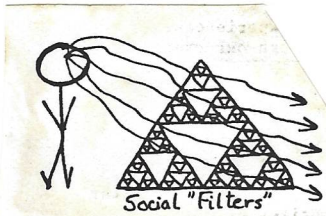
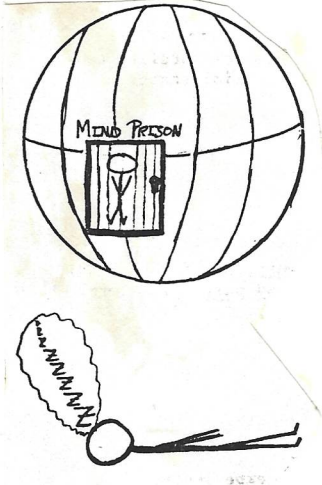
In our lucidity when we run up against ourselves we see our usual kind of consciousness is a defensively squeezed down state. We squeeze life down and build a box around it with our thoughts. We squeeze life into being a Westerner. Then it is only within that box that our thinking process goes on. I think only as a Westerner so I'm on a closed circuit. As someone has said, "We are prisoners of our minds."

Or again, when we see that the mind is usually filled with thoughts with which we unwittingly identify, then it becomes apparent that our usual state of consciousness is one in which we are quite literally hypnotized. The word 'hypnotized' comes from a Greek word which means sleep. To be hypnotized means to be in a state resembling sleep, but it differs from normal sleep in that it has been induced, or brought about by suggestion.

At the same time what is unconscious that what is conscious depends on the structure of society and on the patterns of feelings and thoughts it produces. The effects of society is not only to funnel fictions or stories into our consciousness, but also to prevent the awareness of reality. Every society determines the forms of awareness. This system works, as it were, like a socially conditioned filter. Experience cannot enter awareness unless it can penetrate the filter.

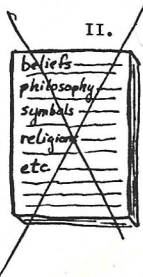
This becomes readily apparent in situations like being gone from the United States for a long time. You have been outside your filter. When you return you suddenly feel like you are smothered by a huge blanket that wraps you up with stories to perpetuate the status quo, the injustices and inequities around the world. After a while it feels like the blanket has been removed. No, I've just gotten use to it. So we might add to the statement that we are prisoners of our minds, that we are also prisoners of societies mind.

Yet, this awareness is the first step on the journey of freedom. This leads us to spiritual exercises like meditation.



2. The Role of Meditation

Meditation is not a religion, a symbol system, a series of beliefs, a philosophy, or moral principles. Rather it is a method, or better-- a process.



It is used by all cultures and major religions as a vehicle for putting one in relationship to or presence of the divine. It can take many forms. For example in the history of Christianity it is one of the three major forms of prayer. You see it going on talking with African colleagues who were pointing out places this was going on in their culture. It is available to all regardless of intellectual capacity, cultural situation, or social status.

First, meditation is concerned with a presence, a mode of being which may be expressed or developed in whatever situation the person may be. It is not necessary to be any particular form. There fore, the attitude or 'inner posture' of the meditator is both one's path and goal. For the how is not merely a how to meditate, but how to be which in meditation is exercised in a simplified situation.

Another way of looking at it is to see that meditation is not a particular kind of experience. but rather a way of seeing through experience, always eluding any attempt to pin it down conceptually. When saying 'seeing through'; this is almost a slang way of using 'seeing through'. It is similar to 'seeing through' one's illusion. In seeing through one actually sees 'what is.'

We have seen how we use images as a way of experiencing; our experiencing; i.e. to grasp meaning or significance of the moment. We build up personalities, a self, whereby one can begin to assume responsibility for who they are and the consequences of their choices. Whereas in meditation we are allowed to see through the experience to see its relativity and build-in death.

In other words reality is available to our perception or consciousness and intelligence without having to be interpreted. through our personality or image system or filtered through our cultural bias, or our self-centered concerns.

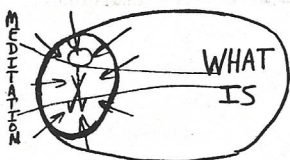
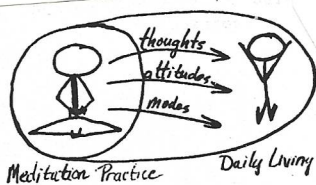
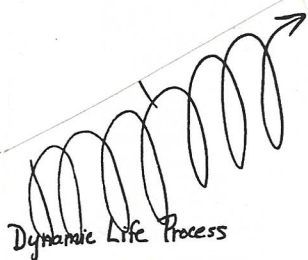
Or to go back to our earliest reference of being hypnotized; our usual state of consciousness is filled with a continuous flow of thought and fantasies which constrict and distort awareness to an unrecognized degree.

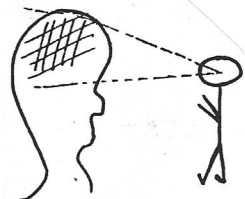
Meditation results in extraction or pulling out awareness from layer after layer of thought each getting more subtle. This process can be seen as de-hypnotizing of ourselves. or breaking the hold of the hypnotic power.

Lastly meditation is the cultivation of certain mental qualities which incidentally allows us to understand a wide range of diverse traditions.

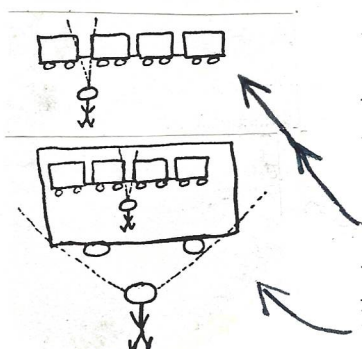
3. The Process of Meditation

What is the cultivation of these mental processes or qualities. (I will pull this through Insight Meditation since that is the one we have been using most).

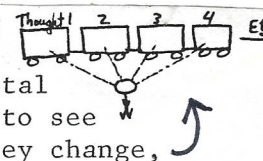




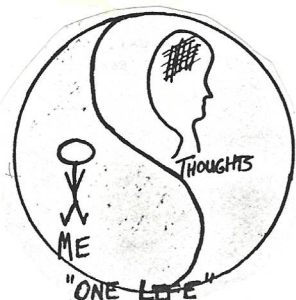
We come to know our own mental processes. For example we begin to see our monkey mind of thoughts jumping from one topic to another.



We begin to have power to shape or control them. That is we don't judge the thoughts, we simply 'note' them and come back to our breathing. Detachment begins to take place.



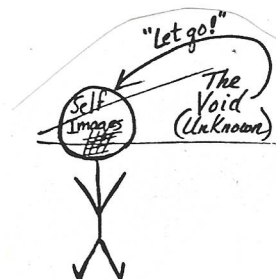
We finally gain freedom from the condition where our mental processes are unknown and uncontrolled. First we begin to see our thoughts go by like box cars in a freight train. They change, they pass on and then then disappear. Next we begin to see the space beyond the boxcars. We begin to see that even the images we have of ourselves are relative and must die, daily, indeed moment by moment. Finally we begin to have the capacity to step back and observe objectively what we are experiencing while we are experiencing it. It allows the ego, to speak technically to be subject and object of its own experience at the same time.



Or again, one finally sees that awareness is aware of the thinker and the thought relationship becoming one, of the observer and the observed relationship becoming one. In other words, both cannot have an independent existence at the same time. There is no thought without the thinker. There is no thinker without the thought. They are one.

4. The Fruits of Meditation

When you see beyond your thoughts, or see through your thoughts what do you see? You see the Void.

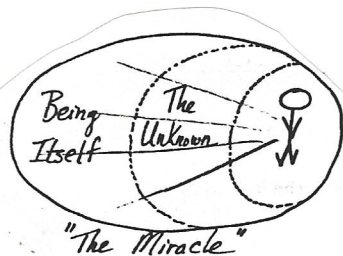


Consciousness is experienced as empty or void. That is, any idea or thought I have of reality is finally empty or void. Or another way of expressing it is that content of consciousness is relative and temporal. That is, it dies.

Let me illustrate. I have my self image. I have this personality, these gifts. I can play certain roles, hold certain values. I work hard at developing my personality, or obtaining self-hood, increasing my humanness, and improving myself. I see this as my basic identification and I tend to believe my being and value rest in it.

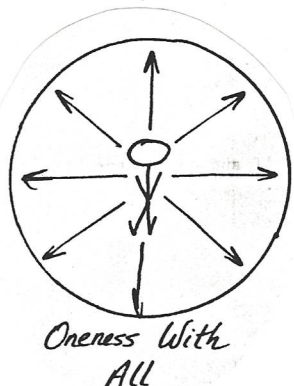
To see the Void, calls for me to give up, let go of me--to surrender me--to the Void--emptiness--to the unknown. Because no thoughts, no philosophy can hold reality, reality is nothingness to the thinking mind. Do you recall D.H. Lawrence's poem?

"I was so weary of myself, everything I touched was my self... Suddenly one night I reached out in the darkness and touched the unknown--the unknown unknown... Suddenly I was a blaze leaping up like a tiger..."



If that poem speaks to us we can see what meditation is out to daily enable.

Once we give up to the Void, it is given back to us and we see that it is filled with incredible form, with sensations, with perceptions. All experience now acquires an unexpected richness of content, a vividness and intensity which is the direct result of living in the present moment. Or to put it another way, one's sensing in the nature of the 6 senses, turns into a merging with the miracle of being. Life becomes a wonder, a joy.



At this point one no longer experiences one's self as totally isolated, but as something larger, inherently connected and inter-related to everything. One sees that all sentient beings, and the world are an extension of one's own body, and are to be treated as such. Our skin instead of being barrier becomes a gateway. Thus compassion and social concern can be realized in an intimately personal way.

In a world filled with closed circuit devastation, destruction and despair and filled with hatred for human, beast and earth alike, spiritual exercises can play the role of breaking open the closed circuit to put people in touch with who they finally are. And the realization that one exists as a web of mutually conditioned relationships that one is absolutely connected with all existence may also be the next step in human evolution.

With this realization a significant shift in one's identity as a human being may take place and an overwhelming aliveness of all things and compassion for all beings and the whole earth breaks loose.

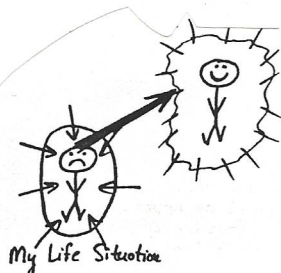
It may be that this next step of the evolution process cannot take place without some form of meditation--one that moves beyond the rational in order to ground us in being itself--

5. The Three Escapes

Items numbers 5 and 6 are poetic ways of trying to express the situation. There are many other ways.

There are many ways to escape the demand of living, but these three expressions may be appropriate at this time. They are Situational Bypassing, Personal Fascination and Spiritual Desensitizing.

Situational Bypassing

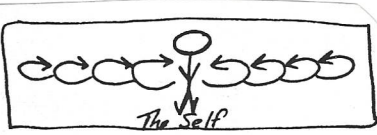


This escape uses spiritual practices to rise above or not deal with difficulties of unresolved personal problems and emotions. These many times include difficulties in dealing with our economic life, raising a family or keeping a marriage together. As an order we have certainly seen the difficulty in dealing with our economic life.

These issues become sticky, messy and painful in our eyes and we try to by-pass or avoid the basic human needs, feelings and development task by using spiritual practices. Many of so-called 'Perils of the Path' such as spiritual materialism, self indulgence, ego inflation, groupthink result from trying to use spirituality to bypass the hard decisions required in our every day life.

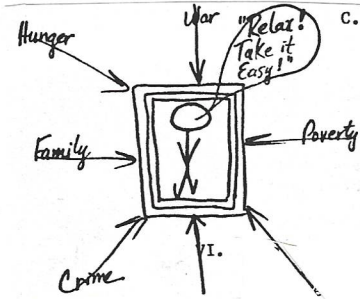
Personal Fascination

A second escape is a tendency to get overly fascinated and absorbed in our own personal process. It can be so fascinating to delve into our emotions, archetypes, dreams or relationships that we can spend a life time examining and process all the rich material. To treat this kind of self-examination as the ultimate journey is to risk self-indulgence--becoming a kind of "emotional junky" who gets "hooked" on processing his own personal "stuff."



Spiritual Desensitizing

There is a tendency in all of us where we would rather not feel things too strongly, but just take it easy, sink into some groove and get through life with as little effort of challenge as possible. So we get some belief system, ideal universe, great past, or hope for the future and hang on to it so we can shift into neutral. We close ourselves, cut ourselves off from our feelings, the suffering of others, and the ambiguities of each situation. We become hard and bitter or else numb and blase. We have turned insensitive and withdrawn from life.



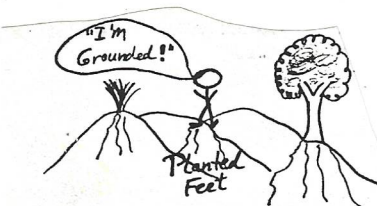
6. The Three Principles

And now some poetry to move against the escapes.

In the ancient Chinese System of thought there are three principles called heaven, earth and human.

The Earth Principle: Grounding

In the Oriental traditions, coming down to earth involves connecting with the center of gravity in the body below the navel--in the hara. Practices like Tai Chi ground a person in this way.



In sitting meditation the sitting posture itself is grounding. The great emphasis of paying attention to detail and mindfulness of the body, also, are means to symbolize the necessity of grounding. This is to come down out of the thinking mind into the body, touch a bodily felt sense of one's life situation and let that body sense have a direct voice.

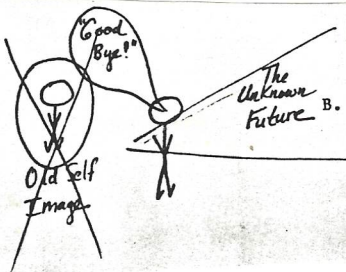
These grounding practices of the earth principle of form and structure are an important part of a complete spiritual path.

There is a story of a monk who thought he understood enlightenment and stated that he could no longer lay his hands on anything. By this he meant that the thingness of the world no longer existed for him. His Master answered. "Oh yes? Well I can lay my hands on something all right." Then he reached out and pulled the nose of the poor monk as hard as he could. The story says at this very moment the mind of the monk was jolted into realization.

The Heaven Principle: Letting Go

The essence of spiritual exercises is learning to let go and surrender. This is specifically letting go of attachment to our ideas of who we are in order to realize that our awareness or consciousness goes beyond any particular form.

We could be fully processed psychologically, that is we have worked through all our neuroses, scripts and emotional tangles. We could be what humanistic psychologists have called "fully functioning" or "self-actualizing," but there is still a way we could hold on to ourselves subtly. In fact the striving to be a fully functioning personality--even a spirit personality is a way of not letting go.

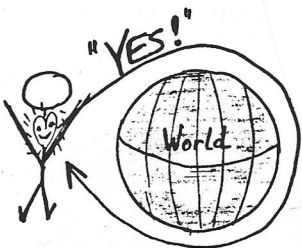


When we let ourselves open to the empty space as in the sitting practice of meditation we get to see the subtly and stickiness of how we hold on to the sense of 'me'. Meditation makes conscious and works with that universal clinging and grasping in order that we can give up, let go of our spiritual striving.

There is a story about a monk that was so holy that even the birds and animals made their offerings to him. One day the monk had an interview with his master which completely opened his eye to the truth. From that day on nobody, not even the birds made him any more offerings.

The Human Principle: Awakening the Heart

The joining of heaven and earth, letting go and grounding can open up a third principle of inner work--Awakening the heart. Heart in this sense refers to the way we are open and exposed to the world; it is the 'part' of us where we can be most deeply touched.



Heart is like a swinging door that opens in both directions letting others in and going out to them. Awakening the heart involves cutting through character or ego armor to let others in as well as appreciate them as they are.

An open heart is also a source of courage, a work which derives from the French word for heart, 'coeur'. Courage involves facing the world squarely and letting your heart be touched, opening to others come what may.

Awakening the heart requires the letting go practice of a spiritual discipline; other wise we might not be able to open our heart up. Awakening the heart requires groundness, because without earth, there would be no compassion.

There is a story of a person climbing the mountain of awakening. One finally must let go of everything, even self-consciousness in order to reach the summit of total transformation. But there is still one more step to the completion of that journey; the return to the valley below to the everyday world.

Who it is that returns is not the one who began the climb. The being that returns is quietness itself. He or she is total compassion for the world, and wisdom, the truth of all ages.



Whatever humble or elevated position that being holds within the community, he or she becomes a light for others on the way, a statement of freedom and compassionate action for all things which only could come from having touched the top of the mountain.

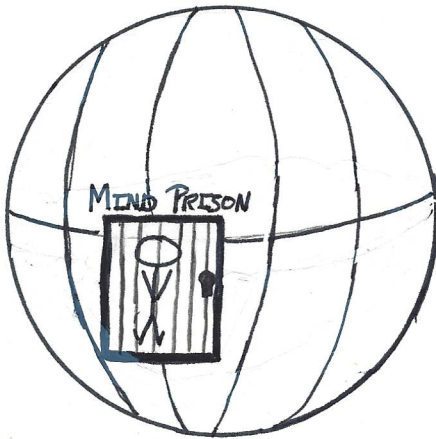
Using this poetry the spiritual path, in short, involves all three spiritual principles--grounding, letting go and awakening the heart.

These counteract the three dangers or escapes of situational bypassing, personal fascination and spiritual desensitization.

The core of such a path we believe, may be some kind of awareness practice such as meditation which helps develop all three principles.

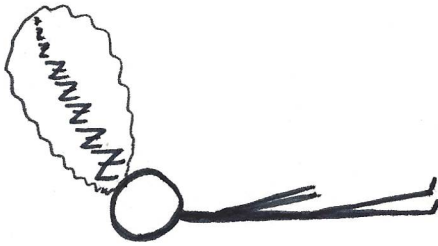
THE ROLE OF MEDITATION IN THE WORLD

I. Trapped in Thought

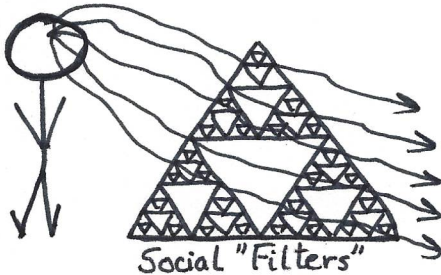


- A. We squeeze life down and build an imaginal box around it with our thoughts.

* We are prisoners of our minds.



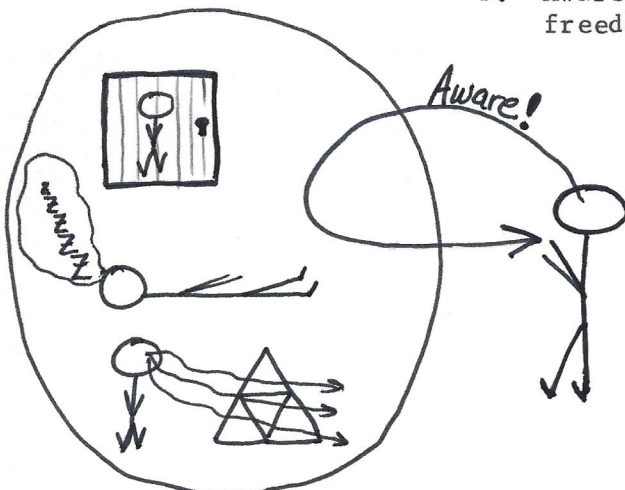
- B. Because we unconsciously identify with our thoughts, we are quite literally hypnotized. (Being hypnotized is like being asleep, only it is brought about by suggestion.)



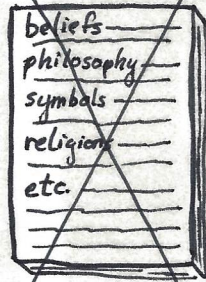
- C. Society gives us a story we unconsciously accept. It determines our awareness. It creates a socially conditioned filter for our thoughts.

* We are prisoners of society's images.

- D. Awareness of this is the first step on the journey to freedom.



II. Role of Meditation



- A. Meditation is not a religion, not a symbol system, not a system of beliefs and not a philosophy.

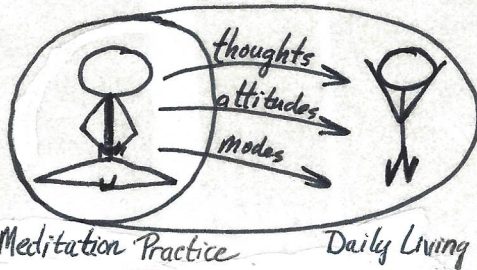
It is a method or process.

It is used by all cultures and major religions.

It is available to all, regardless of intellectual capacity, cultural situation or social state.

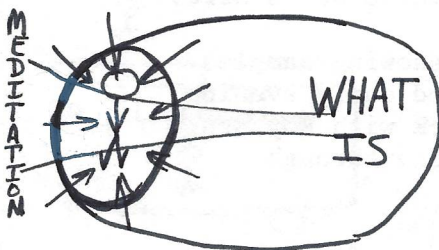
Dynamic Life Process

- B. Meditation is concerned with a presence, a mode of being. It is not necessary for it to be in any particular form.



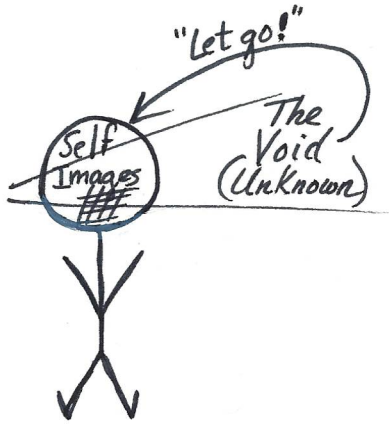
- C. Meditation is a way of seeing through experience.

- 1) We use images to experience our experiences. Meditation allows us to see through our experience.
- 2) Reality is available to our consciousness without having to be filtered through our images.
- 3) Meditation pulls our awareness out from layer after layer of thought. It de-hypnotizes us.



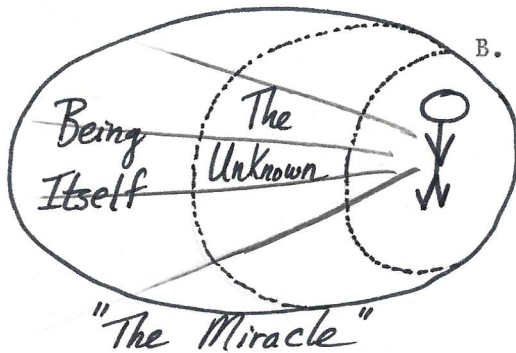
- D. Meditation cultivates awareness of certain mental processes.

IV. Fruits of Meditation

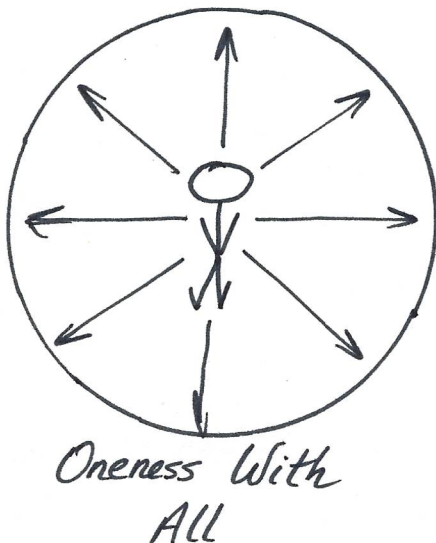


A. Seeing through our thoughts we see the Void.

- 1) Consciousness is experienced as empty. Any ideas or thoughts of reality are empty or void.
- 2) I have images of myself and I tend to believe my being and value rest in them.
- 3) To see the Void, the emptiness, the unknown, calls for me to let go, to surrender me to the void, the unknown.



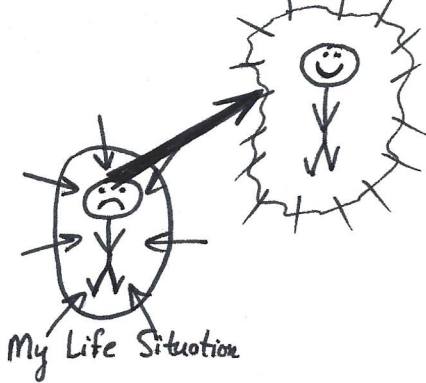
B. To give up to the unknown is to see that it is filled with incredible form. One's sensing or consciousness turns into a merging with the miracle of being.



C. One now sees oneself as inherently connected and interrelated to every being and sees that the world is an extension of one's own body and is to be treated as such.

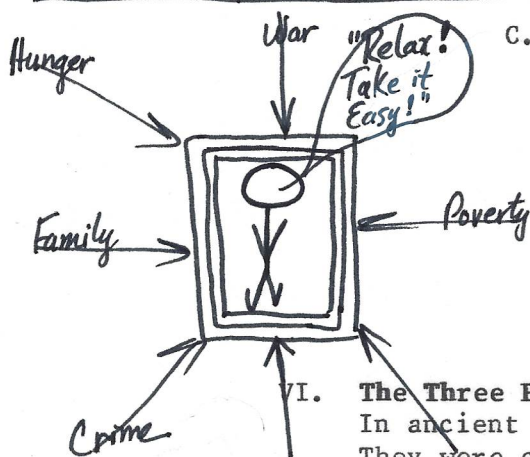
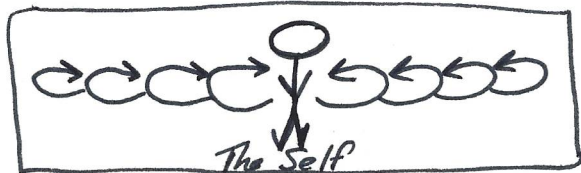
D. Spiritual exercises can thus play the role of releasing compassion and social concern by breaking the closed circuit of devastation and hatred, by putting people in touch with who they finally are as a web of mutually conditioned relationships. This may be the next step in human evolution.

V. The Three Escapes



A. Situational Bypassing: This is to use spiritual practices to rise above or not deal with difficult issues or personal problems or emotions.

B. Personal Fascination: This is to get overly fascinated and absorbed in our own personal processes.



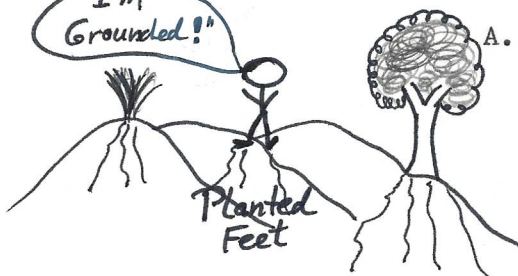
C. Spiritual Desensitizing: This is to cut off our relationships to life. I would rather not feel things too strongly, but just take it easy and get through life with as little effort as possible.

VI. The Three Principles

In ancient Chinese thought there were three principles. They were called earth, heaven and human.

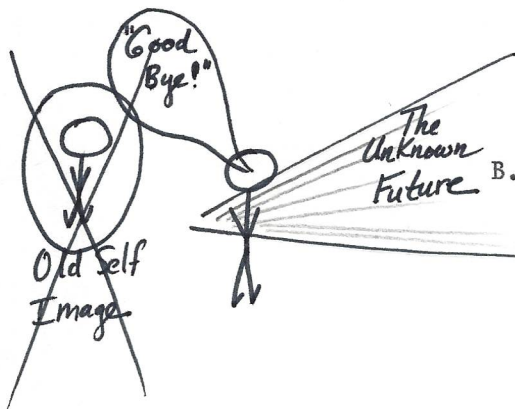
A. The Earth Principle: Grounding

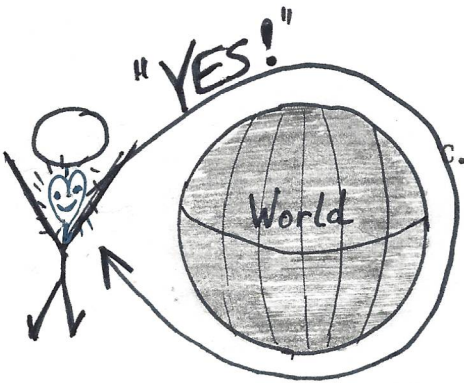
In such practices as Tai Chi and sitting meditation, the body posture itself is seen as grounding. To be mindful of the body is to come down from the thinking mind into the body, touch a body felt sense of one's life intention and let that body sense have a direct voice.



B. The Heaven Principle: Letting Go

The essence of spiritual practice is learning to let go and surrender and give up attachment to our idea of who we are. We could be fully processed psychologically, we could be "fully functioning", "self-actualizing", but still hold on to ourselves subtly.





C.

The Human Principle: Awakening the Heart

Heart here means opening oneself to the world, allowing oneself to be deeply touched by as well as appreciate the other. An open heart is a source of courage to face the world squarely. Awakening the heart requires grounding in order to keep compassion and letting go, otherwise we might not open our heart.

A complete spiritual path involves all three principles: grounding, letting go, and awakening the heart.

These three counteract the three escapes of situational bypassing, personal fascination, and spiritual desensitizing.

The core of such a path we believe may be some kind of awareness practice such as meditation similar to that which we have been practicing.