

MEDITATION AND THERAPY: A QUADRANT APPROACH

by

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The triangle model of meditation presented in Naranjo & Ornstein (1976) is well known, and I have used it for years. It says that there are three types of meditation - the Way of Forms, the Expressive Way and the Negative Way.

Through working with the developmental model of Ken Wilber (1983) however, I have come to see not only that there is a very important fourth type, but that the actual relationships between all four are very much clarified. The work of John Southgate (1983) is also very relevant to this.

Wilber says that in understanding the process of psychospiritual development, we have to use at least two dimensions, both of which, in quite different ways, could be called **eros** versus **thanatos** (love versus death). The horizontal dimension we could call preserve (eros) against release (thanatos). When we preserve something or somebody, we hang on to them, we want to keep them, we want to be near them, we want to be involved with them, we want to know what they are doing - all these involve some kind of **desire**, as Southgate has underlined.

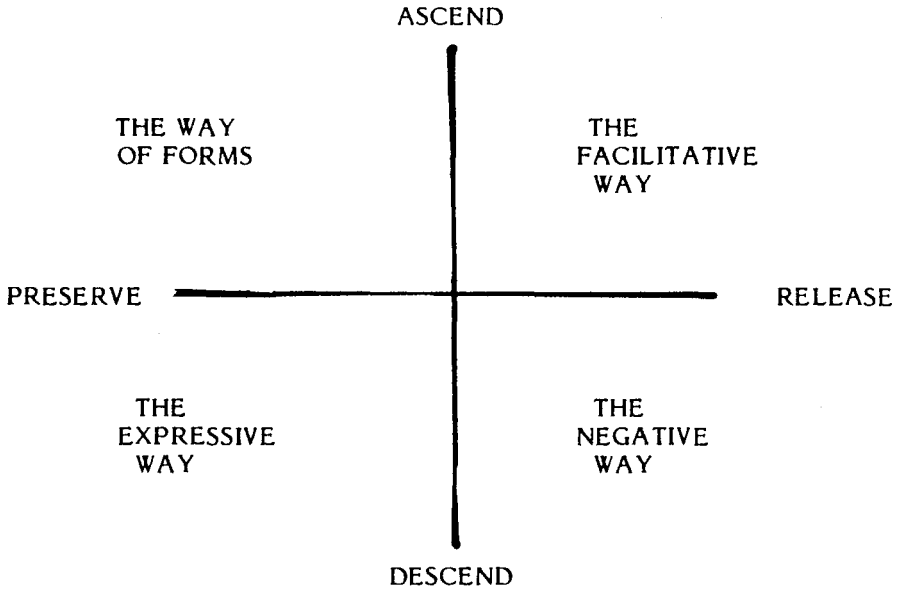
Conversely, at the other pole of this dimension, we are willing to let go,

willing to be separate, willing to be independent or autonomous, willing to be alone, willing to be free, willing to finish with something or somebody. These again are in the realm of desire.

The vertical dimension we could label ascend (eros) versus descend (thanatos). When we ascend, we push towards creativity, we go towards love, we move towards orgasm, we thrust towards satisfaction - all these, as Southgate has remarked, have the nature of **drives**. And again if we look at the opposite pole, we push towards destruction, we go towards hate, we move towards violence, we thrust towards depression. This again is seen as an active drive: as Wilber puts it - "Not a fear of death, but a drive towards it".

Now we can come back to the types of meditation outlined by Naranjo & Ornstein, and see where they fit in.

The Way of Forms, otherwise known as concentrative or absorptive meditation, is any way of working which involves a definite object which is held to. This object may be a mantra (word or phrase), a yantra (symbolic design), a mudra (movement of the hands), a bija (seed affirmation), a kasina (plain



object), a symbol (such as cross, lotus, heart, sun, etc.) or something else. In the meditation we focus on this object, and if we find ourselves drifting away from it, we bring ourselves back to it. This is an Apollonian, outer-directed form of meditation, which fits very well into the "ascend-preserve" quadrant of our model. Very often the symbols chosen represent some form of aspiration, as in Bhakti yoga.

The Expressive Way is more Dionysian, and may include possession by gods, spirits or energies. A very familiar version of it is dynamic meditation, which involves heavy breathing, fast movement, loud chanting and so on. In this form we take the things which distract us, and which in other forms of meditation are often the enemy, so to speak, and make them the very

centre of the meditation. Some of the shamanic forms, such as the sweat-lodge, use this approach, and Sufi dancing works in this way. "Speaking in tongues", as in the Charismatic Church, can also be regarded as an example of this way of approaching the divine. But because it also includes the martial arts, we put this way into the "descend-preserve" quadrant. We actually focus on the opponent, so to speak, as the thing we need to keep in front of our gaze.

The Negative Way is where we try to eliminate all forms, all expression. The yoga meditation of Patanjali is a good example of this. The Zen practice of shikan-taza is another. The phrase **neti-neti**, loosely translated "not this, not that", is appropriate too. The work is done by letting-go, but in a way which

merely empties the mind. Clarke has written at length about this, in a book which came out recently, how we can progress by attending more and more intensely to fewer and fewer things, until the zero point is reached. Because this is a kind of deprivation, we place it appropriately in the "descend-release" quadrant of our diagram.

This now leaves the Facilitative Way, which simply opens awareness to what is there. These are the forms of meditation which are all about witnessing whatever takes place. Whereas most forms of meditation focus on one thing, this form flows with whatever is being experienced, following it and allowing it. In Vipassana, Mahavipassana and Satipatthana meditation, we are mindful of whatever passes. This mindfulness can be extended in every direction - "If any further comment, judgement or reflection arises in the meditator's mind, these are themselves made the focus of bare attention". (Coleman 1977) So this fits in to the "ascend-release" quadrant, because it is friendly to everything, and enables fresh movement to take place.

The advantage of putting matters in this way is to see that there are real differences in the various forms of meditation, depending on where they fall in the structure. The Way of Forms and the Expressive Way are both seen to be quite conservative, in the sense that they tend to hold on to what is. This is quite easy to see in the case of the classic, Apollonian Way of Forms, which so often is attached to an orthodox religious structure of discipline, but it is

much harder to accept in the case of the apparently Dionysian and romantic Expressive Way. Certainly the followers of the Expressive Way very often see it as radical or challenging. But the proof of the pudding is in the eating. The followers of the Expressive Way seem in practice to be as strongly attached to a firm structure of firm leadership as any of those following the Way of Forms. They are in fact very orthodox in their adherence to a guru or other head. So in social terms, things stay as they are.

In the case of the Negative Way, social impotence is the result. Because good is no better than bad, because all distinctions ebb away, there is no impulse to do anything in the world.

But in the Facilitative Way, - and if we are correct in our location of these forms in our fourfold structure - both Wilber and Southgate say that it is here that real change and development can take place. And we can now see the connection and similarity between this way and the best in therapy. As Levin (1981) puts it:

Health, radically understood, is simply a question of **staying** with the situated experiential process just as it presents itself, and letting the spontaneous play of energies flow freely, not separated by conflict into subject and object, inner and outer, myself and others, nor myself (here) and the situation (there). The wholesome flow, or creative interplay, of the process is what principally matters.

He is talking here about Tibetan Buddhist therapy, which seems very close to what we try to do as humanistic practitioners. And the results of therapy can be very dynamic in changing the lives of people and the people around them. Furthermore, since the Facilitative

Way of meditation is so similar to good therapy, it can be used along with such therapy as a valuable preparation and follow-up, taking the person further along the path, and encouraging the same mindfulness to be extended to other people and their interdependence.

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