
THE MEDITATION GAME

by

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All forms of spiritual practice, all 'ways', are forms of seeking. Of a more or less obvious kind, from the 'Seek and ye shall find' of orthodox Christianity to the mystical 'Flight of the alone to the Alone'. It is interesting to note in this connection that John Rowan (whose ingenious 'quadrant' approach to this somewhat complex matter in your Jan/Feb issue has prompted this reply) describes the horizontal preserve/release relation specifically in terms of desire categorising the vertical ascent/descent more generally as a 'drive'. Be that as it may the above point still applies. This is not meant as a stricture on what J. Krishnamurti has called 'conscious' meditation to distinguish it from that spontaneous quality of choiceless awareness which he maintains, quite rightly in my view, is absolutely essential for real inner change. However if motivated activity or 'end-gaining' is where one is at - whether in be some form of self-improvement, or total self-annihilation! - that surely is the relevant fact in our experience to be understood and hopefully resolved. You can only start from where you are. To imagine otherwise is a futile exercise in 'wobbling'.

Now the curious thing to be discovered here, as one shops around in the spiritual corner of the self-improvement supermarket, is that the goal of most systems of liberation from the restrictive confines of self with a small 's', (however urgent and desirable it may be), is a strict psychological impossibility. For, if one takes the trouble to inquire into it seriously, one comes face-to-face with the absurdity of deliberately trying to become hoist with ones own petard. In Lord Rochester's words: "The higher he (the ape) climbs the more he shows his arse". Whether or not the spiritual aspirant surrenders to some guru or not to make his decisions for him is quite irrelevant here since it is he who has done the choosing in the first place. It is a problem of reflexivity. Any action of the unregenerate and separate self towards its goal of self-transcendence is a further action of the very self that wishes to become free. The 'straight and narrow' path of the spiritual journey leads directly into a trap. Any 'approach' to the truth in this respect is through an impasse!

Does the promulgation of such an apparently negative attitude towards the practice of meditation put me in the bottom right-hand corner of the quadrant amongst the socially impotent? Though I'm not much of a political animal personally I have to admit, I don't think this follows. For, if this is so, woe betide all of our modern science whose basic principle of simplification (nicknamed Occam's Razer) has made possible whatever degree of material progress mankind has achieved after centuries of blind struggle. Surely there is a big difference between negation as a form of yoga carrying with it the danger of a misplaced kind of asceticism, a self-isolating exclusion-for-exclusion's-sake as it were, and what I would like to call the true spirit of scientific endeavour. The natural tendency of the human mind to cast aside, without conscious effort, what is seen to be irrelevant. Gurdjieff's 'rejecting in order to accept' perhaps comes nearest to the attitude of openness to the new I'm trying to describe here. Which is not to say that science as practised is always necessarily like that. Nor that its theories and hypotheses, though necessary and sometimes useful, are in any way absolute. Scientists, in common with the rest of us, are all too human. They too see our world through the obscuring eyes of our survival-based habits of perception. The truths they discover are always selective and there is the constant danger that the 'selection' will be of what happens to be theoretically convenient. The scientific community's dismissive attitude towards Professor Stevenson's carefully scrutinised 'hard' evidence for memories of past lives

springs to mind here. If things are to be different, it is perception itself that needs in some way to be 'cleansed'.

In this regard the point made in the article about the close parallels between Facilitative meditation (or what has been called 'access' or 'opening' in contrast to 'trance') and good therapy is both apt and encouraging. For its necessarily all-inclusive nature makes it highly conducive to creativity and growth. Though I feel bound to add here that to talk of using it as a preparation or follow up is to deny by implication the essentially gratuitous nature of its finest fruits - on the lines of the old adage "You can take a horse to the water but you will never make it drink". In my view, if any such way is to have an even chance of avoiding the catch 22 situation referred to above, it must have, built into it as it were, the facility of observing (and hence seeing through) itself in action. For as Da Free John, whom Ken Wilber regards as 'a religious genius of the ultimate degree', puts it: "... radical understanding is the only real liberation, and it alone is the truth and realisation of this moment. Every motive is seeking. Every turning away is avoidance. Every turning towards is avoidance. All these things are seeking, for they are not abiding now in the form of reality.

Thus to turn at all is to act. And every turning will awaken the problem for direct or 'radical' self-understanding turning will awaken the reaction of turning the opposite way in time". The practical problem for direct or 'radical' self-understanding here is that the very

moment of deciding to practise some form of vipassana and simply watch oneself in action is itself just another moment of seeking, a highly purposive interruption of ordinary living still in gear with the ego insofar as I 'want sumptin' out of it'. Which I generally do. Tired of its role-playing activities, old monkey mind has decided to play Witness! So only if I am prepared to stay with this awkward paradox to the point of total self-surrender, (deciding to 'do nothing' or simply drift also counting as actions in this sense), is there a possibility of something new occurring. A true spontaneity, surely as good a definition of authentic being as any? It is worth noting here that any such possibility is in no way antagonistic to conscious reflection or analysis in the strictly zen sense of living in the now, e.g. "When (think)-ing THINK" etc. Bearing in mind that, with due mindfulness to their real nature, any tendencies to get hung up on the self-created barriers of identification and desire are seen immediately for what they are. Broken up automatically by the a clear perception of their secondary and fragmentary character against the vast backdrop of consciousness itself. Always prior to its contraction into form and content.

Does this sound like the ramblings of a spiritual spoilsport? An arrogant attempt to knock the self-serious game of formal meditation, itself

just another (rather dismal) game of intellectual nitpicking? If so, I stand convicted. It is certainly true that the great mass of devotional literature on this subject is not so much descriptive in character as prescriptive. Of the form 'Suck it and see' or, as one famous churchman said in reply to those who insisted on spending all their time disputing the truths of Christianity, "Try it!" Furthermore, to engage in any such enterprise for the sheer fun and excitement of it or the pure aesthetic pleasure is different again as Alan Watts has pointed out. For my part I like to do zazen myself, and sufi dancing is quite a ball! No, its the ponderous 'What's in it for me?' attitude that I have suggested has to be looked at and resolved whenever it crops up, each and every moment of seeking. It is not only self-contradictory, merely serving to create a mental and emotional barrier to any real spiritual progress, it is also utterly beside the point. But of course 'progress' is quite the wrong word here (how easily it slips in!). For it belies a deepdown feeling that to think of 'getting anywhere' in this respect is to perpetrate the folly of compounding an error. Namely that there is really ultimately anybody to get or, for that matter, anywhere to go. We're already there! And this life of ours that we cling to so obstinately IS in fact a Game of many players, no one of which is playing it.

References

- * 'The Knee of Listening' - Franklin Jones (Da Free John). p 225.
Dawn Horse Press, Calif. '73
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