

Meditation - Many paths

This issue, focusses on meditation ; it was not planned: it just grew. The article by Jean-Claude See was to have been one among many different articles covering different aspects of humanistic psychology. But in the event it turned out to be the first of several articles on a common theme. In his work Jean-Claude combines one of the oldest meditation techniques - vipassana - with one of the most modern techniques - the use of video feedback. In his article he makes links between the 'gestalt' aspect of video feedback - encouraging the development of a sharper feeling of 'here and now' by seeing a television picture of oneself at the same moment. This in fact makes another link - between meditation and gestalt therapy, both of which seem to be concerned with the richness of the experience of being.

Tom Sargent's article came in shortly afterwards and developed the idea of using fantasy to control mood and behaviour. Again, the technique of imagining a special place, or ashram, goes back many centuries in Eastern philosophy, but at the same time links up with modern brain development exercises to make another link between the past and the present.

Willow's paper about the sensory deprivation tank seems to be quite modern, using what has been an aggressive technique of political control in a completely peaceful and therapeutic way.

Having thus got three articles all broadly to do with the same subject, I noticed that Stephen Fox's Rolfing article, which had been waiting for a special issue on body therapies, again made links with meditation. So far, four quite different paths leading to the same end. And so this became a meditation issue !

"To what end?" my interlocutor/alter ego/ devil's advocate says. And this brings me up against the temptation of using jargon words. Instead, I ask, "What do I really mean by 'meditation'?"

My immediate thoughts and associations seem to define this as a valuable, useful, powerful and comforting activity that seems to be completely within my own control. I am crossing my fingers as I dictate this. And yet it is within my own control: if I go through the necessary routines, I usually achieve the effects I want: if I do not, I think I do not achieve these effects, although I have yet to run a proper control on myself.

I have used meditation for many years now and it has added immeasurably to my enjoyment of life, to my sense of purpose and being, and to my ability to deal with life's problems.

For the record, I use a relatively simple technique combining an auto-hypnosis programme with theological and philosophical overtones. I could go into details but do not want to blind you with pseudo science. My experience is that it works and that is the important thing.

So, what do I mean by 'meditation'? I think it has to do primarily with a sense of being, with an awareness of oneself as an existing, living, operating, feeling, thinking organism. When meditating, I feel that I really am 'me' and that I am nearer to knowing me. At the same time, I feel a link with all that is 'not me'. By really concentrating on my own awareness of myself within myself, I become aware too of being part of a larger system - of being a factor in an energy field which I can describe as the Universe, God, the Life Force, the collective unconscious, or the other. It is at once a way of experiencing myself and the world and a way of being one with a sea of cosmic energy and of being a channel through which that energy can flow and operate on my environment.

For me perhaps the most exciting thing about meditation is that it seems to link our new world of therapy, growth and the development of human potential with the old world of philosophy and religion. And it seems to me that links are really what life is all about.

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