

Through this simple exercise, the rigid, programmed and hence reliable part of the mind is used to assure the availability of the kind of mental flexibility that is usually absent in high stress situations. The meditative elements are conditioned to be available under any work conditions.

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Willow

THE SAMADHI TANK

Meditation through Sensory Deprivation

The Sensory Isolation Tank is a most exciting tool, which was developed in the States and is just beginning to be used in this country. It is an incredibly powerful instrument for self discovery. I first read about it in a book by Dr John Lilly, Programming and Meta Programming the Human Biocomputer, which I came across 'by accident' last year. Lilly's style of writing is deliberately boring because he didn't want the isolation tank to be generally known. He invented the tank in the 50's and kept in secret for the first year of its existence while he tried it out for himself. After that it was known only a small number of people in the scientific community until the 1970's when he considered that the design had been perfected to such a point as to be safe for use by the general public. He then held workshops on the use of the tank and as a result Glen and Lee Perry started production of a commercial version known as the Samadhi Tank. This is a fairly small tank primarily built for one person to use at a time but large enough for two people as well. Very few of these tanks are in Great Britain, perhaps three in all. The first person to have a Samadhi Tank, John Alcock, decided that he could build a better version and so there is now an English version which is smaller than the Samadhi Tank and incorporates a body centering system which prevents the body from touching the sides. This tank is easier to maintain and will take up less space but is only large enough for one person at a time.

I purchased a Samadhi Tank at the beginning of 1980 and started to consider the possibilities of building a larger version. This has now been completed. My design is in the shape of a pyramid with ten foot square base and is large enough for three persons to use at any one time. The other novel feature is that the air ventilation unit pumps negatively ionised air into the tank. The principle of the tank is to create an environment in which the mind is freed from all external sensory input, ie light, sound, smell, taste and touch (including gravitational pull). Lilly thought that the mind in such an environment would soon fall asleep. However, what actually happens is that in the absence of external stimuli, internal stimuli gain a prominence which is normally experienced only in deep meditative states. If you imagine conscious awareness as being like a television screen then normally most of the 'picture' is taken up with external stimuli. Heart beat for instance would occupy a space only if something out of the normal was happening, eg great panic or after running. Take away all the external stimuli and the internal world springs into sharp relief. Because this internal world is so vast, each time the tank is used, the experience is very different. One day you may be very aware of breath, heat and cold in the body; on another you may be more aware of thoughts and fantasies.

However, the one common denominator of each experience is deep relaxation. This comes about because inside the tank there is 10" of Epsom Salt solution in which you float. It looks like ordinary water until you lie down in it and find that you float quite effortlessly. This means that you can let go of everything simultaneously. Deeper levels of relaxation can be obtained than with massage because you are outside the effects of gravity. There are no pressure points on the body and hence no need to change position.

Inside the tank then you are floating effortlessly in a completely silent blackness. Many people assume that this must be a frightening experience, but it is not. I often sleep in the tank at night instead of using a bed. I would not do this if I was frightened. Getting in and out of the tank is simple and this means that you can terminate the tank experience at any point. You can remain indefinitely in the tank because the water is kept constantly at skin temperature and so there is heat loss or gain by the body. This means that it is possible to lose the sensation of being in a liquid and to feel that you are floating in air. You can also imagine that you are not floating in a horizontal position but spinning, flying, standing upright etc.

Other interesting phenomena are what Lilly calls 'displays' because he finds the word 'hallucination' too emotive. For example recently I drifted into a half sleep state and when I opened my eyes I was able to see inside the tank quite clearly. Light appeared to be pouring down from the apex of the pyramid and my body glowed as did that of the person I was in the tank with. I asked her if she could see the light as well, but she couldn't and shortly after it disappeared. Sound displays are also common. I find that when I'm shifting from one state of consciousness to another I hear doors slamming. At first I was irritated, thinking that it was outside, until I realised the pattern.

As a tool for personal growth, the Tank offers enormous opportunities. For a start it offers a space completely free from distractions where you can be with yourself. How you choose to use that space will depend upon you. Working with another person in the tank can offer the possibility of a development of pleasure and sensuality. Lying in the stillness alone and then reaching out to touch your partner is one of the most beautiful sensations I have experienced.

Also, with a partner, the Tank offers a unique massage table. You can be massaged 'three dimensionally' because there is nothing underneath you and no need to turn over as with a normal massage. This means that you back and your front can be stroked simultaneously. This kind of massage is also much easier for the masseur who doesn't need to use energy in lifting the body.

An added bonus of tank use is that the solution is extremely good for your skin. It doesn't wrinkle as it would in a bath. Quite the reverse. The skin looks smoother because it takes in water.

Tanks aren't cheap and are outside the price range of most individuals unless they borrow the money and repay it by renting out the tank. So it is likely that most people who use a tank will do so through growth and therapy centres investing in one.

One final point: if you do try a tank out, then give it a fair trial. One session is like meditating once and then complaining it doesn't work.

If anyone wishes to use a tank it is now possible to do so if you live in London. There is a tank for hire in Kalptaru the sanyassin centre in North London, and the new Pyramid Tank Centre in Ealing gives individual sessions and courses. (Telephone 01 567 8530) To purchase a tank, contact Willow on 01 748 1407.

John Alcock has produced a new design of tank with automatic centering and facilities for music. Details of this from The Physical Sensory Isolation Tank Company, 36 Saville Crescent, Ashford Common, Ashford, Middlesex.