

Caroline Sherwood

COP-OUT, PANACEA, OR WORKING SOLUTION?

Many people still regard the word 'meditation' with suspicion - and understandably so. It has for a variety of reasons come to be linked with drug taking, with destructive social agitation; with dropping out in a negative and self-centred way. Or it is regarded as some elitist 'spiritual' discipline; hailing from the Far East and having no relevance in the day to day humdrum routine of life. By a smaller group, it is regarded as an obscure and specialised form of psychotherapy.

Yet the practice of meditation is none of these things. It is a way as old as Man's search for understanding and peace of mind. It offers no answers (yet presents many solutions), it poses many questions and it provides a practical, down-to-earth **approach** to the common questions of daily life. This approach is one of awareness. Another overworked word, yet one which describes a very real, attainable and rewarding state of mind. What is this awareness? It is a state of gentle watchfulness. A state of 'listening'. A state in which one, having learned to slow down and appreciate the mechanisms of perception and one's reactions in the world, is able to view the circumstances of one's life more clearly. And in the light of that new view, develop the trust to change.

So meditation is not a **thing** or an **activity**; therefore it is nonsense to talk of 'doing a meditation', or 'my meditation'. It is a state of being - a style of living. It may have none of the expected trappings of the 'spiritual life'. No holy faces, no robes or secret rituals, no totems or incense sticks. Just a different atmosphere. Just a quality of flow and friendliness and flexibility. So often people find disappointment in the external appearance or characteristics of their teacher. But what **should** a teacher look like? If he or she did fulfil their fantasies, would they ever be attracted to this person, even be able to relate to this person?

No, meditation is a human way for human beings. A way to learn relaxation, a way to learn to develop and express energy, a way to learn to concentrate efficiently, a way to learn compassion and love - first for oneself and then for all beings. And a way to learn wisdom. Not wisdom for some pie-in-the-sky dream of a heaven-to-come.

Wisdom for right here and now. Heaven now. Because if we can't change and find peace and meaning NOW - when can we find them? There's no other time available to us.

As far as cop-out is concerned - this is in the final analysis actually impossible. As Chogyam Trungpa has said: if we try to get in by the back door, all we will experience is our 'backdoor-ness'. It is not possible to avoid the consequences of one's existence, without paying a price - at some point. As for panaceas, they do not exist either. Only constant and hard work yields the results. Of course we may dope ourselves with soporifics or delight ourselves with decorative spiritual entertainment on the pastime-paths, but is that what we really want; when one day we'll simply have to wake up and face facts - one way or another.

So much of our conversation, so much of our mental activity is concerned with pasts and futures. Relating and discussing events that have gone. Anticipating future events. Airing theories. Yet these things have no existence - except in mind. They serve no function, except as an attempt to reassure ourselves that we are still in existence; except as a thin veil to cover up - if only temporarily - the yawning gap which arises when nothing is happening and which makes us feel uneasy. But is this not madness? Surely to base our sense of reality in pasts and futures is the real madness. The only workable, functioning reality is NOW. Now we can change our attitude to ourselves and the world - and in so doing - change all things. This is the gift of meditation.

If I sound unfashionably joyful and enthusiastic - I am. I offer no apologies. I have spent too long in grey, intellectual tunnels - trying to solve the problems of life - not to rejoice at a way which puts an end to all that.

The stuff of psychology and psychiatry (and indeed of medicine in general) is to affirm the existence of a problem and then try to cure it! But in truth there is no problem. Problems; in mental terms, only exist in pasts and futures. This is not to say that life is always seen through rose-tinted spectacles. That realities of hardship, pain, difficulties, confusion, poverty, fear - and all the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to - are ignored. Of course not. But with a fundamental approach of love and positivity and energy and the sure knowledge of freedom and responsibility (within each individual) to change; the tendencies to react negatively or destructively and to produce negative situations in the world are vastly changed.

What's the point of all this? The point is that when you have had enough of knocking nails into your skull - you have the choice to stop! To realise - at the gut level; deep in one's heart - or wherever you realise things - that you really are free, that you really do have a choice and that it is your choice which creates and destroys in this world - is probably the fundamental realisation of any therapeutic, healing, or meditative process. One quickly discovers the inter-relatedness of all life. The fact of our relatedness to nature - not as mystic dream - but as **something to be experienced**. One stops viewing things from one's own point of view - How useful will they be? What will I get out of this? - and starts feeling with the spirit of the thing itself. One experiences rock, water, tree, bird, mushroom, ice in the spirit of what Alan Watts called 'Is-ness' or 'Thing-ness'. False separations or ideas of separateness dissolve. There is a sense of commonality with all life - from the grossest to the finest. Insects and micro-organisms are no longer seen as a threat. The rapport extends from ant to leaf. This breeds respect, and in its turn - compassion.

The senses are liberated. There is an opening out and a tuning in. Things are received 'flat against' the senses. No longer is there an intermediary commentator. There is a directness and a power about the information received. A new, vital, active, 'listening' quality enters and transforms the whole being. Restlessness is quelled. The present is celebrated.

Sally Griffiths

ON WHOLENESS

Desire for unity and completeness is universal - though the ways in which it manifests are varied. To feel complete and 'full' as a person requires bringing into use around 90% of our potential which has been latent, according to popular psychology. Everything we think and do should be a furtherance to this end - expansion of happiness and **full** humanness.

What I want to consider, from 9 years practical experience and a great deal of theoretical knowledge, is the use of the Transcendental Meditation technique (T.M.) as a very basic tool - more basic, I feel, than