

## INITIAL MEDITATIVE EXPERIENCES: PART I

Roger Walsh  
*University of California Medical School-Irvine  
Orange, California*

### INTRODUCTION

This is an account of the subjective experiences of some two years of Vipassana or Insight meditation. During the first year this comprised an average of approximately one hour per day and during the second was increased to about two hours, as well as some six weeks of intensive meditation retreats, usually of two weeks duration. These retreats comprised about 18 to 20 hours daily of continuous walking and sitting meditation performed in total silence and without eye contact, reading or writing. While this amount of practice may be vastly less than that of more experienced practitioners, it has certainly proved sufficient to elicit a range of experiences beyond the ken of day to day non-meditative living.

Vipassana, or insight, meditation aims at a simple nonjudgmental, noninterfering precise awareness and examination of whatever mental or physical phenomena enter awareness (mindfulness). Usually one object is observed at a time, the object being selected by a process of "choiceless awareness" in which the attention is allowed to settle effortlessly on whatever percept is predominant. If judgments, attractions, aversions, thoughts, etc., arise in response to the percept, then these reactions are themselves allowed to become the primary object of awareness. This differs from the usual state in which there is no experiential recognition of the phenomenon of awareness per se, of the distinction between awareness and the object of awareness, and a greater number of reactions go unnoticed.

*insight  
meditation*



*training  
participant  
observers*

In presenting this material I have several aims. The first is simply to share these explorations with the hope that they may prove helpful for other beginning meditators, since there is surprisingly little in-depth writing on initial meditative experiences (Walsh, 1977b). I would also like to examine them in the light of Western psychology, especially recent advances in learning theory, state-dependent learning, altered states of consciousness, behavioral self-control, and traditional psychodynamics. I also wish to do exactly the opposite: i.e., where possible to examine Western psychology within the light of these experiences. While there are a number of poignant, rich and courageous accounts of individuals' experiences and insights (e.g., Shattock, 1972; Lerner, 1977), they lack the precision and psychological background essential for scientifically productive analysis. Thus there have recently been repeated requests by a variety of Western psychologists (e.g., Shimano & Douglas, 1975; Tart, 1975a; Globus, 1976), for individuals with extensive training in the behavioral sciences to undertake the exploration of consciousness as trained participant observers. This paper seems to present an opportunity for beginning a preliminary testing of such a paradigm.

While a number of things led me in the direction of meditation, the major forerunner was clearly a year and a half of intensive individual psychotherapy which has already been described in some detail (Walsh, 1976, 1977a). Certain features of this therapy seemed especially conducive to meditation. These included a markedly increased awareness of, and perceptual sensitivity to, the formerly unrecognized stream of inner consciousness and a heightened ability to discriminate among altered states within this stream. There was also less fear of, and more trust in, this formerly subliminal realm of awareness and motivation, and hence a greater sense of trust in myself, "myself" having now been expanded to include this formerly unknown realm. In particular some of the states which emerged towards the end of therapy were characterized by feelings of peace, and a relative absence of thoughts, needs and "doing." These states readily became the objects of noninterfering awareness, and it felt inappropriate to "work with them" in a traditional psychotherapeutic way.

I began meditation with one-half hour each day and during the first three to six months there were few times during which I could honestly say with complete certainty that I was definitely experiencing benefits from it. Except for the painfully obvious stiff back and sore knees, the psychological effects other than occasional relaxation felt so subtle and ephemeral that I could never be sure that they were more than a figment of my wishes

and expectations. Certainly had it not been for these expectations, prior psychotherapeutic experiences, and the encouragement of more experienced practitioners, I would never have gotten beyond the first couple of weeks. The nature of meditation seems to be, especially at first, a slow but cumulative process, a fact which may be useful for beginners to know.

*a slow  
process*

However, with continued perseverance, subtle effects just at the limit of my perceptual threshold did begin to become apparent. I had expected the eruption into awareness of powerful, concrete experiences, if not flashes of lightning and pealing of bells, then at least something of sufficient intensity to make it very clear that I had "gotten it," whatever "it" was. What "it" actually turned out to be was not the appearance of formerly nonexistent mental phenomena, but rather a gradual incremental increase in perceptual sensitivity to the formerly subliminal portions of my own inner stream of consciousness, a process which had begun in therapy.

*a gradual  
increase in  
sensitivity*

At first this was apparent as the occasional ephemeral appearance of a sense of peace or some other subtle, hard to categorize affect interspersed among innumerable pains, itches, doubts, questions, fears and fantasies which occupied the majority of meditation sitting time. Usually one or more of these "events" would be deemed important enough to divert my attention from meditation. With increased practice the disruptive nature of these breaks became more and more apparent, and the stringency of the criteria for disrupting meditation became progressively higher. Interestingly enough the order in which the different kinds of distractions were given up seemed to provide an index of the strengths of my attachments. For example, I am an analytic, intellectually curious person who loves to understand things. This predilection runs counter to the Vipassana process which emphasizes just watching and observing the arising and passing away of all mental phenomena, thoughts, feelings, sensations, without analyzing or changing them in any way. Therefore, when something unusual occurred in meditation, I may have thought, "Wow, I could really learn something from that." This thought was usually sufficient to jolt me out of a relaxed meditative watching and into an active analytic probing and changing of the experience.

*the strength  
of attachments*

#### FANTASY

"When one sits down with eyes closed to silence the mind, one is at first submerged by a torrent of thoughts—they crop up everywhere like frightened, nay, aggressive rats" (Satprem,



*a torrent  
of fantasies*

1968, p. 33). The more sensitive I became, the more I was forced to recognize that what I had formerly believed to be my rational mind preoccupied with cognition, planning, problem solving, etc., actually comprised a frantic torrent of forceful, demanding, loud, and often unrelated thoughts and fantasies which filled an unbelievable proportion of consciousness even during purposive behavior. The incredible proportion of consciousness which this fantasy world occupied, my powerlessness to remove it for more than a few seconds, and my former state of mindlessness or ignorance of its existence, staggered me (I am here using mindlessness in an opposite sense to the Vipassana term mindful, which means aware of the nature of the object to which the mind is attending). Foremost among the implicit beliefs of orthodox Western psychology is the assumption that man spends most of his time reasoning and problem solving, and that only neurotics and other abnormals spend much time, outside of leisure, in fantasy (Tart, 1975b). However, it is my impression that prolonged self-observation will show that at most times we are living almost in a dream world in which we skillfully and automatically yet unknowingly blend inputs from reality and fantasy in accordance with our needs and defenses. Interestingly this "mindlessness" seemed much more intense and difficult to deal with than in psychotherapy where the depth and sensitivity of inner awareness seemed less, and where the therapist provided a perceptual focus and was available to pull me back if I started to get lost in fantasy.

The presence of inner dialogue and fantasy seems to present a limiting factor for the sense of closeness and unity with another person. However, if I am with another person, and free of dialogue and fantasy, and feeling an emotion, especially a positive one such as love, which I know the other person to be also experiencing, then it feels as though there are no detectable ego boundaries; we are together in love. But if part of my mind is preoccupied with dialogue and fantasies, then my awareness is split; I know that my experience is different from the other individual's, and feel correspondingly distanced and separated.

*the subtlety  
and complexity  
of fantasies*

The subtlety, complexity, infinite range and number, and entrapping power of the fantasies which the mind creates seems impossible to comprehend, to differentiate from reality while in them, and even more so to describe to one who has not experienced them. Layer upon layer of imagery and quasilogic open up in any point to which attention is directed. Indeed it gradually becomes apparent that it is impossible to question and reason one's way out of this all-encompassing fantasy since



the very process of questioning, thinking, and seeking only creates further fantasy.

### *Meditation Exercise*

Since the power and extent of this entrapment is so difficult to convey to someone without personal experience of it, I'd strongly encourage any non-meditator to use the following concentration exercise (Goldstein, 1976) before continuing.

Set an alarm for a minimum of 10 minutes. Then take a comfortable seat, close your eyes, and turn your attention to the sensations of breathing in your abdomen. Feel the abdominal wall rising and falling and focus your attention as carefully, precisely, and microscopically as possible on the instant to instant sensations that occur in your abdomen. Don't let your attention wander for a moment. If thoughts and feelings arise, just let them be there and continue to focus your awareness on the sensations.

Now as you remain aware of the sensations, start counting each breath until you reach ten, and then start again at one. However, if you lose count, or if your mind wanders from the sensations in the abdomen, even for an instant, go back to one. If you get lost in fantasy or distracted by outside stimuli, just recognize what happened and gently bring your mind back to the breath. Continue this process until the alarm tells you to stop and then attempt to estimate how much of the time you were actually mindfully focussed. As your perception sharpens with more practice, you would probably recognize that you have greatly overestimated, but this should be sufficient to give a flavor of the extent of the problem. "Your mind has a mind of its own, where do you fit in?" (Sujata, 1975).

*focussing  
attention  
on  
breathing*

The impossibility of working or thinking one's way out of this multilayered, multidimensional fantasy world into which one falls, rapidly becomes apparent, even though it is very tempting to try to do so. That leaves within the experiential meditative world only the primary sensations, e.g., pain and breathing, on which to focus as perceptual anchors. By focussing attention back on the breathing it seems that the energy or arousal going into the fantasy by virtue of the attention being paid it is withdrawn, and it collapses under its own weight leaving only the primary sensations until the next fantasy arises. This is presumably an example of Tart's (1975a) statement that certain mental structures are dependent on a minimum amount of attention for their creation and maintenance.

## *Fantasy and Illusion*

*the background  
of dialogues  
and  
fantasies*

*the brain  
as a  
difference  
detector*

The power and pervasiveness of these inner dialogues and fantasies left me amazed that we could be so unaware of them during our normal waking life and reminded me of the Eastern concept of *maya* or all-consuming illusion. The question of why we don't recognize them seems incredibly important, but to date I have seen no explanations other than the almost universal ones among the meditative-yogic traditions that normal man is an automaton, more asleep than awake, etc. Several mechanisms seem to be operating here. Firstly, the dialogue-fantasy creations are completely congruent with the current ego state and with what Gendlin (1962) and Welwood (1976) would call the "felt meaning," i.e., that affective background or context which we assay when we try to answer the question "how do you feel right now?" It is the contrast between the dialogues-fantasies and the background affective state which makes the detection of their pervasiveness easier. It is therefore interesting that I have not infrequently found that when I am what initially appears to be dialogue-free, closer examination of my consciousness reveals dialogue with which I had been completely and unconsciously identified such as "I'm really doing this well, I'm in a really clear place, I don't have any dialogue going, I'm really getting to be a good meditator, etc." However, at such times a thought like, "I'm not getting anything out of this," stands out strongly and is readily identified for what it is, yet another thought. This fits well with the general neurophysiological principle that the brain is essentially a difference detector which picks up differences between stimuli or stimulus complexes rather than absolute levels of individual stimuli. Other factors possibly accounting for our inability or unwillingness to identify the extent of this dialogue-fantasy may be the extent to which we have habituated to its presence. Furthermore, it is only when we attempt to stop it that we become aware of its remarkable hold on us, a situation strongly reminiscent of addictions.

A further masking factor may comprise the process of "time-sharing." Usually we are able to switch rapidly between focussing on real stimuli and fantasy in a manner analogous to the process by which a computer rapidly switches between different terminals which may be feeding in input simultaneously. Thus for "normal" levels of external sensory awareness and performance there may be relatively little functional impairment apparent, especially since the vast majority of the population is also functioning in this manner. It also rapidly becomes apparent that these dialogue-fantasies may serve a major (perhaps *the* major?) defensive function. If so then ob-



viously there would be major dynamics operating to prevent awareness of them (perceptual defense).

It is clear that fantasy plays a major role in psychological health and pathology. Obviously a full exploration of these relationships is beyond the scope of this article, but it is clear that meditation offers insights into the phenomena which may extend far beyond current Western psychological understanding.

Traditionally fantasy has been seen as ranging from being a source of creativity and pleasure in well-adapted individuals (e.g., Offer, 1973; Offer & Offer, 1974) to a central hallmark of psychopathology when excessive (Linn, 1975). When the individual believes his fantasies to be real, and they are discordant with those of the majority of society, the fantasies are called hallucinations and he is labelled psychotic. Also, when the fantasies are especially painful and egodystonic, the individual may experience himself, and be diagnosed, as mentally ill, even though he knows them to be fantasies. Thus in Western psychology, fantasies are seen as normal or even beneficial, unless they prove especially painful or overwhelming.

*fantasy  
as viewed  
traditionally*

However, a remarkably wide range of meditation and yogic disciplines from a variety of cultures hold a very different view. They assert that whether we know it or not, untrained individuals are prisoners of their own minds, totally and unwittingly trapped by a continuous inner fantasy-dialogue which creates an all-consuming illusion or *maya*.

*fantasy  
as illusion*

We are what we think.  
All that we are arises with our thoughts.  
With our thoughts we create the world.

The Buddha (Byrom, 1976)

“Normal” man is thus seen as asleep or dreaming. When the dream is especially painful or disruptive it becomes a nightmare and is recognized as psychopathology, but since the vast majority of the population dreams, the true state of affairs goes unrecognized. When the individual permanently disidentifies from or eradicates this dream he is said to have awakened and can now recognize the true nature of his former state and that of the population. This awakening or enlightenment is the aim of the meditative-yogic disciplines (e.g., Ouspensky, 1949; De Ropp, 1968; Nyanaponika Thera, 1972; Ram Dass, 1974, 1976, 1977; Goldstein, 1976; Goleman, 1977; Wilber, 1977). However, according to Tart (1975a), there is as yet considerable resistance to this idea in Western psychology and psychiatry:

We have studied some aspects of samsara (illusion, maya) in far more detail than the Eastern traditions that originated the concept of samsara. Yet almost no psychologists apply this idea to themselves. They assume . . . that their own states of consciousness are basically logical and clear. Western psychology now has a challenge to recognize this detailed evidence that our "normal" state is a state of samsara and to apply the immense power of science and our other spiritual traditions, East and West, to the search for a way out (p. 286).

### *Perceiving and Labeling Fantasy*

*quieting  
the  
internal  
dialogue*

With continued practice the speed, power, loudness, and continuity of these thoughts and fantasies began to slowly diminish, leaving subtle sensations of greater peace and quiet. After a period of about four or five months there occurred episodes in which I would open my eyes at the end of meditation and look at the outside world without the presence of concomitant internal dialogue. This state would be rapidly terminated by a rising sense of anxiety and anomie accompanied by the thought, "I don't know what anything means." Thus, I could be looking at something completely familiar, such as a tree, a building, or the sky, and yet without an accompanying internal dialogue to label and categorize it, it felt totally strange and devoid of meaning. It seems that what made something familiar and hence secure was not simply its recognition, but the actual cognitive process of matching, categorizing and labeling it, and that once this was done, then more attention and reactivity was focussed on the label and labeling process rather than on the stimulus itself. Thus the initial fantasy and thought-free periods may feel both strange and distinctly unpleasant so that we are at first punished by their unfamiliarity. We have created an unseen prison for ourselves whose bars are comprised of thoughts and fantasies of which we remain largely unaware unless we undertake intensive perceptual training. Moreover, if they are removed we may be frightened by the unfamiliarity of the experience and rapidly reinstate them. This is reminiscent of the lines of a poem by Yevtuschenko, who on visiting a Canadian mink farm found the minks bred in open cages from which they never tried to escape despite the fact that their peers were slaughtered in the adjoining room.

He who is born in a cage,  
shall weep for a cage.

Presumably this labeling process must modify our perception in many ways, including reducing our ability to experience each stimulus fully, richly, and newly, by reducing its multidimensional nature into a lesser dimensional cognitive labeling



framework. This must necessarily derive from the past, be less tolerant of ambiguity, less here now, and perpetuative of a sense of sameness and continuity to the world. This process may represent the phenomenological and cognitive mediational basis of Deikman's (1966) concept of automatization and Don Juan's "maintaining the world as we know it" (Castaneda, 1971, 1977). It is a far cry from the perceptual end state devoid of all this labeling described by the Buddha as "In what is seen there should be only the seen; in what is heard only the heard; in what is sensed [as smell, taste or touch], only the sensed, in what is thought only the thought" (Nyanaponika Thera, 1962, p. 33).

It also provides an explanation of the electrophysiological finding that experienced Zen practitioners may exhibit repetitive, non-habituating orientating responses to repeated stimuli during meditation (Kasamatsu & Hirai, 1966; for a review see Davidson, 1976). This is as would be predicted if they are in fact responding to the stimuli themselves rather than to the cognitive labeling process as described above. This also provides an explanation for the "deautomatization" which may occur with meditation (Deikman, 1966). One might also wonder whether these Zen meditators and also self-actualizers—who have been characterized among other things for their ability to repetitively experience things freshly and uniquely (Maslow, 1971)—display similar non-habituated patterns in daily living.

*developing  
non-habituated  
responses*

This perceptual process might also provide support for, and a substrate and an explanation of, constructional realism. This is the philosophy which suggests that we do not simply learn to recognize reality, but rather learn to construct reality. This philosophy has recently been rediscovered by researchers in a diverse number of fields such as neuropsychology, developmental psychology, philosophy, and consciousness (Piaget, 1960; Pribram, 1976; Wilber, 1977). Although not yet widely recognized, it may be that this philosophy should be expanded to include the idea that we may construct *a* reality, rather than *the* reality. In any event, the above phenomena may provide an initial suggestion of the cognitive-perceptual processes by which this is achieved.

*constructing  
our reality*

#### THE FIRST MEDITATION RETREAT

The first meditation retreat, begun about one year after commencing sitting, was a very painful and difficult two-week affair. I had never meditated for more than an hour at a time and so continuous walking and sitting brought me to a

*a marked  
hypersensitivity  
to all  
stimuli*

screaming halt. Within three hours I literally felt as though I had ingested a stimulant, and by six hours there were significant psychedelic effects. A marked hypersensitivity to all stimuli both internal and external rapidly developed, resulting in intense arousal, agitation, discomfort, and multiple chronic muscle contractions, especially around the shoulders. This agitation was associated with an increased sensitivity to pain which seemed like part of a more general hypersensitivity. This was particularly apparent during the first three or four days and any exercise such as running would result in extreme tenderness in the corresponding muscles.

*vivid  
hallucinations*

One of the most amazing rediscoveries during this first retreat was the incredible proportion of time, well over 90 percent, which I spent lost in fantasy. Most of these were of the ego self-aggrandizing type, so that when eventually I realized I was in them, it proved quite a struggle to decide to give them up and return to the breath, but with practice this decision became slightly easier, faster, and more automatic. This by no means happened quickly since over the first four or five days the proportion of time spent in fantasy actually increased as the meditation deepened, and on days three through five of the retreat literally reached psychotic proportions. During this period each time I sat and closed my eyes I would be immediately swept away by vivid hallucinations, losing all contact with where I was or what I was doing until after an unknown period of time a thought would creep in such as, "Am I really swimming, lying on the beach?" etc., and then I would either get lost back into the fantasy or another thought would come: "Wait a moment, I thought I was meditating." If the latter, then I would be left with the difficult problem of trying to ground myself, i.e., of differentiating between stimulus produced percepts ("reality") and entirely endogenous ones ("hallucinations"). The only way this seemed possible was to try finding the breath, and so I would begin frantically searching around in this hypnagogic universe for the sensations of the breath. Such was the power of the hallucinations that sometimes I would be literally unable to find it and would fall back into the fantasy. If successful, I would recognize it and be reassured that I was in fact meditating. Then in the next moment I would be lost again in yet another fantasy. The clarity, power, persuasiveness and continuity of these hallucinations is difficult to adequately express. However, the effect of living through three days during which time to close my eyes meant losing contact almost immediately with ordinary reality was extraordinarily draining to say the least. Interestingly enough while this experience was uncomfortable and quite beyond my control, it was not particularly frightening, if anything the



opposite. For many years I had feared losing control if I let down defenses and voyaged too far along the road of self-investigation and discovery. This appears to be a common fear in most growth traditions and seems to serve a major defensive function. Having experienced this once feared outcome, it now no longer seems so terrifying. Of course, the paradox is that what we usually call control is actually exactly the opposite, a lack of ability to let go of defenses.

*the fear  
of losing  
control*

During moments of clarity a process occurred which seems supportive of Goleman's (1976) hypothesis of global desensitization as one of the mediating mechanisms of meditative effects. During this first retreat a lot of old, almost forgotten, highly charged memories would arise into consciousness, remain for a moment, then slowly sink back out of awareness. Not infrequently as they did so I would be aware that the affective charge, e.g., anger, sadness, etc., which was originally associated with them would tend to diminish while they were held in awareness, and that they had not infrequently attained a neutral status by the time they disappeared back into the unconscious. It was also interesting that some of these memories ranged all the way back to age three or four, and to the best of my recollection I had never recalled them previously since their original occurrence. This phenomenology seems highly consistent with Goleman's proposed desensitization mechanism.

*the arousal  
of early  
memories*

While a good 90 percent or more of this first retreat was taken up with mindless fantasy and agitation, there did occur during the second week occasional short-lived periods of intense peace and tranquillity. These were so satisfying that, while I would not be willing to sign up for a life-time in a monastery, I could begin to comprehend the possibility of the truth of the Buddhist saying that "peace is the highest form of happiness." Affective lability was also extreme. While more than 80 percent of the time of the first retreat was sheer pain, there were not infrequently sudden apparently unprecipitated wide mood swings to completely polar emotions. Shorn of all my props and distractions there was just no way to pretend that I had more than the faintest inkling of self-control over either thoughts or feelings.

With continued practice and greater sensitivity I began to gain an experiential sense for the meaning of a word which is widely and loosely used within meditation-yoga circles, namely the type of "vibrations" that I was experiencing. It appeared that in any sensory modality at all, there is an endogenously generated continuous flux of perceptual-neural noise. Both figure and

greater  
sensitivity  
to  
neurocybernetic  
signals

ground, or signal and noise, are at least partially generated by this process. What gets interpreted as signal or figure are sometimes simply the larger fluctuations in neural activity of sufficient magnitude to stand out effectively against the remaining background. During periods of agitation these "vibrations" appear stronger, larger, more frequent, and more variable, whereas the reverse is true during periods of calm. Presumably this simply represents a subjective correlate of the neurophysiological activity and disturbance of the nervous system. Since one of the aims of meditation is calm, this suggests a basis for the advice given by several meditation teachers to do that which "fines down the vibration" and avoid those things which lead to "heavy coarse vibrations" (Ram Dass, 1976). Thus these subjective sensations can be used as a sensitive self-guiding neurocybernetic signal to move one in the direction of increasing calm and peace.

This also suggests a further basis for the heightened sensitivity of meditators, namely, the reduction in the magnitude of background fluctuations or noise. This would result in a greater signal:noise ratio. It also raises the interesting question of whether what is noise at one level of perceptual sensitivity may not be signal at another more subtle level. Indeed this leads to the ultimate question of whether there is in fact any neural "noise" within the brain at all, or merely unrecognized signals?

the  
disrupting  
power of  
attachments

It soon became apparent that the type of material which forceably erupted into awareness and disrupted concentration was most often material—ideas, fantasies, thoughts, etc.—to which I was attached (addicted) and around which there was considerable affective charge. Indeed, it seemed that the stronger the attachment or charge, the more often the material would arise, a fact which suggested that we may all be subject to an at least partially conditioned hierarchy of attachments as well as a more biologically based hierarchy of needs à la Maslow. There was a definite sense that attachments reduced the flexibility and power of the mind, since whenever I was preoccupied with a stimulus to which I was attached, then I had difficulty in withdrawing my attention from it to observe other stimuli which passed through awareness. This is reminiscent in a more subtle form of a phenomenon called "stimulus boundness" which is found in brain damaged individuals who, once their attention is fixated on a particular stimulus, experience great difficulty in transferring it to another object. Interestingly enough, the attachment or need to understand, itself proved a perceptual and information limiting factor. As long as I needed to understand something it was necessary to keep



that something around in awareness until it was understood rather than allowing it to pass away of its own accord to be replaced by the next object, i.e., “to understand” my experience I had to retain and analyze it and thereby stop the free-flow of awareness.

Paradoxically it seems that a need or attachment to be rid of a certain experience or state may lead to its perpetuation. The clearest example of this has been with anxiety, which I worked quite hard to reduce in my psychotherapy with considerable success. However, some six months ago I suddenly began to experience mild anxiety attacks of unknown origin which curiously enough seemed to occur most often when I was feeling really good and in the presence of a particular person who I loved. At such times I would try all my various psychological gymnastics to eradicate it since it was clearly not OK with me to feel anxious. However, these episodes continued for some five months in spite of, or as it actually turned out because of, my resistance to them. During this time my practice deepened and I was able to examine more and more of the process during meditation. What I found was that I had considerable fear of fear and my mind therefore surveyed in a radar-like fashion all endogenous and exogenous stimuli for their fear evoking potential and all reactions for any fear component. Thus there was a continuous mental radar-like scanning process preset in an exquisitely sensitive fashion for the detection of anything resembling fear. Consequently there were a considerable number of false positives, i.e., non-fearful stimuli and reactions which were interpreted as being fearful or potentially fear provoking. Since the reactions to the false positives themselves comprised fear and fear components, there was of course an immediate chain reaction set up with one fear response acting as the stimulus for the next. It thus became very clear that my fear of and resistance to the fear was exactly what was perpetuating it.

*anxiety*

*the  
perpetuation  
of  
fear*

This insight and the further application of new meditative awareness to the process certainly reduced but did not eradicate these episodes entirely. Paradoxically they still tended to recur when I felt very calm and peaceful. It was not until the middle of the next meditation retreat that the reasons for this became clear. After the first few days of pain and agitation I began to feel more and more peaceful and there came a sitting in which I could feel my meditation deepen perceptibly and the restless mental scanning slow more and more. Then as the process continued to deepen and slow I was literally jolted by a flash of agitation and anxiety accompanying a thought—“But what do I do now if there’s no more anxiety to look for?” It was

apparent that if I continued to quieten, there would be neither anxiety to scan for nor a scanning process itself, and my need to get rid of anxiety demanded that I have a continuous scanning mechanism, and the presence of the mechanism in turn created the presence of anxiety. My "but what do I do now?" fear had very effectively removed the possibility of the dissipation of both, and its occurrence at a time when I was feeling most peaceful, relaxed and safe, of course explained why I had been subject to these anxiety episodes at the apparently paradoxical times when I felt best. Paradoxically then it appears that within the mind, if you need to be rid of something, then not only are you likely to experience a number of false positives but you may also need to have them around continuously so you can keep getting rid of them. Thus within the province of the mind, what you resist is what you get.

Since the things which tend to preoccupy consciousness and disrupt meditation tend to be those things with strong attachment, it becomes apparent why the paring away of attachments is one of the three aims of the triune path of purification (Pali: *silya*), discriminating wisdom (*panna*), and concentration (*sammhadi*). These three are said to interact in such a way that the deepening and increasing of one deepens the other two and hence the whole meditative process. It took no more than a few days of the first retreat to make this painfully obvious. Any time I did something which broke the rules or consciously disturbed other people's practice or well-being, I found myself agitated and disturbed in a way which affected my own meditation as well as other apparently unrelated aspects of my behavior. For example, one of the rules was that we could shower only during two or three set times during the day so as to minimize the possibility of disturbing other people's meditation. However, I soon found that showers were an excellent, if only partial antidote to the intense agitation and dysphoria that I was experiencing. Thus I was certainly not about to let a minor matter like the disruption of someone else's meditation stand between me and my comfort, and so for the first five or six days I averaged perhaps six showers a day. However, by about the fifth day my meditation had deepened to a point where I was more aware of the emotional reactions I underwent during this transgression. What I eventually noticed that I was doing was minimizing the effects on me of their imagined discomfort by creating a psychological distance between us. To do this I found myself creating feelings of anger, separation, and superiority toward them so that the discomforts which I imagined them to be experiencing, I could now justify, defend against, and even feel righteous about. By the seventh day this process had become too painful and ugly



to watch and I was forced to at least partially give up my attachment to showers and to resign myself to showerless agitation. This devaluation of people who are wronged is consistent with cognitive dissonance theory, which is concerned with the effects of incongruity between expectation and actuality (Festinger, 1957; Malmo, 1975). If this process is generalizable, then it obviously holds widespread implications for understanding the dehumanization which occurs with crime and warfare.

Using the example above, and I could if necessary present several others also, it has become apparent that greater inner sensitivity reveals more clearly the multiple yet often subtle ways in which we harm both ourselves and others by behavior which is not marked by authenticity and integrity. Furthermore, the reason we act without integrity is to avoid confronting and having to possibly give up our attachments. On the other hand, if we wish to speed up the meditative process of increasing concentration, insight, and reducing attachments, then living with as much integrity as possible will bring us up against the greatest number of attachments in the shortest possible time. Although this will, of course, be uncomfortable, it will afford, if we wish, the opportunity of most speedily recognizing and letting go attachments and hence progressing most rapidly. This provides a rationale for many of the ethical precepts of most of the meditation-yogic traditions and seems analogous to Don Juan's concept of impeccability (Castaneda, 1971). It also fits with the hypothesis that the more mentally healthy person will tend to be motivated by approach rather than escape and avoidance (Walsh & Shapiro, 1978). Certainly it is apparent that perceptual sensitivity and integrity are both mutually interactive rate-limiting factors for this process.

*living  
with  
integrity*

#### BELIEFS

As with psychotherapy (Walsh, 1976), the limitations and self-fulfilling prophetic nature of beliefs and models again became apparent. Once again John Lilly's (1972) statement proved awesome in its power. "Within the province of the mind what I believe to be true is true or becomes true within experimental and experiential limits. These limits are further beliefs to be transcended. Within the mind there are no limits." Usually it has seemed that my beliefs and models of who and what I am seem to lag behind the changing reality and to be closer to what I was than what I am now. In areas where there is growth this can be especially limiting because I then find myself fighting and dealing with an outdated chimera rather

than acknowledging the reality that is. Although at the present time it is very subtle and often at the limits of my perception, at times when I become aware that I have been operating out of a model rather than out of the current reality, then I am able to detect the following: Firstly that my awareness is split with a major portion fixed on the mental model, some sense of repressing the awareness of the here and now, and a sense of lessening being and flowing and heightened active "doing" to match the expectancies of the model.

Another limiting belief, derived in part from my Western psychological and psychiatric training, is that I cannot change my mental state—e.g., affect, state of consciousness—without adequately working through all the intervening determining psychological material; e.g., if I feel guilty, then it is necessary to work through the determining factors before I can expect to feel good again. A mere moment's consideration will show the inaccuracy of this assumption, but it's amazing how often it has caught me and others.

#### BEING AND DOING

The theme of allowing and "being" versus "doing" has been a central and recurrent one for each and every retreat. It gradually became apparent that the sense of doing actually represents a form of paranoia, a readiness to correct the on-going automatic process of being, for fear that it will be inadequate or suboptimal. This fear leads to hypervigilant surveillance of both the present and anticipated situations and behavior, coupled with an emergency readiness to deal with any shortcoming of being. We are thus continuously and needlessly on emergency alert, derived from a basic pervasive fear that we will not be sufficient in any moment.

The process of doing became most forcefully apparent during the second retreat, by which time I was attempting to passively observe as much as possible. However, if any stimulus, of seemingly greater significance than others came into awareness, then I would immediately cease passive observation and go through a series of stages of first actively directing my attention towards the stimulus, secondly focussing on it intensely, thirdly attempting to identify it, and fourthly sometimes to transmute it in some way, e.g., from fear to excitement. However, by the end of the first week when my mind had become more sensitive there was an almost continuous stream of surfacing of "significant" awarenesses. So much so that I was fatigued and unattracted to working with them and no

*directing  
attention  
to the stimulus*



longer attempted to transmute them. Then with more time I did not even bother to identify them, next could not even be bothered focussing on them, and finally could barely raise the interest to turn my attention towards them. This sequence thus evaporated in accordance with the sequential loss of the links of a non-reinforced behavior chain. This fatigue led to an increased willingness to just be, to just watch, to surrender and to recognize that I really did not have to do anything with the contents of awareness. At first this type of trusting was very difficult, but was necessary out of sheer fatigue, a situation reminiscent of the spontaneous recovery of some neurotics who literally wear out their own defenses and themselves. With time, however, there was an increasing sense of letting go, surrender, less need to react and to work to change experiences, and a greater sense of just allowing them to be whatever they were, e.g., it was OK to be scared rather than having to try to change it.

One question of both theoretical and practical importance which comes up repeatedly not only in meditation but in all the growth disciplines, is whether thought and behavior patterns, habits, conditioned responses, etc., are ever fully extinguished. Learning and behavior theory suggests that they follow declining asymptotic curves. My own experience suggests that the same thing happens in meditation. As a behavior pattern is eradicated at one level this in turn increases perceptual sensitivity so that one is now more likely to become aware of it operating at an as yet uneradicated and more subtle level. This process can recur many times, each in a more subtle, sensitive, exquisite, and more difficult to detect manner than the time before.

*different  
levels of  
behavior  
patterns*

At my next retreat, some five months after the previous one, it should have been no surprise to me, although it was, to find myself amazed and astounded at the amount of "doing" that I was doing. Whether in fact I was actually "doing" more or whether I was simply more sensitive to it, I cannot be certain, though subjectively it felt more like the latter. In any event by the second or third day of the retreat it was apparent that a large proportion of my mental time and effort went into an active, anxious doing attempt to change the mental contents to fit a variety of predetermined models. Subjectively it seemed that a percept, thought, feeling, etc., would arise and would then be immediately anxiously scanned for its threat value and to determine how well it matched whatever the relevant model was of the way it and I should be. The most frequent model was one of an idealized end state, e.g., happy, clear, perspicacious, insightful, aware, deeply meditative, etc. Whenever the

monitoring  
an object  
of attention

mental object of attention was found to be lacking in any way, as surprisingly enough it not infrequently was, then immediately a whole series of corrective measures would be taken to try to align it with the model. These corrective measures would include all the psychological, mental, and meditative maneuvers that I had learnt over the previous three years, e.g., relaxing, letting go, taking the energy up, attentional focussing, etc., ad infinitum, ad nauseam, all within the space of seconds or less. If the corrective actions were successful, then they would tend to diminish, but if not then they would increase in intensity and there would be a detectable mounting anxiety. To complicate matters still further these corrective actions would themselves in turn be contrasted with specific models of the way they ought to be, judged, and modified in turn so that there could literally be chain reactions cascading out in all mental directions until something else became the focus of attention.

It felt as though the process I was now witnessing was a faster and more subtle version of the one I had seen in the previous retreat where I had initially semiconsciously turned my attention towards and then tried to modify prominent percepts. Now I was observing the same process at work on larger numbers of more subtle mental events.

In the midst of this dilemma it felt as though any doing, any volitional activity, involved an active modification or correction of what was, and only trapped me more in my own reactivity. This raises the interesting question of whether doing, as opposed to just being, is always reactive and therefore always follows some stimulus, and therefore always adds more conditioning and perhaps what might be viewed as *karma*. This was certainly the subjective experience and if so would explain the Buddhist and many other meditative teachings that it is literally impossible to "do" anything to get oneself out of one's mental trap.

"doing  
the  
right  
thing"

Similarly my attachment to getting ahead with and speeding up this process became patently counterproductive. It became apparent that periods of intense well-being lasting even only a matter of several seconds, tended to elicit thoughts and concomitant anxiety along the lines of "but what if I'm not doing the right thing?" The *right* thing was of course that maneuver which would propel me forwards at the fastest possible rate and which had to be constantly searched and selected for, a process which could not continue if I was just sitting feeling calm, peaceful, and happy.



Interestingly enough this achievement need also trapped me in an endless treadmill. It turned out that one of the little games I was playing with myself to supposedly speed up my growth was to retrospectively negatively distort my self-image. Thus the memories of myself and my behavior that I retained across the years, and even across the duration of a meditation sitting, were negatively tinged and biased. One of the beliefs out of which this process sprang was that these negative memories would prove aversive enough to provide the motivation to keep me working on myself as intensively as possible. The only problem with this was that of course I spent years trying to chase and correct chimeras, and chimeras turn out to be hard things to improve, especially when all you have to go on are negative memories of how poorly you dealt with them last time. In rereading it, this description of the memory distortion feels rather gross since the process itself was very subtle, though not without pervasive effects, so subtle in fact that it was only in the depths of a retreat that I became aware of the operation of the mechanism at all. It does seem important, however, since once having recognized the mechanism, I was able to see how much of my current behavior is motivated by beliefs about who I have been and hence am. The awareness that those beliefs were subject to specific detectable distortions was a powerfully relieving one.

Associated with doing and “doing the right thing” was, of course, an incredible amount of judging. This thought was good, that was bad, this feeling was OK, that was not, this experience really shouldn’t be allowed into awareness, etc., in an initially continuous and never ending process in which things, e.g., thoughts, feelings, etc., *actually felt* good, bad, right, wrong, etc. with increasing recognition of it, this process became quite distressing, since it became apparent that I could do, think, or feel, almost nothing without being subjected to a barrage of judgmental reactions, and even judgments of judgments. These so clouded my perception as to significantly and continuously distort it. Now I could understand the words of Sengstan, the Third Zen Patriarch (Clarke, 1975):

*judging*

When thought is in bondage, the truth is hidden,  
for everything is murky and unclear.  
And the burdensome practice of judging  
brings annoyance and weariness. . . .  
Indeed it is due to our choosing to accept or reject  
that we do not see the true nature of things.

With increasing mindfulness, however, an interesting change began to develop in which I became aware of the temporal and

mental gap between the percept and the judgment. Thus a thought which originally would have "felt bad" and possibly ugly and painful was now experienced as "just a thought" without any particular affect attached to it. Then a small but detectable time after, there would be a wave of affect corresponding to the nature of the judgment, e.g., distasteful affect for a negative judgment, but this affect was now no longer identified with the original percept. The original percept, e.g., thought, sight, etc., was just whatever it was, and in another time and space there was an affect which represented a judgment. With still greater mindfulness and the passage of time, the strength of these judgments began to diminish and there was a slight but detectable sense of things just being a little more "what they are," rather than being good, bad, etc. The range and pervasiveness of this judging process is difficult to convey, but there were times when I felt almost mentally crippled by the constant checking, limiting, deleting, and proscribing of whole ranges of thoughts and feelings, a process which formerly had been below the threshold of awareness.

There are several other counterproductive factors involved in efforting and achievement in meditation. Firstly these motives seemed to produce agitation and anger, both of which appeared disruptive and reduced sensitivity and insight. In addition the attempt seemed somehow intrapsychically splitting since it had the feeling that "part of me is trying to push another part which the first part doesn't trust." The result was a subtle but significant sense of dissociation in which I felt aware of the energy, agitation, and sometimes strength and power, but also somehow felt very superficial as though I was out of touch with my deeper awareness, a situation which would follow, I suppose, naturally from the process of separating myself from it in order to manipulate it. This seems analogous to the process of objectification which Bugental (1965; 1976) has noted to be a common pervasive feature of existential numbing.

*effort  
and  
achievement*

If you determine your course  
with force or speed,  
You miss the way of the law.

The Buddha (Byrom, 1976)

#### PERCEPTUAL RECOGNITION PROCESS

The perceptual process of recognition, categorization, and naming or labeling a stimulus seems to be important and central to a number of psychological processes. The process



seems to be similar for both internal and external stimuli and to be multiphasic. To date I have managed to identify the following components. At the first awareness of the stimulus there is an arousal and an orientation of attention towards it coupled with an active attempt to recognize it. When the stimulus is identified, there may sometimes be a sense of relaxation or alternatively there may be a fraction of a second of what feels like searching past memories in order to decide how to respond to it. At this stage more attention is focussed on the category or label and less on the stimulus itself. This whole process, however, is markedly susceptible to modification by meditation and this modification is discussed below. The interesting point is that once the stimulus has been identified and labeled, then habitually most of the responses to the stimulus-label complex are actually determined by the label rather than the stimulus per se. Thus, for example, if I experience a feeling which I label either correctly or incorrectly as fear, then I will tend to respond to “fear” with all its connotations and associations rather than to the percept itself, which may be so mild as to warrant very little reaction or may actually have been misidentified and not be fear at all. However, if it has been misidentified, I will continue to react to it as though it were fear unless I choose to go back and reexperience the feeling directly.

*labeling  
stimuli*

Interestingly the extent of reaction to the stimulus itself as opposed to the label seems to be a direct function of the degree of mindfulness or meditative awareness. If I am mindful, then I tend to be focussed on the primary sensations themselves, to label less, and to react to these labels less. For example, there was a period of about six weeks during which I felt mildly depressed. I was not incapacitated, but was uncomfortable, dysphoric and confused about what was happening to me throughout most of the waking day. However, during daily meditation this experience and its affective quality changed markedly. The experience then felt somewhat like being on sensory overload, with many vague ill-defined somatic sensations and a large number of rapidly appearing and disappearing unclear visual images. However, to my surprise, nowhere could I find stimuli which were actually painful. Rather there was just a large input of vague stimuli of uncertain significance and meaning. I would therefore emerge from each sitting with the recognition that I was actually not experiencing any pain and feeling considerably better. This is analogous to Tarthang Tulku's (1974) statement that “The more you go into the disturbance—when you really get in there—the emotional characteristics no longer exist.” It is also reminiscent of the state of affairs in quantum physics. “Our conception of sub-

*becoming  
more  
mindful  
of primary  
sensations*

stance is only vivid as long as we do not face it. It begins to fade when we analyze it . . . the solid substance of things is another illusion" (Commins & Linscott, 1969). Therefore, it may be that appearances of solidity and stasis in both the inner and outer universe are merely illusions reflecting the limitations of our perception.

However, within a very short time I would lapse once more into my habitual non-mindful state and when I next became mindful once again I would find that a powerful regression had occurred. That is, I would find that I had been automatically labeling the stimulus complex as depression and then reacting to this label with thoughts and feelings such as "I'm depressed, I feel awful, what have I done to deserve this?," etc. A couple of moments of relaxed mindfulness would be sufficient to switch the focus back to the primary sensations and the recognition once again that I was actually not experiencing discomfort. This process repeated itself endlessly during each day. This effect of mindfulness or phenomenology and reactivity should lend itself to experimental neurophysiological investigation.

The subjective experience above of the perceptual recognition process with its initial arousal prior to identification, identification and sometimes concomitant relief and relaxation, may represent the subjective analogue of the psychophysiological phenomenon called the orientation reaction (for reviews, see Lynn, 1966; Raskin, 1973; Pribram, 1975; Waters, *et al.*, 1977).

This reaction is important at both behavioral and physiological levels and has been postulated to be a mechanism mediating environmental effects on brain anatomy and chemistry (Walsh & Cummins, 1975, 1976a,b). As described objectively the orientation reaction consists of a complex of behavioral and physiological responses which orient the subject to a stimulus and increase perceptual sensitivity. The reaction is most readily elicited by stimuli which are either novel or of historical significance to the subject. Sokolov (1960) has proposed a neural matching model to explain this in which the stimulus initiates a response in the cortex and this response is then compared with cortical neural models of previously experienced stimuli. If the stimulus matches any existing neural model, then the orientation reaction is blocked, but if no match exists, i.e., if the stimulus is a novel one, then the reaction occurs. With repeated presentation of the initially novel stimulus, habituation of the reaction takes place. This would seem to fit with the subjective experience above inasmuch as the initial subjective arousal ceased upon recognition.

*the  
orientation  
reaction*



If the arousal prior to recognition is aversive, as indeed it is sometimes felt, then an interesting situation arises which may provide the basis for explanations of psychopathologies such as paranoia and intolerance of ambiguity. It should be noted, however, that Sokolov's model does not explain the activation of the orientation reaction by familiar but significant stimuli (Lynn, 1966). Thus the finding as described above, that a major portion of reactivity is in response to cognitive labels rather than the percepts which elicit them, is especially interesting since it would provide an explanation of this phenomenon.

In moments of special clarity it has seemed that the recognition (labeling) of a stimulus is followed by an extremely rapid process, of recalling how I responded to it in the past, and choosing a current response. It may be that the existence of this instant of choice represents a crucial demarcation between different psychological models of man. Skinnerian behavior modification at one extreme sees responses as merely choiceless conditioned automaticity. On the other hand, psychologies which emphasize the importance of cognitive mediating processes in determining responses—from several branches of behavior modification (Mahoney, 1974; Thoresen & Mahoney, 1974; Bandura, 1977a,b), all the way through to transpersonal psychology—recognize and emphasize the existence of this choice process even though it may normally reside below perceptual awareness. However, it must be noted that recognition of this choice process tells us nothing about whether it itself is merely a conditioned choiceless stimulus-response chain, but rather merely brings the level of observation and analysis to a much finer level.

*the  
stimulus-  
response  
chain*

Subjectively it is clear that habitual interpretation of stimuli according to expectations, mental set, etc., may lead to misidentification. For example, during the anxiety episodes mentioned elsewhere which occurred most commonly while with someone that I felt very close to, I initially labeled these as due to a fear of intimacy. Having done this the process generalized (stimulus generalization) to situations with other people which I also began to label as fear of intimacy, where in point of fact as detailed elsewhere, these episodes actually turned out to be determined by a number of processes, none of them in fact related to intimacy. The experiences described above all suggest that unconscious labeling and conceptualization is a highly significant process with far-reaching and pervasive effects which when performed without mindfulness may cause a shortcircuiting and misinterpretation of, and loss of contact with, experience resulting in a limiting automaticity and sterotypy. On the other hand, increasing mindfulness may per-

manently weaken and disrupt misinterpretation, automaticity and conditioning. "Any label is entrapping, because labels are limiting, they are finite, they have suffering connected with them" (Ram Dass, 1977, p. 114).

#### FEAR

*over-  
interpreting  
and  
mis-  
labeling*

Fear, in one form or another, was a not infrequent experience especially during the earlier phases. However, during the second retreat, the nature of this experience began to change rather dramatically, and it became apparent that I had been overinterpreting (misattributing) a number of emotional experiences as fear. For example, after the first few days of the retreat as my mind became a little more sensitive, it became apparent that there was a whole range of emotional and somatic responses which were automatically mislabeled as fear. For example, the sudden slamming of a door would elicit a strong sensation in the abdomen and chest which I initially assumed to be fear, whereas a closer examination of the sensation revealed it to be an affectively quite neutral arousal response.

Similarly it became apparent that many of my reactions, e.g., fear, sexual, came not out of an accurate identification of the primary response but rather out of old expectations about the way I would react. Thus, for example, a stimulus would elicit the thought-feeling "I should be scared of that," followed by an emotional reaction which was initially labeled as fear but which on closer examination had a different flavor to it and did not actually seem to be fear. This seems to represent a specific example of the post-stimulus recognition choice point which was discussed above. It also raises, together with the previous discussion on depression, the question of whether the actual sensations underlying any emotion are actually inherently aversive or whether their aversive quality comes purely out of the labeling and expectations that we ascribe to them.

*the  
fear  
of  
death*

One of the major recurrent fears has been of what will happen to me if I continue on this path. This has manifested in a variety of ways and provides an interesting lesson in psychodynamics. Fear of death has been especially prevalent, especially the fear of death of a particular sub-personality or personality complex, and this is described in more detail in Part II. It seemed that this basic fear activated a variety of more superficial ones in ways which interfered with my meditation. Thus, for example, there was a period of several days in which I had intense visual and somatic imagery of



having my toenails ripped off, a fear which had lain dormant since an adolescent reading of Nazi tortures. For several days I was unable to get past this fear until eventually I went into it deeply and found myself suddenly experiencing terror that if I continued with the meditation and did not heed the fear I would die. A similar process occurred with a number of other fears, and I gained the impression that a part of my personality, or what would be called ego in Eastern terminology, was literally fighting for its survival. In doing so it seemed to be activating other latent fears in a way which would interfere with the meditative process and therefore presumably abet its survival. This has also emerged in more subtle ways such as procrastination, forgetting etc., suggestive of Freud's (1914) "psychopathology of everyday life." For example at one stage it became very apparent that to be optimally effective the meditation procedure or mindfulness was going to have to be continuous throughout the day. I therefore decided to draw up a plan of how I could best attempt to work towards this. Some two months later, after almost daily decisions to get it done that day, I began to suspect that perhaps I might be exhibiting a little resistance and so decided to do it that hour. Two days later I felt pretty confident that I had been right about my resistance since there was still no plan in existence. Having decided to do it there and then, within minutes I was in the middle of a full-blown panic attack and watched myself crying "No, no, please don't make me do it, I'll die, don't make me do it, please, please." At times like this the strength of the resistance and defenses against awareness seem remarkably powerful.

As more and more anxieties were confronted and the feared catastrophies failed to materialize, there gradually began to develop a deepening trust in the process. It gradually became more apparent that fear was certainly not necessarily a reason to avoid something. Indeed often it served as a useful signal that here was something which needed looking at and experiencing. In addition it became apparent that there was a certain pattern to at least some of my fears of meditation. Particularly clear patterns included the fear of becoming amotivational without a desire to produce, achieve, or contribute to others. This would come up especially whenever my striving, controlling, and obsessional defenses were under examination. Another factor which assisted this increasing trust was the recognition that any experience could be used as grist for the growthmill. Certain experiences were not necessarily any more growth evoking than others, but rather what was important was the way they were used. This was a recognition of one of the major Vipassana precepts that it is the process of mindfulness

*a deepening  
trust  
in the  
process*

which is important rather than the object, or experience, which is being observed. This is reminiscent of Rajneesh's (1975a) statement that "the only sin is unconsciousness."

allowing  
things  
"to be"

With lessening fear and increasing trust came a greater willingness to allow things to be the way they are. This transition represents an interesting example of interaction between meditation and other inputs. Thus my third retreat was marked by significantly greater "allowing things to be" than previous ones, and this was almost certainly due to a conversation the day prior to the retreat in which a close friend had pointed out how much difficulty I had in "allowing things to be as they were" without worrying, thinking, and planning how to change them. This retreat was marked by a number of new experiences which felt secondary to this thematic switch. There was a considerable increase in feelings of peace and a heightened awareness of the incredible number of models I have of how things should be, and the amount of judgment that goes along with this.

Finally towards the end of the retreat there was a powerful experiential recognition that I do not have to try to change any part of my experiential process. All I need to do is to watch it. The next thought to follow this was the recognition that to some extent I had misused what I had learned over the previous three years of therapy and meditation. I had taken the skills and tools and used them to try to more adroitly change and manipulate my experience. In terms of the approach-avoidance model of health (Walsh & Shapiro, 1978), I had used the information in order to more skillfully approach and avoid rather than to transcend this dichotomy.

Paradoxically, allowing an experience to *be* rather than attempting to change it, seemed to modify it in a beneficial direction. Thus when a percept which I would formerly have changed now arose and I allowed it to be as it was, e.g., anxiety, I would not infrequently have a thought such as "this feeling can't be too bad if I don't have to change it," and as I did, some of the aversiveness of the percept would be reduced and I would feel less need to change it.

Several reactions to this increased allowing became apparent over the weeks succeeding the retreat. There were occasional eruptions of self-punitive anger and hatred (see the section on subpersonalities in Part II) associated with the idea that I had given up striving and was thus weak and cowardly.

There was also an episode involving the eruption of a number of what felt like formerly repressed fears. While sitting quietly



I began to experience a familiar fear, and rather than resisting and attempting to change it as I was accustomed to doing, I just allowed it to be. Shortly thereafter another fear also arose and I allowed it also to be there. There then followed an increasingly rapid eruption of fears until I felt myself to be physically encased in them to the extent that my body felt stiff and difficult to move, and I had the visual image of being completely surrounded by them. It also felt as though it was the allowing which made it possible for them to erupt and, interestingly enough, also seemed to serve to minimize my discomfort. For a while I felt surrounded by and physically encased in the fears, but I also felt remarkably unperturbed and continued to observe them with only minimal discomfort. There was also a gradual but perceptible change in behavior along the lines of reduced worrying about what people would think of me. This was translated into action as a greater willingness to say and do what I thought. This is reminiscent of Rajneesh's (1975b) assertion that "first change your consciousness and behavior will change automatically."

*the  
eruption of  
formerly  
repressed  
fears*

The increased allowing also resulted in a greater sense of congruity between different aspects and levels of being. Whereas formerly a percept might be created and then judged and changed, and possibly the judging and changing mechanism in turn would be judged and changed, now it felt as though these formerly disparate and warring factions were more at peace and more closely aligned. This may be akin to Rogers' (1961) concept of self-acceptance and Bugental's (1965) concept of authenticity.

#### SURRENDER

These experiences have led to a greater understanding of and willingness to surrender to the meditative process. In the West surrender has connotations of succumbing or being overwhelmed but here it is employed more in line with its use in the meditative traditions. Thus with increasing experience I have begun to surrender to the process in the sense of trusting, following, and allowing it to unfold without attempting to change, coerce, or manipulate it and without necessarily requiring prior understanding of what I may be about to go through or predicting the outcome. Thus, for example, one of my major fears has been the threat of losing certain psychological and intellectual abilities, e.g., of losing control, intellectual skills, and scientific capacities. This seems reminiscent of Fadiman's (1977) statement that one of the major barriers to moving on to the next level is always the fear of losing that which we have.

*trusting  
the  
process*

Thus although I need to make it very clear that this surrender is far from complete for me, it has come a long way since first beginning. The experiences which seem to have contributed to this are as follows. First of all, to the best of my knowledge the feared catastrophies have not eventuated. Thus, for example, my intellectual and scientific skills seem to have remained intact although there has been a shift in the major areas of interest. In addition, meditation seems to have provided a range of experiences, insights and developments formerly totally unknown to me. Thus, to expect, demand, and limit that which is novel to extensions of that which is already known can prove a major limitation. This is similar to the statement by both Bugental (1965) and Rajneesh (1975a) that growth is always a voyage into the unknown. "Freedom has now become Spinozistic, i.e., the freedom to embrace and love one's own destiny . . . by the discovery of what and who one is, of one's Real Self (à la Horney), and of being eager to surrender to it. This is to let *it* control; to choose freely to be determined by it; this is to transcend the dichotomies 'freedom versus determinism' or 'freedom versus control' " (Maslow, 1966, p. 43). Thus the fear of the unknown has diminished somewhat.

Furthermore it now seems clear that allowing experiences to be as they are, and experiencing them without forcibly trying to change them, is effective. This is especially true when viewed with the recognition that any experience can be used for growth even to the point of perceiving the experience as necessary and perfect for the process. Indeed, recognizing the perfection and functionality of each experience appears to be a highly productive perspective for several reasons. Firstly, it reduces the deleterious agitation, resistance, and eruption of defenses and manipulations which occur secondary to judgment and negative perspectives. Secondly, contrary to my previous beliefs, acceptance and a nonjudgmental attitude towards an experience or situation does not necessarily remove either the motivation or capacity to deal with it in the most effective manner. Thus my prior beliefs were that I *needed* my judgments, aversions, and negative reactions in order to power my motivation to modify the situations and stimuli eliciting them. It should be noted here that the experience of perfection is just that, an experience, which may say more about the psychological state of the individual perceiving it than about the stimulus per se, and may not necessarily in any way vitiate the perceiver's perception of the need to modify it. Finally, there has been recognition that the great meditation teachers really knew what they were talking about. Time and time again I have read descriptions, explanations, and predictions about meditation, the normal psychological state, the states that arise

using  
each  
experience  
for  
growth



with more and more meditation, latent capacities, etc., etc., and have scoffed and argued against them feeling that they were just so removed from my prior experiences and beliefs that they could not possibly be true. However, by now I have had a variety of experiences which I formerly would have believed to be impossible and have gained the experiential background with which to understand more of what is being taught. Thus I now have to acknowledge that these people know vastly more than I do and that it is certainly worth my while to pay careful attention to their suggestions. Thus experiential knowledge may be a major limiting factor for intellectual understanding of psychological processes and consciousness, and even highly intellectually sophisticated non-practitioners may show a grossly deficient comprehension and interpretation of such experiences (Deikman, 1977).

*experiential  
knowledge  
as a  
major  
factor*

It is interesting to note the changes in the nature of the predominant motivation at different stages of this journey. While there has obviously always been considerable seeking and exploring (approach), this seems to have increased with time, while on the other hand the initial levels of avoidance of various experiences seem to have decreased. Most recently there seems to have been some transcendence of this dichotomy as I have begun to allow experiences simply to be and not to do anything to myself or them in response. This is consistent with the recently proposed hypothesis that the approach: avoidance ratio provides a measure of psychological health until it is transcended. At this point the ratio of reactivity to nonreactivity provides a supplementary measure (Walsh & Shapiro, 1978).

#### IDENTIFICATION

Another change which has occurred especially in the second year has been a sense of less identification with and susceptibility to, inner processes and experiences, e.g., affect, pain. Thus, for example, the experience of physical pain during meditation now tends to feel more physically distant, less influential, and less part of, me. Thus I experience a reduced susceptibility to the motivational forces of these stimuli and feel less identified with them. This phenomenon first became apparent shortly after the initial experiences of allowing things to be. This description of disidentification from, and diminished influence of, pain is reminiscent of the phenomenology of pain reduction following narcotics where the pain is described as still there but not so worrisome.

*disidentification  
from  
pain*

A further level of disidentification occurred as a result of adopting the procedure of naming percepts and processes, e.g., "thought thought, feeling feeling, pain pain, etc." The result was a marked increase in disidentification from the internal process and this was particularly noticeable with regard to thoughts. For the first time I now had the experience of my mind being extraordinarily vast and stretching in all dimensions, and of thoughts passing through this vast space in a relatively calm and nondisruptive fashion while I merely sat and watched them. Clearly there was now a nonidentification with some thoughts with which I would have identified previously.

In the light of these experiences it is interesting to consider the role of identification in concepts of health and psychology. Goldstein (1976) has suggested that the degree of disidentification from the mind is a measure of psychological health since disidentification is the primary process for extracting awareness from the conditioned tyranny of the mind. In addition, Walsh & Vaughan (1978a,b) have proposed that differing concepts of identification constitute a major differentiating factor between transpersonal and traditional Western psychologies. Traditionally the latter have recognized only identification with external objects and have defined it as a largely unconscious process in which the individual becomes like or feels the same as something or someone else (Brenner, 1974). Recent views in transpersonal psychology and a variety of Eastern psychologies on the other hand, recognize external identification but state that identification with internal (intrapyschic) phenomena and processes is even more important (Walsh & Vaughan, 1978a). Furthermore they state that this type of identification goes unrecognized by most people, including psychologists, therapists, and behavioral scientists, because we are so involved in this process, i.e., so identified, that it never even occurs to us to question that which it seems so clear that we are. Thus contrary to other Western psychologies, the transpersonal therapist may hold "disidentification from mental content" as a major though advanced therapeutic goal. Since, as described above, reactivity to nonidentified processes is significantly reduced, this raises the interesting question of whether nonidentification may be one of the major mechanisms underlying the attainment of the so-called free or unconditioned state. Supposedly in this state of consciousness the individual is free from all past conditioning (Goleman, 1977). This difficult to comprehend state is described in a variety of traditions and so presumably exists as an at least phenomenologically real state.

*disidentification  
from  
mental  
content*



As I have gradually passed through an increasing number of barriers over the last few years, there has developed a sense of increased psychological flexibility and potential. Along with this there has gradually emerged into awareness an increasing perception of the power of intentionality. With fewer barriers to its effectiveness there is a sense that simply intending to obtain a goal may be sufficient for the mental machinery to complete the task without additional efforting or strain. Thus at this stage it is beginning to feel as though one of the major limitations is the extent to which I can be mindful of and clear in my intention. For example, meditation continues to be marked more by mindlessness than by concentration and on first examination it feels as though the problem is simply forgetting to concentrate. However a more precise examination of the process suggests that at least some of the time the "forgetting" may be an active process in which feelings of not wanting to concentrate and of wanting to direct attention elsewhere arise, and then I identify with them and at this stage actually intend to lose the initial focus of concentration.

*the  
power of  
intentionality*

An interesting extension of this is contained in the close examination of experiencing some unpleasant internal state, e.g., anxiety, depression. What I usually identify with is the experiencer of the unpleasantness and forget that I am also its creator. When I try to change the unpleasantness, I sometimes find that I am blocked, and that subliminal (formerly unconscious) mental maneuvers occur which keep me exactly where I am until I am forced to the conclusion that I am experiencing exactly what "I" (and here I mean an "I" identified with a larger portion of consciousness than simply the experiencer of the unpleasantness) intend. Thus another perspective from which to view this situation is that I am doing an incredible job of creating exactly the experience that I want to create.

#### THOUGHTS

During the last retreat I sometimes found myself experiencing mind as a vast space in which thoughts could be observed to materialize, move, and disappear. They would first be detectable as a physical sensation soon to be accompanied by a visual image. To the physical sensations would soon be added an affective tone and then also a body of information. At my clearest I could watch thoughts materializing into consciousness in the form of a visual image of a bubble arising from the surface of some invisible material, arcing up into the mental space, and then if not identified with, diminishing in

*watching  
thoughts*

size and brightness and disappearing, sometimes back into the material from which it arose. In some cases bubbles would begin to form but then would merge back into the invisible medium from which they appeared without breaking free and reaching clear awareness. The image of an individual thought appeared to be composed of two spherical parts of unequal size and intensity. The largest sphere appeared dull and amorphous, seemed to be composed of affect, and to be carrying a smaller sphere within it. The smaller one appeared brighter, to be situated within the upper portion of the larger, and to be composed of a highly compact body of information, i.e., the cognitive component of the thought.

It seemed that the positionality of the thought in the visual image was directly related to, and informative of, my degree of identification with it. Thus thoughts which I was clearly observing without identification appeared to be in front and to arise out of and return to unconsciousness below me (here I am using "me" in the sense of the observer). However if a thought arose and, after it had appeared, I identified with it, then it seemed that in a very small fraction of a second my awareness moved towards and centered in the sphere, and perhaps especially the brighter information component. Thus I would suddenly find myself in the middle of and surrounded by a complex three-dimensional fantasy. On the other hand, if I gradually became aware that I was already in and identified with a formerly unrecognized thought, then that thought would appear from behind and gradually separate from me.

*the  
relation of  
thoughts  
to  
feelings*

The nature of the thoughts which would arise seemed clearly related to the affect which I was experiencing at that time. Furthermore both would elicit further thoughts and feelings of a similar kind. Thus, if I was experiencing anxiety, then anxiety provoking thoughts would appear and elicit more anxiety in a self-perpetuating stimulus response chain. In this case the background affect, which might be very subtle, would comprise the "felt meaning between the thoughts" as described by Welwood (1976) and would function as an "operator" (Globus, 1977), or context (Erhard, 1977) determining the nature of thoughts and a perspective from which they were viewed.

What then is a thought? Usually we tend to think of thoughts as being distinct from emotions but these experiences would suggest that the demarcation is not so clear. Rather thoughts appear to be comprised of both informational and affective components. Subjectively it seemed that the affect acted as an energizer or carrier wave to power the information component,



or signal wave, into awareness. Certainly at a grosser level it is clear that affective arousal tends to increase the number of thoughts, and this carrier wave-signal wave concept provides a rationale for the meditative approach of reducing desires and arousal as a means of reaching a thought-free state.

The obvious capacity of thoughts to act as components of stimulus-response chains raises some extraordinarily interesting questions concerning conditioning and identification. It seemed that if I was watching as a non-identified observer then one thought did not necessarily stimulate another. However, if I did identify with it, then it seemed that there would very rapidly arise multiple cascades of further thoughts so that I would rapidly be buried within thoughts and fantasies within thoughts and fantasies. That is, I would almost immediately be back again in my multilayered fantasy universe. Thus identification with a single thought may be all that is necessary to remove us from the here and now and to initiate stimulus response chains.

During the brief (seconds at most) formless experiences free of identifiable thoughts and feelings, another phenomenon emerged. It seems very difficult to stay in these states apparently because of the mind's active radar-like searching for stimuli. At other times when there is no shortage of stimuli the searching seems to be for specific categories of percepts, e.g., threat, fear, etc., but in this state the sought characteristics seem to be broader, i.e., form or differentiable stimulus of any type as opposed to the formless. As previously discussed, the searching process itself appears to generate stimuli and to thus end the formless or stimulus-free period. This is consistent with Ram Dass' (1975) statement that it is ultimately necessary to give up attachment to all form. Some of these states, as well as others, may be extraordinarily pleasurable and may give one the sense of being totally surrounded by, bathed in, and composed of, such feelings as love, compassion, lightness, and bliss. Indeed, the intensity of these pleasures may far exceed the range of most nonmeditative experiences.

*staying  
in  
thought-free  
states*

#### PERCEPTUAL SENSITIVITY

One of the most fundamental changes has been an increase in perceptual sensitivity which seems to include both absolute and discrimination thresholds. Examples of this include both a more subtle awareness of previously known percepts and novel identification of previously unrecognized phenomena.

*enhanced  
sensitivity  
and  
clarity*

Sensitivity and clarity frequently seem enhanced following a meditation sitting or retreat. Thus, for example, at these times it seems that I can discriminate visual forms and outlines more clearly. It also feels as though empathy is significantly increased and that I am more aware of other people's subtle behaviors, vocal intonations, etc., as well as my own affective responses to them. The experience feels like having a faint but discernible veil removed from my eyes, and that the veil is comprised of hundreds of subtle thoughts and feelings. Each one of these thoughts and feelings seems to act as a competing stimulus or "noise" which thus reduces sensitivity to any one object. Thus after meditation any specific stimulus appears stronger and clearer, presumably because the signal:noise ratio is increased. These observations provide a phenomenological basis and possible perceptual mechanism to explain the findings that meditators in general tend to exhibit heightened perceptual sensitivity and empathy (Lesh, 1970; Brown, 1971; Upudua, 1973; Leung, 1973; Davidson *et al.*, 1976; for a review see Shapiro & Giber, 1978).

*visual  
images*

Visual images during meditation constitute another example. Visual images go through a process of appearing and then after a variable period of time disappearing, or rising and passing away. Thus when an image arises there is the possibility that I will become completely lost in and identified with it so that my experience is of living in the fantasy and experience created by the image. On the other hand, I may recognize the image for what it is and be able to watch it without identification or getting lost in it and forgetting that I am meditating. This recognition may occur at various stages which seem to come more rapidly with practice.

*the  
changing  
nature  
of  
experience*

With increased sensitivity has seemed to come an increased awareness of the continuously changing nature of experience. More subtle awareness leads to finer and finer and more and more rapid discriminations of change within what formerly seemed to be a static experience. Thus, for example, during the periods between thoughts the general background of awareness may initially appear uniform and relatively constant, but with a finer awareness each of the smallest component areas seems to be in continuous flux. A useful analogy to this might be the phenomenon of "flicker fusion threshold." Thus, for example, when a light is turned on and off more and more rapidly there comes a point at which the flicker can no longer be noticed and the flicker fusion threshold at which this occurs is a function of perceptual sensitivity. Accounts by advanced meditators suggest that this phenomenon of continuous



change ultimately reaches dramatic existentially threatening levels at which the impermanent nature of all phenomena is recognized and the individual is left with the realization that there is nothing which can afford permanent security (Buddhagosa, 1923). This is reminiscent of progress in modern philosophy and physics which now advances a dynamic ontology of reality as an ever-changing process (Heisenberg, 1958; Capra, 1975).

This also raises the question of an interesting experiment to perform with meditators; namely, determining the flicker fusion threshold and tachistoscopic recognition skills at various stages of meditation and comparing it with that of nonmeditators.

One unexpected demonstration of greater sensitivity has been the occurrence of the synesthetic perception of thoughts. Synesthesia, or cross modality perception, is the phenomenon in which stimulation of one sensory modality is perceived in several, as for example, when sound is seen and felt as well as heard (Marks, 1975). Following the enhanced perceptual sensitivity which occurred during my prior psychotherapy, I began to experience this phenomenon not infrequently, suggesting that it may well occur within all of us though usually below our thresholds (Walsh, 1976). Now during moments of greater meditative sensitivity I have begun to experience this cross modality perception with purely mental stimuli, e.g., thoughts. Thus, for example, as previously described I may initially experience a thought as a feeling and subsequently become aware of a visual image before finally recognizing the more familiar cognitive information components. This mental synesthetic perception has interesting implications inasmuch as it lends support to Buddhist psychology which views mind as a sensory modality analogous to vision and hearing (Buddhagosa, 1923).

*the  
synesthetic  
perception  
of  
thoughts*

Another novel type of perception seems to have occurred as a result of a change in meditative technique in which I began the process of naming mental phenomenon. As previously described, this resulted in less identification with thoughts and feelings, less active focussing of attention on them, and hence a sense of being further removed from them and less able to clearly identify their precise nature, e.g., anger, greed, etc. However, with continued practice I have begun to find myself gradually but increasingly able to recognize their nature without close focused attention. This has resulted in an increased recognition of affects, motivations, and subtle defensive ma-

neuers and manipulations. Indeed these latter recognitions seem to now constitute the sensitivity limiting factor since the discomfort which attends their more frequent perception is often sufficient to result in a defensive contraction of awareness.

The following hypothesis is experientially derived and highly tentative but may provide a useful model of growth through meditation and be open to empirical testing. In both therapy and meditation it feels as though the greatest potential for change occurs during the moments of mindfulness. Furthermore, the greater the perceptual sensitivity, the greater is the range and depth of experience. Thus the rate of growth may be proportional to the product of perceptual sensitivity and the proportion of time spent in mindfulness.

#### OTHER MEDITATIONS

*meta-  
meditation*

All of the previous discussion has concerned insight meditation, but there are two other varieties with which I have experimented briefly. These are the Buddhist meta-meditation or loving-kindness meditation, and mantra. Meta-meditation consists of the repetition of simple phrases such as the following.

May I be happy,  
May I be free of suffering,  
May I be free,  
May I be liberated.  
As I am happy,  
so may all beings be happy, etc.

This can be varied to emphasize family, friends, adversaries, etc., and is then sometimes used in a progression from those people for whom you have most affection to those for whom you have least. For me this meditation has been of varying effectiveness, but has certainly sometimes resulted in feelings of intense love. The most outstanding example was when I used it frequently during a one-week retreat and found it very effective in eradicating long-standing feelings of resentment towards a particular person. The technique of generating feelings of love and then focussing in a hierarchical fashion on people for whom one feels varying degrees of affection seems analogous to the behavior modification procedure of systematic desensitization (Hilgard & Bower, 1975; Rimm & Masters, 1975), except that the state which is being conditioned is love rather than relaxation. The use of such states may have



considerable implications for the extension of behavior modification and suggests that the Buddha was familiar with the principles of this science some two and one half millenia before its official birth.

The second approach was the use of mantra, a single phrase repeated for prolonged periods, e.g., days or weeks. For some two months I attempted to maintain a mantra continuously during all waking hours. For the first week I used an English phrase, but found that it felt somehow discordant and so began using the most common of all mantras, "*Om mane padme hum.*"

*using a  
mantra*

To date it has proved extraordinarily difficult to maintain the repetition and I would guess that I was unable to do this for more than about five percent of the time. The extent to which I could maintain the mantra during various activities seemed to provide a good index of how much attention they commanded and how lost into them I became. Thus, for example, walking and driving were relatively easy, whereas reading, writing, and conversing proved very difficult.

However, even this small five percent proved sufficient to elicit detectable effects. These seem to be of four major types and to be mediated by a somewhat larger number of mechanisms. The first effect was to increase the amount of time in which I was mindful. This seems to result from prolonging an episode of mindfulness because of having a clear perceptual focus for it. In addition, during periods when I became unmindful, the mantra sometimes continued unattended long enough for me to recognize it and be reminded.

*the  
effects of  
using a  
mantra*

A second function seems to be one of attitude change. Thus while the mantra was going, I was reminded that my intention was to use this present experience, whatever it might be, in order to learn and grow, i.e., karma yoga, rather than just to deal with the situation.

Thirdly, maintaining the mantra seemed to reduce my identification with, and tendency to get lost in, fantasies and emotional reactions. Maintaining the mantra meant that part of my awareness and intention must remain consciously focussed and could not be swallowed up with consequent loss of mindfulness and self-awareness, by the emotions and fantasies. Thus, their ability to motivate and compel was reduced and it seemed impossible to become completely lost in them while even a small proportion of awareness was under conscious control.

Finally, the mantra seemed to provide a microcosm of my relationship with everything else. Thus, there were times when it sped up, slowed down, I forgot, I forgot again, and barriers to continuing it arose as did all sorts of emotional reactions, e.g., anger, frustration, embarrassment, etc. Thus, I found myself having to give up my models of the way it is meant to sound, of how long it should take to get it going, to let go my frustration, etc. It thus seems a deceptively simple tool with far reaching potential and one which I certainly intend to pursue further.

*Part II of this discussion is scheduled to appear in the next volume of the Journal.—Editor.*

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INITIAL MEDITATIVE EXPERIENCES:  
PART II

Roger N. Walsh  
*University of California Medical School—Irvine  
Orange, California  
and  
Mill Valley, California*

*Part II of this article concludes the author's report on his experiences and reflections during and after a series of Vipassana (insight) meditation retreats. Part 1 of this article appeared in Volume 9, Number 2 of the Journal—Editor.*

It is the mind that maketh good or ill  
That maketh wretch or happy, rich or poor.

Edmund Spencer

Mind control is not your birthright. Those who succeed owe their liberation to perseverance.

Ramana Maharshi

SUBPERSONALITIES

During the meditation retreats, another major unexpected recognition was the existence of an identifiable subpersonality. This seems to have evolved from an initially powerful and integral component of my total personality into a weaker, dissociated, and partially autonomous subpersonality—an evolution which is still in progress. The recognition of a subpersonality arose through a powerful self-anger and hatred with which I judged myself whenever I failed to meet certain

*evolution  
of a  
subpersonality*

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The author wishes to thank the Foundations Fund for Research in Psychiatry which supported him with a fellowship during the period in which this paper was written.

*early  
subpersonality  
characteristics*

standards, and which I also employed to motivate myself to perform. In my teens I had deliberately cultivated it as an aid to performance and achievement, and it certainly provided powerful energy for these purposes. However, during therapy it became apparent that this subpersonality had become partially autonomous—it was running me as much as I was governing and utilizing it. This situation manifested itself in a variety of ways, through overwork and a limited willingness to allow myself to enjoy daily life. When it first began to erupt in therapy, I would find myself livid with rage, swearing and berating myself. At other times I would experience feelings of an uncertain fearful nature, accompanied by images of being beaten, mauled, smothered with feces, and stabbed, etc., by a powerful authority figure. Some months after I had left therapy, it became apparent that these images expressed a conflict between a punitive component and my remaining personality.

In time, I began to feel less identified with this anger. When it erupted into awareness during meditation, I found myself able to watch it, rather than always being caught up in it. Concomitantly, the images changed and mirrored this evolution. The attacker was now a vague, shadowy figure, which in turn became an image of me. Over the months this image became smaller, less forceful, less sadistic, and even distraught at the damage it was doing. At the next stage, the image became a small, black, frightened boy whose black coating readily came off when rubbed gently.

*transformation  
of  
subpersonality*

At about this time there suddenly appeared in the images a huge angel carrying an even larger spear of light. For some months the angel remained as a silent bystander, who was simply present while the small devil-boy continued to grow less offensive and even friendly. Eventually the boy disappeared from the scene for short intervals, though periodically returning to goad or threaten me. Finally it became apparent that the devil-boy was going to be absent as much as present, but he assured me that he would be keeping an eye on me and would "get me if I got out of hand." At this stage the angel broke silence, saying, "You don't need me anymore," handed me his spear and disappeared into the sky leaving me with a feeling of loneliness and bewilderment. The bewilderment was compounded when a few days later there appeared on the imaginal horizon a huge body of horsemen representing all the armies of the world, who galloped up and announced that they were at my service. More than a little surprised and puzzled, I watched myself procrastinate, and dismissed them saying that I was not yet ready to use them, and then, weary from the strain of psychological processing and responsibility, walked into my family's house to play.



There followed a gap of some six months, until one meditation where I deliberately chose to experience the angry personality again. This time there erupted an image of a small, jet-black, demonic figure with blazing cat's eyes who maliciously informed me that it was going to kill me if it was the last thing it did, and that I was never going to be rid of it. The demon seemed to epitomize evil, and it remained unchanged until the thought arose, "That's me." In that instant it became apparent that this figure represented all the aspects of myself which I judged negatively and wanted to deny. Immediately the role relationship between the images of the demon and myself changed and I became the dominant figure. Instantly there began an imaginal orgy of angry retribution in which I gleefully tortured it. Subsequently this image disappeared and to date has only occasionally returned, and then in fragmentary fashion. These fragments have suggested that while the process is not entirely complete, much of the energy tied up in this system seems to have become functionally available, providing an increased sense of strength, energy, and will.

*changes  
in  
available  
energy*

Paralleling these imagery changes there was an evolution in the relationship between the angry component and my remaining personality. Initially the anger had dominated, instructing and berating the total personality—"You hopeless cretin, what have you done to feel good about? I'm not going to let you feel happy," etc. This gradually changed in both tone and content, from demanding to pleading, and then to a desperate entreaty in which it seemed that this subpersonality was fighting for its very existence—"Please don't enjoy this. If you keep on meditating like this, I'll die. I don't want to die. Please don't." Meditation itself became terrifying, as did other growth experiences, since they were all apparently perceived as ultimately leading to its death. The extent to which this angry, punitive component was seen as a separate personality can be judged from the fact that I began referring to it as "he" and feeling quite compassionate for his terror.

The evolution of this process, which now spans some four years, has been multidimensional. Projection onto authority figures has given way to a recognition of them as a part of myself, followed by a disidentification, with the apparent formation of an autonomous subpersonality. This subpersonality was initially dominant, but has become weaker, less frequent, and more subtle. It is less controlling, more fearful, fighting for its survival. Most recently, this sense of enmity seems to be decreasing, and is being replaced by acceptance, and even loving coexistence.

*weakening  
of  
subpersonality*

conceptions  
of  
subpersonalities

These experiences raise a number of fascinating questions regarding the nature and genesis of subpersonalities. A variety of disciplines have recognized their existence, although they have been named in different ways. Thus while Assagioli (1965) named them "subpersonalities," Jung (1961) labeled them as "complexes" and Gurdjieff considered them as "separate and distinct 'I's'" (Speeth, 1975), and stated that "Man has no permanent and unchangeable I" (Ouspensky, 1949, p. 59). Lilly (1972), using a computer analogy, considers them subprograms, while Tart (1975a), using an altered states of consciousness paradigm, might describe them as "identity states" and considers them as practically universal, though unrecognizable by the individual except when trained in self-observation.

These descriptions raise the question of whether we may not all have subpersonalities of varying strengths and salience, and whether there may not be a continuum of subpersonalities, with clinical cases of multiple personalities representing only an extreme example. Interestingly, the secondary personality in these cases usually possesses features which are quite unacceptable to and repressed by the first (Nemiah, 1975). Thus, for example, in *The Three Faces of Eve* (Thigpen & Clekley, 1957), a highly voluptuous and psychopathic Eve Black would periodically erupt out of the very prim and proper Eve White. It is also characteristic of these cases that the primary personality is usually unaware of subsequent ones, but the reverse is not true. Furthermore, there seems to be a rapid all-or-none transition between personalities as though there were some type of threshold phenomenon operating. Therefore, strong subpersonalities may develop, but awareness of them and their emergence is strongly repressed until they are sufficiently strong enough to overwhelm the repression and become, at least temporarily, dominant. This raises the question of whether dissociation and repression may represent the essential features for the development of subpersonalities.

a  
tentative  
model

The question of how best to conceptualize the nature and genesis of subpersonalities is a difficult one, but the following may afford a tentative but heuristically useful model. The essential feature of the model is its hierarchical organization of components. These components may be considered to be "programs" and "metaprograms" if one uses Lilly's (1972) analogue for the human biocomputer, or of "behavior habits" if one uses a social learning theory of behavior modification (Bandura, 1969). A personality would be constituted by a higher order component, such as a metaprogram capable of activating and programming components subordinate to it in the hierarchy. A program which had either less power or was



slightly lower in the hierarchy might thus constitute the basis for a subpersonality, while programs of approximately equal strength and level, and which exerted a dissociative inhibition on the other, might constitute the basis for multiple personality.

The process described above, in which an initially powerful and sometimes dominant subpersonality weakened and seemed to feel its survival threatened, might be represented by a program whose lessening power reduced its influence on higher levels yet still left it able to function relatively autonomously and activate lower programs, such as survival. (It may be that programs such as this are structured to maintain their own survival.) Thus the evolution of a subpersonality may offer an analogue for the evolutionary changes that the ego as a whole undergoes during meditation. If "ego" is synonymous with "defensive doing" as opposed to simply "being" (see Walsh, 1977; Globus, 1977, 1978; Walsh & Shapiro, 1978), then the ego would represent the highest order of defense or emergency metaprogram.

*subpersonality  
and  
ego*

The subpersonality described here as well as the examples of multiple personality would seem to fit well with the Jungian "shadow" which represents some of the unacceptable aspects and components of the psyche. Although clearly incomplete, the above description does suggest that meditation may speed the integration of the shadow, a process which is usually not complete until well into the second half of life (Elkind, 1975).

#### FATIGUE

One of the most clearly marked effects of an intensive meditation retreat shows in altered sleep needs and arousal levels. Usually for the first two or three days, I find myself feeling considerable fatigue, but after that there is a dramatic drop in sleep needs. At this stage usually about four hours suffice, and even then I sometimes find myself going to sleep simply to escape awareness. A similar but slower trend towards less sleep has also been occurring in my daily life and has resulted in the reduction of some three hours a night over the last three years. At the same time my response to the experience of fatigue has also changed. When I first observed fatigue closely, I found myself reacting with discomfort, agitation, and avoidance. My fears of sleep deprivation proved to be surprisingly strong, and included beliefs that I wouldn't be able to function, couldn't concentrate, would lose control and go crazy, and experience extreme discomfort. While these fears still partially control me,

*reduced  
sleep  
needs*

they are no longer as strong as they were, and my reactions to fatigue have changed considerably. Now there is less avoidance, agitation, and discomfort, and fatigue is beginning to feel like just another altered state in which I can learn to experience and function as in any other state. This is consistent with studies showing that short sleepers are less prone to worry, and are less upset by sleep deprivation (Hartmann *et al.*, 1972; Meddis, 1977).

#### SPIRITUAL MATERIALISM

Although I have experienced many beneficial effects of meditation, there have also been some deleterious consequences or, perhaps more precisely, it is obvious that I have at times misused the process for ego-gratification. Such a misuse is a commonly recognized trap inherent in all meditation-yogic traditions and probably in all growth disciplines. It has been well described by Trungpa (1975) who labels it "spiritual materialism," and who states that any and all techniques, experiences, and insights are likely to be used by the ego for defensive purposes wherever possible. Certainly my own experience would seem to bear this out. I have seen myself—and others have seen me—using meditative experiences for personal achievement, social prestige and manipulation, and as a way of avoiding unpleasant experiences. Most amazing of all is the rapidity with which a phenomenon may be subverted. Thus, for example, I may have a valuable insight, and within seconds find myself scheming how I can best use it for egocentric purposes. A special variant of this has developed since I began writing this paper. Now I sometimes find myself judging insights and experiences for their potential literary impact, and this seems to increase my attachment to "insights," with a consequent occasional agitation and disruption of meditation. Certainly there is always available the potential for "the awful smell of enlightenment" (Kapleau, 1967), an exaggerated regard for an experience. Thus, meditation is a tool which can be put to a variety of uses, but the intention of the meditator may be a prime determinant of the outcome.

*"using"  
meditative  
experiences*

#### IDENTITY

Undoubtedly the most fundamental question raised by the practice of meditation is that of identity. Most commonly in the West this question is framed in the form of "Who am I?", meaning, what kind of person am I? During the last six months it has become apparent that intensive meditation raises the much more fundamental question of "*What* am I?" Since



the experiences that arise within meditation are so inconsistent with the concepts of identity which we usually hold, they call into question our usually unquestioned beliefs and assumptions about who and what we are. The following paragraphs, then, represent an attempt first to describe some of my experiences and then to examine some of their implications for different models of man.

The following experiences are described in the order in which they occurred over a period of some six months, most often while in meditation retreats. There is no clear progression, nor is their precise relationship to one another clear.

The first experience occurred during a moment or two of special clarity in which I was observing—in what I thought to be a non-identified manner—the rising of thoughts. However, I suddenly noticed that I was in fact identifying with, and hence unaware of, certain thoughts, mainly “I” thoughts, e.g., “I’m not identified with any of these thoughts.” Having seen this process, I was able to observe without identification at least some of these “I” thoughts, although obviously I cannot say what percentage of them, since identification with them renders them impossible to observe. At this point there was a moment of heightened clarity, and I saw that “I” thoughts were somehow differentiated from others; they were somehow grabbed by and absorbed into consciousness. It seemed as though the “I” thoughts were recognized as belonging to a special category and were then somehow grasped and incorporated by the awareness which had been watching them. In the instant of recognizing this, the “I” thoughts ceased to be differentiated and grasped, and then existed as “just thoughts” without their former significance. Immediately there followed a powerful awareness accompanied by intense emotion that “I” did not exist, and all that existed were “I” thoughts following rapidly one after another. Almost simultaneously the thought, “My God, there’s no one there!” arose, and my consciousness reverted back to its accustomed state. It is difficult to convey the power of these seconds of experience, but it was sufficient to activate “the awful smell of enlightenment” and to disrupt my meditation for the next two days.

*identifying  
with  
“I” thoughts*

A further sense of the non-existence of the observer or “I” has come from attempting to focus awareness on the observer. In this procedure, concentration on objects, such as the breath, is developed first, and then turned back on the observer. Due to the limits of my concentration, my attempts have seldom lasted more than a few seconds, but the experiences have all been somewhat similar. Often there is identification with that which is looking for the observer, the latter apparently having simply

*non-existence  
of  
the  
observer*

switched positions. However, on those occasions when I have been able to avoid this identification, I have had the experience of looking into darkness and sensing that there is no one there.

Another, more frequent experience has arisen within the last few months as a result of a change in technique in which percepts and mental objects are named (as previously described in Part I), e.g., thought thought, anger anger, etc. The process of naming objects seems to reduce the risk of identifying with them. Thus there have been periods lasting several minutes in which I have had the experience of being a point in a vast space constituted by my awareness, in which thoughts, feelings, and percepts occurred, but which were separate from and did not necessarily influence me. During and after these states there is the feeling that what I usually identify with is the mental content, e.g., thoughts and feelings, and that this "I" represents a very narrowed, limited, and driven portion of awareness which has lost sight of that which is much larger. This progression from lesser to greater awareness seems to begin with an initial identification with and a failure to recognize thoughts, then a recognition of some thoughts and a beginning awareness of the space between them which usually had an affective quality attached to it, and finally a sense of vast space or context within which these phenomena occur.

*interspaces  
between  
thoughts*

These interspaces between thoughts may represent the "transitive parts" of the stream of consciousness described by William James (1890). He commented that "The great blunder to which all schools are liable must be the failure to register them (transitive parts), and the undue emphasizing of the more substantive parts of the stream." These interspaces often possess an affective quality which may correspond to Welwood's (1976) "felt meaning," which he describes as "yet undifferentiated and unarticulated meaning." In my experience, this felt meaning corresponds to emotion, which, as previously described, is not totally distinct from thought, but rather appears to lie on one end of a continuum and to possess a high ratio of affect to information. Both thought and felt meaning appear to occur within the context of the vast space which may correspond to the "big, big mind" described by Suzuki Roshi (1970).

One particularly powerful experience occurred during a meditation in which I was having great difficulty extricating myself from identification with numerous fantasies. I would realize that I was lost in a fantasy, bring my attention back to the breath, and then rapidly get lost in yet another fantasy with which I would stay identified for varying periods of time before recognizing what was happening, and beginning the cycle



again. Over the course of a sitting, this process of disidentification became more rapid. Eventually there came a point at which I seemed to be recognizing the fantasies for what they were almost as soon as they appeared, and I had a sense of sitting behind them, letting go of one after another at a faster and faster rate. This process seemed to speed up more and more until at one instant I found myself looking at what appeared to be another fantasy, and that fantasy was what I thought I was. That is, I felt that my sense of identity—e.g., the person, the striver, psychiatrist, writer, worrier, achiever, player, etc.—was just another fantasy, a creation of mine whose illusion of continuity and permanence was derived from the piecing together of salient patterns and behaviors, and that who I really was was the awareness which had created—and was now watching—this fantasy. In the next instant there arose a visual image of a huge sphere of consciousness, on one side of which was a small mask of a face called “Roger.” “I,” a sphere of consciousness, was looking at the world through the eyes of the mask, identifying with the mask, and forgetting everything else that I was. Immediately there appeared a sense of awe, followed by two thoughts: “Now I understand what they mean when they say, ‘You are not who you think you are’.” And, “I already am everything I am striving to be—I just don’t recognize it.”

*identity  
and  
disidentification*

A somewhat similar image arose during an experience of “big mind,” as described earlier in Part I. The image was comprised of a large clear sphere representing a consciousness overlaid by an incredibly complex superstructure made up of desires, fears, and anxieties, together with plans, doings, and strivings aimed at fulfilling the desires. This superstructure was in ceaseless activity and of such incredible complexity that it was impossible to figure it out or work one’s way out of it, especially since any effort to modify it only fed more energy into it and so was self-perpetuating and self-defeating. However, when this consciousness turned its attention towards itself—towards the big mind—and withdrew attention from the desires and merely allowed them to be, then the whole elaborate superstructure was drained of energy, collapsed, and disappeared. This image is especially interesting because of Tart’s (1975b) observation that states of consciousness are maintained and energized by focussing attention on them.

Assuming that these experiences are, at least, partially valid sources of information, what do they indicate about identity? The one thing I am certain of is that I am not who and what I thought I was. The following represents an attempt to conceptualize my experiences and current understanding of this process. Clearly these experiences and concepts lie close to the

limits of my present perception and understanding and, hence, must be regarded as highly tentative.

“I”  
as  
mental  
content

What seems clear is that who I thought I was represented a product of identification with mental content: that is, I thought I was my mental content. By identifying myself solely in this way, I lost sight of the broader context which held this content. It seems that what I identify with runs me, and it provides the motivation and the context within which I interpret other content, determine my reality, and adopt a logic. Thus, identification with mental content transforms that content into the context which holds, interprets, attributes, and elicits other content in a manner which is congruent with and reinforces this context. For example, if the thought arises, “I’m scared,” and I observe it as just another thought and do not identify with it, then it exerts little influence on me. However, if I identify with it, then the reality at that moment is that *I am scared*, and I am likely to identify with a whole series of fearful thoughts and to interpret any nondescript feelings as fear. Thus identification sets in train a self-fulfilling prophetic process. The thought “I’m scared,” when identified with, constitutes a belief, or in behavioral terms, a self-attribution. In the light of this it is interesting to recall Lilly’s (1972) statement that, “Within the province of the mind what I believe to be true is true within experimental and experiential limits.”

“I”  
as  
illusion

It appears then that the two major (and to some extent mutually exclusive) factors determining the sense of who I am appear to be mindfulness and identification with mental contents. Mindfulness of an experience affords the potential for disidentification and for reducing context to content, and in so doing minimizes its motivational influence. Awareness thus becomes the ultimate context for experience. If the “I” or observer, which is what I usually think myself to be, is also an illusion of identification with mental content, then this leaves only awareness and content and both are effectively devoid of any “I”; that is, there remains just an impersonal flux of mental phenomena and the awareness of them. This concept seems analogous to the Buddhist doctrine of *anatta* or “not self,” which states that both awareness and objects of awareness exist as automatic processes devoid of any “I.” If this is true, and at this stage I am forced to agree that it probably is, then it provides an interesting solution to a long unanswered mystery of neurophysiology. Researchers have been able to follow the perception-induced train of neural excitation up the sensory pathways into the brain, but have long been puzzled as to how the excitation of the brain’s sensory areas is “observed.” Various types of observing homunculi, “the ghost in the machine” (Globus, 1977b), have been hypothesized, but none have pro-



duced particularly satisfying explanations. Now it would seem that the subjective experience of the observer is an illusion, and the question becomes one of explaining the illusion rather than explaining an observer. Presumably the illusion could be explained in terms similar to the "flicker-fusion threshold phenomenon" as described in Part I. The extremely rapid frequency of thoughts and percepts would produce a fusion effect and the illusion of continuity. Thus, this perception of continuity, when identified with, would constitute the "I."

In view of the above, it is interesting to speculate that one definition of ego might be, "That which comes into existence when consciousness identifies with anything other than itself." Since consciousness has the potential to encompass anything conceivable, it follows that, in identifying with anything other than consciousness, this potential will be limited. This limitation might include the loss of awareness of the original potential, the assumption of properties of the mental content with which it identifies, and control by this content. Thus, for example, the thought "I am angry," if not identified with, might be merely observed without reaction to it. On the other hand, with identification, one would, to all intents and purposes be angry, lose awareness of any part of consciousness which might remain unidentified and of the potential to disidentify at any moment, and be powerfully motivated by this anger. The individual would thus, through identification, have committed what is described in so many non-Western psychologies as the primary error, namely, forgetting who he really is and forgetting that he forgot.

*ego  
as  
limited  
consciousness*

It is fascinating to speculate on the experience of an individual who has disidentified from all mental content. Presumably, if there is no identification, then there can be no dichotomy of identification:non-identification, or self:non-self. Such a being would presumably identify self with both nothing and everything. Thus, the process of disidentification may provide a mechanism which explains a variety of states of consciousness in which perception is described as nondualistic, and the individual may feel that he or she is connected with, one with, or is, the universe. Such states may be the goal of a variety of meditative disciplines (Goleman, 1977; Wilber, 1977) and are often described as "higher" states in the sense of Tart's (1972b) description of higher states as possessing the potentialities and functions of "lower" states as well as additional ones.

*disidentification  
and  
states  
of  
consciousness*

We are dominated by everything with which our self becomes identified. We can dominate and control everything from which we disidentify.

Assagioli, 1965

As long as we are identified with an object, that is bondage.

Wei Wu Wei, 1970

As awareness becomes focussed on the mental contents in meditation, identification and constriction of awareness are reduced and other states of consciousness are experienced. The sense of identity begins to shift from external to internal features of reference, and from more conscious to originally subliminal features of awareness, until ultimately disidentification is complete and there is no distinction between self and non-self. Personal meditative experience, plus a variety of meditative texts, suggest that unrecognized beliefs constitute the operators or algorithms which mediate, instruct, guide, and maintain the identificatory constriction of awareness. These beliefs must first be recognized and opened to possible disconfirmation in order to allow growth and ultimate transcendence. It may well be that beliefs are adopted as strategic defensive decisions about who and what we must be in order to survive and function optimally (*see* Walsh & Vaughan, 1978).

*identification  
and  
the goals  
of  
therapies*

If identification represents a fundamental differentiating feature between traditional Western psychologies and Eastern and transpersonal orientations, then it is interesting to compare the goals of the respective therapies and growth disciplines. In general, the Western therapies aim at changing the mental content with which we identify. Most commonly this involves changing negative self-attributions (thoughts) to positive ones. The Eastern and transpersonal psychologies, on the other hand, aim to foster self-awareness and to remove identification with any mental content, positive or negative. This difference might be conceptualized in terms of first versus second order change (Watzlawich *et al.*, 1974), content versus process, or content versus context change. Changing context automatically leads to changes in content, though the reverse may not necessarily be true (Erhard, 1977; 1978).

A person in the West, for example, with chronic recurrent thoughts such as, "I'm just no good, I don't deserve to feel any better than this," would be viewed as having low self-esteem, poor ego strength, or negative self-attributions, according to the psychotherapist's particular discipline. If a psychodynamic approach were employed, then the therapist might attempt to determine the genesis of these thoughts. A "reality" approach would have the client examine their reality, whereas a behavioral approach might attempt to modify thoughts directly by environmental change, differential reinforcement, and cognitive approaches (Mahoney, 1974; Thoresen & Mahoney, 1974; Rimm & Masters, 1975). Whatever the approach, the effective aim would be to reduce the number of such thoughts, to re-



place them with positive ones, and thus to modify the client's belief about *what type of person* he or she is.

An Eastern meditative approach, on the other hand, would view this problem as only one example of the many types of identification with which the client would be unwittingly involved. The distinguishing feature of this particular identification would be merely that it caused discomfort of clinical proportions. The meditative approach would involve training awareness with the aim of disidentifying from all thoughts, thus resulting not only in a different belief about what type of person he or she is, but an alteration in the even more fundamental perception of *what* he or she is. A transpersonal psychotherapist, on the other hand, might well employ both approaches to varying degrees depending on the individual. We might paraphrase Freud's classic statement on the aim of therapy: "Where *id* was, the ego shall be" as "Where context (identification) was, there content shall be." In practice, the distinction between the use of these two approaches may not be mutually exclusive, since a variety of meditation teachers recognize the usefulness and even the desirability of content changes as a sometimes necessary and facilitating preliminary to intensive meditative practices (Kennett Roshi, 1975). The two approaches may facilitate each other, at least in the early meditative stages, but it would seem that, ultimately, the goals of meditation extend far beyond and transcend those of traditional Western psychotherapy. This comparison is starkly outlined by Wilber (1977) who states that Western therapies help us prevent the dream from becoming a nightmare, while the Eastern approaches help us to awaken.

#### RE-ENTRY

At the completion of a retreat the re-entry into the world may provide quite an experience in its own right. In my case, for a day or so I am aware of a heightened sensitivity, and this is particularly apparent with regard to negative experiences. Indeed, not infrequently I am dismayed at the amount of pain and suffering in the world. On more than one occasion, I and other meditators with me have experienced marked discomfort during the first week. I can give one graphic illustration of this sensitivity by describing my reactions and those of a friend to a movie which we watched twenty-four hours after completing a retreat. We had decided to view the inflight movie on our return flight home and to watch it as mindfully as possible for half an hour as a type of meditation. However, we were unable to complete it since this unremarkable police drama left us both so shaken that by the end of twenty minutes both of us

*the  
problem of  
heightened  
sensitivity*

were sweating, unwilling to continue, and felt the need to meditate to regain our equilibrium. Each picture of aggression, pain, and tension elicited strongly painful responses in us which, in addition to being highly uncomfortable, made it extremely difficult to remain mindful. With this degree of sensitivity, it is perhaps not surprising that, on another occasion when I left a retreat for one evening, this produced sufficient agitation to require almost a full day of meditation to return to the calm which I had previously experienced there. Recently Otis (1978) has suggested that a significant proportion of continuing TM practitioners experience negative consequences, including anxiety. Perceptual sensitivity might account for some of this.

*hypothesized  
re-entry  
process*

The re-entry process might be hypothesized to occur as follows. Meditation produces greater calm and perceptual sensitivity, so that on returning to a non-meditative environment one is effectively sensitized as in sensory deprivation (Walsh & Greenough, 1976; Walsh, 1978). Formerly habituated stimuli now elicit unaccustomedly large responses which, especially in the case of negativity, may reach painful proportions. This may be especially noticeable with negative stimuli which had formerly been defended against. Invariably, there seems to be some sort of asymptotic closing down or reduction of awareness and sensitivity over the next few days which may reflect both simple habituation as well as more complex mechanisms, such as defensive repression, reduced concentration, and a general reduction in mindfulness.

#### LIMITATIONS OF THIS PAPER

In evaluating any report of this nature it is essential to consider the general limitations which are inherent in the approach employed, as well as any limitations which are unique to the particular project. However, since most of the limitations appear to be general and are related to the use of an introspectionist approach, they will be considered only in summary form.

*a  
summary  
of  
methodological  
limitations*

It should be noted that this approach of in-depth phenomenological reporting by an individual is not without advantages. First, it allows an openness to unanticipated phenomena which is precluded by more objective questionnaire and nomothetic approaches. This is especially important in view of the finding that many of the major progressions represent discontinuous and unanticipated second-order changes. A subjective account such as this also affords the possibility of a finer sensitivity and



analysis of subtle perceptual shifts, for the essence of this process lies in developing greater sensitivity to more and more subtle phenomena. It also permits a study of the actual processes at work, both moment to moment and long term. The importance of examining the developmental process cannot be overemphasized, since even the more sophisticated studies of abstracted phenomena (Osis *et al.*, 1973) render them static, devitalized, and devoid of some of their significance. On a long-term basis, it allows a longitudinal picture of the meditative process. Finally, the use of such an approach by scientifically and clinically trained individuals allows the recognition and description of clinically relevant and heuristically valuable processes and potentially empirically testable implications.

The first and most crucial question concerns the validity of verbal reports on mental processes. This question is especially critical in light of a resurgence of anti-introspectionism by some cognitive psychologists who suggest that we may have almost no direct access to higher order mental processes. Indeed, there is no shortage of extreme statements. "It is the *result* of thinking, not the process of thinking, that appears spontaneously in consciousness" (Miller, 1962, p. 56). "Only the products of cognitive and mental activities are available to consciousness" (Mandler, 1975, p. 245). "The constructive processes (of encoding perceptual sensations) themselves never appear in consciousness, their products do" (Neisser, 1967, p. 301). Nisbett and Wilson (1977, p. 231) conclude,

*the  
validity  
of  
verbal  
reports  
of  
mental  
processes*

There may be little or no direct introspective access to higher order cognitive processes. . . . It is proposed that when people attempt to report on their cognitive processes, that is, on the processes mediating the effects of a stimulus on a response, they do not do so on the basis of any true introspection. Indeed their reports are based on *a priori*, implicit causal theories, or judgments about the extent to which a particular stimulus is a plausible cause of a given response. This suggests that though people may not be able to observe directly their cognitive processes, they will sometimes be able to report accurately about them. Accurate reports will occur when influential stimuli are salient and are plausible causes of the responses they produce, and will not occur when stimuli are not salient or are not plausible causes.

On first sight this view seems to represent a serious, even crippling, challenge to the investigation of phenomenology in general, and meditative phenomenology in particular. However, closer examination suggests that the meditative experiences reported in the present paper are actually in close agreement with the conclusions of cognitive psychologists. In

addition they point to another possibility and solution to this problem, namely, they agree that access to mental processes is usually extremely poor and that the poverty and distortion of this access is rarely recognized. However, they add to this a strong suggestion that introspective sensitivity and validity may be enhanced by training (long and arduous though this may be) to levels not only unrecognized, but even unsuspected, by Western psychology. An excellent example of this is the superb cognitive psychological analysis by Dan Brown (1977, 1978) of the levels of concentrative meditation described in the Tibetan Mahamudra tradition. This possibility holds an implication of the greatest importance for cognitive psychology: the use of highly trained meditators as experimental subjects might provide a wealth of formerly inaccessible information.

Assuming, then, that introspective data have some validity as a source of knowledge, the factors which might limit this validity can be listed under the headings of distortion of experience, the limitations of memory, communication and generalization, and of underestimating the effects of other interventions.

*influence  
of  
expectation  
and  
belief*

Of the factors which limit the validity of the phenomenology itself, the strongest might well be expectation and belief (Smith, 1975). These are powerful influences on any perceptual process and might therefore be expected to exert a significant influence on the process of introspection, even when that introspection is highly trained, as it is in meditation. In light of this, I should mention that I did very little reading on meditation during the first eighteen months of practice, and so my expectations and beliefs, based on reading, were minimized during this period. Other possible distorting influences include the Rosenthal Effect (the expectations of others), and the self-conscious production of certain experiences to gratify ego needs. Also, the degree of conviction which accompanies an experience or belief is not necessarily a guide to its validity.

The nature of the visual imagery which forms the basis for some of the phenomenological part of this report deserves a brief mention. These images often seem to be exquisitely compact and detailed representations and projections of underlying mental contents, and are typical of autosymbolic phenomena (for a review, see Schacter, 1976). Some visual images, as reported by Zen meditators, are said to represent a hindrance to meditation (Kapleau, 1967; Deikman, 1977), but their status and degree of importance remain uncertain. It may well be that the attitude of the meditator is most important in determining the outcome of this phenomenon. It certainly seems reasonable that believing the images to be real in and of



themselves, becoming overly fascinated by them, or being out of touch with the cognitive affective state which projects them, could render them a hindrance to progress.

Another limiting factor is that of memory. Presumably, selective memory must operate, and this might be of two kinds: first, the category or nature of information which is remembered, and second, limitations of state-dependent memory. Subjectively, the things which are most easily remembered are phenomena which can be readily labeled, such as ideas, insights, and strong affects. On the other hand, nondiscrete and subliminal affect appears most difficult to remember. It is also apparent that there is limited recall across meditative states, and it is not uncommon to desire to memorize something while in a deep state, be unable to recall it during the nonmeditative state, and then to remember it during the next deep meditation. Subjectively, it seems that what is most easily recalled is that which is most readily labeled.

*limitations  
of  
memory*

Communication also presents certain limitations, and what gets communicated is that which is most easy to communicate. Those things which can be most readily labeled, such as the cognitive aspects of the experience, are emphasized, while the flavor of more subtle, affective experiences may be lost. Language also plays a role. By comparison with some languages (e.g., Pali), English is very poorly developed for the communication of inner experience (Tart, 1975a). This comment may illustrate the tenets of linguistic relativism: we create our language, and then our language creates us. This means that the paucity of language would tend to reduce the development of experiential sensitivity in the population. "We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native language" (Whorf, 1956, p. 213). Another major concern is that the states which meditation seeks are beyond verbal description, a claim that is made in numerous spiritual disciplines (Rajneesh, 1975b; Goleman, 1977).

*limitations  
of  
communication*

The receiver of the communication on the other hand may also be limited by state dependency (the limits of state-dependent communication have been well described by Tart, 1972a, b). In addition, communication may be further limited if the receiver has no personal experience of the phenomena being described.

The problems imposed by attempting to generalize the experiences of one subject are so obvious that they need no elaboration. On the other hand, single case studies are now recognized as an essential aspect of procedure in clinical psychology and psychiatry (Davidson & Costello, 1969; Barlow &

*influences  
of  
idiographic  
and  
nomothetic  
approaches*

Hersen, 1973; Hersen & Barlow, 1976). The decades-old debate on the appropriateness for psychology of idiography (intensive investigation of, and attempts to understand, the individual) versus nomothesis (investigation arrived at determining general principles), still continues (Marceil, 1977). The implications of this debate include not only the appropriateness of different experimental approaches but touch on the very nature of man. As the distinguished psychologist Gordon Allport spent much of his life pointing out, our models of man influence perceptions and the type of scientific evidence that is gathered, in a self-reinforcing fashion (Allport, 1940, 1943). If we are not to commit the cardinal sin of avoiding "the first obligation of science (which) is to confront all of reality" (Wirth, 1966), then it is clear that for a full examination of meditation we need some form of synthesis of both the idiographic and nomothetic.

Idiography cannot do it alone. It must have a preceding groundwork by nomothesis. It is from the integrated use of the two methods that we will make progress.

Beck, 1953, p. 359

The history of science is rich in the example of the fruitfulness of bringing two sets of techniques, two sets of ideas, developed in separate contexts for the pursuit of new truth, into touch with each other.

Oppenheimer, 1954, p. 96

Indeed, the exploration of subjective experience may well become more central to Western psychology in light of recent trends, for example, the tendency to view the time-honored split between subjective and objective as reflecting different levels of a continuous hierarchy, rather than as a dichotomy. Similarly, general systems theory suggests that conscious experience may represent a higher order *emergent property* or system property of brain which might function as an active causal determinant of neural function (Sperry, 1976, 1977). Only further, intensive individual studies of subjective experience such as this, though more carefully controlled, plus objective studies of the implications that arise from them, will provide a firm empirical foundation for this area.

*additional  
limitations*

Another difficulty with a report of this nature is that it tends to emphasize progress and probably fails to convey a sense of the vastness of the conditioning, automaticity, fantasies, and mindlessness with which it is necessary to cope continuously. In addition, it underestimates the impact of the many other inputs which tend to accompany a meditative life style. These include selective social groups, the adoption of advanced



practitioners as models, a variety of growth-oriented exercises and workshops, and related reading. These seem to operate in a continuously interactive and often synergistic fashion. Thus, for example, an insight gained in meditation may render a formerly incomprehensible teaching understandable, which in turn may provide more motivation to meditate. Thus, it is impossible to partial out the effects of any one component, although it should be noted that this is an acceptable and often necessary initial stage when a new field of investigation is being opened (Maslow, 1966; Walsh, 1978b).

#### CONCLUSIONS

In view of the limitations discussed above, it may be necessary to accept some of these conclusions with caution, but it seems possible to make the following brief statements based on the phenomena described in this paper.

If limited to a brief period each day, meditation is a slow but cumulative process whose effects are largely subliminal at first. However, with intensive practice, as in a retreat, the effects may be extraordinarily powerful.

*meditation  
is a  
cumulative  
process*

The effects, which initially occur with brief daily meditation, appear not so much as *de novo* experiences, but rather as a gradually deepening awareness of formerly subliminal processes.

Initially, concentration is surprisingly limited, but trainable. William James (1962) stated at the turn of the century that concentration was limited to three or four seconds at the maximum, and Western psychology has more or less accepted this.

The extent to which consciousness is normally occupied by fantasy is enormous. That this gross encroachment on awareness has gone largely unnoticed, for example, by behavioral scientists, represents a significant hiatus in Western psychology. Meditation tends to reduce the amount of this fantasy, and initial fantasy-free episodes may elicit feelings of strangeness, unreality, and discomfort. Reduction in the amount of fantasy, therefore, may reduce the sense of separation from others. It may be impossible to think or work one's way out of these fantasies and, in fact, such attempts may even exacerbate them. However, withdrawing attention from them and concentratedly fixing the mind on a neutral object may collapse them.

*fantasy  
encroaches  
on awareness*

*perceptual  
sensitivity  
may be  
developed*

It seems possible to develop perceptual sensitivity to limits far exceeding usually accepted norms; for example,

- Synesthesia across traditional sensory modalities may develop fairly rapidly, and, contrary to traditional assumptions, may be a widespread, but usually subliminal phenomenon.
- Synesthesia may also occur with thoughts, and individual thoughts may be seen in the form of visual imagery and as tactile sensation.
- Increasing perceptual sensitivity results in an awareness of the constant flux of changing perceptions.
- Mindfulness applied to judgments may result in the affective charge being recognized as separate from and following the percept which is judged, so that the percept itself may appear affectively neutral.

During the initial stages of intensive meditative practice, hallucinations of a presumably hypnagogic nature may reach psychotic proportions whenever the eyes are closed, and this state may persist for several days. This phenomenon lends support to Goleman's (1976) concept of global desensitization as one mediating mechanism for meditative effects. The induction of specific states and affects, e.g., love, may be used effectively for counterconditioning.

Attachments appear to at least partially determine the amount to which specific stimuli emerge into awareness. They also appear to produce a kind of stimulus boundness and to reduce mental flexibility. Intellectual analysis and the need (attachment) to "understand" experiences tend to result in manipulation and disruption of the flow of the stream of consciousness.

Fear of, and resistance to, a certain type of experience may effectively sensitize, exacerbate, and perpetuate it, whereas a willingness to allow the experience to be, may result in desensitization.

The sense of *doing*, as opposed to simply being, may be the result of a vigilant readiness to correct the ongoing experiential-behavioral process. Such doing may set in motion chains of reactive mental events which may in turn become the stimuli for further reactive attempts at correction. It may well be impossible to *do* anything other than be aware in order to extricate oneself from this process.

Efforting, or striving for achievement, may elicit a variety of counterproductive reactions including agitation, constricting models of what is right, and judgment.



Labeling an experience tends to result in reacting to the label and its connotations rather than to the experience itself. This process may be inversely proportional to the degree of mindfulness.

Emotions, when closely examined, may be found to be composed of stimuli which are largely or totally devoid of affective quality. For example, under customary conditions of mindfulness and perceptual sensitivity, responses to stimuli may be misinterpreted, and this misinterpretation may tend to be in the direction of one's expectations; e.g., a nonaffective arousal reaction may be interpreted as fear.

The mind may function in a radar-like fashion searching for stimuli of a predetermined type. This perceptual set may result in a number of false positives, an example of the saying that "The mind finds what it looks for" (Rajneesh, 1975). Where the stimulus being sought is an emotion, then the reaction to finding one may be a response to the same type of emotion. Thus, for example, if the mind is searching for fear, then the response to a positive finding, be it true or false, may be more fear, thus setting up a self-sustaining positive feedback loop. This may account in part for the relatively prolonged persistence of affects independent of external stimuli.

*the  
mind  
may  
function  
like  
radar*

The perspective or attribution that each experience is functional and perfect for growth and learning appears to be a highly effective strategy, and contrary to popular expectation does not necessarily result in deficiencies of motivation.

Allowing the meditative process and experiences to be as they are, and to unfold naturally without attempting to change them, may result in desensitization of charged mental contents, surrender to the process, and greater congruity and alignment between different levels of consciousness.

Thoughts appear to be composed of both informational (cognitive) and affective components combined in a manner analogous to the signal and carrier waves of radio transmission. The demarcation between thoughts and feelings is not as clear as it initially seems.

The evolution and dissociation of a subpersonality may correspond to the Jungian "shadow." As this subpersonality weakens and loses effectiveness, it appears to activate survival programs.

Intensive meditation appears to produce marked reductions in sleep needs and affords the opportunity for the recognition of aversive responses to fatigue.

Lack of experiential knowledge may represent a major unrecognized limiting factor for the intellectual understanding of psychological processes and consciousness. Thus, accounts of meditative experiences, insights, and processes may be incomprehensible to one who has had no such experiences.

Intellectual understanding may be essentially inadequate for a comprehension of the range and processes of consciousness. The inner universe may not only be more than we think, it may be more than we *can* think.

*what  
is  
sought  
will  
probably  
be  
found*

The mind seems capable of creating an infinite amount of "relevant" mental content in response to any search for such content. This has important implications for psychodynamic theories and therapies, since any causative factor which is actively sought—e.g., sexual libido, power, striving—will probably be found. Such findings have an obviously limited validity for support of psychodynamic theories. Because of this, it may be that meditation, which does not seek any specific mental content, may be inherently less productive of artifactual material. It also supports the Zen concept of continually going beyond the current content, rather than getting caught up in and attached to it.

Our "normal" state of consciousness may actually represent a defensively contracted state in which awareness of the contraction and uncontracted potential are forgotten.

The process of judging and evaluating is extremely pervasive and gives an affective quality to the percepts being judged. This judging may hinder the meditative process.

The heightened perceptual sensitivity which occurs with meditation may be due to reduced neural and phenomenological "noise," thus raising the signal:noise ratio. As sensitivity increases, what was "noise" at one level of sensitivity may become comprehensible as "signal" at another. This raises the interesting question of whether there is in fact such a thing as noise, or whether all experience represents subliminal signals.

Deepening relaxation may be associated with reduced perceptual noise. This, and the resultant signal:noise ratio, may be the basis for the heightened perceptual sensitivity which occurs. The amplitude and variability of this noise may perhaps provide an index of neural activity and be used as a self-guiding neurocybernetic feedback signal for deepening relaxation.



Wronging others may result in their being negatively evaluated in a way which reduces feelings of guilt and cognitive dissonance. These negative evaluations may be accompanied by a variety of processes which impair meditation and distort perception. This cognitive dissonance and resultant psychological perturbations provide a rationale for the high emphasis placed on ethical behavior and "purification" in all meditative-yogic disciplines, and allow an understanding of the tendency to dehumanize and see as less than fully human those we victimize.

Perceptual sensitivity and ethical behavior appear to be mutually limiting factors for meditation. Increasing one seems to increase the other in a positive feedback manner. Cognitive models and expectancies may impair meditation, constrict awareness, and lead to judgment and all its complications.

Mantra appears to be an effective tool for increasing the amount of mindfulness in daily activities.

Re-entry into daily life after an intensive meditation retreat may be a traumatic and labile experience, apparently due to a partially transient hypersensitivity to normal daily levels of sensory input.

The outcome of meditation may depend at least partially on the intentions of the practitioner, and it is certainly possible to misuse meditation for egocentric purposes.

One of the major mechanisms mediating the effects of meditation may be a disidentification from mental content. Identification appears to transform mental content into the context from which other mental content is viewed, and to then set in train a self-perpetuating and self-fulfilling process. Identification with mental content may thus reduce awareness.

In addition to the question of who am I, meditative experiences raise the much more fundamental question of what am I, and it appears that our traditional identities are derived from unconscious identification with mental content. A variety of experiences suggest that the concept of an observer watching the experience is an illusion, and that both awareness and mental contents are devoid of any 'I,' that is, they are impersonal phenomena. It may be that the observer arises as a product of identification with "I" thoughts, and that total disidentification would result in transcendence of the me: not-me dichotomy. The absence of an observer removes a classic problem of neurophysiology, the inability to explain the neural

*the  
observer  
may be  
an illusion*

nature of the observer. The flicker-fusion phenomenon may represent a possible mechanism accounting for the illusion of continuity of an observer.

*identification  
demarcates  
Western  
and  
Eastern  
psychologies*

The recognition of the extent of identification represents a major demarcating feature between traditional Western psychologies and those of the East and transpersonal psychologies. In the West the recognition of identification has traditionally been limited to external phenomena, while the Eastern and transpersonal orientations emphasize identification with mental content as well as external phenomena.

Certain current limitations of Western psychology and psychiatry reflect the use of normal, but by comparison with meditative experiences, superficial, awareness of mental phenomena which leads to an illusory misinterpretation of mental processes. For example, Western behaviorism finds it impossible to explain such conditions as paranoia and obsessive-compulsive neurosis, since they apparently run counter to learning and reinforcement theory. However, a more discrete and finer analysis of mental processes, as allowed by meditation, shows that typical descriptions of pathological mental processes are, in at least some cases, erroneous, and a more adequate description may render these conditions explicable.

The laws of consciousness may be different from those of the physical universe. For example, efforting and striving may be effective in the world, yet quite counterproductive in the mind.

The range and depth of experiences and states of consciousness during meditation may far exceed those of untrained awareness and span the entire spectrum from pain to bliss. Though often uncomfortable, these states can at times confer such remarkable richness, depth, sensitivity, insight, and bliss to awareness, even while not practicing, that meditation may prove an inherently beautiful and rewarding process.

*as  
research  
paradigm  
meditation  
has  
advantages  
and  
disadvantages*

The use of meditation by scientifically and psychologically trained participant-experimenters as a research paradigm has both advantages and disadvantages. However, it does have a potential for providing unique insights into a number of psychological processes which traditional methods have not been able to approach. If extended to include larger numbers of subjects, tighter controls, and empirical testing of hypothesized implications, the use of meditation may well prove an invaluable compliment to traditional paradigms. Certainly it is capable of providing testable hypotheses which are open to



disconfirmation, and this is the procedure by which science is advanced (Popper, 1972).

The reliability, validity, and generality of the principles enumerated throughout this paper are as yet unknown, but most are open to testing. Hopefully, in the not too distant future, more precise descriptions employing groups of subjects, will expand far beyond the limits of this account. However, if this paper spurs the production of these more advanced reports, it will have served its function as the preliminary testing and reporting of a novel—but perhaps essential—experimental paradigm. In addition to being only a beginning from a scientific perspective, the same seems true for me personally, since the more I learn, the more I sense that what I and many of us have assumed ourselves to be, represents but the merest glimpse of our true nature.

a  
scientific  
and  
personal  
beginning

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Communications with the author may be addressed to: Psychiatry Dept., Univ. Calif. Medical School—Irvine, 101 City Dr. South, Orange, CA 92668.