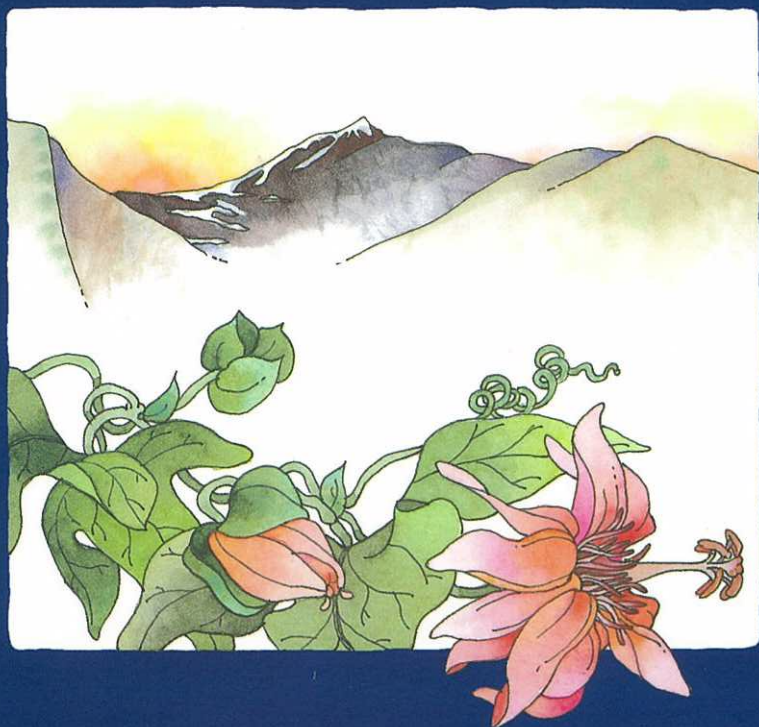


NATURAL AWAKENING

The Way of the Heart



Tarchin Hearn

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NATURAL AWAKENING

THE WAY OF THE HEART

Tarchin Hearn



WANGAPEKA BOOKS

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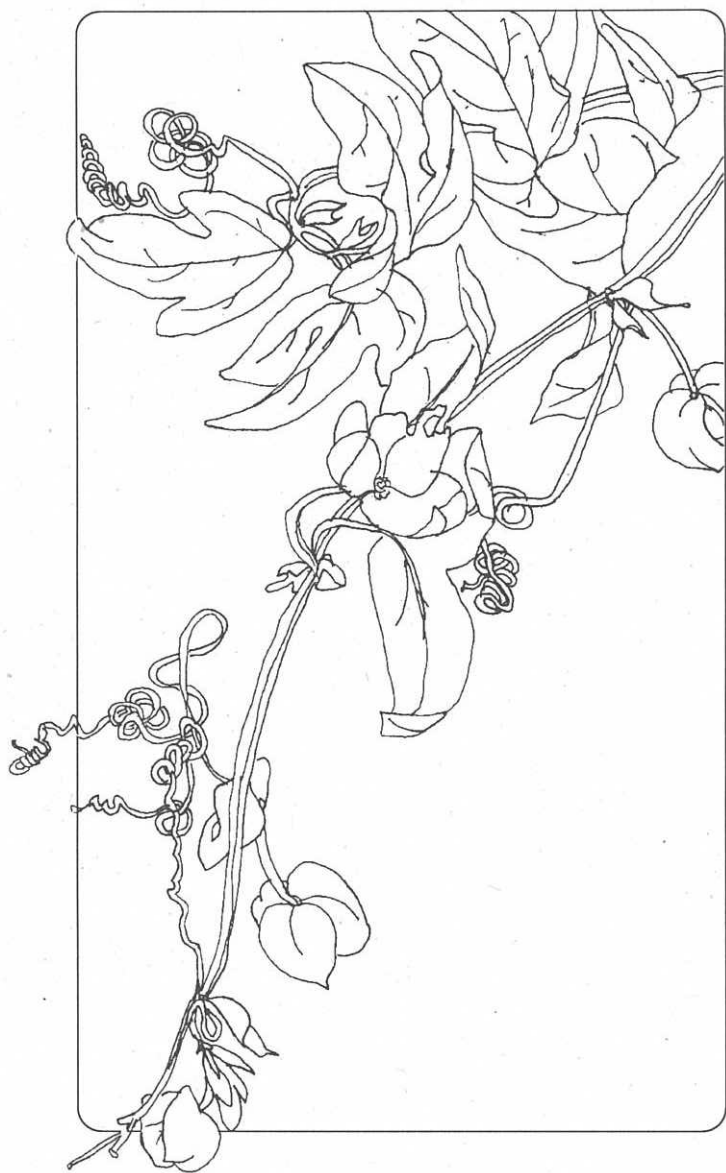
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Introduction

A long time ago, in the mountainous area near where present day Afghanistan, Pakistan, Russia and China come together, there lived a loving father and his talented son. At the age of ten, it was decided to send the boy to study with a great master who resided in the neighbouring valley. The father urged his son to apply himself to his studies and to absorb everything the master taught.

For eight years, the boy was away. He developed into a brilliant student quickly outstripping all his peers. He learned Sanskrit and was able to translate any text. He memorised many tantras and shastras and became skilled in philosophical debate. He personally assisted the Master and received all the esoteric transmissions. By the age of 18, he was already quite well known and everyone thought he would be the Master's successor. One day, the Master called him in and said he had nothing further to teach and that the young man should go back to his valley and begin to help others.

Returning home, he was greeted by his father who saw his now grown up son, very certain about life and filled with a sense of his own importance. His book knowledge was formidable, but his pride prevented him from really seeing or hearing anyone else. The father was secretly dismayed. After a few days of listening to his son going on about his studies and accomplishments, he decided he would have to intervene. He asked, "Did the Master teach you 'that which can not be taught?'"

Now it was the young man's turn to be disturbed. He was sure he had received all the teachings but he hadn't even heard of this one. "This is a very important teaching," his father said. "You'd better go back and ask for it." So the young man went and asked the Master to teach him that which can not be taught. The Master looked at him and asked, "Are you sure you are ready for such a lesson?" The young man insisted that he was.

"All right," said the Master. "You see that flock of two hundred sheep? Take them up the mountain and don't come back until there are one thousand. Then I will give you the teaching."

The young man climbed the slopes with the flock, puzzling over his teacher's instruction. Wolves came in the very first week and ate a dozen sheep. Then the weather grew cold and killed even more.

During the first year he became frustrated and depressed. As the flock was gradually reduced, he despaired of ever accomplishing his master's instructions. Each day he counted the sheep and each day he spent hours speculating on what a teaching that couldn't be taught might be, and how people would be impressed by him after he had attained it.

The months passed, the years passed, and it became obvious that it would take time to raise one thousand sheep. The young man grew older and gradually forgot about his life in the valley. Out of necessity he became more and more attuned to the mountains. He eventually gave up counting his flock and began to marvel at the harmony and beauty of nature. He found himself actually putting into practice the teachings he had received.

Some years, the wolves would take more sheep. Some years the grass grew rich and green and many lambs played in the meadows. He began to relax and settle into a deepening appreciation of his mountain world. Exploring the shrubs and flowers and the interweaving of creature's lives, he learned to love the world he was in.

One day, he was sitting in front of his hut enjoying the morning light when he remembered his teacher's parting instruction. More out of curiosity than any compulsion, he counted the sheep. There were

now well over a thousand. That day he began to slowly make his way down the mountain. He walked with a vibrant awareness of everything around him. The sheep, the mountain, his body and mind, the streams and sky were one harmonious arising. It didn't even occur to him that he no longer cared if he received this special teaching or not.

As he entered the village, the Master came out and watched him approach. He spread his arms and warmly embraced the young man. "I see you have finally learned that which can not be taught."

In its simple way, this ancient Sufi story illustrates the problem of a book on awakening. It was not written as something to read once and then store away on your bookcase. It is really a collection of hints and reminders to accompany you into the mountains of your own life, while you are learning the great mystery of "that which can not be taught." Most of the suggested exercises are very simple, but they need to be done many times, until the invisible heart of understanding flowers in your being and you begin to see and experience the world in a different way. From time to time you may find it helpful to reread certain sections. This will refresh your vision and aspiration for what is really a lifelong journey.

Natural awakening is about nature awakening. It is a process older than the earth. We might even see it as the foundation and ground of life itself. Throughout history, people from diverse backgrounds have recognised this wonderful flow of being and have attempted to communicate their experience to others. Inevitably they used the language and images of their own culture and sometimes huge religious movements grew from their seed-like lives.

12 *Natural Awakening*

For the last 25 years, I have had a deep involvement with many traditions of Buddhism. My root teacher, a Canadian known as Namgyal Rinpoché, not only taught from both the Therāvadin and Mahayāna schools but, by using much of the world as a temple, classroom and laboratory, he led us into situations that forced us to experience life more fully. Studying and practising in different places around the world, we often didn't know where we would sleep, what we would eat or how we would support ourselves. We plunged into many explorations with a sense that each one was the most important thing we had ever done. It was a passionate time. Along with Buddhism, we explored psychotherapy, science, art, sociology and deep ecology. Sometimes we spent three months on one discipline or one year on another, yet always the central themes of wisdom, compassion and non-clinging awareness threaded everything together.

Looking back on that time in the 1970s, it seemed as if we were mythical jewellers faceting a fabulous gem. Each of us began as a pebble with promise in the river of life – the proverbial diamond in the rough. It would be misleading to say we intentionally cut the facets. It more often seemed that life ground away some of the bumps and the facets gradually revealed themselves. Each side of the gem began to reflect and illumine the other sides and after years of what sometimes seemed to be random tumbling, an orderliness, beauty, and simplicity of being, began to emerge where before there had been a lot of chaos and complication.

During the last 18 years of teaching, I have tried to communicate something of this beautiful gem. These efforts have sometimes been successful, but often I would have the sense that people, though parched with thirst, were so dazzled by the cup – the jewelled cup of Tibetan Vajrayāna, the wooden cup of Zen, the functional cup of therapy and so forth – that they seemed to lose sight of the water that was resting easefully within the cup, just waiting for their lips.

I began to ask myself what was the unifying factor hidden behind the vessels of theory and technique? What was the essence of the work that allowed the water to be drunk – that revealed this precious jewel? And how could it be communicated in a straight forward way without reducing the infinite richness and complexity of life to a simplistic formula?

This book is about all of nature awakening, not just humans, and certainly not just the psychological aspect of humans. It is non-linear in format because life is non-linear. In a way, any chapter could have been the starting point. As such, it might appear like a multi-dimensional tapestry. Travel undulates with poetry, philosophy weaves with meditation technique, science merges with mysticism, and all move towards bringing forth a hint of this precious gem which is really the natural expression of our own heart-mind.

Most of the twenty-two exercises appearing in the text are intermingled with commentary to help give a feel for the flavour and spirit of the work. In Appendix A, the exercises are listed in 'bare bones' fashion to provide a reminder of the steps when you are actually doing the practice.

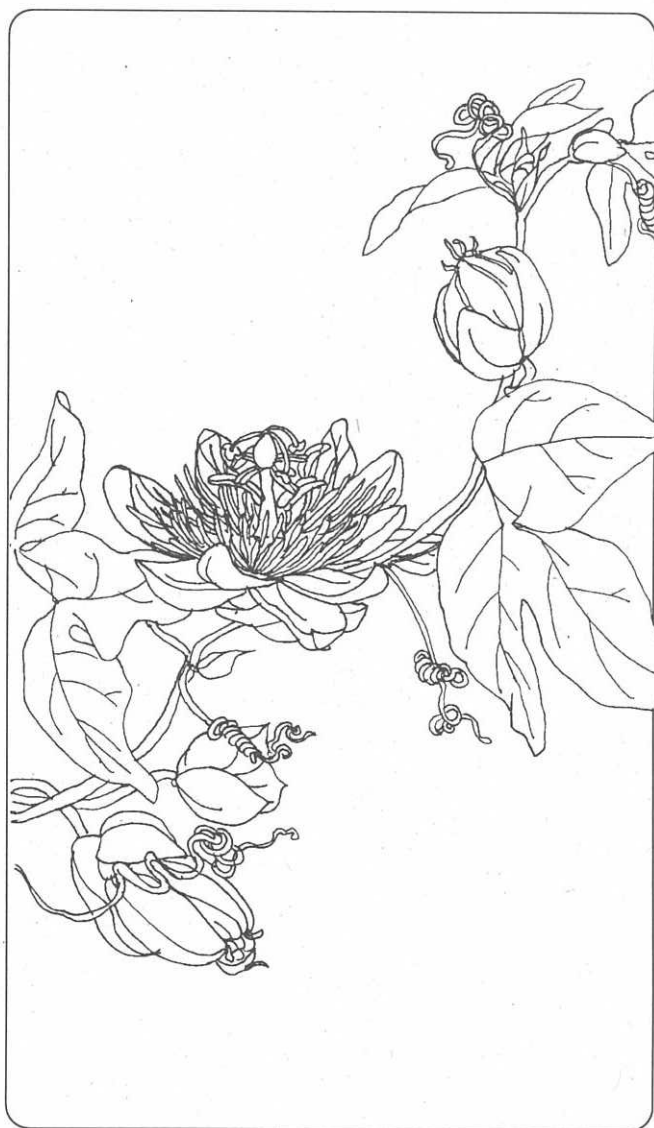
Behind the specific words and techniques is an attitude to living. Sharing this with you is my wish in writing the book.

My life has been immensely supported and inspired by Namgyal Rinpoché and Kalu Rinpoché and the traditions of Mahamudra and Dzogchen teaching. In more recent years, through their writings, I have felt great support from Thich Nhat Hahn and Stephen Levine. Their work is an inspiration for manifesting the most profound teachings of dharma in the nitty-grittyness of people's daily lives. Probably most important, in terms of encouraging the emergence of this book, are all the people in many parts of the world who have given me their trust and allowed me to learn through teaching them and working with them.

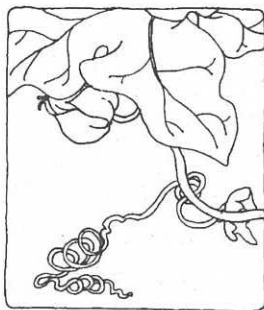
In addition to teachers and students, this book has been greatly helped by the supportive critiques of Edrea Daniel, Mathew Eades, Bonnie Ross, and Mark Webber. Eileen Burton, Margaret Peart and Terry Walton helped refine the text with detailed proof reading. Pierre Robillard donated the DPalatino font program that allowed us to do the diacritical marks for the Pali. John Logan helped with the over-all design and supervised the printing. Gisela Lange offered her photographic skills for the making of the transparencies. Michael MacKinnon has been the administrator and anchorman for Wangapeka Books. Peter Woollett was invaluable for his patient work on layout. Robert Sinclair enlivened the entire text with his wonderful drawings.

Finally to Mary Jenkins who has supported this and so many other projects over the last ten years, you have been a companion and teacher to me in more ways than you know.

Thank you everyone
Tarchin



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Chapter One

Nature, Wonder and Mystery

*The interconnectedness of everything reveals itself
wherever you look.*

In 1988 I had the wonderful opportunity to spend three weeks exploring in the Amazon. Journeying into the Amazon rain forest is more than merely travelling some miles along a river. It feels like journeying into a timeless place of mystery and wonder.

Departing from the city of Manaus in central Brazil, you leave the realm of human ego concerns: schedules to meet, lives pressured by the invisible clock and the madness that evaluates every experience and every object with the question, "How much is it worth in dollars?" You enter a different way of being that feels more whole, much richer and incredibly ancient.

It's as if you have discovered a world which is both macroscopic and microscopic at the same time. A world in which everything is transforming through an unending variety of colour, form and function: this into that, that into this. The bird life is stunning: brilliant rainbow-hued macaws, parrots of

many colours and sizes, herons and egrets, jewel-like humming birds, golden yellow king birds, vultures, hawks, flycatchers, kingfishers. Then there are the insects: magnificent scarab beetles, brilliant butterflies, tiny orange ones, huge electric blue morphos. The spiders are extraordinary: from eight inch bird-catching varieties, to thick, hairy tarantulas, to strange triangular body shapes with bright pink and black stripes. Each outing we discovered new creatures. In the river were pink freshwater dolphins and in the trees, colonies of monkeys stuffing fruit and flowers into their mouths. Occasionally we'd see the three-toed tree sloth. What an amazing world!

Let me share with you a few notes from the journal I kept on that trip. July 14: Awoke in the Anavilhanas Archipelago. The river here is 16 miles wide. Many islands were flooded and we went between the trees in motorised canoes. Wonderful bird life: macaw parrots, vultures, toucans. We spotted some very beautiful fat-tailed monkeys. In the evening we went out again in the boats and found three sloths, a possum and lots of baby alligators. At one point, the river narrows to only a quarter mile in width and is more than 350 feet deep!

Stopped at Novo Airao and saw where this boat was built. The carpenters work with magnificent hardwood timber. It's so dense that it has to be pre-drilled for nailing and it's too heavy to float. All the work is done by hand.

Into the Rio Branco. The water is very high. Everything is in flood and yet we are experiencing very little rain. It's the wet season in the mountains of Venezuela, hundreds of miles away. Raining there and flooding here. The cafe-au-lait coloured Rio Branco and the black Rio Negro run together for a long way without mixing.

Our trip naturalist told us a few facts about the region. "The Amazon basin drains three million square miles, half the continent

of South America. This area is about the same size as the face of the full moon. At its mouth, 28 billion gallons of water per minute empty into the sea, but it wasn't always like this.

"Two hundred million years ago, an inconceivable length of time in human terms, the Amazon flowed into the Pacific. Twenty to thirty million years ago, the Nazca Plate began to push into the South American Plate. Imagine these two immense islands of rock, floating on a spinning globe of cooling molten magma, all of it orbiting around a star. This slow motion collision caused the earth's mantle to buckle up, forming the Andes. The river was blocked and a huge inland sea came into being. Eventually the water broke through in the east and began to flow into the Atlantic, the way we see it today.

"There are three types of Amazon water. White or coffee-coloured water generally flows from the mountains in the west. It is heavily laden with sediment and hence the colour. Black or dark red water comes from the north. Having flowed through well-leached sandy lowland soil, it is stained by the tannin from rotting vegetation and looks a lot like strong black tea. Clear water flows from the south from the grassland of the Mato Grosso. From Iquitos in the Andes to Belem on the coast is 2400 miles and over this distance the river drops an average of only one inch per mile. It's said that the Amazon doesn't so much flow to the sea but is pushed by the weight of water backed up behind.

"Further north and south in the temperate zones, during periods of glaciation, ice churned up the earth's surface, replenishing eroded minerals with fresh material from deeper levels. With the alternating summer-winter seasons, deciduous trees dropped their leaves which were transformed by small creatures and micro organisms into a rich humus. In many of these areas, the soils became very fertile. The tropical rainforests had neither of the above. Near the equator, there was very little glaciation to turn over the ground. In addition to this, when the average yearly temperature is 77 degrees F. or higher, the fungi

at ground level break down organic material as fast as it falls. Because of this, topsoil hardly exists deeper than eight inches and most of the roots are in this narrow zone. Podsolized soil, a few feet down, contains a lot of iron oxide. When it's exposed to sunlight, as it is when the rainforest is logged, it forms hard rock called laterite and nothing will grow in it except grasses and sedges."

Evening on the Rio Branco. Zillions of parrots, kites, herons, and swifts. Three types of monkeys. One, very large, with bright russet fur. There are so many flowers, and apart from "no-see-ums", very few biting insects. It's a real bird paradise. We visited some local Cobolco people and saw how they grow and process manioc, one of their main food staples.

July 18 - 21 Took two motorised canoes up the Catramani. Bivouacked in the forest, building a self-supporting structure with a roof of plastic and slung with 13 hammocks. It rained hard the first night. Piums (sandflies) were voracious, though there were few mosquitoes. At other times of the year, this section of the river is full of impassable rapids. Now the water is very high and allows us to go far up stream. We saw a spectacular flock of 65 red and blue macaws, sloths, squirrel monkeys, howler monkeys, and blue morpho butterflies. Oropendula nests that look like deeply woven bags hang from branches. Huge ceiba trees tower above the rest of the canopy and everything is covered with vines and epiphytes. We found a strange bird called a hoatzin. A brown coloured prehistoric throwback. Its young are born with claws on their wing-elbows. If they fall into the water, they can swim to shore and then climb out using their claws. The claws and swimming ability disappear after six weeks.

Eventually, the mountains of Venezuela appeared mirage-like in the distance. That same day we found the hut of Peruano (the man from Peru) mentioned in Alex Schumatov's book, "Rivers Amazonas." We walked through the bush looking for the

Yanamani people. We were very close, but had to turn back. It turned out later that the Yanamani village was only half an hour further up the river and they could hear us coming!

I stepped into a path of fire ants. They are very small but their bite burns sharply. Rushing back to the river, I dunked my legs in the water. We are all in this together. Each one of us is food for others.

Off the Catramani. No more piums! Hurrah! We went up the Rio Aqua Boa, a black water river. The vegetation is low scrub and everything is flooded like a colossal water garden. The trees have beautiful lichen patterns on them, the colours of the painted desert: soft pastel greys, sage greens, light and dark browns. Beautiful beetles with iridescent green abdomens and yellow and black-marked heads and legs. The jungle is full of many sweet-smelling flowers. As we boat along, we pass in and out of whole banks of often lovely odours. Such an extraordinary weaving of life.

Yesterday, we anchored mid-stream and waited for Benie, a Canadian missionary pilot, to fly in supplies. I swam with the pink river dolphins. The water was so full of silt that I couldn't see anything, but I could hear and feel them squeaking all around me. Later, we saw some fantastic sprays of pink cattleya orchids. Benie arrived late, a few minutes before a terrific thunderstorm.

Today, we went for a flight to an Indian village, the Atroaris tribe. They live in a huge, circular communal house called a maloca. We traded knives and magnifying glasses for bows and arrows. Just 15 years ago, these people killed 13 of a group of 14 visiting missionaries. Today they were laughing with us, wearing shorts and T-shirts.

On the way down the Rio Negro we found a nightjar sitting on a dead tree branch. It blended in with the greys of the trunk so perfectly that, just five feet away, some of us thought it was a knot of wood on the branch. Arguing over whether it was a bird

or a bit of bark, we woke it up, and it flew to a different perch where we had an unmistakable view. It made me wonder how many other creatures we had looked directly at, but failed to see.

Sounds of frogs in the evening. We visited a Coboclo family living in four small boats moored under the trees. They live off the land: hunting, fishing and collecting fruit and nuts from the forest. With the sound of bullfrogs and night insects filling the air, the nearly full moon floating in the sky and hundreds of insect-catching swallows whirling overhead, it was a picture of natural simplicity. We returned to our boat, the Alyson, to hear "Phantom of the Opera" blasting from the loud speakers, drowning out the sounds of the forest. I found myself thinking, "So this is civilisation?"

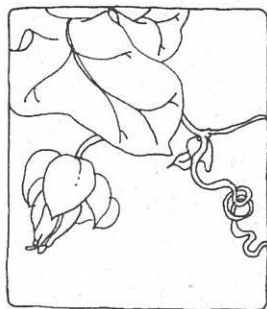
An early morning excursion. We saw a beautiful trogon and a large troop of squirrel monkeys eating red flowers and sucking the nectar from white, bell-shaped flowers. After breakfast we went back out and spent most of the morning studying leaf-cutter ants and their highways. One big worker ant cuts an almost oval shape piece of leaf and carries it down the tree. There is often a very small ant riding "shotgun" on the bit of leaf. Its job is to keep a parasitic fly away from the big ant so that it can continue its work uninterrupted. The leaf is carried 100 metres to their mound where it is taken underground. There, ants of another type chew it, mixing their enzymes with the green leaf tissue. They spit this mixture out and cultivate a fungus in the mulch, which is then used as food by all the ants. As if this isn't complex enough, there are also huge soldier ants that patrol the "highways." These giants have pinching mandibles that are so big they are unable to feed themselves, and so smaller ants bring them food.

When you visit the Amazon the interconnectedness of everything reveals itself wherever you look. What we call the Amazon is made of sky and clouds, and Andes mountains causing the water vapour to fall as rain. It is made of the sun,

pumping the water cycle and feeding the green plants. It is made of the plant realms and the animal realms and millions of years of geological history. This seems so obvious when you are open to the beauty and wonder of life. Yet tragically, few people see this way.

We heard a story about Brazil nuts. Earlier this century, a wealthy American family business decided to invest in Brazil by starting a nut plantation. It acquired a huge amount of land that was clear-felled. Then Brazil nut trees were planted in tidy plantation rows. As it turned out, the project was a total disaster. None of the trees would grow. Later studies showed that these trees are so intimately linked with the entire ecosystem that, on their own, they simply can't survive, any more than a vital organ of our own body can survive without the rest of our body giving its support. The Brazil nut tree and the Amazon could be thought of as one living being. As Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh might say, they are "interbeing." Even today, every Brazil nut you eat has been hand gathered from wild trees in the jungles. Perhaps, when we eat these nuts, we should think of them as the fruit of the entire rainforest.

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Chapter Two

Breathing with Green Plants

*See if you can experience breathing
in an entirely new way.*

Water, forest, low flat horizons, vast blue skies with piling tropical thunderclouds and heat: a hot-house of life. Looking down from the float plane, we could see the forest canopy stretching to the horizon in all directions. Innumerable shades of green through russet interweaving with the tannin black meandering waters of the Rio Negro tributaries. I felt the planet breathing, as if we were passing through the lungs or digestive tract of an enormous organism. Veins and arteries of water, narrowed to capillaries and smaller. Our airplane felt like a tiny corpuscle, making an incredible voyage through a great timeless body. Huge amounts of oxygen and carbon-dioxide were exchanging all around us. Nutriment was being absorbed and waste given off. Output transformed into intake and intake became output in a wondrous seamless cycle of becoming.

Living in the cement jungles of the modern city, with co-axial vines, fibre-optic lianas, the ringing of fax and phones filling in for birds, and the roar of the traffic and the demands of people as our fellow creatures, it is easy to forget that, in fact, we are part of an ecosystem that is incredibly old and spans a whole planet. This forgetting has gone so deep that it has become part of our culture and part of our institutions. It's as if we humans have become hypnotised by the technical wonders of what we can do, paralysed in a fascination with our own reflection. So obsessed with human things, we have become blind to all the other expressions of life that support us on this jewel-like planetary home. This blindness is a very dangerous way to live. In a way, the most widespread illness threatening life today is not cancer or AIDS or heart disease, but the gulf of separation that seems to exist between humans and the rest of nature.

Separation has become the norm of modern living. Not only are humans separate from nature but mind is separate from body. Body is separate from feelings. Parents are separate from children. Material is separate from spiritual. Knower is separate from that which is known. Creator is separate from creation. I'm sure you could add to this list. All in all, we have arrived at a place of painful isolation, as if we had been torn out from the womb of our mother and the larger womb of life and dangled, frighteningly alone, in a terribly empty space. . We yearn for nurturing contact, yet at the same time we often seem to fear that contact will bring us even more pain. This situation has turned the world of human experience into a convention of strangers and we now put forth immense amounts of effort and inventiveness to reach across the gaps, trying to reassure ourselves that we are not alone. Ironically, these efforts often serve to isolate us even further. Please pause for a moment and contemplate how this manifests in your own life.

Here is a very simple and effective exercise that will support the healing of this sense of separation. I call it "Breathing with the Green Plants."

Find a place where you can see some living green plants. It's wonderful to do this outside in a beautiful garden, or in a wild and undisturbed part of nature. If this is not possible, you could look out from a window or be with a healthy indoor plant. Sit in a posture that feels easeful and at the same time supports a sense of alertness. Take a moment to contemplate how plants absorb carbon dioxide and give off oxygen through the process of photosynthesis. Pretty well all the oxygen that we breathe has been liberated into the air by green plants. Much of the carbon dioxide that we exhale becomes the breath of life for a plant. If all the green plants were to instantly disappear, we wouldn't survive for long. They are as vital to our health as our heart or our lungs. We might even think of them as partners in a wonderful dance of sharing.

Allow yourself to relax into your seat and become aware of your body breathing. Don't try to control the rhythm of the breath. Simply feel the coming and going of the air at your nostrils.

See if you can experience breathing in an entirely new way, as if you were from another planet and you've been given a brief moment to explore what it's like to be a human on this planet. Imagine the air as some kind of marvellous nectar, very rare, of exquisite vintage – an excellent year! You have this one unique moment to savour it.

Lean forward a tiny amount, just a fraction of an inch, enough to give the body a sense of alert expectancy. Now, as you inhale, imagine you are drinking in the air, wondrous liquid-like air, flowing in through your nostrils. Appreciate the texture of the breath entering your body. Sometimes it feels like silk or rayon or cotton or burlap. It may be shot with little

bumps or sharp points. Along with texture, you may sense that it's coloured, perhaps blue or red or green or translucent. It may begin with great strength and then taper off with pulsing softness. Perhaps it begins imperceptibly, finishing off with a great rush. There are an immense range of possibilities. Allow yourself to be very sensuous with this. Feel the process of breathing with your entire being. Give it all your attention.

Savouring every moment of the inhalation, feel your body receiving the gift of life. As you exhale, savour the breath flowing out: a beautiful weaving of temperature, texture and rhythm. Breathing in – tasting the nectar. Breathing out – enjoying the miracle of breathing.

As you breathe this way, let your eyes gently focus on the green foliage in front of you. Sometimes you might pick out a specific leaf and allow the exploration to become very personal. Each time you inhale, mentally say, "Breathing in – gifts from the green plants." When you exhale, mentally say, "Breathing out – gifts to the green plants."

As you breathe in this way, gazing at the leaves, you may begin to sense the miracle that is taking place. In the mind's eye you may see the sunlight travelling millions of miles from our star, dancing with the chlorophyll and the water drawn up from roots in the living earth. You may "see" the gift of oxygen wafting from the leaf's shiny surface and your gift of carbon dioxide being gratefully received. You may sense the timeless rhythm of intimate sharing.

"Breathing in – gifts from the green plants. Breathing out – gifts to the green plants." Continue like this for at least five minutes.

Many people have practised this simple exercise and have found that it rapidly brings a sense of calm and well being. It is especially useful if we spend a lot of our life indoors. The attention to breathing brings us back to our body. The giving and receiving of gifts reconnects us to a larger world. This exchange shows us that we do have something of value to give and that, breath by breath, we are supported by others. The colour green balances our nervous system and supports a deep level of healing. Eventually, the pain of separation between ourselves and nature is seen as an unnecessary illusion as we merge with this primordial dance of sharing and mutual support.

Please pause in your reading. Put the book aside and breathe with the green plants. Give yourself a few minutes of practice, right now. "Breathing in – gifts from the green plants. Breathing out – gifts to the green plants."

So simple.

So healing.

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Chapter Three

Views of Life

*Strange to see
but all this knowing
draws a needed knower.
And so, creative beings,
we make one!
A terrifying fiction.*

As we probe more and more into the interbeingness of life, it becomes clear that the universe is an infinity of viewing points. I look at myself. I am a unique individual. I am composed of trillions of cells each interested in its own survival. Sometimes my stomach seems to have a mind of its own. The dreams at night go their own way. I am the product of atoms, cells and organs. I am part of a family, part of a society. There are so many knowings that make up this me.

All being is a dance of many
We are planes of being
Symbiotic sharings of many
Realms interbeing
Sharing the same time space atoms.

All dancing manys are knowings,
The pushing and the pulling
The forcing of form
Many mutual informings,
Realms of interpenetrating conversations
 informating intimately,
Symbiotic fields of knowing
Like a multidimensional weaving of
 Aurora Borealis,
Pulsing, crackling, veils of light and colour
 dancing rhythmically to unheard music,
Knowers within knowers, knowing knowers
Or do they try to close their eyes?

The Wangapeka Valley is a crisscross field of
 knowing,
Each part the size of the universe
Each parting forming something elsing
Birding lawning fooding writing
Mother visions clear,
Raining sunning gravitating
Eating eroding meeting discovering
Bursting freshly free

Oh Joy!

Hearing is knowing
Seeing is knowing
Feeling is knowing
Comparing is knowing
Remembering is knowing
Imagining is knowing
Reflecting is knowing
Worrying is knowing
Hoping is knowing
Pushing is knowing
Pulling is knowing
Eating is knowing
Digesting is knowing
Raining is knowing
Rivering is knowing
Mountaining is knowing
Oceaning is knowing

Strange to see but all this knowing
draws a needed knower
And so, creative beings,
we make one! A terrifying fiction.
A singularity knowing everything else.
A me!
Alive and intelligent
renders all the rest as object.

While plural knowing is all around
a fusion of awesome complexity
a seeming confusion
Resting heartfully here.

If we look closely, we see that when we're anxious, this multiple-knowing me vanishes and a one-eyed stubbornness takes over. The dance, the play of viewing moments, so creative and playful, shrinks into a stodgy bounded view. The spacious openness, once alive with possibility, congeals into a tight, limiting position, which seems to highlight difficulty and struggle. The freedom of multidimensional knowing has disappeared and we don't know where to find it.

When the Buddha awakened, he recognised the path by which humans expand their field of knowing and deepen their appreciation of being. He called this the Eightfold Noble Path. One of these eight is *sammādiṭṭhi* which is traditionally translated as right view. This rendering can mislead us, if the idea of right view implies that other views are wrong. We can easily get caught in a debate of what's right and what's wrong, defending what we believe to be right and avoiding or negating what we think is wrong. No matter what the view, this struggling always brings us suffering. It limits our knowing the fullness of being.

The Pali word *sammā* actually means complete or total. Pali was the standard vernacular of northern India and was probably spoken by the Buddha. It was the language of the earliest written Buddhist texts and has many similarities to Sanskrit.* In English, the word sum (to add up, to total or to collect into a whole) comes from *sammā*. *Diṭṭhi* means view, though when used alone it usually implies a view that is partial. It's not that the view is necessarily wrong but that it's incomplete. All views are partial. While focussing in one particular direction, we often exclude or ignore many other aspects of the whole.

* For a more complete discussion of the origin of Pali, see the forward to "The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary" edited by Rhys Davids and William Stede, Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1979.

When we put *sammā* and *diṭṭhi* together, we get the idea of complete view or, in a more active sense, complete viewing. Rather than a complete or total view in the sense of knowing everything, with nothing more to discover, think of *sammādiṭṭhi* as a way of viewing that allows a deepening appreciation of wholeness. It could be thought of as an attitude to life, an openness of being, that has the capacity to embrace and integrate any aspect of a situation, be it easeful or difficult. It is inclusive, not exclusive, deepening the sense of wholeness and strengthening the sense of health.

Sammādiṭṭhi merits some deep pondering as it could be understood in a number of ways: complete view, total viewing, whole view, viewing wholly. This first step of the Eightfold Noble Path points towards an expansive understanding of life. It could also be hinting at a profound and rarely seen truth. In the "unbroken wholeness of totality," as physicist David Bohm has put it, in a universe where everything is connected to every other thing and everything is shaping everything else, then any viewing or seeing or knowing must be "Totality" viewing. Not "me" viewing but the universe viewing. "Totality" knowing something of itself. To invite this larger viewing into our moment by moment experience, can transform our sense of who and what we are. Life reveals a much greater range of possibilities. Paths of healing open in many directions.

The Buddha saw very clearly how our views, like tinted glasses, colour the world we are in. When I wear pink glasses the whole world has a pinkish tinge. When I wear grey glasses, everything looks a bit dull. There are so many ways of viewing. What is a forest? Ask a tree, a bird, a logger, an environmentalist, a drop of rain. They'll each give a different answer. The difficulty in recognising a view is that it tends to become an inseparable part of our being. It's like looking all over for our glasses, only to find them on our face. After we've

had these tinted glasses on for a while, we forget we're wearing them. Another major problem is that we often assume that everyone else is wearing the same glasses as we are.

Each point of view is a way of defining or limiting the moment. It allows us to see order instead of chaos. It gives a sense of meaning to the present situation, within the context of our own life experience. Could we discover a way of using views without actually limiting our understanding of the world?

Perhaps it's impossible to live without a point of view. Each moment of experience carries a *ditṭhi* implicit within it. The key to a more embracing understanding doesn't involve avoiding views, but it does require that we don't cling to any particular view. The Buddha once said, "I too use concepts but I'm not fooled thereby." The third Chinese Zen patriarch once said, when speaking about the path of awakening, "Do not search for truth, only cease to cherish opinions."

Each time we cling to one view we inevitably lose sight of other possibilities. *Sammāditṭhi*, on the other hand, encourages a kind of translucent quality to come into our experience. It's as if, by not requiring one view to be the only correct one, we begin to see innumerable crisscross layerings of life, weaving together an immense richness of being. A deeper way of knowing begins to emerge, which could lead us to a much more meaningful understanding of the world as it is. Throughout forty years of teaching, the Buddha continuously urged beings to allow *sammāditṭhi* to ripen in their experience. This is the dawning of wisdom.

A vast world of relative views can be philosophically interesting, particularly for people of a speculative temperament. Inevitably, though, we come face to face with the nitty gritty question, "What should I do in this specific situation?" I know I don't see all the viewpoints and I'm not aware of all the

possibilities. How then should I act? Asking this question is a critical moment in our life because there are three major paths we could follow. Each of these paths tends to define how we experience ourselves and how we see the world.

The most common response is to ask others what to do and then to follow their instructions. Parents will tell us. Teachers will tell us. Social systems or religious traditions will tell us. This is often tricky as we may simply be trading in our own short sightedness for somebody else's. Too often this becomes the story of the blind leading the blind.

A second, less common response is to decide not to act until we have thoroughly investigated every aspect of the situation. However, in a world where everything connects to everything else, we might become overwhelmed trying to appreciate the factors involved in as simple a task as drinking a cup of tea. This path can lead to paralysis.

The third choice, though rarely taken, is to follow the advice of St. Augustine when he said, "Love God, and do as thou wilt." Dwell in the state of profound loving kindness and do what seems to be appropriate. This is the way of the heart.

In her wonderful book, "World as Lover, World as Self"* Joanna Macy traces out four views of life that powerfully shape our experience. The first she calls "world as battlefield." Everyone today knows something of this. Life is seen as a struggle, a competition, a war, or a test, in which there will always be a winner and always a loser. We don't have to look far to see evidence of this view. In politics, one party fights or out-manoeuvres the other for power. In economics, we find competition in the marketplace. Education trains students to compete for marks, to battle with tests and exams. Scientists working with this view discover the law of survival of the fittest, competition strategies, and the power of the "selfish gene."

* "World as Lover, World as Self" by Joanna Macy, Parallax Press, 1991

When we see the world as a battlefield, it's very likely we will experience our body as a battlefield as well.

This view can colour every aspect of life. It even affects our approach to healing. We wage war against cancer, against AIDS, and against heart disease. Our immunisation system is seen as a mobilised army guarding our fortress-like body against invasion. The whole medical establishment is devoted to fighting disease and somehow all this fighting is supposed to bring about peace and health. It reminds me of something I saw in New Delhi back in 1969. There was a huge billboard standing in Connaught Circus that said, "We need peace! Fight Commensalism!" I wasn't sure what commensalism was, but I remember being struck by the bizarre contradiction that came across in "We need peace.... Fight." How can we develop peace by fighting? How can we develop love by hating? How can we find freedom through some imposed slavery?

"World as battlefield" is a difficult and often tragic view to live with. Anything we don't like, we try to deny or get rid of. We try to get rid of neuroses and other difficult states of being. We fight for peace, fight disease, fight poverty. We seem to be constantly fighting, always suspicious, ever on the alert. Immersed in this view, we see our bodies, our spiritual life, our relationships and the world at large as an unending series of struggles, with strategies, hierarchies of command and an obsessive fear of failure. This view is great for supporting a sense of righteousness and a strong sense of belonging. God is always on our side. We are the "in group." We are the chosen. It's us and our buddies against all of them. In addition to a battlefield camaraderie, this view supports an almost unquestioned assumption that life involves following orders or instructions from higher up. As compensation, of course, we might get to boss around other people or other parts of the ecosphere, that seem lower down in the hierarchy.

When our psyche is dull and on the edge of sleep or boredom, "world as battlefield" can act as a stimulant. It keeps us awake, fighting fit and on our toes. However, it may also make us hypersensitive to feeling we are under attack. "World as battlefield" is the world of victors and victims. Even in places of learning and study, it's "publish or perish." In this modern society, the issue of truth or justice is often obscured by the need to be right or to show that others are wrong. In religions this is an ancient theme: the battle of good vs evil, light vs darkness, light and love vs the lie. We search for allies on the inner plane, armies fighting for Christ. Each side sees itself as just and the other side as evil. These attitudes were happening at the time of Jesus and are still happening today.

Consider how this mind state might approach healing and the meditative life. Pain, fear and other difficult states are seen as enemies to be fought against and eventually conquered. Meditation is often experienced as a battle against wandering thoughts and painful or distracting sensations. Our commanders have names like Ought and Should and there is a continual concern about getting the meditation right. Any problem is seen as a matter of finding a more powerful or effective technique. Are we really looking for a healing technique, or are we looking for a weapon to slay our current enemy? People can meditate for years like this and "win" very little sense of peace and well being for all their struggle. On the other hand, by immersing ourselves in this view, we may become champion fighters!

Does any of this sound familiar? Can you recognise "world as battlefield" in your life? When we are operating with this view it seems so natural. After all, this is the way the world is, isn't it? It becomes so incredibly pervasive, we are almost incapable of seeing any other possibility.

Pause for a moment right now. Feel your body resting in

the chair. Become aware of your breathing and contemplate how this "world as battlefield" view shows up in your own life and the world around you. Is this the truth of the universe or could it be that we've been conditioned to see in this way?



A second all too common view is to see the world as a prison or a trap. Most of the world religions have aspects of this. "Trapped on the wheel of becoming." "Imprisoned in the flesh." With this view, we always have a sense of wanting to be other than where we are. Where we are is a prison. Our life feels too confining. We want to escape. We want to burst out. We feel trapped in our job, trapped in a relationship, trapped in obligations, trapped in an economic situation, trapped in an insane world. Fundamentally, though, we are trapped in our own ignorance.

With this view, the big motif becomes escape. In healing work we use drugs to escape pain and various difficult mental states. Meditation is seen as an escape from the busy-ness, the madness and the confusion of life. Religions put forward the aims of transcendence, a sense that truth or liberation is somewhere else, "beyond this vale of tears." We search for nirvana or yearn to escape from the world, the flesh and the devil. We dream of entering the rapture and finding ourselves in heaven. I wonder if this isn't a form of religious masochism in which the great reward is put off until sometime in the future.

Most damaging is the negative attitude developed towards the body. A truly "spiritual" being will want to leave the earthly realm of the senses to enter the ethereal world of spirit. This produces a very painful ambivalence. It seems we can't live comfortably with our body, but at the same time, we can't live

without it. It's as if the body is working against us, its appetites constantly dragging us back to the painful world of material necessity.

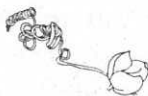
When people meditate with this view, it's not unusual for them to feel they are undergoing some kind of penance to redress past sins. A meditation retreat can feel like being in jail and the teachers become prison wardens. If this attitude gets a grip on us, there is little attention for what is actually happening in and around us. After all, who is interested in prisons? Our bodies can become stiff with chronic tension, almost incapable of moving. Our minds feel dried up and devoid of any creative impulse. Most of our energy becomes focussed on fantasies of what might happen after we get out: dreaming about liberation, speculating about enlightenment, fantasising about a new relationship or job that will solve all our troubles. Meanwhile we behave like model prisoners.

One of the problems that gets in the way of healing is that we tend to become comfortable with the familiar. When anything new or unusual arises, it shifts us out of our habitual routines. This can be threatening to the old sense of self. If we are steeped in "world as battlefield" view and unexpectedly find ourselves in a peaceful state, we will often go looking for a new fight or cause to get involved in. It's as if we were addicted to conflict. Have you ever noticed this? When we identify as the eternal escaper, we sometimes accidentally succeed, whereupon we begin to feel oppressed by the freedom. It's so hard having to make all these decisions and, bingo, we have created another prison out of freedom itself.

These views are so deeply ingrained that we really believe in them. We become convinced that this is the way the world is and easily become confused or angry when we meet people who see things differently. After all, our struggle is difficult enough. To be shown that the world is not what we always knew or felt it to be may leave us feeling frighteningly empty. We may even

feel we are going insane. Not realising there are many other ways of understanding the world, we cling to our views, clinging out of habit and sheer fear of all the possibilities we don't want to know about. Could it be that we're really afraid of freedom?

Pause here for a moment. "World as prison, world as trap." Contemplate this view. Can you find any aspects of it in your relationships with people, your means of livelihood and your approach to challenge or difficulties? How does this colour your understanding of healing and your whole sense of the direction and purpose of life? Breathe with this for a few moments and examine it deeply.



The third view is very different from world as battlefield or world as prison. In the first two, the world or the body is often treated as if it were an inanimate stage upon which the action of living takes place. For example, we might chop down a rain forest and then plant a pine plantation thinking that the earth was just so much dirt for anchoring plants and holding them upright. We may forget that the soil is a complex living process or even a living breathing being that is intimately part of the tree itself. The tree depends on the soil and the soil depends on the tree. In a similar way, we might develop an uncaring, insensitive attitude towards our body as if it were merely a mechanical vehicle for our ego to get around in. We easily overlook the wisdom and dynamic responsiveness of this miraculous body, which is inseparably interbeing with what we call mind.

The third view, Joanna Macy calls, "world as lover." Here, we begin to relate to the world and our body as a living being. Not an inanimate space, but a vibrant intelligent presence with whom we have a passionate relationship. World as lover. Body as lover. Life as lover.

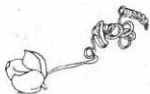
When we are in love with someone we want to know them more deeply. We are totally interested in them. We feel good in their presence. We celebrate their uniqueness and we wish for their success and well being. These feelings are mutual. They flow beautifully in both directions. Love is not a one-way selfish concern that sees others as objects to be manipulated for desired ends. I explore nature and, simultaneously, nature explores me. Every aspect of life becomes imbued with mystery. The walls of separation soften and become transparent, revealing qualities of openness and passionate interest.

This view is found in many of the world's religions, but usually in the smaller, peripheral sects. Look at the Sufi poetry by Rumi, continuously rapt in the presence of the "beloved." Read the writings of Hildegard of Bingen and other Christian mystics. In the East there is the dance of Krishna and the tantric teachings of Vajrayana Buddhism. They all point towards this loving way of seeing. In the past, "world as lover" has inspired the experience and writings of a few mystics and saints. Today, with a deepening global ecological crisis, we need this view to become the common experience of everyone.

Think of how healing and therapy work could unfold when moving this way. We might see our body and the world around us as alive with wisdom and knowing. We could approach them in a receptive and open way, ready to learn and to be transformed through the experience. With this attitude, we begin to realise that healing is not found through confronting neuroses, defences and disease, but through seeing these difficulties as cries for help; not fighting the hurting parts of our being, but allowing them into our heart and touching them with kindness and mercy.

Consider how the view, "world as lover" might shape meditation practice. I was once teaching in the Auckland maximum security prison and began the class by asking the people how they saw meditation. One man said he thought meditation consisted of focusing inwardly so strongly that you walled off all outer disturbances. Only then could you maintain a sense of peace. This motif of keeping out disturbance so that you can be peaceful inside is often associated with meditation but it comes from "world as prison" or "world as battlefield." Meditation with the view "world as lover" doesn't try to control or manipulate the flow of our experience. Rather it seeks deeper understanding through meeting each moment of life with friendly openness, great sensitivity, and a willingness to be fully engaged with whatever is arising. Here, meditation moves from being a mere technique to being a profound act of communion.

Please pause for a moment and feel your body breathing. Relax into your seat. Now, contemplate the degree to which "world as lover" operates in your life. Note areas where it is missing and consider the possibility of allowing this view to flavour your relationship with yourself and others.



Although this third view moves from the heart, there can still be a sense of separation between the lovers. There is me and there is you. There is man and there is nature. However, when oneself and the world are experienced more and more as an unending dance of interbeing, we might begin to glimpse the possibility of a fourth view. Joanna Macy calls this "world as self." I tend to think of it as "world as union," or "world as one."

This is the Oneness, the God experience, Totality, or the Dharmakaya, spoken of by the mystics. It is a viewing that accommodates all views, an openness that excludes nothing and includes everything. Perhaps this is the total viewing of *sammāditthi*. As yet we don't have many therapies or social systems consciously rooted in this view. Can you imagine what they might be like?

Please pause again to ponder these last two: "world as lover" and "world as one." See if you can sense how they are manifesting in your life. How would the world be if more people lived with these views? Try breathing with the green plants. The simplicity of one moment of actual connectedness can teach us far more than years of intellectual speculation.

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Chapter Four

Exploration and Natural Awakening

*We were all early explorers,
early in our life that is.*

As you grasp the pages of this book and note your eyes scanning the lines of print, pause for a moment and appreciate some of the beings and some of the activities, that support this simple action.

Consider the paper. Sunlight dancing with green leaf chlorophyll, flowing water and minerals of the earth; a forest, a weaving of uncountable lives, of mycorrhizal fungi and microbacteria, a tapestry of bees and birds and rotting leaves.

See the logger cutting the forest, his heart filled with hopes and fears and aspirations, a logger with wife and children and parents and desires to live well; a pulpmill with hundreds of employees all eating vegetables and meat grown by unknown farmers elsewhere. All these lives have touched this paper.

And consider human inventiveness, passed like a torch

through millennia, creating machines for pulpmills, creating social systems and attitudes about men and women. And Henry Ford developing cars and trucks to get the paper to the printer. And minerals mined and smelted for the heavy equipment – art forms of raw material founded in stars, light years away. And fossils, bodies of living beings buried and transformed deep in the earth, carbon to oil. And Persian princes and colonial powers and oil rigs in the Persian gulf. The poet Rumi touches this page in an ephemeral way.

As you hold this book you are holding part of my life. For this book to be here, I, the writer, had to be born. Think of the extraordinary coincidences that brought parents together, that brought egg and sperm together, that joined millions of years of mammalian experience with the end of the Second World War and bronchitis in my mother's lungs to cause my family to immigrate to Canada. All these beings and activities were continually fed and supported by sunlight, water, green plants and an entire planetary ecosphere.

Your reading this book rests on your parents and their parents and so on, back through a whole lineage of DNA and social conditioning: patterns shaping the flesh, moulding the mind. Ponder some of the past moments that brought together book and hands and mental attitudes, and feel how, in a way, they are all part of this moment right now. Your holding this book depends on my teacher Namgyal Rinpoché and the fact that as a young man he went to Burma to study Dharma. It depends on the Buddha 2500 years ago and all the weavings that brought the teaching to this moment. Water cycles, food cycles, idea cycles, mind awakening.

And reflect more closely on your hands, an amazing play of fingers and thumb, of delicate bones and wonderously strong tendons. Reflect on how these hands have grown in an unbroken lineage from your mother, from our mother, the earth. We are interbeing. My breath is in your body. Your past is in

this book. These ideas reflect the world. A book reading itself. A dance of profound mystery.

I've always enjoyed the stories of the early European explorers. Imagine what it must have been like, sailing across the ocean with no maps or navigation instruments, when many people believed that the world was flat and that you could fall off the edge or be devoured by monsters if you went too far. No travel agents. No American Express. No posters or brochures showing you the accommodation and cuisine of where you might visit. Picture meeting new expressions of life, unknown and even unimagined by the European mind; the sense of excitement and discovery; the shock of confronting cherished beliefs. When the first duckbilled platypus was sent to the British Museum, the taxonomists were sure it was a hoax, someone's idea of a practical joke!

Many of the early explorers were funded by the military or by merchant princes seeking riches in the mythical east, and yet they also took artists to record the sights and naturalists to collect specimens. Those long sea voyages must have left a lot of time for contemplation. This showed in many of their journals as they wrestled with the moral dilemmas of man and nature, and often praised the wonderful works of God.

Imagine sailing from England and seeing the tropical jungles of South America for the first time, or meeting with the vast expanses of the Sahara desert, or seeing the snow capped peaks of the Hindu Kush. Most of us today wouldn't dare sail the oceans in the ships that were their homes for so many years. These explorers needed to be well equipped with courage and a native intelligence for dealing with unknown situations. Of course, many sailed with rigid views about life and every new thing they met just strengthened their already pre-conceived prejudices. Some, however, travelled with an openness and a willingness to learn. Imagine young Darwin's

excitement and pleasure as he discovered more and more newness, challenging the old ideas and views.

Sometimes the early explorers brought back knowledge and objects that were useful to their sponsors or to society at large. Perhaps more important, though less acknowledged, they brought back themselves, transformed and deepened through their experience. They brought back a larger vision of life.

I remember when I was 10 or 11 years old, I wanted to be a cartographer. I collected all the National Geographic maps and kept them in a large flat folder. I was so enthusiastic that I made a tripod and some primitive survey sticks and then mapped our street and the nearby woods. I also painted a huge map of the world on the wall above my bed. I recall colouring in all the oceans and marking the warm and cold currents, as well as filling in the largest lakes and river systems. I didn't bother with the political boundaries of countries. Somehow they didn't seem important. I would spend hours lying on my bed, travelling all over the world in my imagination, seeing how one could use the ocean currents to move about. If you were prepared to throw in the odd portage (of a few hundred miles!), you could go almost anywhere in the world by water.

We were all early explorers, early in our life that is. Birth is the great awakening. We enter the world, the room containing the womb of our mother – wombs within wombs. All of our senses leap into activity. Light floods our eyes sending reverberations of rhythmic chemical changes throughout the nervous system. Sound plays through our ears. Smell, taste and touch open to new levels of intensity. Our whole body is awakening to inner and outer growth as we are launched on a voyage of exploration and transformation. At this stage, like the early explorers, we have little in the way of maps. We do have our parents, but they are also explorers with questionable

maps for navigating the world of parenting. There are many terrors lurking at the edges, where the charts say *terra incognita*. Life is exciting, challenging and sometimes dangerous, as we awaken to a new world and a continually changing sense of who and what we are.

The bundles of cells, that are our bodies, are pulsing with sensory messages from the outer universe. Our brains and nervous systems are arranging themselves into a wondrously complex network, bringing order and predictability to a chaos of impressions. Our organism is learning to sense an outer environment that is a constant flux of changing vibrations. We learn to crawl and walk and to control some of the inner functions. All of this seems to unfold spontaneously. It's the age-old story of life being received into a world.

Unfortunately, as we get older, we often lose touch with this natural awakening that we are. We started off as a rushing stream of newness, dancing and shaping itself to the banks of parents, society and the world. Now this stream begins to flatten out, somehow curling in on itself. Back-eddies swirl around, as if the water has temporarily forgotten its journey. More and more we lose touch with the cellular levels of curiosity and child-like questioning. Instead, we settle into a life of surface performance and superficiality. The ego has become more important than a total growing organism.

Now, the call of awakening is thoroughly veiled, hidden by what Buddhists call the eight worldly winds: concern over praise and blame, loss and gain, pleasure and pain, obscurity and fame. Often our entire life becomes involved with avoiding one of these winds or trying to encourage another. We stop exploring and, with that, we stop growing. Safety becomes more important. Our views become fixed. Our bodies become inflexible. Our emotional responses become predictable. We become an adult. We become adulterated! It's as if we have traded in being a multidimensional organism for being a rather static "I" or "me."

By now, it's quite common for our lives to feel like a battlefield or a prison and, with this, we inevitably transform the rest of the world into one too. What happened to the exploration? It seems that natural awakening has ground to a halt or at least temporarily nodded off to sleep!

At this stage we may feel there is something wrong with our life – perhaps a slight listlessness, or a feeling of something left undone. Doubt may begin to creep in where before we felt a certain surety. “Have I been wasting my time?” “Is there no more to life than this?” It may seem we have entered a stage of crisis and yet maybe this suffering and doubt is really a call back to life.

Some people speak of healing and awakening as if they were two completely separate things, when really they are two faces of the same process. Health, in its broadest sense means wholeness. In a way, our entire life could be seen as a process of healing. As we grow and investigate the world within and around us, we inevitably deepen our understanding and experience of how everything is interconnected. Awakening to this greater wholeness brings us more and more frequently to a sense of wellbeing. This quality is not only good for ourselves, but radiates out for the benefit of the world.

Healing is often regarded as a kind of symptom management, an attempt to get rid of things like pain, fear or illness. Unfortunately, trying to get rid of something doesn't necessarily bring us closer to wholeness. In fact, it can do the opposite, pushing us further into feelings of loss and separation. We hack off great chunks of our being and try to banish them – physical sensations, difficult emotions, unpleasant memories. We disown them, bury them, and try to pretend they don't exist. Everyone has done this. We take a living part of our being, something that has contributed to who and what we are, and we turn it into an object. It becomes an enemy to be destroyed or guarded against

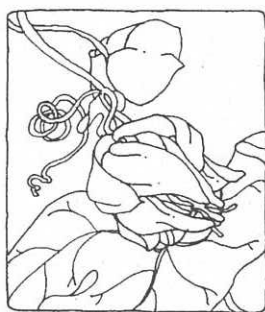
or at least hidden away. Living like this can be very painful. In order to feel more secure, we try to deny the difficult feelings but, in doing so, we shut the world out of our hearts. Every time we do this, we die a little bit, shrinking away from the fullness of life.

The path of natural awakening or meditative healing is essentially a very gentle process. We need to open up, to touch the world of our experience with love and genuine interest. Unfortunately, in a society so addicted to views such as "world as battlefield" or "world as prison," to learn the value of gentle and sensitive enquiry is sometimes quite a challenge. It's particularly tough on the ego that's worked hard to feel strong, independent, and aggressively assertive; the ego that has heavily invested in the fantasy ideal pushed forward by most media advertising. Look at some of the newspaper employment ads. Have you ever seen an advertisement for a sensitive, gentle, loving accounts-manager or sales-person?

Many people don't seem to recognise the path of natural awakening until they have battled their difficulties with every weapon available and are still losing. They have tried every stratagem to escape but continually find themselves back where they started, face to face with the same old problem. For many people, the turning point in their life comes in the form of a major catastrophe, a life-threatening illness or the death of a loved one. I met a woman in Canada who referred to her recent experience with cancer as her "wake-up call." It seems that it's only when we reach the bitter end, when all the standard methods have failed, that we can say to ourselves, "Well, I've completely exhausted myself, fighting, defending, justifying, trying to control or change things. What have I got to lose? Perhaps I should try something quite radical. Why don't I give up fighting and trying to escape, and begin to make friends with the world as it is." Perhaps it's at this moment we remember the life of exploration, the great call to adventure.

For some it may be a bit scary, but for many it feels right. Meaning is coming back into living. We are finding our way back home.

People are sometimes put off by the idea of meditation. It either brings forth images of Eastern religions and 'culty' life styles, or it suggests powers of concentration and determination which they may feel are quite beyond them. Although there are many types of meditation practice, if we cut through the fantasies and opinions surrounding meditation, we would find something very simple and sane. The essence of meditation, the core of all healing practice, is to bring a mind of friendly enquiry to each moment of life; moment by moment, just as it arises. Friendliness and enquiry are the two 'legs' of Natural Awakening. In the following chapters we will explore them in greater and greater depth, learning how the two mutually support each other. Friendliness and enquiry are easy words to say but they represent the most challenging work facing a human being. They can lead us out of the boringly familiar back-eddies of life into a vast unknown, filled with possibility.



Chapter Five

Making Friends with the Breath is Making Friends with the Body

*Coming home to our body is the first
fundamental step of healing.*

It's sad to realise how many people feel uncomfortable with the sensations of their body. So many stresses and pains. So many faceless fears and anxieties, hiding in postures and muscular fatigue. For some, especially people who have been sexually abused, the body can seem downright unsafe, full of bad feelings and fears. It's as if a wound of betrayal, or a damaged core of faith and trust, has been frozen in flesh and bone and highly strung nerves. Pleasure becomes risky. Feelings of softening and surrender can be absolutely frightening. We learn to escape, or to just hang on, or sometimes to both escape and hang on at the same time. Often we retreat into a labyrinth of thinking, worrying, planning, justifying, blaming, or simply day-dreaming. Anything to cover over the feelings in the body. Any ploy to give us a sense of stability and control.

If this goes on for too long, we eventually remove ourselves from the direct experience of the body and are left, instead, with a tangled overlay of emotions and mental processing. This emotional cover-up begins to upset our daily interactions with others and, after a time, we may even start to feel negative about the defensive patterns themselves. It's easy to condemn these states. We've all fallen into them at one time or another. "If only I could stop worrying." "I wish I could be more bright and awake." "If I could just get rid of this confusion, or this anger." Does it sound familiar? These difficult energies become our style, always worrying, often angry, critical or controlling. Actually, they are desperate attempts to cope with a deeper level of disturbing feelings and sensations. Unfortunately, in adopting this way of dealing with our troubles, we become divorced from our body. We move towards becoming a no-body. Unable to completely abandon the body and unable to feel relaxed and easeful with it, we find ourselves in a terrible position. It's as if we have lost our way home and have become emotional tumbleweeds, blown around by winds beyond our control. Thinking, plotting, planning, justifying; always in the head, always on the move.

Breathing is essentially a physical activity. When we meditate on breathing, we are really attending to the tactile sensations of a living, moving, body. Bring your attention to it right now.

What we call breathing is a rhythmic dance of tensing and releasing associated with the movement of muscles, bones and ligaments. This is coupled with alternating sensations of warm and cool air pressure moving by our lips and nostrils.

We begin to breathe as soon as we are born and usually continue to do so until the moment we die. Breathing is absolutely central to life and if it is disturbed, we know about it very quickly. Making friends with our breath brings us home to our body. Coming home to our body is the first fundamental step of healing.

Perhaps you could pause for a moment right now and feel your body breathing. Feel the coolness at the nostrils, the rise and fall of the rib cage, the sensations in the neck and throat and the tone of the legs and belly, all these moments blending into the overall movement. Don't try to control or change the breathing. Just make friends with whatever you find. When you meet someone for the first time and you're in a friendly state, you don't immediately try to correct or change that person. You simply spend some time with them in an open and receptive way. So too, when you make friends with the breath.

As you're reading this, gently focus on the sensations of breathing. Remember how we breathed with the green plants. Feel the air entering your nostrils and leaving your nostrils. Really pay attention to these physical sensations and soften any tendency to judge or criticise what you're doing. Allow yourself to surrender into the movements of breathing, letting go and letting be.

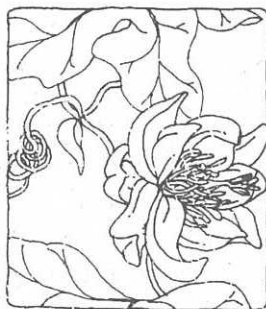
You might begin by breathing in gifts from the green plants, or you may just attend very sensitively to the sensation of breathing by itself. Try breathing for the sheer pleasure of breathing – not trying to accomplish anything. Simply coming home to the breath, coming home to the body. It's actually a good place to be.

Though it may sound a bit odd, making friends with the breath is the beginning of a lifelong friendship. Like any relationship, the more we bring to it, the more meaningful it becomes. Through the simple act of breathing, we enter a deepening communion with the body. After a time of practising like this, the breath will really seem as a friend, someone we enjoy being with. It's a friend that will never abandon us. It's been with us since we were born and will stay with us through thick and thin until we die. It's a good friend to have.

Developing a friendly awareness of breathing is the most fundamental form of meditation.* It's something we can come back to, again and again, in almost any situation. Try making friends with the breath when you wash the dishes or when you are waiting for the traffic light to change. Settle into your breathing when you are waiting for something to come up on the computer screen or when you've been put on hold on the telephone. There are so many moments in the course of the day when we have to pause and wait for something. Instead of drifting aimlessly with our thoughts and fantasies, think of this pause as an invitation to deepen our friendship with the breath and our appreciation of the body.

If you are new to meditation, don't sit too long with the breathing. Better than one long struggling effort to "watch" the breath, is to allow yourself many moments in the course of the day, when you can pause to be with the sensations of breathing in a natural and enjoyable way. As you discover the pleasure and interest of relaxing into your body breathing, you might then begin to extend the length of time you do this. Five minutes easily becomes ten or twenty. This work will lay a wonderful foundation for all meditative explorations. Making friends with our body is a great step towards making friends with ourself and making friends with the world.

* My earlier book, "Breathing: The Natural Way to Meditate" Wangapeka Books, 1991, describes this process in much greater depth.



Chapter Six

Coming Home

*Many people have a house. Not so many people
feel they have a home.*

Did you see the film E.T.? Remember the poignant scene where the little extraterrestrial points his knobby finger towards a star and says in a plaintive voice, "E.T. go home." Nearly everyone has a deep longing for home. We might think of it as a kind of homing instinct. Home is a place where we feel we belong. It supports a sense of easeful presence. We can relax here. It's a place where we feel safe to drop any pretence, a place to be open and natural. Home, deep in all our memories, probably resonates with the goodness of the womb where we were cradled and nurtured and grown into life. Perhaps, home is really the quality of mind we find whenever there is an overall atmosphere of goodness, rightness and well-being.

Buddhist monks are sometimes called homeless ones, or ones who have entered the homeless life. In a way, this interpretation may be quite misleading. It is likely they are houseless, in that they wander from place to place and don't own a dwelling place,

but if they live with a sense of well-being then they are certainly not homeless.

We often confuse house and home. An unfortunate number of people don't feel at home, even in their own house. The house becomes a place of strife and worry: family problems, possessions to guard, mortgages to keep up with. Many people have a house. Not so many people feel they have a home.

In the Buddhist Teaching, there is a meditation for returning home. It's called the *Brahmā Vihāra*. This is usually translated as the Divine Abiding. *Brahmā* was the king of the devas. *Deva* means radiant or shining being. *Vihāra* means dwelling place or abode. So *Brahmā Vihāra* means dwelling place of radiance. We could even call it the house of radiance or perhaps the radiance of home.

Consider the idea of radiance, not the glow painted around saints or a speculative fantasy about auric fields but something very basic and down to earth. When someone is feeling really well, we might say they look radiant. Their complexion shines. Their eyes twinkle. There is a presence of calm and well-being about them, a kind of serene energy. If you were to say to them, "make yourself at home," they would have no trouble in doing so. In fact, with that kind of energy, they would probably feel at home anywhere. In the *Brahmā Vihāra* there are four contemplations that can lead us to this state. Loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity are all pathways that can bring us back home.

Loving Kindness

Imagine a square, one room house. It's a very simple house, though perhaps it looks a little odd. What's unusual about it is that it has four doors, one on each side, and each door leads into the same, single room. We could also imagine there are windows in all the sides. A soft, warm, golden glow, that mysteriously

whispers "home" through every cell of our being, gently streams out from all the windows and doors. Something wondrously familiar resonates in our hearts, inviting us to enter. Looking at the door directly in front of us, we see a sign above it that says, "Loving Kindness." This is the pathway home, through the door of loving kindness.

Loving kindness, or *mettā* as it's called in Pali, is a long way from the fantasies of harlequin romances and the scenes of Hollywood love affairs. It's really a state of mind or a spaciousness of heart that can genuinely embrace everyone, just as they are. When loving kindness is present, there is a wonderful warmth and openness towards all beings. We feel so easeful and relaxed within ourselves that we feel easeful and relaxed with everyone else. With loving kindness present, we are completely at home.

Imagine approaching this radiant home through the doorway of loving kindness. We begin to focus on someone with a feeling of open friendliness blossoming in our hearts. It can be a very magical moment, as if this person were drawing out a treasure of aliveness and love that was hidden away in our being. Radiance mutually incites radiance, and we glow with a sense that all things are possible and all things are good.

The ancient meditation texts warn us of a common pitfall in this practice. Although we begin relating with a heart of loving kindness, gradually, in the name of love, we can sometimes become possessive and controlling. We were walking towards the doorway of loving kindness and strangely, as if falling into a bad dream, we find we have veered off course onto a very different path, one that is now leading us far away from the free and open radiance of loving kindness. Instead of coming home, we become increasingly entangled in a sticky mess of attachment, bargaining (I'll give you this, if you give me that) and exclusiveness (I "love" this person but I can't stand that one.) Has this ever happened to you?

The practice of loving kindness can be risky. We are drawn towards a wonderfully open, radiant, generous, spacious state

but end up in a suffocating relationship. What happened? If we're fools enough to try the tricky and sometimes deceptive path of loving kindness (you should realise that you need to be a bit of a fool in order to awaken) we discover that life is very forgiving. Lo and behold, we seem to get another chance. Pausing for a moment to look up from the mess, we can once again feel the friendly radiance streaming from the house. We're not so far from home after all.

Compassion

The house looks just the same but the sign over the door is different and we realise we have unexpectedly found our way around to the side, or perhaps we are in the same place but the house has magically turned as if to greet us. We see the sign and it now says, "Compassion", *Karuṇā* in Pali. Entering through the doorway of compassion.

Now we find ourselves looking more deeply at this being to whom we've become so attached. Instead of the rosy glow of all our projections, all the qualities we would like to be there, we begin to see the signs of shortcomings, the "warts and bumps," the illness and suffering. We might not feel so infatuated with them as we begin to sense their pains and sorrows and their struggles to survive. Instead, we begin to feel a great warmth of compassion. We deeply want them to come to a state of well-being, to heal or awaken or achieve whatever it is they are wanting or needing in life. Instead of relating to the person in terms of what they can do for us, we begin to see them for what they are, and we want to help them in any way we can.

As we might suspect, there are possible difficulties lurking in the practice of compassion which become only too real for many caregivers and social workers. We begin being moved by the aspiration to help another person or a situation in the world, but in meeting with so much suffering it's easy to become over-

whelmed. Radiant compassion shrinks into a mere caricature of itself, called pity. Eventually, we might fall into feelings of hopelessness, wondering if there is any way we can meaningfully be of help. When faced with war and famine and the ecological madness in the world, it is very easy to become despondent and depressed. Burnout is the common word for it today. We began walking the path of compassion, entering the radiance through identifying with, and being open to the suffering of others. Then, unwittingly, something imperceptibly shifts in our attitude. We slide off the path and seem to find ourselves further away from home than ever. Feeling shut down, exhausted, and sometimes frightened, we often end up angry or frustrated with the very being we were trying to help; angry at them for causing us to be in such a miserable state.

Does any of this sound familiar? Pause for a moment and contact your breathing. Very gently, consider how this story of compassion manifests in your life. The real work of compassion is not so much the act of helping another – that is more the natural outflow of compassion. As American teacher and author, Stephen Levine, has so often and skilfully pointed out, the real work of compassion is learning to remain open in the presence of another's pain, without having to shut them out of our heart.

Sympathetic Joy

Some people might argue that, in the light of so much suffering, perhaps we shouldn't practice compassion at all. We're very likely to get ourselves into trouble. However, if we are still a bit of a fool – a divine fool of course – and are determined to walk the risky path of compassion, the great heart of being seems infinitely forgiving. Just when we feel most depressed, we might raise our eyes and see a door directly in front, radiating the glow of spacious well-being. Above it is a sign that says "Sympathetic Joy". Coming home through the door of sympathetic joy: *Muditā* in Pali.

Sympathetic joy is the pleasure we spontaneously feel when we meet with the happiness or success in another. When our child overcomes a difficulty and laughingly makes a new discovery, we feel glowing and good inside. We feel happy for them.

Sadly in this age of so much suffering, sympathetic joy is the least frequented doorway and probably the most needed. Moved by compassion, we enter the world of another's suffering but soon we cease to see them as a whole person. They are degraded into a two dimensional cut-out being. They become a cancer victim or a case of terminal illness. We often end up relating to the difficulty and losing sight of the real person. These victims of war, disease, famine, and physical or mental violence draw forth from us the wondrous energy of compassion. If, however, we are now unable to receive all that pain into our hearts, and we shut down in order to protect ourselves, we can begin to relate to them in a very distorted way. Losing sight of the whole being doesn't only happen in the case of others, it can also arise if we see ourselves as a victim or a damaged object. At these times we really need the practice of sympathetic joy.

Contemplating sympathetic joy, we reflect on the aspects of joy and goodness that are also this person. We bring to mind and celebrate the breakthroughs, the discoveries, the talents, the generosity and the moments of sharing and loving that have been a real part of their life. If our compassion fades through guarding ourselves against the pain, we can reopen the door to the heart by contemplating the goodness of that person's life. Sensing the interweaving of all life, we begin to realise that their joy and goodness support our own joy and goodness and we are spontaneously uplifted.

As you can imagine, like the other doors, this one also has potential problems. Here it is the possibility of getting lost in elation. Wow, everything is just great! The universe is absolutely perfect! And as we slide away from sympathetic joy on a spiral of fantasy and manic elation, we find ourselves again moving

away from home. We might feel wonderfully spaced out but our feet are no longer on the ground. This state is precarious and very unstable.

Equanimity

If we are 'fool' enough, or courageous enough, to work with sympathetic joy and we do find ourselves getting off track, we might look up and discover that we are now at the fourth side of the house. In front is a door and above it a sign that sometimes says, "Equanimity," sometimes "Serenity," and sometimes "Even-mindedness."

Wondrous indeed is the universe! It always seems to give us another chance. The Pali word above this fourth door is *Upekkhā*. *Upe*, like the English word upper, can mean higher. The *ekkhā* is from the Sanscrit, *iksha*, which is one of the verbs to do with seeing. Putting them together we begin to understand that true serenity or equanimity arises from seeing the overview. It grows from a kind of higher or more pervasive seeing or, if you like, a deeper understanding.

Even this fourth door has its dangers, so stay alert. The danger is of falling into a state of apathy and indifference. "The universe is just as it should be. There is nothing we can add to it or subtract from it so why bother doing anything?"

Here we are at the fourth door. If we try to develop serenity but fall off the track into apathy, what then? Life hasn't finished with us yet. We look up and see a curiously familiar door, although it looks a bit bigger or possibly a bit closer than before. Above it is a sign that says, "Loving Kindness"!

Actually, we can begin our journey home through any of the four doors. If we meet with these common difficulties, we need only to remember to apply the antidote of the next door. Round and round the house we go, wandering off the path and finding our way back, but always spiralling in towards the centre.

Occasionally we miraculously find ourselves inside the house, and we may not be sure how we got there. Looking out from inside, there are no doors. There are no walls. In fact, there is no obstruction whatsoever in this vast boundless heart – the centre of being. With a sense of radiant spaciousness, we open to the whole world and all its manifestations. There is no need to defend. There is no need to escape. Easefully present and totally engaged, we have come home to a place we may now realise we have been carrying within us all the time.

Here is a very traditional Buddhist meditation on the four divine abidings. First read or chant the following in English or Pali. Go slowly and really feel the meaning of the words flowering in your body and being. Then explore the breathing and visualisation that follows.

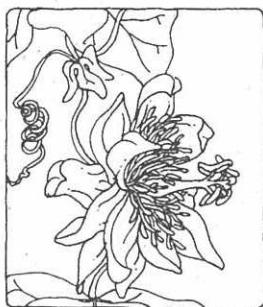
May I be friendly, calm and free from ill-will and may I live in happiness. As I am, so may all beings be friendly, calm and free from ill-will and may they live in happiness.

Ahaṃ avero homi, abyāpajjho homi, anīgho homi, sukhi attānaṃ pariharāmi.

Ahaṃ viya sabbe sattā averā hontu, abyāpajjhā hontu, anīghā hontu, sukhi attānaṃ pariharantu.

Now become aware of your breathing. As you breathe, imagine in your heart a jewelled flower or a soft globe of light radiating loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity to every part of your body. (Breathe with this for a few minutes.) As feelings of easefulness, spaciousness and clarity flower in your experience, send the light of these four divine abidings in all directions to touch beings throughout the universe, supporting their health and unfolding.

(from Daily Pūja)



Chapter Seven

An Awakened Spirit

*An outstanding attribute
of an awakened spirit
is its expansiveness.*

We were travelling in Costa Rica with a group of people, meditating in the rainforests, learning to appreciate the wondrous weaving of inner and outer. There I came across the writings of a biologist named Alexander Skutch. He was not religious in a churchy sense. He was absolutely devoted to closely observing nature and would sometimes study a particular bird family for two or three years in a row. Spending hours and hours each day in all kinds of weather, he patiently let the lives of these creatures reveal themselves. After a lifetime of contemplating nature and thinking very deeply on the process of evolution, he wrote these marvellous words.



*"An outstanding attribute of an awakened spirit
is its expansiveness,
its insatiable hunger to experience more widely,
to know more broadly and profoundly,
to cultivate friendly intercourse
with the whole of Being.
The noblest mind is that which understands,
appreciates and loves
the largest segment of the Universe."**

Please read this a few times and feel it working in your being.

* From "Life Ascending" by Alexander F. Skutch, University of Texas Press, 1985.



Chapter Eight

Tuning the Instrument

*The unstruck drum of eternity
sounds within me
but my deaf ears
hear it not.*

The human body is potentially a superb instrument. A Stradivarius violin doesn't begin to approach the range of resonance, the depth of possible feeling and expressiveness of the human body. Like any musical instrument, however, it has to be cared for and it has to be tuned. The breath is like the bow. As it flows in and flows out it strokes the nostrils, the bronchia and the lungs. Breathe in and out a few times to remind yourself. At times the bow strokes the body quite powerfully. You can feel the friction. Other times it caresses the body in a wonderfully smooth and subtle way.

The throat and vocal chords are the strings. Have you noticed when they are tighter than usual your voice becomes higher pitched and strained. At other times they seem so relaxed and vibrant, you can express yourself with a rich tone and an effortless volume.

When we speak, the entire body acts as a sounding box. Sometimes it is very easeful. The sinuses are clear, the head, throat and chest are open, and the voice has a rich resonance. Sometimes the opposite is happening. Our muscles are tight. The sinuses are blocked and, when communicating, we feel restricted and withdrawn.

Not only is our body like a musical instrument, it is also like a scientific instrument, an instrument of marvellous sensitivity able to respond to the most subtle messages of life. When you tune two guitars together, do you know what happens? If you pluck the E string of one guitar and the two are not well tuned then nothing much happens except that the string that you plucked makes a sound. If however you pluck the string when the two guitars are very closely tuned, the E string of the second guitar begins to vibrate sympathetically. It responds to the first one. We might even say it "hears" the first one.

Our body is a bit like this. It's as if our muscles, nerves and sense organs and even our attitudes and expectations, need to be closely "tuned" to the inner and outer environments, in order to respond to particular messages. When our own range of vibration is varied and vast, we can potentially resonate with an extraordinary variety of movements. If, however, we are tight and inflexible in our way of being, our range of responsiveness will be greatly reduced.

Potentially, humans can tune into a wide spectrum of experiences. Not only can we pick out the cry of our own child or one particular voice in a crowded room, we can also respond to a tree, to a forest and to a field of flowers, each one in a different way. We can pick up all sorts of subtle intimations from others. We can tune ourselves to the breathing of a living planet. Right now innumerable TV and radio signals are passing through our bodies as well as gamma rays and gravity waves – the entire song of the universe. The poet Kabir once wrote, "The

unstruck drum of eternity sounds within me but my deaf ears hear it not." How do we unblock our ears?

Breathing not only gets air in and out of our lungs, it also allows us to make sounds. Singing, talking, coughing, grunting, groaning, screaming, yelling, crying, laughing and sighing; these are all expressions of our breathing and as such reflect our whole state of being. In this chapter, we'll look at two more ways of making friends with the breath and the body. We could think of them as two ways of tuning this precious instrument. Both of them involve making sounds. Children can enjoy these meditations. They are wonderful ways to bring together people of all ages. The first is simply called "Sounding." The second is called "Ah-ing".

In these explorations, we work with two types of sound. The first is "the sound of silence." This is the sound of the inhalation: the texture or feeling of the incoming breath. We need to be very still and attentive to appreciate it. The second type of sound we might think of as "the sound of sound." This is the audible vibration that can happen on the out breath. The first is quietly interior. The second is gently exterior. Both are equally important.

Sounding

Sounding can be done on your own, but it's also a lovely meditation to do in a group, sitting in a circle, facing inward. Use a chair, or if you find it comfortable, sit crosslegged on the floor. It's important to have a posture that supports a sense of easefulness and alertness. When we practise sounding it helps to have our chests and bellies really open in order to allow the sound to vibrate fully through our bodies. With this in mind, try to sit without hunching over. (There are instructions for good meditation posture in Appendix B.) Once you have a comfortable

posture, then, with great sensitivity, begin to follow your breathing. Breathing in. Breathing out. Allow your body to relax, particularly on the exhalation.

After sitting for a few minutes, relaxing into the body, begin to focus on the "sound of silence." Without any sense of hurry, bring an immense sensitivity to each inhalation. Breathing in, appreciate the texture of the breath. Listen to it, taste it, touch it, feel the breath coming all the way in, and feel the breath going all the way out.

After a while, allow a soft humming sound to come with the exhalation. "Hmmm." This is the "sound of sound." Draw in a sensitive and gentle inhalation, appreciating the sound of silence. Then, let it cascade out, with a soft Hmmm. Humming is very good for people who are a bit shy about singing in public. It's sort of singing with your mouth closed! Take your time exploring it. At the beginning you may feel the vibration primarily in the area of your lips and face. As you become more relaxed, the vibration will spread through the throat and into the chest. Eventually, it may involve your entire body. Breathe like this for a while, relaxing and letting go into the sound.

After Humming for a few minutes, you may feel ready to expand the exploration. Open your mouth and experiment with vowel sounds. Ahhhh, Ehhhh, Eeeee, Ohhhh, Uuuuu. Just as you did with the Hmmm, remember to bring a great deal of sensitivity to the inhalation, the sound of silence. Really savour the nectar-like air as it enters your body. Feel your whole being receiving this gift of life, and then, from the state of fullness, let the air pour out with the sound of sound.

Allow yourself to explore all the vowels. Be experimental with it. Try pulling faces while you are sounding and discover how different muscular tensions support different sounds. Try nasal tones. See if you can find the sound that brings the greatest feeling of vibration into your body. Once you do, stay with it and let it deepen. The important thing is not volume but vibration.

With practice you may find that the sound is massaging your insides. It is vibrating and loosening the tissues, a kind of ultrasound treatment.

When we sound in a group, we usually do so for about twenty minutes. It's not necessary for everyone to sound together at the same time. We all have different lung capacities. Some will be inhaling while others are exhaling, so with a large enough group, there will probably be a continuous sound. Don't even be concerned about making the same notes.

Each person begins with a low note which gradually gets higher and higher. After that it descends again until it finishes on the deepest tones. Let go of all concerns and surrender into a rich awareness of vibration in your body and in the room. Allow your sounds to merge with the sounds of the others.

Eventually all the outer sounding stops and everyone sits quietly, gently breathing in and out, aware of a greater sense of aliveness and a wonderfully nurturing silence.

Ah-ing

This second form of sounding can be deeply healing. Though you can do it in a group, I know many people who have found themselves Ah-ing in the car, at work, at home, in the shower – just about anywhere. I sometimes think of "Ah" as the western doctor's mantra. "Open your mouth. Stick out your tongue. Say Ah!" I suppose, as a doctor's mantra, it ought to be good for healing.

Ah-ing is really primordial mantra work. It is not the invention of a particular religious tradition. Human beings all over the world sigh with an Ah. It is natural to every culture. In some schools of Tibetan teaching, the syllable Ah represents love. In the teachings of Dzogchen, the Great Perfection, it is visualised to represent the essential Guru-mind. The energy of

Ah can teach us. Ah is the sound of satisfaction, the relief of letting go and letting be. It is also the sound of discovery and understanding, Ah-ha! Can we learn from these moments? With "Ahhhh" we bring a merciful friendliness to our body and being. It's such a natural expression and it can move almost anyone in surprisingly deep ways.

We begin Ah-ing the same way we do the Sounding. Take up a supportive posture and sensitively attend to the breathing. After a while, begin to Hummmm.

Gradually allow an Ah sound to come on the exhalation. The Ah is very gentle. We're not trying to sing an Ah so that others can hear it. It's more important to feel the vibration in the throat and chest, a deep sigh of letting go. A sigh of relaxing the need to control – just allowing the moment to be as it is with kindness and appreciation, breath by breath by breath.

Observe the sound of silence, the quality of the inhalation. Feel the texture and the temperature of the breath. Feel the body allowing the breath and the breath enlivening the body: a full, unforced, inhalation. There may be a natural pause between the incoming breath and the outgoing breath, then, without any pushing, it gently cascades out. "Ahhhhhhh." The sound fades away at the end of the exhalation until you hear/feel only a soft "hhhhh." Again inhale through the nostrils and repeat the cycle. Keep going like this for 10 or 15 minutes.

Sometimes Ah-ing brings forth a wave of sadness. In letting go, we begin to feel, and in feeling we respond to some of the stories hidden within us. Many people become alarmed when strong emotions arise. So many years of keeping things under control seems suddenly threatened by a gentle sigh!

If emotions do show themselves, see if you can touch them with patience and love. Allow the organism to tremble if it wants

to. Just go with the process and meet whatever is arising with kindness. Shutting off these difficult states robs us of life energy. In the past, we may have learned to cope with them, but in doing so, we often lost contact with the fullness of our being.

With the Ah-ing, it's not uncommon to experience a strange quality of emotion, a kind of bitter sweetness, a feeling of both sadness and relief happening together at the same time. This may be the sadness and grief for all that has been lost and not lived, and the relief of no longer having to deny it. Just Ah-ing, allowing the feeling in. Ah-ing making friends with myself as I am.

Touching ourselves with inner friendliness can move us in very deep ways. It's simple, direct, and very much needed. Many people meditate for years without ever really doing this. We are so busy trying to achieve something or trying to get somewhere, that we forget the essence of meditative healing. We forget to touch each moment of experience with friendly enquiry, gently, compassionately, forgivingly, "Ahhhhh."

Every time you finish a session of Sounding or Ah-ing, give yourself a moment to rest in the stillness and follow your breathing. As you do this, gently open all your sense doors and note the outer sounds, sights, smells, tastes and touches as they arise and pass away in the vast space of stillness. Sounding and Ah-ing can loosen the subtle structures of the body. The more flexible your body and voice, the more receptive you will become when dwelling in the silence.

Sounding and Ah-ing are two ways of tuning this wonderful instrument.

*Sitting in the silence
Breathing the song of life
Singing ourselves alive
Softly, gently, Ah!!!*

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Chapter Nine

Enquiry

*A question is a quest. It is an adventure
that moves us into the unknown and
transforms us in the process.*

Friendly enquiry is the essence of meditative healing and the heart of natural awakening. The friendly part could refer to any one of the four Brahmā Vihāra: loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy or equanimity. For example, it could be loving enquiry or compassionate enquiry. I use the word "friendly" to hint at all four – a fresh, light, non-clingy openness.

Enquiry is the active questioning part of awakening. It's really an attitude of mind or, if you like, a mode of being. You might wonder, how can a question or an enquiry be a mode of being? Most people see a question as something they direct toward another person in order to get an answer. It's a kind of verbal tool, a bit like a knife or a scalpel that cuts the veils of 'not knowing' so that an answer, hidden behind the screen, can be revealed. The trouble with this view is that the answer is always filtered through the conditioning patterns and understandings

of the person we are asking. The response is, in a sense, second or even third hand. Imagine I ask you about something. I'm actually interested in the "something," but your reply will inevitably be coloured by your present views and expectations. Could I be more direct and enquire into the experience itself, instead of relying on your opinion?

There are really two types of question. The first is a way of approaching truth, an organic growing into maturity. This type of question is a quest. It is an adventure that moves us into the unknown and transforms us in the process. Question, quest, query, enquire, require, conquest, these all grew from the same ancient root sound 'kuere.'^{*} All true enquiry is preceded by curiosity. It is motivated by genuine interest in what is happening. The deeper the questioning, the more open-ended the exploration. This openness may lead us into unexpected new understandings and experiences. The shallower the questioning, the more we place conscious or unconscious restrictions on the type of response we are willing to receive.

Consider the question, "How should I deal with my fear?" This simple query contains many hidden assumptions and expectations. First of all it indicates we are more interested in "dealing" with the fear, rather than investigating the nature of fear itself. Second, it seems to picture fear as a kind of lumpy object that can be controlled or shifted around to our benefit. Third, it assumes that, somehow, I own this object called "my" fear. A question like this could send us off looking for a technique to free us from this thing called fear when what might prove more useful is to enquire directly into the nature of the fear itself. A more open mode of questioning might have us investigating the fear rather than automatically assuming it to be bad and then trying to escape from it. Questioning in this way may reveal something quite unexpected. It may not turn out to be a lumpy

^{*} For a fascinating tour of the origins of English, see "The Origins of English Words" by Joseph T. Shipley, John Hopkins University Press, 1984.

thing after all. On really exploring it, we may discover that, from a different perspective, the energy we've been calling fear is actually enlivening and leading in the direction of growth and newness. What a surprise this would be!

The first type of question is an attitude of being that approaches truth. The second type of question, however, is more for confirming already held opinions and views. There are many varieties of this one. For some people today, enquiries and investigations are things that government and police departments do when they are looking for someone to blame. A lot of our personal questioning has this flavour. Why did this happen to me? Who's fault is it? With this type of enquiry, it often seems that truth is less important than identifying who or what is responsible. Here we are looking for definitive answers. Yet, consider the nature of an answer. It often means the end of looking. A question keeps us awake and involved. It enlivenes us. An answer closes the book. Perhaps this is the purpose of this second type of enquiry, to close the book, to give a sense of final assurance. These questions aren't really probing towards truth. They are basically attempts to make ourselves feel more secure.

Our culture has a disturbing and largely unconscious relationship with the whole idea of question. For example, we have the type of question that isn't really a question at all. It's more an excuse to relate to another person. "Hello, I'm here. Do you see me seeing you? Please give me some attention." Or, "Aren't I an intelligent person for asking such a thing?" We can converse for hours on a subject without learning anything new and without really changing the way we experience or see the world. We might believe we are interested in a particular subject, but our questioning is more to massage our ego than to support any new discovery. To explore a feeling or a tree or the geomorphology of a mountain range, we would

need a much deeper level of enquiry than this.

Most education systems of today don't do much to encourage honest question. In fact, with all the competition to get the right answers, achieve high marks in exams and so on, they actually discourage deep enquiry. Today, many people would rather be told what to do and how to live, than to risk having to enter the wobbly state of true question.

In the Buddhist tradition the first factor of awakening is investigation of truth. Not having enough question is probably the most widespread weakness in people's meditation practice today. Look at your own practice. Do you value and support your exploration and interest? Do you give it a free range and lots of encouragement? Or, do you keep it on a tight leash, concerned more about doing the meditation correctly? Given our education systems, however, this dulling of question is only too easy to understand.

Even when the flicker of living curiosity has managed to stay alive, people still think of question in terms of words and intellect. The idea of asking a question without words, not to mention receiving an answer without words, is almost meaningless to many. On our trip to the Amazon, we had an American naturalist with us who knew the Latin names of all the plants and animals. Someone would see a lovely bird high in a tree and ask, "What's that?" and he might reply, "That's an *Aratinga Leucophthalmus*." This was to describe what looked like a white eyed parakeet. Hearing the Latin name, everyone in the canoe would go, "Oh....," and nod wisely. I noticed that, as soon as the name was spoken, some people seemed to lose interest in the creature and would swing their binoculars off in a different direction, looking, I suppose, for something else to name. Perhaps it's that when we name something it makes us feel safer because somehow we think we know it. There can be, however, a profound difference between naming and knowing.

On the same trip, there was a Brazilian guide named Moacir Fortes. He had been taking people up the Amazon for more than twenty years. He had lived all his life on the river and had an amazing alertness and enthusiasm about him. Frequently, he was the first to spot an animal. After forty years of living in this environment he would still get excited about seeing a flock of macaws. Sometimes people would ask Moe about a bird. "Moe, what's that?" There would be a long pause of silence while we watched the bird for a few moments more, its loud squawks battering our ears and the splash of falling fruit wetting us in the boat. After allowing us to be with the experience for some time, Moe would say something like, "That's a great big red and blue beautiful bird." Or, "That's a tiny yellow headed spotted bird." I still recall those birds, six years later! Moe was a gem. For those who could learn, he taught what couldn't be said in words. He showed a richness of appreciation and a relaxed alertness. These qualities can come through heartfelt enquiry, but not through simply asking verbal questions.

There is a well known saying in Zen. "The greater the question, the greater the awakening. No question. No awakening." We could just as well say, the greater the enquiry, the greater the awakening. To enquire into something is to want to know more about it, to understand it more deeply. In the Old Testament, when Adam "knew" Eve, it meant he had intercourse with her. He didn't ask someone else what she was like. Knowing wasn't something done at a distance. It was intimate. To know someone, you had to unite with them, to become one with them. This kind of knowing involved the whole of one's being. In the old Anglican marriage ceremony there used to be a phrase, "With this body, I thee worship." We know with our body. We know with our entire being.

To enquire deeply into something is to open ourselves in a sensitive and receptive way. For example, I could ask about a

flower and you could tell me its name and anything you know about it. On the other hand, I could say nothing to you, but approach the flower directly with all my senses open, breathing in the scent, bathing in the colour, letting the shape and form resonate intuitive understandings. Enquiry really begins to deepen when we find that place of exquisite stillness coupled with a wonderfully subtle receptivity. In other words, we are absolutely involved with the object, not standing back and viewing it from a distance, and not bringing to it a whole load of preconceptions and expectations. True question is really a state of openness, a willingness to enter the experience and be profoundly touched by it.

When we understand enquiry in this way it becomes clear that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to enquire into something that we dislike or fear. The very energy of disliking has us pushing the object away so that we never get close enough to know it deeply. To enquire into something there must be a willingness to get closer to it, to mingle and merge with it. In order to enquire deeply we must be in a friendly or loving state.

In a way, the friendliness and the enquiry are the same thing. When we love someone, we are interested in them. It's absurd to think, "I love this person but I'm not interested in them." To love them is to be interested in them, is to want to know them more thoroughly. Now we begin to see that true friendliness is enquiry and all enquiry embodies an aspect of friendliness or love. You can't really have one without the other. This is the key to bringing peace and wholeness into our life and into the world. Can we bring friendly enquiry to our body, our breath, our feelings and our thoughts? Can we bring it to our experiences of the world?

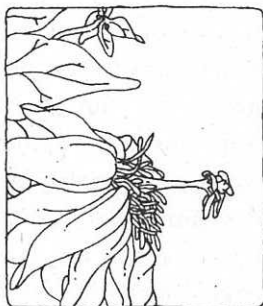
Open the doors
Open wide the doors
Oh daffodil!

Pull up the shutters
Open all the windows
Open your body
Open your mind

Breathe with it deeply.
Currents of transformation playing
gently the boundless ocean vastness.

Open the doors
Open wide the doors
Oh daffodil!

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Chapter Ten

Gurus

Humour is essential for awakening.

I don't know how many times I have been asked if I think it's necessary to have a teacher. In the "Western" world, there seems to be a great ambivalence about this. Some don't think they can trust a teacher but still feel compelled to stay around the periphery of a group, not being able to wholeheartedly join in, and not feeling free enough to walk away. Some people seem almost blind with devotion, often at the cost of denying the validity of their intellect and discriminating faculties. Today, many are attracted to the idea of "doing their own thing" or finding their own path. These people often see the relationship with a guru or teacher as a bit demeaning or threatening to their sense of dignity, and definitely something belonging to the past. There are a large number of different views on this subject. Rather than entangling ourselves with any of the usual positions, perhaps we should ask, "What is it that really teaches us?"

In the Tibetan form of Buddhism, there is a tremendous emphasis on the importance of having a close relationship with a guru or teacher. It is said in some of the texts, that the degree to which a person can master the guru yoga, the degree to which they can come into union with the guru mind, indicates the degree to which they are capable of profound knowing. Having been ordained as a monk in the Tibetan Karma Kargyu tradition for 12 years, and having practised many of its contemplations and yogas over the last 25 years, I have come to see that this is inescapably true, though not necessarily in the way you might expect.

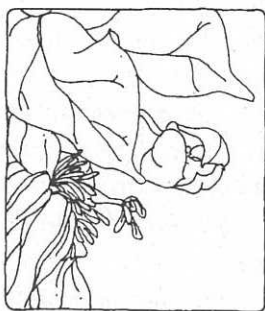
In the course of my life, in addition to the outer teachers I have been fortunate to meet and study with, I have also been blessed by living and working with the six greatest teachers of this world. It is extremely rare to find such masters today. Most people would hardly recognise them even if they were pointed out. Those that do meet them and practice their teachings are truly blessed. I urge you to make every effort to find them and be initiated by them even if it means travelling all the way around the world.

It is said, when the student is ready, the teacher appears, but these teachers are sometimes hidden behind the pomp and pageantry of religious tradition, so you will have to search very carefully. It can be a bit like not being able to see the forest for the trees. Actually, I would go so far as to say that if you don't find them and receive their blessings, there is no possible way you will attain deep healing or realise the profound path of natural awakening. These teachers are so holy that I feel I should reveal their names only in verse. Please breath deeply and mindfully before reading on.

I have six wondrous Teachers
I recommend to you
Their names are
What! and Why! and When!
And How! and Where! and Who!

May your entire being receive their blessings!

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Chapter Eleven

Friendly Enquiry

*Friendly enquiry is rooted in the very material
of our bodies.*

Friendly enquiry is really the foundation of all life. This is not merely a psychological or philosophical concept. Friendly enquiry is rooted in the very material of our bodies. According to microbiologist Lynne Margulis and her colleagues, evolution of life on this planet makes most sense when seen as a co-operation, a symbiosis of different forms and energy processes. This co-operation and sharing is the "friendliness." Atoms share electrons. Clumps of atoms sharing together are called molecules. Complex chemical reaction chains mesh into other complex chains to produce stable biological structures like the membranes of a cell. The various parts of our cells trace their parentage back to independent units that found it more functional to co-operate and work together. Our heart supports our lungs which support our liver and so forth. The green plants support our metabolism. The sun supports us all. Everywhere we look in this vast cosmic ecology called life we see sharing and co-operation. Everything

is feeding and supporting something else. Could this be a material demonstration of love?

When we consider the aspect of "enquiry," we also find it happening everywhere. Each cell is checking out the environment. Can I eat this? Will it eat me? In a way, even the atom is feeling the environment. Can I bond with this? Will it make me more stable? The enquiry here is more in terms of the push and pull of electromagnetic forces. Flowers open and close with the changing light. The sea responds to the gravitational pull of the moon. Every manifestation of life appears with some degree of receptive responsiveness to whatever structures are around it. Every object is "questioning" made manifest. Perhaps a human being is essentially a question appearing in blood, flesh and bones.

During a course I was giving in New Zealand, we saw a video called "Birth of a Brain."^{*} At one point in the film, there was a fantastic sequence that showed the growing of a nerve ending. Imagine a long nerve cell. One end was bulging and, from it, what looked like many tiny hairy bits seemed to be groping outward in all directions. One hair or dendrite, looking translucent pale blue with the colour-enhanced microphotography, would reach out, extending further and further, only to collapse back onto itself. Another would reach out, pulsing, twitching and stretching. Then another and so on, groping into the unknown, reaching for a connection which was surely not random. Yet the process of making contact seemed so haphazard. An immense number of these dendrites were snaking out in many directions simultaneously, as if searching for something. Meanwhile, nerve endings from another cell were jiggling and groping towards the first cell. At the moment of contact, you could almost feel a sigh of relief and satisfaction. Immediately, the groping stopped and a friendly intimacy reigned between the two cells. Not shown on the film, of course, was the subtle electrical enquiry still going on

^{*} "Birth of a Brain" distributed by CRM/McGraw-Hill Films, U.S.A. 1982.

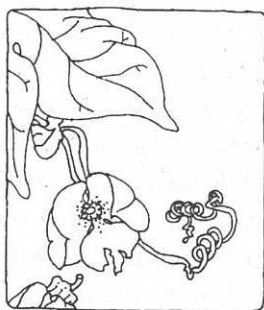
between them. This electrical enquiry goes on for as long as the cell is alive. In fact, when the enquiry stops, the nerve is dead.

Enquiry is the way we grow and transform. The act of friendliness is the process of life dancing with life. Friendliness and enquiry are inseparably intermingled. Even when we look far back to the earliest traces of "something" forming the universe, or the first indicators of the existence of our own being, we find friendliness and enquiry playing in harmony. Together, they form the foundation of our being.

In the Tibetan Teachings we do a practice called *Ngon-dro*. This is usually translated in English as Foundation Work. Many people, approaching *Ngon-dro* for the first time, think of it as a kind of beginner's work, the meditations you do before getting on to the really profound practices. Perhaps we could look at this in a rather different way. Foundation work is the work of discovering the foundation of our being. Is your foundation working? Is it functioning? Is the process of friendly enquiry alive in your being, or has it atrophied and become lost in the struggle to get by in a superficial world?

As we develop a deeper appreciation for the role of friendly enquiry in our life, we begin to realise that it's not so much something to practise, as something to be. It's what we are. We don't have to bring it into being. It's been there, as the Buddhists say, since the 'very-no-beginning'. Our real work is to relax the need to defend, and to allow the loving or friendly enquiry to arise. This is the heart of natural awakening. Regardless of what techniques or traditions we may be following, friendly enquiry is the core of all meditative work.

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Chapter Twelve

Embodiment

*The first big step of healing is to learn to be
with the sensations of our body
in a friendly, caring way.*

The Dalai Lama is thought of by the Tibetan people to be an "embodiment" of the Compassionate Buddha, Chenrezi. This is not unusual, as many of the high lamas are thought to be embodiments of one spiritual principle or another. The idea of embodiment is the subject of much speculation especially on the part of devotees but, in truth, we are all embodiments. The question is, embodiments of what?

We were once attending a talk given by the Dalai Lama in Dunedin, New Zealand, where he referred quite dramatically to this idea. He thumped his left arm with his right fist as he said, "Embodiment. In the body!" Speaking on ecology and the religious life, he emphasised that a wholesome life was not simply a matter of having spiritual beliefs and high intellectual ideals, but that these ideals and beliefs needed to be manifested "in the body."

The next time you walk down a busy street or stroll through a shopping mall, look at the people. Observe their faces, their posture, the way they move, their general carriage, complexion and the quality of their skin. There are all kinds of embodiments in this world. Not only do we have embodiments of compassion, such as the Dalai Lama, but we have embodiments of anger, frustration, longing and hoping. We have embodiments of frozenness, lust, greed, desire and confusion. The habitual thoughts and emotional energies of the person have shaped the flesh. They have become manifested "in the body."

For many, the body has become an unfriendly place, a source of pain, of fear or simply discomfort. These difficult feelings are often lingering from earlier times and events. Each of these unpleasant manifestations could be seen as a cry for help, an earlier part of our being calling out for attention, calling out for the love or nurturing or support it never received. Sometimes the problem may be something from as recent as a few minutes ago or yesterday or last week – a current illness or injury. Sometimes the body has been calling out for so long that the calling has become a habit, the physical posture of who we are. Some part of our being needs love and attention, but we often turn a deaf ear and a blind eye. The call itself is sometimes so painful, that we push these sensations away, preferring to escape into mental fantasy. We try to pretend there is no problem. If, however, we're unsuccessful at this, we may find ourselves overwhelmed with impatience.

Imagine seeing a young child in distress. Its crying may irritate and upset us to the point where we yell at it. "For God's sake shut up!" If she or he persists in crying we may even hit them out of frustration. Have you ever done this? When we are not in a negative state, though, isn't the most natural response to hold the child, to touch them and surround them with a field of caring. So often we get angry and impatient with the pains and fears in our body. We want to get rid of them and yet, perhaps

they are child-like parts of our being, crying out for love.

The first big step of healing is to learn to be with the sensations of our body in a friendly, caring way, to be willing to hear the story that a painful muscle tension or a flighty stomach wants to tell. Most important, we need to stop fighting against ourselves, to stop beating ourselves. We need to pause, to feel, and to listen mercifully to this story of our own being.

Here are two ways of deepening our compassionate contact with the body. The first explores in a general way the areas of our head, throat, chest and abdomen. The second is a way of going into more specific parts of the body. In both of them we learn to contact the physical sensations and realise it's okay to be in and with this body just as it is. We also come to meet with the emotions and the feelings that are embodied in the habits of our flesh, to meet them and know them in a merciful and forgiving way.

The meditation of Chenrezi is for the development of compassion. In this practice, there is a line of prayer that goes, "Looking with greatly merciful eyes on all that lives." This is the essential work of healing. Can we learn to look with greatly merciful eyes on all that lives, including all that lives within us?

Body Scan in Four Parts

This method takes about half an hour, but you could do it much more quickly if necessary. Here, we explore in a very open way the areas of the head, the throat, the chest and the abdomen.

Sit in a posture that feels relaxed and supports a mind of alertness. If sitting is uncomfortable, settle into whatever posture works best for you. Some people find it very good to do these explorations lying on their back. If you have any problems with lumbar pain when you're lying down, putting a thick cushion under your knees will relieve the tension.

Now, bring a gentle awareness to the movements of breathing. Breathing in. Breathing out. Take a minute or so to allow your body to relax into your seat or onto the bed.

Consider your desire for healing and wholeness. As you are reflecting on this, notice the effect this aspiration has on your body. Perhaps it gives you a little more determination or a stronger sense of purpose. Refresh your intention to explore your body with the spirit of friendly enquiry, to meet whatever arises with an open heart and a merciful mind. Take whatever time is necessary to be quite clear about how and why you are doing this work.

Staying with the breathing, gently bring your attention to the area of your face and head. Simply be with whatever sensations are arising there. It's not necessary to look for anything special. Perhaps there's a tingling at the back of the head, a softening around the eyes or a tension near the left ear. It may be something on the surface or something that seems deep inside. Whatever arises, just breathe with it in a gentle, unforced way. Don't try to change anything. Simply meet what's there with friendly interest.

After exploring the area of the head for about five minutes, bring your attention into the throat and neck area. Allow yourself to touch each sensation and to be touched by each sensation. This is very soft and delicate work. As relaxation deepens, let the texture of your breathing merge with the sensations that are arising. Allow your body to be as it is, without criticising or rejecting anything. No matter what arises, see if you can breathe with the sensations in a friendly way. If it helps, name them as they appear. "This is tension." "This is anxiety." "This is pleasure," and so forth.

Investigate the throat area for five minutes. Then move down to the chest for five minutes and do the same thing there. After that, explore the area of the abdomen for another five minutes. In each of these places, stay mindful of the breathing and

encourage a quality of gentleness to flavour your exploration. After the abdomen, give yourself five minutes to touch any part of the body that may still be asking for attention. Finally, for five minutes, feel the entire body as one complete, integrated organism, simply breathing in and breathing out.

When you have completed the meditation, open all your senses and sit with a soft appreciation of where you are: the room, other people and so forth. Feel the overall quality of being that is present for you, right at this moment. Do you recognise anything of value? Is there something here that seems particularly meaningful or worthwhile? Perhaps it's a sense of clarity or a rare pool of calm. It may be a feeling of aliveness or simply a clear sense of presence. Take a moment to appreciate whatever it is you have discovered. Breathing in and breathing out, allow it to nurture you. Don't be in a hurry. Just rest with it for a while. Consider how you might contact this quality more frequently in your daily life? Let your own wisdom instruct you and show you the way.

Finally, if you have the time, review the whole process of the meditation. How did it go? What did you learn? Then conclude the practice, by aspiring that this work not only be of benefit to yourself, but also be of benefit to others. In the Buddhist teaching we call this the sharing of the merit.

This body scan in four parts is something we can do many times and continually make new discoveries. In the early stages it can be a bit like the adventures of the early explorers. Imagine Humbolt, paddling up the Orinoco River. Now we are moving into the river of our bodily sensations. At first everything is so new. We have to learn to see and experience in different ways. There may be frightening shadows and unknown possibilities lurking in the dark spots, but there is also brilliant sunlight dancing on shiny leaves or the joy of

unexpected beautiful butterflies, flitting into the light and then disappearing.

Sometimes it's a real challenge to contact certain areas of our body. Our face is what we present to the world. Although it can be incredibly expressive, at times it can also be painfully frozen. The area around the eyes may feel tense, revealing a stiffness of view. The jaw may be tight from biting back expressions of anger. As we descend into the body, we may find our throats are constricted – all that swallowing down of hurt feelings and unsaid things. In the chest, tight muscles between the ribs can hold surprising amounts of sadness. The abdomen and solar plexus are often tense, protecting us from feelings of fear and distrust. As we scan the body, we don't go looking for difficult feelings and sensations. However, realising that the body is an embodiment of all that we are and all that we have been, we need to enter these explorations with great gentleness, not trying to force anything. If we find resistance to going into a particular area, then, at this stage, we should just skip over it. We move on to the next part of the body and, as our confidence in this way of working grows, we may find that we are able to come back to the difficult area later.

In body scan work, some people find it helps to make an 'Ah' sound, as we did in the chapter on sounding. With each breath, sensitively feel the inhalation and then, on the exhalation, allow the 'Ahhh' of letting go. I don't mean letting go of the tensions or unwanted sensations that we find in the body. In this work, we're not trying to get rid of anything. The 'Ah' of letting go, is to help soften the critical or fearful mind, the mind that feels compelled to get rid of these tensions, that wants to banish them or deny them or pretend they don't even exist.

I sometimes wonder if "world as battlefield" people see the meditations on loving kindness as a kind of loving kindness

machine gun exercise. "Take that!" you say to the tension, as you shoot it with loving kindness bullets. When we meditate with this attitude, we're still not interested in making friends with our difficult experiences. Our motivation is to get rid of them as quickly and as quietly as we can. For profound healing, though, it's best to abandon this Rambo approach and learn the art of being with and in the body in a loving, non-judgmental, non-escaping way. Eventually we will be able to allow the wisdom of the body to guide us towards health and wholeness. With deepening faith and trust we may be able to acknowledge and honour each moment of experience, as it arises, as a possible doorway to greater understanding. Even better than letting go is the great sigh of letting be!

Please set this book aside now and try doing the body scan in four parts while the instructions are fresh in your mind.

The Inner Smile

Here is a different type of body scan that can also be profoundly healing. It's an adaptation of a Taoist practice. Although it's called the inner smile, it requires an outer smile as well. Before we go any further, try smiling right now. Feel what this does to your whole body and being. Don't focus so much on the big toothy grin. This is not a toothpaste commercial! Rather, pay particular attention to the feelings and sensations in and around your eyes. What is the quality of smiling eyes?

When I teach this in class we sometimes do what I call the Bali eye dance. Are you familiar with Indonesian dancing or the Katakali dancing of Southern India? The performers move their eyes in the most fantastically expressive ways. Try it yourself. Without moving your head, gently glance to the right and then to the left. Go back and forth like this a few

times. Roll your eyes around, clockwise and counter clockwise. You'll probably find yourself smiling. It's very hard not to. Recognise the feeling around your eyes. People describe it in many ways: light, twinkly, quick-moving, warm, humorous, spacious, crystal-like. One thing is certain, smiling eyes definitely feel different from that heavy, horse-blinkered look we get when we are feeling dull or disinterested.

In this meditation we explore three lines going down through the body. The front line includes many of the vital organs, the middle line is basically the digestive system, and the rear line encompasses the nervous system. Since this is a fairly complex meditation sequence, I suggest you read the whole of this section before attempting it. The main places of focus have been italicised so that they will stand out from the rest of the text. Once you have the hang of it, the summary and diagrams in Appendix A will probably be a more useful way of reminding yourself of the steps.

Inner smile work begins the same way we did the four part body scan. Sit or lie down in a posture that speaks of easefulness and alertness. Contact your breathing and relax for a few moments, simply breathing in and breathing out. Now, refresh your aspiration to bring friendly enquiry into your body, to meet and know and appreciate your body, just as it is, without the compulsion to change anything or make it different. Take some time to really feel the deep desire for healing and wholeness.

Front line

First smile a genuine, warm, happy smile. Feel the sensations around your *eyes*. At the same time stay with awareness of the breathing. Now bring this light smiling quality down into the area of the *cheeks* and cheek bones. Remember the mind of friendly enquiry and, if it helps, use the 'Ahhh' sound on the

exhalation – smiling with a great sigh of letting be.

Bring the smile down through the *face* and into the *jaw*. Breathing in. Breathing out. Smiling deeply. Now smile into the *throat* area. Spend as much time as you wish at each position, but try to remain there for at least one breathing cycle. With an open-heartedness touch each area with great sensitivity. Feel the body. Listen to it. Stay with it long enough to see if it responds in some noticeable way.

Now bring the smile into your *lungs*. Feel them moving with the breathing. Breathing in smiling. Breathing out smiling. Pause for a few breaths, while you meet the arising sensations with friendly interest. You might even imagine a smile beaming back at you.

It's very easy to lose the compassionate flavour of this exploration. Our culture is so achievement oriented. People often become quite locked into the idea that the whole point of the work is to get the body to relax. If this attitude takes over, we unwittingly lose touch with the essence of the meditation. It's not so important to relax an area as to come to an easeful acceptance of whatever is occurring there, be it pleasant or unpleasant. With this in mind, don't linger too long in any one place. If a tension doesn't want to release, just let it be. Touch it with kindness and interest and then move on to the next point. 'Ahhhhh!'

After the lungs, bring the smile into your *heart* – a great pulsing heartfelt smile. Perhaps you might follow the circulation of the blood. You could imagine thousands of little smiles, like boats, travelling through all the arteries, veins and capillaries of the body. Breathe with this for a few moments.

Now smile into the other major organs. Explore the area of the *liver*; softening and refreshing. Then move to the *pancreas* and *spleen*, roughly opposite the liver on the left side. Bring the

smile into the *kidneys* and then into the *adrenal glands* just above the kidneys. As you smile and 'Ahh' into each of these areas, making friends with these places, you may experience them responding in all sorts of unexpected ways. Some organs may seem to smile back with a subtle burst of energy. Some areas may reveal neglected feelings or memories. Without judgment, touch whatever arises with friendly enquiry.

We finish the front line by smiling into the *bladder* and then into the *genital area*. These organs are sometimes difficult to contact, especially for people who have been sexually abused as children, or even as adults. Be especially soft and unforcing as you approach this vulnerable place. Gradually allow a sense of contact there, as if the breath was reaching out and touching in a loving and caring way.

Gently touched,
Gradually responding,
This is the path of healing.

Once you have taken a bit of time to explore these places in the front line, then go back to the eyes and glance around the room. Refresh the feeling of smiling eyes. Now smile down the front line again, only this time quite quickly. Imagine a waterfall or a continuous stream of smiles cascading down through your body. Do it a number of times.

In practising this meditation, you may occasionally lose the light smiling quality and find yourself staring into a certain part of the body. Sometimes this staring has a kind of dull hypnotic heaviness about it. At other times, it is as if you are pushing to change something or trying to get rid of something. Whenever you find this happening, let go of the particular area and come back to the eyes. Physically smile a real smile. Do the Bali eye dance and glance around the room. After recontacting the feeling of lightness and playfulness, you can return to the place you left

off and continue with the meditation.

Middle Line

The middle line is mostly concerned with the digestive system. Even if we are getting sufficient input of food, we may not necessarily feel nurtured. Our digestion may be upset in some way and we are not able to receive the food that we are given. It's tragic that so many people today suffer from hunger. It's doubly tragic that so many people who get plenty to eat are starving for nourishment through anxious stomachs and nervous intestines. Perhaps we could make friends with our digestive systems.

Begin again with the *eyes*. Breathing in. Breathing out. Smiling eyes. Letting be. 'Ahhhhh!'

Now smile into the roof of your *mouth*. Smile into the base of the *tongue*. Feel your *teeth* floating in your *gums*. As you smile into this area you may begin to salivate. Allow this to happen while you continue to explore. Eventually, gather the saliva together on your tongue. Imagine a bundle of crystal bubbles, each one with a happy smile floating inside it. With sensitive awareness, swallow this bundle of smiles and feel it travelling down your throat as a gift to your stomach. Smile into the *stomach* – a great big belly smile. You might even imagine a huge smile in your stomach, smiling out to the world. Spend a little time here before moving on. Smiling into the stomach can improve digestive problems immensely.

Now bring the smile down through the *intestines*. You could have fun here, riding your smile boat down this huge hydroslide. Eventually you smile into the *large intestine*. We are approaching parts of the body that our society doesn't like to think about, the human sewage system. It's okay to have nice public problems with our face, but many people have embarrassing problems with these not nice "lower realms." Allow yourself to make friends

with the large intestine, then bring the smile into the *rectum* and finally the *anus*. Smiling into this last part of the digestive tract will improve the ability to reabsorb water soluble vitamins and minerals, and will help heal problems connected with elimination.

Now return to the eyes and smile rapidly down the middle line a number of times.

In this meditation, it's not uncommon for people to have difficulty in contacting certain parts of the body. Sometimes they can't feel anything. There's just a blank or a nothingness, a deadness or a numbness. It's as if part of the body just isn't there. If you experience something like this, first check out any tendency towards frustration or self condemnation. Gently acknowledge these feelings and allow them to soften. Then move towards making friends with the blank. Just be with it. Taste the quality of nothingness. Explore around its edges where there is some sensation. Then try the following.

Hold your hands in front of your face and look at the palms. Contact your breathing and imagine a large smile in the centre of each hand. You may begin to feel a tingle of sensation and warmth there. Now, as you smile into the body, place your smiling hands gently but firmly on or near the part you are trying to contact. This can really help to bring life into an area that feels numb or dead. It can also help to soften an area of holding or pain. The first step towards getting in touch is to touch. Gently touching yourself with your hands – it's okay to do this! Eventually you'll learn how to touch yourself with your breath. This in turn will lead to touching with your heart-mind.

Gentle hands.

Smiling breath.

Ahhh!

Letting be.

Back line

Begin again with the eyes. A little Bali eye dance will refresh the feeling. Now direct the smile to either the left or right side of the *brain*. Breathing in sensitively. 'Ah-ing' out sensitively. Smile into this area for a while and then shift over to the other hemisphere and explore there for a bit. If you have difficulty in shifting, move your eyes in the direction you wish to go and physically touch that side of the head with your smiling hands. Once you've done both sides, see if you can ping-pong back and forth a few times: right to left, left to right. Now bring a warm open smile into the middle of your head to touch the area of the major *endocrine glands* – the pituitary, the pineal and the hypothalamus. Take your time with this. Don't worry about the specific location of these glands. The general area directly behind the bridge of the nose, in the middle of the head, will be quite effective for this meditation.

Breathing and smiling and 'Ah-ing,' slowly feel your way down the *spinal chord*, one vertebra at a time. Smile through the area of the *neck*, then through the *upper back*, then the *mid-back*, the *small of the back* and finally into the *sacrum*. From here you can smile all the way down your *legs*. Take plenty of time with this. You may find the smile slipping out between the vertebrae and travelling along the nerves through the rest of your body. In a way, the brain is spread throughout the body! Feel the smiles flowing through the entire nervous system.

Once you've finished, return to the eyes and smile down the back line a number of times quite quickly. After you've done this, again return to your eyes and glance-dance around the room.

Now we come to the challenging part. See if you can smile down all three lines simultaneously! Three waterfalls of smiles, dancing with the sparkle of lightness and well-being. As this experience develops, it may lead into what some mystical traditions call the baptism of water – bliss; melting, healing, rejuvenating, cascading down through the body.

At this point, if there is a part of the body that wants a bit more attention, bring a warm open smile to that area now.

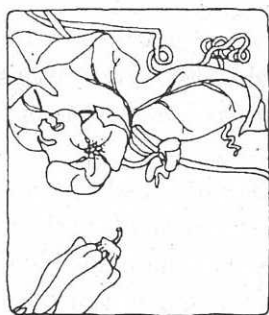
To finish the exploration, turn the smile inside out! Instead of smiling into your body, feel every cell of your body smiling outward toward the world. Breathing in. Breathing out. Smiling with the animals. Smiling with the plants. Smiling with an entire living planet.

Feel the overall quality of energy that is with you now. Do you recognise it? Is there something in this present moment that feels particularly worthwhile to you? Take a few moments to review the meditation and appreciate what you have discovered or experienced.

Finish off by sharing the merit. "May these explorations be of benefit to others."

When you are beginning to explore with the inner smile, don't worry if you can't complete the whole process in one sitting. If you find an area particularly engaging, then stay there as long as you like. If an area's not so interesting, then move on after a few breaths. Eventually you will find that you can smile through the whole body quite quickly with noticeable effect.

Either of these methods, the body scan in four parts or the inner smile, can help us to feel more at home in our body. They move us from being a disembodiment to being an embodiment; in this case, an embodiment of appreciation and wonder. As we soften the need to battle with the body or to escape from it, we may begin to feel much more centred and clear. With no more effort than friendly interest, a deep healing arises in our being. Feeling more centred and easeful in the sensations of our body supports a field of wholesome energy that often spreads to others around us. We become present for ourselves and we actually become a wonderful present for others – the present of our clear presence. This is a precious gift.



Chapter Thirteen

Looking With Greatly Merciful Eyes (Working with Difficult States)

*It can be such a relief to stop
fighting ourselves.*

When we use the phrase "It's all in your mind," we usually are implying that a person is projecting his or her feelings or opinion into a situation. There is a vague implication that they are imagining things or that they are having a bit of a fantasy. The fact is, this common statement is much truer than most people would ever think. Every moment of experience arises in the mind. In extremis, we might have to admit that it's impossible to prove there is even an objective world "out there" at all. Our eyes don't see trees. They simply receive photons of light. Our ears don't hear Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, they simply respond to alternating densities of air striking the ear drums. A similar process happens with our other senses. The sense organs excite our nerves and, somehow, a complex weaving of chemical changes in the brain gives rise to "seeing" a tree or "hearing" a symphony.

Whenever this happens, we usually get a little something extra, something not obviously "out there." When an object appears in the mind, a "me" simultaneously appears. This is the "me" that has the experience.

Let's imagine I bump my head. There is a sense of pain and there is this "me" who is experiencing the pain. It seems that "I" hurt "my" head. We'll call the pain the object or the "known" and we'll call the "me" the subject or the "knower." Generally speaking, it makes little sense to think of a "known" without a "knower," a pain without someone experiencing it. The philosopher, George Berkley, puzzled over something like this when he wondered if, when a tree fell in a forest and no-one was there to hear it fall, did it make any sound? Can there be a known if there isn't a knower? The opposite, of course, is just as thought provoking. Can there be a knower without anything to know?

The more we ponder, the more it seems that the knower and the known are intimately related. Every known has a knower and every knower has a known. We might even suspect that the knower somehow determines or shapes the known and the known equally affects the knower. Philosophically, this may seem fairly straight forward, but in everyday life we act as if the two were completely unconnected. This strange blindness contributes to a fundamental separation that we find throughout society, the separation of mind and matter, of subject and object, of humans and nature. This separation leads to the immense suffering we touched on briefly in chapter two.

Although we take it for granted, it's quite amazing that we can know such a wide range of objects. It could be a physical object or a feeling or a thought. It could be something "outside," like a tree, or something "inside," like a yearning. It could be as large as a galaxy or as microscopic as an atom. The object could even be me.

As part of one lengthy course at the Wangapeka Study and Retreat Centre, each participant had to research and present a

few talks on some aspect of human physiology. One person was exploring sight and he drew a cartoon of a cutaway view of the human head. The eye was shown as a camera with a cable leading to the back of the brain where there was a TV set with a little person watching an upside down picture. The person was wearing a T-shirt with the word "ME" on it. Who is this person?

When we look for this knower called "me" we can't seem to find it. Instantly, it becomes an object called "me," and there is now another "me," the knower, hovering elusively in the background. When we focus on this "me," it too becomes the object or the thing known and the knower again fades into the background. Some people, when meditating in this way have ended up with an endless regression and often a lot of frustration. It reminds me of a poem that fascinated me as a child.

Yesterday upon the stair,
I saw a man that wasn't there.
He wasn't there again today,
I wish that man would go away!

Despite "me's" apparent invisibility, it seems to be where all our suffering and all our joy takes place. Listen to how we speak. "I'm so worried." "I'm so happy." "I'm really angry." "I'm absolutely confused." It's interesting that when the "me" or the knower is flavoured with openness and love, it doesn't seem to matter what is happening. We always see the sunny side of things. If, however, "me" is in a negative mode then, even in the midst of good activity, it still has a problem.

Concern for "me" is our major life obsession and yet it's so difficult to find. In spite of our ongoing infatuation with "me", in daily life we focus almost all of our attention onto the object. When we have a problem, we want to change things out there. "If only I could get my husband to be more sensitive." "I don't know what the younger generation is coming to. They don't seem

to have any values." "Until I can get rid of this illness, my life is a total mess." When "me" feels good, no matter what the object, we feel drawn to support it. The situation is absolutely fine. If, on the other hand, "me" feels unpleasant then we experience contention with the object and want to change it. Isn't this strange? Although we really want a better feeling of "me", we rarely think to investigate it. Instead, we focus almost exclusively on the object, plotting and planning how the object is the thing that has to change.

Have you heard of the foolproof recipe for the creation of misery. You don't have to be a great chef to cook it up. First step: decide that there is something unsatisfactory in your life. Most people can do this. Second step: focus on this unsatisfactory thing or situation to the exclusion of everything else. It's funny how, in meditation, people find it so hard to focus, but when it comes to negativity, everyone has the one-pointedness of an accomplished yogi! Third step: decide that you will never be satisfied until this problem is resolved. Mix these three together for a short time and then let the concoction set. Before you know it, you will have prepared a real mess of misery! Unfortunately, when it comes to this recipe, we're all expert cooks. It's as if we've become completely hypnotised by objects. The question is, "How do we get unhypnotised?"

Consider some of the problems in your life. So often it seems that things would improve if someone else changed their way of being. This, however, is easier wished than done. It's very difficult to change another person, perhaps even impossible. The way they are is tied to their parents, their childhood and their parent's childhood. Tensions you feel at work may be linked to decisions made in New York, to the weather, to volcanic dust clouds, to the El Nino effect or to the health of your boss's child's cat. The problem in your body could be linked to genetic tendencies, global stress or itinerant bacteria. It is going to be

impossible to achieve a sense of well being if it means controlling all the objects in the world. The task is endless.

Everyone begins the work of uncooking the recipe for misery by trying to shift or change the world around them. The "knower" tries to change the "known." Sometimes we have a bit of success and we feel good, but often we end up feeling frustrated and angry. Instead of "we" the "knowers," deepening in friendly enquiry, we end up neglecting the essence of meditative healing, the heart of natural awakening, and try instead to eliminate the pain or get rid of the fear. Without necessarily intending it, we've turned the world into a battlefield.

As we deepen the enquiry into our body, whether through sounding or bodyscan or any other meditative exercise, we inevitably meet with difficulties. Sometimes we discover pain or fear or simply unusual physical sensations. Sometimes we meet resistance or vague anxieties and we don't even know what they are about. Occasionally we may be shocked by what arises and feel ashamed or embarrassed or even disappointed with ourselves. When difficulty arises in your meditation practice, instead of struggling with the object, instead of trying to get rid of it, trying to change it or trying to pretend it's not really there, try doing this:

First of all, pause wherever you are. Just for a moment, rest in the experience as it is, without trying to change anything. What is happening right now? Feel your body breathing. Be with the pain or the fear or whatever the difficulty is and mentally say something like, "It's okay to be like this." If this phrase doesn't quite work for you, try opening deeply to the state, as if you were seeing it for the very first time and then, from the heart, say, "May you be well and happy."

Before we go further with this, I'd like to make something very clear. When I suggest you say "It's okay to be like this," I am talking about what we do in the process of 'meditative'

healing. I'm not saying that if you are angry with someone that you say, "It's okay to be like this," and then hit them. Remember we are considering here how to deepen a meditation technique.

At this point, many say, "But surely I should try to get rid of my anger. You seem to suggest we do nothing about it." Others, with a smile of understanding, might nod their heads and say, "You mean... we should practice acceptance." If acceptance means learning to cope with the difficult situation or standing your ground and putting up with it, no, I don't mean that. For healing, we need to bring not only friendliness to a situation but actual interest. This is much more than doing nothing or merely learning to cope.

Let's continue with the example of anger and examine the situation more closely. When anger or illwill arises, we may feel it's very negative. In fact, if we're honest, we might realise we are sometimes even afraid of it. It's quite understandable that we would want to get rid of this state or at least change it. The "knower" me dislikes the anger and is constantly trying to push it away. Without friendly enquiry, it's unlikely we'll ever get near enough to understand it more deeply. If, however, the knower says, "It's okay to be this way," or "May you be well and happy," we instantly have a new situation. We may not have changed the object, but we have shifted the subject from a state of ill will to a state of wishing another well. Now the door may be open to investigate and learn further. We're no longer stuck.

One of the early Karmapas, the head of the Tibetan Karma Kargyu lineage, gave an analogy to this. He asked, "What would you do if the world were covered with thorns?" How could you move about in a situation like this? Today, some people would propose huge projects, such as spraying or clear felling the entire planet. Not only would this be a colossal undertaking, but it would probably end up creating more problems than it solved. The Karmapa's solution was very simple. All we have to do is wear shoes! Now we could go anywhere and with so little effort.

Encouraging a friendly attitude is a bit like wearing these shoes and it can benefit us in two ways. First of all, when the "me" softens and relaxes, when it becomes less critical and more friendly, it allows us to draw closer to the object and to explore it with greater appreciation. As the "space" between the knower and the known decreases and the tension between them lessens, the possibility of new understanding grows, and some resolution to the problem may come in the process. Secondly, my simply looking into the difficulty and wishing it well, immediately changes the situation. Wishing a situation well is very different from being critical or defensive or embarrassed or generally negative about it. Since, in fact, the knower and the known are inseparably linked, by changing the attitude of the knower something will have shifted already. We have a new situation with new possibilities without having to actively change the object at all.

Instead of the phrase, "It's okay to be this way," some find it very effective to 'Ahhh' and the sound and feeling of the vibration physically remind them to be open, with more friendliness. Try it. If a difficult state appears and you catch yourself rejecting it, make a long 'Ahhh' sound. At the same time, allow yourself to explore the body sensations that are present.

It can be such a relief to stop fighting ourselves. I was once sitting with a woman, guiding her through a body scan meditation. She had experienced a horrific past. She had been sexually abused as a child. Her husband had died. A child had died. She'd been swindled out of her estate by unscrupulous lawyers. She had been ill for some time and, all through this, she had fought to hold herself together. In the process she became deeply cut off from her body because it reminded her of so much fear and pain.

As we went through the body, she met with a numbness. I suggested she say to herself, "It's okay to be numb. It's okay to

be this way." I also encouraged her to deepen her breathing. As she worked with this, tears began to trickle down her cheeks and she cried silently for some time. Eventually she said, "These tears are like jewels. They've been so long in coming, I don't want to wipe them away." For her, it was an incredible discovery, to feel the blessed relief of touching herself with mercy and kindness, instead of the familiar condemnation.

*"Looking with greatly merciful eyes on all that live,
To Chenrezi I reverently bow down."*

When we begin to work with difficulties it's skilful and necessary to move very gently. In some schools of meditation, we are instructed to look directly into the centre of the pain or the fear. This is good advice when we have the inner friendliness to do so, but sometimes the pain and fear can be overwhelming and the situation, instead of resolving, just gets worse. In these cases the direct approach is too forceful and aggressive to be of much use.

Have you ever tried to reason with a really upset child? They may be kicking and screaming and hitting out in all directions or perhaps they are sullenly withdrawing and shutting down on all fronts. You, the adult, might find yourself saying, "There, there, don't be silly. There's nothing to be afraid of," or some such platitude.

I once had a job which involved dressing up as a giant raccoon. Rootytoot Raccoon, Kinktail the Cougar and Jim the Human travelled around the primary schools in Vancouver, Canada, doing skits about protecting the forests and not polluting. During one show, I approached a youngster while wearing my costume and he burst out screaming. He was terrified of this huge animal looming over him. I didn't know what to do. I reached out to him and that made things worse. I spoke and said, "It's okay, I won't hurt you," and when that had no effect, in

desperation, I said, "This is really just pretend." The longer I spoke, the more upset he became. Suddenly an alert teacher ran in from the side and, without even slowing down, scooped up the crying child and rushed out of the hall. When a child is really frightened, he doesn't want to be reasoned with, he wants to be embraced and held.

Sometimes it's like this when we meet with our own very difficult states. The adult mind tries to reason with them, tries to strike a bargain. "You know it's silly to feel this way... after all... you're an adult." But we are much too upset to listen. It just doesn't get through. Part of our being really wants to be held and touched in a loving way, not to be "reasoned" with.

In the Buddhist teaching there is great emphasis on the practice of mindfulness. Unfortunately, for many, this means standing back and watching in a sort of critical, knowing way. In Pali, *citta*, the word for mind, also means heart. Perhaps we need to trade in the practice of mindfulness for the practice of heartfulness. To bring about profound healing, we have to allow all the world into our heart. We need to embrace each moment with deep understanding, not keep life at arm's length while we analyse it.

If the fear or pain is too great, don't try to approach it directly. Come back to your breathing and touch the peripheral symptoms – physical, emotional or whatever – with a loving presence and a heart of interest. "It's okay to be as you are. I'm here for you." It may feel a bit silly but it often helps to really say these things to yourself.

Sometimes it's as if a 'frightened child' part of our own being has become so suspicious and untrusting that, if you reach out to it with any kind of firm attention, it will try to run away and hide. Imagine meeting such a being. At the beginning, you probably can't talk to her and you certainly can't touch her. Perhaps all you can do is sit beside her with an open heart and offer kind presence with no expectations. This damaged part of

your being has felt threatened and pressured for so long, she'll run away at the slightest hint of aggression, even if it's well intended interest. Just as we might be there for a frightened person, so we need to be here for our own frightened self.

Gradually, as we sit quietly with the difficulty, not rejecting it or demanding any explanations, the energy of this child part feels less threatened. The process has its own timing. You can't rush it. Eventually you may be able to hold her and, as she begins to trust a bit more, she may even begin to tell her story. All you, the "knower," need to do is to be easefully present, with "greatly merciful eyes." There is so much suffering. It's time to stop hurting ourselves. We've been hurt too much already.

It's often easier for people to be caring towards others than to be kind to themselves. We criticise ourselves. We push ourselves to perform. We kick ourselves when we are down. We are impatient with our pain, intolerant with our fears, angry at our shortcomings. I'm sure you know what I'm talking about. We frequently beat up on ourselves in the most heartless, merciless and unforgiving ways: not good enough, not smart enough, not caring enough, not focused enough, not tough enough. The list can be endless.

Have you seen the TV show, "The Muppets?" My favourite characters are the critics, those two geezers who always sit off to one side and come out with an unending stream of critical mumbo-jumbo and smart alecky comments. I've often thought that every meditation centre should make two life-sized muppet critics to sit in the rafters of their main hall. Perhaps it would remind people, in a back handed way, not to take all this self criticism so seriously.

Tragically, though, we often take the critical voices very seriously indeed. It's as if we have a full blown civil war going on inside our body and mind which can be just as disastrous and devastating as a real war. There can be casualties and horrific

injuries, with parts of our being wounded and dying. There is often an escalation of mistrust, fear and anger, and always the danger of the war spilling over the borders and involving others. It grows and grows, a kind of communal plague, until eventually we have a real conflict going on in the outer world.

In the aftermath of the insane war in the Persian Gulf between Iraq and the so called American allies, it seemed that perhaps the war was, more than anything else, a spasm of insanity, an unconscious one-sided attack by humans against nature. In addition to the appalling human suffering, the scars of that conflict cut deeply into the earth with the immense upheaval of the eco-sphere. For many years to come, anyone with a discerning eye visiting that area will see the residue, the tortured evidence of that disaster.

When we go into our own body with a meditative mind, our discerning eye can often sense the evidence of past conflict. We sometimes discover pain or fear or strange worrisome symptoms. These don't need any more brutality by being criticised or told what to do. They really need to be invited into the heart-mind and touched gently with love and understanding. The challenge is to remember to do just this, at the times when we need it.

Practical Hints for Going Deeper

Physical Symptoms

While exploring any of these meditations, if you meet with difficult physical symptoms, always come back to your breathing. Rest as easefully as possible in the flow of the immediate experience and see if you can discern a mental or emotional component associated with these manifestations.

Perhaps there is a layer of resistance and fear, or some other emotion or attitude, hovering protectively around the pain or tension. Gently pause. Breathing in and breathing out, allow yourself to taste the resistance or whatever it is. Touch it with friendliness. "It's okay to be resisting." Avoid getting lost in intellectual speculation, especially if it's really just looking for something to blame. Sit with the feeling for a while, not trying to force anything. There may be a story that needs to be heard. By touching these emotional wrappings in a merciful way, the physical sensations often begin to shift.

Explore how the physical state of your own body supports the presence of emotion and how the emotion feeds back into the body giving rise to particular holding patterns. The body, energies, and mental patterns are intimately linked. Whenever one shifts, the others will shift as well. Begin to notice this. What is the body saying? Take the time to listen.

Miming: If you discover a tension in the body which won't move and you don't have much understanding of why it's there, sometimes it helps to mime it. First, have a stretch and shake the body a bit. Then experiment to see if you can voluntarily create this tension. For example: if pain arises in the neck and shoulder, study the way the muscles and posture participate in forming the tension. How is it done? Once you have a clearer picture of the process, try moving your body in a way that recreates or even increases the tension. Do this slowly, gently, and with great sensitivity. Then relax for a moment. Try repeating the process a few times. What does this movement do? What is it saying? What does it accomplish? Look at it as if from the outside, or as if it were happening in someone else. Is it possible to experience the movement in an entirely new way, as if you were seeing it freshly for the first time without the baggage of fear or expectation? Can you find a positive aspect to it?

Because our skeletal muscles are voluntary muscles, each configuration of tension is an attempt to achieve something. What positive result could this movement or holding pattern be leading to? Perhaps it's a way of protecting yourself. Feel your way into it and come to a new understanding.

Emotions

As we've just seen, when we feel really stuck with physical symptoms, it can often help to look for an emotional or mental component. The reverse is also true. If the difficulty presenting itself is more an emotion or quality of mind, then it can be very skilful to look deeply into the physical. Where is the fear or resistance located in the body? Is it fixed or does it move? Does it have a rhythm? What is the physiology of fear? How does the body hold this state? Become aware of your breathing. As you gently explore, see if it's possible to allow a softening around the edges of whatever physical tension you find. As the body begins to shift, the emotional and mental states will also begin to move. This is a way we can encourage a dense, difficult state to open and become more spacious.

Mandala Work

Another very rich avenue of healing is to paint mandalas from your meditation experience. There are many ways to do this, but one very simple and immensely rewarding approach begins with lightly drawing a circle on a blank page. Working within a circle can help to guide the exploration towards wholeness, a sense of balance and integration. With your paints or crayons beside you, relax into your breathing for a few moments. Take a bit of time with this. Now recall the state or quality or situation you would like to explore more deeply. Feel the way these images or ideas begin to shape the sensations in your body. Study how the overall

texture of your being shifts into a new state. When you feel this new quality clearly present in your body, without intellectualising, choose a colour and begin to draw something. Don't be concerned about what it looks like. Just let the feelings and bodily sensations express themselves with colour and form, within the boundaries of the circle. Sometimes you may end up with a recognisable object. Other times it may be quite abstract. Gently aware of your breathing, continue colouring in a quiet way until the picture seems finished. Then take a break.



After a while, begin the second phase of the exploration. Place the painting a comfortable distance in front of you and relax into your breathing. Softly gazing at the mandala, let it resonate in your being. Now close your eyes and hold the mandala in the mind's eye. As you do this, explore the overall sensations and feelings that may arise in your body, triggered by the painting. Study them for a bit.

Again, recall the experience that inspired the mandala in the first place and compare it with what's happening in the body right now. Has anything changed? Do the mandala and the experience have a name? Has this process supported any new insights? Sometimes, while painting the mandala or meditating on it afterwards, we suddenly have the inspiration for a new mandala. We could paint this second one. Meditating on it may give rise to new experience which, in turn, could trigger a third mandala, and so on. Thus we deepen our exploration, alternating back

and forth between direct inner experience supported by friendly enquiry and outer mandala painting. This can be a rich and rewarding way of gaining insight into difficult states.

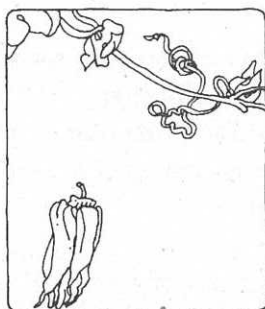
The most important thing when meeting with any difficulty is to remember the quality of loving presence and to let your friend the breath be with you. It's also important to not spend all your time for meditative healing looking into problem areas. There will always be phases of difficulty. It's normal for everyone. These too will pass. In the meantime, breathing with the green plants and contemplating interbeing will help keep a balance. "Yes, this is a very difficult state for me, but isn't it extraordinary that 15 billion years of evolution can blend space and stardust, DNA and gravitational fields, to give rise to a miraculous human creature having these problems!"

"The Buddha said. "Suffering is trying to make permanent that which is impermanent."

*Recognising this, may I cease grasping after permanence and live each moment fully, with bright, non-clinging awareness." **

* From "Daily Pūja" by Tarchin Hearn, Wangapeka Books, 1993.

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Chapter Fourteen

Nāma Rūpa Dolls

Somehow in the process of stardust becoming human, the unity splits in two.

In the last chapter we spoke a lot about the knower and the known, about the subject and the object. When we begin to understand the process of natural awakening through friendly enquiry, we see that a big problem is simply remembering friendliness when we fall into the grip of habitual critical reactions.

Here is a rather childlike exercise I've given out at Natural Awakening or Meditative Healing retreats. First of all contemplate the following list of pairs:

That which names	That which is named
Knower	Known
Mind	Matter
Subject	Object
Me	It
Nāma	Rūpa (Pali)

Choose a pair that you can easily relate to, and contemplate the many ways they mutually shape each other. Consider how one can't really exist without the other; how, like the head and tail of a coin or the Taoist yin-yang symbol, they fit together to make a complete whole.

Now take a piece of clay or a block of wood. This represents the state of oneness, the natural unity of being, the unbroken wholeness of totality. Somehow, in the process of stardust becoming human, the unity splits in two. A separation occurs, or so it appears.

Break the clay in half, or split the block in two, and make a doll out of each piece. One doll represents the *nāma*, the namer, the knower. The other doll represents the *rūpa*, the form, that which is known. Have fun with this. Give your creative impulses a free rein.

When you've finished making them, play dolls! "Knower" sees "object" and says, "I don't like you. You're not good enough. You're so lazy. Why don't you get your act together?" It then tries to manipulate or control the object. Of course, the conversation is not always angry. Sometimes it's full of desire. "Oh, you're so beautiful, so handsome." Then follows the game of seduction. Occasionally, the knower is just confused, not knowing whether to approach or flee. Let your doll express all those old familiar voices that come through your being when you, the knower, meet an object. There can be an amazing number of variations and sub-plots!

After you've done this for a while, pause for a moment and review what you've learned. Then experiment with what happens when the "knower" softens the need to control and adopts a quality of genuine friendliness and interest. Play dolls this way. The knower and the known come closer and closer to each other. Actually they fit together perfectly. Because they are essentially from one block, it becomes obvious that if you shift the attitude of the "knower" you immediately begin to change the situation of what's known.

With an easeful and clear-seeing mind, explore this knower – known relationship. Observe it arising, moment by moment,

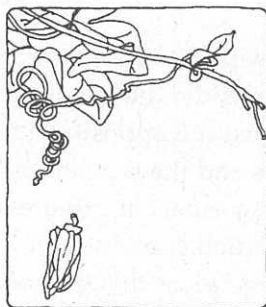
in your own experience. If you are able to do this, you will begin to make some very liberating discoveries. With a very subtle state of awareness, it becomes increasingly clear that there is often an inner tension between the knower and the known. This tension seems to bridge a gap which may be in space, or perhaps in time, or perhaps in some psychological place of expectation that somehow blends both space and time. The tension is a holding, a kind of grasping, that in Buddhism is called *Taṇhā*. Think of two objects floating in space, tied together with a coloured thread or perhaps kept apart by a painted pole. The colour indicates the quality of emotion that flavours this tension. The two objects can't seem to get apart, nor can they come together. This dynamic is the ongoing contention of the human condition.

Sometimes, the knower feels uncomfortably close to the known and acts with a hidden agenda of "let me get away from here" or "I need more space." Other times, the knower is painfully separated from the known and again operates from an inner agenda, only this time of how to get closer. The subject and object are always tussling back and forth, controlled by this tension that very much defines our feeling of being.

In the laboratory of your own inner experience, would it be possible to soften this tension? Perhaps this softening could lead you, the knower, and the object, to making friends with each other. Making friends might support the realisation that you are sharing a single experience. The sharing may become a merging and here, in a state of easeful clarity and stillness, can arise understanding of the great mystery of union. If you discover this, rest in it for a while. It can reveal a vast new world.

Next time you feel stuck in negativity, take out your dolls and play with them. Keep them in your room as a non-verbal reminder. Take them to work and lean them against your computer screen! Remember Christ's words, "Except ye become as a little child... ."

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Chapter Fifteen.

Heart Sounding.

We grow through hints and intimations, subtle messages guiding us on the path of goodness.

We are born into the world naked. We are immediately touched and cradled and held close to a warm human heart. Life is richly sensual. We go from the womb to our mother's breast. Our lips are already making sucking motions. Our eyes and ears are wide open, receiving a chaos of stimulation which all together makes up the world of love and caring. Gradually we associate certain shapes and sounds with goodness and others with the absence of goodness. We search out this wondrous kaleidoscope called mother's face and we learn to read the hints and intimations conveyed by shape and smell, touch and sound. We learn by being intimate, by being close enough and open enough to understand what mother is, to feel the very texture of her being. The slightest look, the change of touch - these all communicate to us. We grow through hints and intimations, subtle messages guiding us on the path of goodness.

Everything in life is relationship. Adults generally think of

relationship as two separate beings coming together with deepening intimacy. Consider the possibility though, that for the infant, relationship is just the opposite. Life for all of us begins with union. The foetus and the mother are one flesh. Anything experienced by one is an aspect of experience for the other. The feeling of this state of union continues for a while, even after we are born. There is no clear sense that the goodness, that is mother, is other than us. Our contact with the world is intimate, flesh to flesh. Everything goes into our mouths. We know with our bodies. Gradually, though, we learn how to be separate.

Inevitably, there must come a time when there is a gap between the want, the need, the hungering, and the fulfilment. Mother is out of the room, busy with brothers or sisters. For whatever reason, she's not available. The intimacy that was inseparable from goodness is now bringing us close to pain. Our body and being begin to know anguish, the pain of separation, the tension of expectation. This happens even if we have the most loving mother. As the moments of apartness increase, we learn about relationship and, as we get older, we might learn about game-playing and about business deals. Aristotle once said that a child that is not loved will seek to be admired. If I can't have love, at least I can get attention. Unfortunately, this attention often becomes a physical and mental tension, a deep holding in our being.

For the infant and young child, intimacy and relationship are the way we touch and learn about the world. At that age we don't have sophisticated intellects to see things "objectively," at a distance. Our explorations simultaneously reveal a world and create our sense of self. We are shaped by our experience. We have to touch things and be touched by them for the world to make sense. Children who are denied this intimate contact inevitably have difficulties with relationships when they get older. Of course, as adults, we try to ignore all this and simply stumble along.

As the years go by, our scope for relationship potentially widens. In an ever-growing mandala we relate to mother, to family, to the immediate home environment, to friends outside the family, to the town, to the ecosystem, to the universe. This mandala expands from people, to plants and animals, to inanimate objects and even to complex systems of ideas and information exchange. Constantly probing, continually rediscovering our place, we enlarge the sense of who and what we are. This is the natural process of awakening. Remember the growing nerve cells groping their way towards an unknown connection?

Unfortunately, many people have had very painful experiences that built into their being a sense of distrust, betrayal, and often outright fear. Their range of relationship doesn't widen much beyond parents and family and so their appreciation, not only for the world but also for the richness of their own being, remains stunted. Too many children have been injured physically, emotionally and mentally. They have become damaged by expressions of their parent's fear and non-love and in turn often damage others through their own fear and non-love.

If this has happened to us, the tone of our relationships with others can become very defensive. We are so afraid of being hurt again that we cultivate all kinds of protective walls around the heart, hiding and covering this place of openness and responsiveness. We were hurt in the past and there's no way we're going to allow that to happen again. Tragically, when we build walls around the heart to guard against the anxieties of vulnerability, we also shut out the aliveness of life. We start to feel isolated and cut off. In a way, we begin to die.

Before you read further, please pause and rest with your breathing. Consider the nature of your own relationships. Does anything we're saying here ring true for you?

When our awareness continually refers to "me" and my pain and my fear, it becomes quite gross in texture and tragically shortsighted. We can hardly see the reality of another person. Everything is related back to the question, "What is this doing to me or for me?" We lose the childlike ability to learn from hints. We are afraid to be sensitive enough to pick up these intimations. Instead of subtle communications, we need to be hit with a sledge hammer to get the message. We become suspicious of intimacy with anyone or anything, and we end up cultivating in its place, a garden of isolation and groundless fantasy.

For adults, the whole idea of intimacy and relationship is often associated with sex. To have a relationship is to have a sexual relationship. Intimacy leads to sex. So unless you are open for sex, don't relate and don't be intimate. Today, sex is a marketable commodity and, with AIDS fears, it's also dangerous. Too often it becomes a game of power, manipulation or control that has nothing to do with love or caring. The simple act of being with another without concern for "relationship games" or "sexual games" is very precious. To be mutually open, touching the world and each other with a friendly awareness and a shared sense of wonder and wide-eyed interest, has become so rare that, for many, rediscovering this state feels like an extraordinary blessing.

Think about intimacy for a moment. The air we breathe has been breathed by others, moving through their cells and lungs, throat and lips. This is very intimate. We eat our food intimately, not at a distance. The photons touch the retina in our eyes directly. Sound is caressing our skin with vibrating densities of air. Life means being in touch. Many worries and concerns of people today, including concerns about illness, could be greatly relieved by allowing the world into our heart, instead of working so hard to control everything. Sometimes I say to people, "You know, it's impossible to open your heart." The reason why you

can't open your heart is because the very nature of heart is openness. It's already open! The work of healing is simply to soften the barricades that may have formed around it.

Heart Sounding Method

Heart sounding is a meditative exploration done with two people. It combines many of the techniques we touched on in earlier chapters, especially breathing, sounding and body scan. Essentially, it consists of learning to be open and sensitive to all the processes that weave together our being, while in the presence of someone else who is doing the same thing.

Heart sounding begins in the same way we did the sounding and the body scan work. When we practise in a group, I often verbally remind people of the steps, as we go along. Here, I suggest you read the instructions and then, not worrying about getting it exactly right, trust in your good intentions and experiment.

It's quite common for people to feel a little anxiety the first time they do heart sounding. For some, it's the first time they have meditated with another person and the ego squirms around with its usual judgmental concerns. After the first session, though, most people find it very supportive and very interesting work. At this point the concerns simply drop away. Heart sounding is a meditative exploration. It's not therapy and it's not a place for confronting anxieties about openness. It is important that both people want to do the exploration.

(1) Arrange your seats so that you are facing each other. The distance apart will vary from person to person. You want to be close enough to feel in contact with each other, but not so close that you feel crowded by the other's presence. I sometimes suggest that people begin with their knees almost touching and then move apart until it feels just right.

(2) Sit with a posture that feels easeful and at the same time supports a quality of alertness or wakefulness.

(3) Allow the mind of friendly enquiry to touch your breath and body sensations. Take a few minutes to settle into this.

(4) Let your eyes be softly open and gazing in a gentle and slightly unfocused way at the area of your partner's chest. Notice the rise and fall of their breathing and realise that in front of you, doing the same exploration as you are, is a living human being.

We don't have eye contact during this work, though it may occur towards the end. Holding a long eye contact is not a natural way of relating to another. It often brings levels of ego confrontation into play and this is not the intent of the heart sounding. The main thing, at this point, is to be aware of the presence of a breathing being who is sharing your aspiration for openness, and then attend to your own breathing and the sensations that are arising in your own body. Essentially, it's as if you are each doing your own meditation while sitting together.

(5) Take a moment to reflect on your aspiration. "Why am I doing this meditation?" Remind yourself of your desire for healing and wholeness. Determine that for the next 20 minutes you will try to meet the sensations and feelings arising in your body with friendliness, mercy and forgiveness. Realise that your partner will be doing the same.

(6) Now really begin to settle into your breathing. Deepen your awareness and explore the sensations that are arising in your body. Just allow whatever is happening to happen. After a minute or so, very softly begin to make an 'Ahhh' sound on the exhalation. You're not singing to your partner. You 'Ahhh'

softly within your body, just loud enough for your partner to hear your sound. In the same way that we did the Ah-ing exercise, inhale with a great sensitivity. Really feel the texture and quality of the breath. Feel how this is shaped by the muscle tensions of your body. As you 'Ahhh' on the exhalation, continue with the sensitive awareness and let the air cascade out. Sometimes it comes out in a great sigh, like a great letting go.

If any emotions or feelings arise, touch them and be touched by them in a merciful and allowing way. Bring friendly enquiry to these moments in the same way you did with the body scans and the sounding work. If difficult states arise and you notice a tendency to push them away or to control them, just 'Ahhh' into this need to control. It's okay to be this way. May you be well and happy. Simply allow the situation to be as it is, while enquiring into it in a sensitive and intimate way. Breathing gently, rest in the embrace of your own heartfelt knowing.

(7) When we work in a group we usually do the Ah-ing part for about 20 minutes. If making the sound audible becomes too much of an effort, let it fade and become internal for a few breaths, just feeling the 'Ah' silently. Then allow it to become audible again. Heart sounding is not supposed to be a marathon race. After the 20 minutes, or however long you have decided to sit, let the 'Ah' sound gradually fade away and rest in a deep awareness of your own breathing.

Sit with the breathing for five minutes. Then begin to expand your field of sensing to take in the room and the other beings in it. Breathing in. Breathing out. Feeling present. Allow your eyes to gently look around. Notice your partner. Notice the room. Stay with the breathing and the overall quality that is present for you. Now there may be eye contact with your partner, but let it be natural – learning to be natural in the presence of another being. When you feel the process has come to an end, have a stretch and change your posture if you wish.

(8) Without speaking to each other, take a few moments to silently review for yourself what happened during the session. What took place? What did you learn? Did any insights arise? How did your partner's presence affect the meditation? When you have finished reviewing take a moment to share the merit, aspiring that any benefit arising from doing this practice be for the good of all beings.

(9) Finally, if it feels appropriate, share with your partner something of your experience. It's not necessary to do this, and it's certainly not necessary to share everything that happened. The valuable part has already occurred, the fact that both of you have done this healing work together.

Heart sounding can be a wonderful process that leads many people to a new degree of openness. It often deepens their sense of contact with the world at large and gives people a taste of relating to another person in a profoundly intimate way, without the usual habitual associations. This sometimes feels strange to people the first time they try it. Many have commented that they felt they had discovered something exciting and new; to be so close to another and yet at the same time so detached. One often feels it an incredible privilege to be able to be with a person in this way, as if they have given us a most precious gift.

This practice can be done again and again. It can be practised with the same person or with many different people. It's a wonderful way to get to know someone in a very new way. At the end of a two week course in heart sounding, one person observed that he wouldn't have believed it possible to have come so close to people that he knew so little about in conventional terms. Although at the end of the course the participants were talking about where they lived and what they did, all these details seemed much less important than the

direct meeting that had taken place in the heart sounding work itself. There is something very special about being in the presence of another who is completely engaged in deep healing.

Further Thoughts

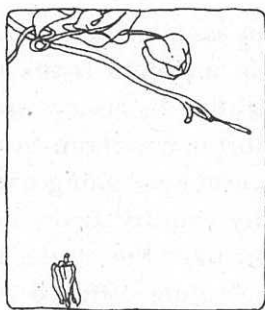
After you have developed an appreciation for heart sounding with people, try extending this work to non-humans. Sit with a tree, with a bird, or some other creature. Try sounding with a flock of birds or a field of daisies – whole groups of beings. Open the doors to all of nature and then come back again to humans. This can become a very exciting journey.

Another valuable talent that seems to grow from this work is that of living on the interface of inner and outer. Many people, when beginning to meditate, discover they are rather one-track-minded. When they focus on something outside themselves, the inner awareness seems to disappear. When they focus inwardly, the outer world becomes fuzzy and vague. In heart sounding, the living person in front of us seems to demand our attention. At the same time, however, we are trying to follow our inner processes. With practice, the distinction between outer and inner begins to soften. One finds oneself balanced on a threshold where inner and outer blend into a single seamless experience. Heart sounding work facilitates this union in a very special way.

One last thing to mention is something that may seem fairly obvious. Heart sounding can be a valuable non-verbal tool for healing relationship difficulties. Sometimes, in the midst of relationship, we fall into a stale routine with our partner. A sense of frustration and irritation can then creep in as our relationship, once filled with enlivening mystery, is replaced with the blindness of taking the other person for granted. At this point we may begin to see all kinds of faults in the other person. It's as if we have abandoned the sensitive aliveness of immediate

presence, with all the risks and vulnerability that it entails, and replaced it with a fairly unchanging fantasised image of the other being. From now on we hardly look at our partner. Instead, we relate to an image carried in our own mind, and the aliveness of the relationship begins to fade.

There are many approaches to healing relationship problems. Some encourage talking things over, getting more communication happening. Others suggest that, when we have problems relating to another person, we look into our own lives and work the problem out there. Both of these approaches have merit. For people who are inclined to meditation, though, heart sounding can be a very direct way of cutting through all the accumulated rubbish of misunderstanding and unskilful talk. It can help us to recontact the sense of mystery and wonderment of two beings meeting in openness. Coming back to the heart, we may discover with fresh clarity the beauty of natural intelligence: mind pouring into mind, heart pouring into heart, the profound healing of loving presence.



Chapter Sixteen

The Practice of Already Here.

*There is an almost magical quality
whenever we are focused
and present.*

If you experiment and work with the themes of the preceding chapters you will begin to realise that friendly enquiry has a particular flavour that's hard to describe in words. If you wanted to really know about the taste of apples you would need to eat many of them. It's the same with friendly enquiry. At first we have rare illuminating moments when friendly enquiry is simply present. When it's there, it seems so naturally part of the moment, that we usually assume it will be with us forever. Then something shifts and it vanishes like dew disappearing into the air.....gone! From this point on, we might have a memory of something that was valuable, but we're not quite sure what it was. Then suddenly, it's there again. We grab at it, wanting to hold and maintain the moment, but inevitably it slips away. Moshe Feldenkrais, a pioneer of subtle body work, coined the phrase "the elusive obvious," which

certainly describes this essential attitude of natural awakening.

Instead of trying to 'maintain' friendly enquiry or worrying about rediscovering it after it's disappeared, try 'Ahh-ing' with the worry and the effort to maintain, and simply bring forth a fresh moment. If natural awakening had a method, it would be to bathe in friendly enquiry again and again, to immerse ourselves in it, until like the apple, its taste and flavour become unforgettable, having suffused every cell of our body and all the habit patterns of our mind. Not me entering or practising friendly enquiry, but me pausing and feeling the friendly enquiry of my entire being flowing with the growing of the world.

This picture of deepening friendly enquiry can seem very attractive to read about, but in practice, when we cultivate friendly enquiry and through it, actually begin to touch a magical clarity of stillness and well being, we may notice more subtle tendencies hidden deep in the field of experience. We may sense the footprints of the anxious organism.

I say "anxious organism" because, behind our life of being a mother or an engineer or a teacher or whatever, there is an organism that does anything it can to maintain itself, yet at the same time, it knows that everything, in the end, will someday die. Somehow these two realities, the drive to keep going and the inevitability of death, need to be reconciled. Even if our life is unfolding fairly well, the Buddha's three teachers – old age, decay and death – hover in the shadow, showing themselves in wrinkles, grey hair and sagging skin. The present moment, when deeply felt, is fleeting and ephemeral. It challenges our ideas of duration and permanence. It reminds us of mortality and makes us feel uncomfortable realising that, if we look too deeply, we may find that we are not who or what we think we are. Not wanting to face this great space of open possibility, we find ourselves

leaning into the next moment, planning a continuing future. Not comfortable or satisfied with this moment, we are already looking for the next.

If the present moment is difficult, the next may bring relief. If this moment is good, the next may be even better! In meditation you haven't finished the inhalation and you are already thinking of the exhalation. You are half way through a retreat and you find yourself planning the next retreat. You're sitting in the meditation hall and mentally cooking a meal. You're driving the car and imagining yourself already engaged at your destination. Has this ever happened to you? Consider how often this "not attending to the moment" manifests in your life. It was once estimated that the average North American spends about 85 percent of his or her life in fantasy!

Everything that happens, happens now, in the present. "Yesterday" is really just an idea, a concept reverberating in our cortex, right now. "Tomorrow" is equally an idea, playing in the cells of our brains, right now. Whenever healing takes place it's always in the present moment. Everything we do and everything that happens is happening here and now, not yesterday or next week. Enlightenment for all the saints and sages throughout history has happened at the same time and in the same place, right here and right now. Nobody gets enlightened tomorrow. Nobody gets healed tomorrow. Bliss and well-being don't happen tomorrow. They happen right here or not at all. Everything that is happening to us happens here, and yet we have this powerful leaning towards what we hope will be, rather than resting in and exploring more deeply what is actually present.

Natural Awakening is an expression of three activities. The first is friendly enquiry. The second, I call "the practice of already here."

Pause for a moment and consider the health or happiness

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or well-being that you yearn for. Recognise that the idea of it occurring yesterday, or the hope for it occurring tomorrow, is quite different from happiness arising right here. Often, an almost magical quality appears when we are calmly focused and clearly present. It's a quality that transforms whatever we are engaged with into a healing and meaningful activity. We feel grounded, centred and present. The opposite of this state is to feel scattered and fragmented, darting between the past and future and rarely touching the present. Instead of trying to slip into the past or jump into the future to find a quality of well being, wouldn't it make sense to look for it right here?

Isn't it ironic? We try so hard to get here, and yet we are already here! Pause for a moment and relax into "the practice of already here."

The practice of already here is profoundly healing. It's not something done only while "meditating." It can be brought to mind anytime, especially when you're feeling rushed or under pressure to do something. Just say to yourself "the practice of already here" and allow a greater awareness into this very moment. Feel the breath. This friend will always help us. Feel the way the body is moving. Open your appreciation for the sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touches that are nurturing and supporting your sense of being at this very moment.

A marvellous time to deepen this practice is while we are walking. We usually walk in order to get somewhere. Often, we are so engaged with the mental image of where we are going and what we will do when we get there, that we hardly notice where we are and what we are doing on the way. The keys to health and well being may be all around us but, engaged in fantasies of last week or tomorrow, we rarely

notice them. It's like a thirsty person searching for a drink beside a clear mountain lake!

Next time you're walking, can you walk so that step by step you are continuously present? You don't have to hurry or work to get here. You'll never be late. You're already here. Try it. And lose it. And try it again...and again...and again!

I once lived in a teaching house in Ottawa, Canada. Each weekday morning people would walk by the house on the way to the bus stop and each evening they would pass on their way home. I would sometimes stand by the living room window and watch them going by. It was amazing how many were moving their mouths and gesticulating with their hands. What were they doing as they swished through the crimson autumn leaves, the early morning light dawning like azure crystal and the clouds of condensing breath puffing tiny jewels into the air? Were they rehearsing some conversation with the boss? Were they reliving an unsatisfactory interchange that happened earlier on that day? They walked leaning forward with an air of tension. They didn't often look happy. They didn't even notice the squirrel that ran up to them chittering and then rushed up a tree.

The practice of already here. Now I'm writing these lines. Pen gliding on paper. Breath smooth. Body easeful. Now you're reading these lines. Please practise this practice of no practice. Simply remember "already here" and deepen into whatever you are doing. Friendly enquiry, right here, soaking into the world. No further to go. No more to get. Nothing to add.

Replete.

Sufficient.

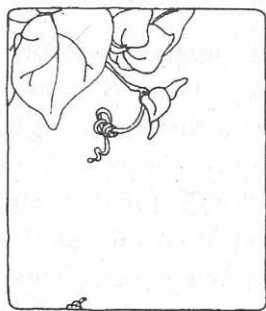
Each moment just what it is.

Moment

by moment

by moment.

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Chapter Seventeen

Meditation for Consumers

What is the one?

All beings live by nutriment.

In the world of business and finance, you and I carry a rather undignified label. It's as if a major activity of our modern lives has so taken over, that we have lost our humanity. We have ceased being humans and have instead become "pacmen." Do you remember the early computer game called Pacman? There was a little black circle with a pie slice mouth that constantly opened and closed. It would move about the screen, gobbling up many different types of objects. What I found fascinating was how, no matter how much the pacman ate, it didn't grow any bigger. Our lives sometimes seem a bit like this game. Although the world of business and finance doesn't call us pacmen, it does refer to us as "consumers," not people, but consumers. It's as if our main function in life is to consume and our real home is now the marketplace.

It's an impoverished world where one's validity as a human being is judged primarily on how much we consume and how

much we possess. When someone who owns several businesses, a number of properties and travels in his or her own helicopter, speaks about the state of the world, all the media listens. We are impressed one way or another. It may turn out that this person is actually a crook, but their control of possessions still wins our attention and often our admiration. If a poor, but basically good person makes some comment about how the world is going, not many people will stop to listen. Even the legal systems of most western countries support this prejudice. The wealthy can hire skilful lawyers. The poor don't have the same options.

When the Buddha wandered through ancient India, teaching people of many different backgrounds and castes, he used the language and metaphors of the people he was speaking to. If he spoke to an educated Brahman, he used philosophical reasoning. When he spoke to a farmer, he talked about crops and cycles of life. I suppose if he were teaching today, he would speak in terms of getting good deals and finding a great bargain.

It seems only right that we have meditations for consumers. "How can we awaken to universal truth through the gateway of the market?"

We Are All Wearing the Same Shirt

Take your favourite shirt. Touch it with your hands. Feel it next to your skin. All the while you're doing this, be aware of your breathing. What is it you like about this shirt? The colour? The texture? The design? The fact that a particular person gave it to you? Staying with the breath, allow yourself to appreciate some of the factors that support the enjoying of this shirt, right at this moment.

If you have a magnifying glass, examine the fabric more closely. Does the look of the fibre somehow correspond to the feel of the shirt on your skin? Examine the shape and texture

of the weave. Look at the way the dyes merge with the cloth.

As you breathe in and breathe out, contemplate this shirt. Consider the weaving looms and the spinning mills, the worker in the cotton field, the sheep farmer or the petro-chemical technician, their lives are part of your shirt. Consider the bacteria in the soil and the city of life called a plant mixing sunlight, water, minerals and the decayed bodies of other creatures to make fluffy white cotton blobs, carriers of life, seeds for more cotton. Contemplate your shirt as a weaving of earth, water, air and sunlight. Think of all the people who worked to transform this fruit of the soil into the garment on your back – tailors, printmakers, machine operators, truck drivers, and shop attendants. The list is endless. Open your heart to the fact that all these people had mothers and fathers and families, an incredible interweaving of education and schools, of hopes and fears, all these diverse lives coming together to provide you with a shirt.

Consider the discoveries of dyeing by forgotten ancestors, passing the secrets of colour alchemy and material from generation to generation. Open your appreciation to human inventiveness – the creation of sewing machines, thread factories, buttons of shell, amber, bead and plastic. Breathing in. Breathing out. Consider how the size of your shirt corresponds to your body, its size in turn, determined by your parents' and their parents' DNA. Consider how your appreciation of the texture and patterning is a result of your life experience and education.

Contemplate how your miraculous eyes receive light from the sun, bounced off the surface of your shirt, allowing you to see and appreciate it. Consider how your body is supported by water, air, plants, bacteria, soil and light.

Breathing in. Breathing out. Appreciating a shirt of life. Life covering life. Life adorning life. We are all wearing the same shirt!

Interbeing

It is said that, after awakening, the Buddha spent an entire week in continuous contemplation of how everything is interconnected with everything else. He tried to share his insights with others by pointing out cause and effect. Everything comes into being due to some cause, and that very thing itself becomes a cause for the arising of something else. He summarised this way of viewing in the *Paṭiccasamuppāda*, the law of dependent origination. This comes into being dependent on that and that comes into being dependent on something else and so on. The Buddha was definitely one of the first "deep ecologists."

For many people at the time of the Buddha, the teaching of *paṭiccasamuppāda* was very illuminating. So much suffering vanished through the simple realisation that it's not "my" pain or "my" fault, but part of an unbroken chain of happenings passed down through time – my mother's fear, her father's fear, etc. We are all profoundly interconnected and, with this realisation, we taste a deeper level of wholeness. Although this way of viewing is very liberating, it can often lead to an oversimplified picture of the world. It is said that the Buddha once asked Ananda, his attendant, what he thought of this teaching. Ananda said something to the effect that it seemed fairly simple and straightforward. The Buddha replied. "Say ye not so. This teaching is as vast and as deep as the ocean."

Many people have a tendency to see the teaching of dependent origination in linear terms. A specific chain of events led to this moment. It's as if life were like a game of snakes and ladders. The meandering snakes and the straight ladders grab our attention and we tend to ignore the other parts of the board. We focus on a particular sequence of events in our life, perhaps the psychological conditioning or the socio-economic factors, and we then ignore the rest of the universe, as if all these other factors had nothing to do with the situation.

There are so many examples today of this narrowed thinking. The economist explains the problems of society in terms of a series of economic events, the rising Dow Jones Industrial Average or falling interest rates. The unionist may see these same difficulties in terms of a history of contract negotiations. The domiciliary midwife speaks in terms of birthing attitudes and techniques and the psychologist in terms of childhood conditioning. This linear view gives a sense of orderliness to the universe and is a great improvement over viewing life in terms of blind luck, but it does have its shortcomings. To approach the richness of interaction that is the universe, we need to have a multidimensional view – a viewing or open heartedness that can embrace much more of the fabric of life, not just some of the threads. This is the *sammāditthi* we met in chapter three.

Abhidhamma is the profound psycho-philosophical basis of Theravadin Buddhism. In the *Abhidhamma* is a section called the *Paṭṭhāna*, the study of causal relations. This is a fantastically complex investigation of how different types of relationships support the arising of any particular situation.

In the early 1970s, I was fortunate to be on a Polish Ocean Line freighter with Namgyal Rinpoché and two other dharma students. It was a three month voyage around Africa. While we were at sea, Rinpoché taught *Abhidhamma*. In port, we explored the surrounding country and practised our *Abhidhamma* “seeing” in the Serengeti plains and on the shores of Madagascar.

The *Paṭṭhāna* has 24 divisions, each referring to a type of relationship that can support the existence of a particular situation.* Each of the 24 has many subsections. These divisions refer to things like: the immediate preceding moment, the present state of mind, food and nourishment, the motivation, the sense objects and organs, the thoughts present, the thoughts not present,

* For an introduction to *Paṭṭhāna* see “A Manual of *Abhidhamma*” by Nārada Maha Thera, Buddhist Publication Society, 1975.

the factors of mind such as energy, effort, pleasure and pain, the degree of concentration, relationships through the law of similarity, and so forth.

Rinpoché gave us the exercise of "doing a paṭṭhāna" on any object. What are the various relationships that support the appearance of a particular object or situation? Like Ananda, we began with great enthusiasm.

I chose, as my first meditation, to look at the fact of Tarchin being on the Polish freighter, Zygmund Starry, anchored in Port Sudan. Within moments the contemplation had become so complex it was hard to continue, and I hadn't even exhausted the first division. I decided to try a simpler object, a glass of water on the table. I got a bit further with that, but soon realised that even a glass of water was the expression of an awesome number of relationships extending quite beyond my knowing. In desperation, I chose the mental object of a single hydrogen atom floating in inter-stellar space. I couldn't think of anything simpler. This time I didn't try to methodically go through each division but just skimmed through them seeing a relationship here and another there. Probing this way, the verbalising intellect was rapidly exhausted and I was left breathing heartfully, feeling a union with a hydrogen atom that was supported by all of the universe.

Throughout the years since then, this theme of interdependence has become a central core of my contemplative practice. Frequently I find myself pausing, opening the heart-mind, and breathing with the rich interconnectedness of the moment. Every object in the world tells a story of everything else. It is a staggering adventure; life exploring itself in an endless saga of creative becoming.

The Zen poet, peacemaker and teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh, invented a word to express what the Paṭṭhāna meditation points toward. The word is "interbeing" - a lovely, direct and simple expression of this whole experience. Everything is interbeing

with everything else in the universe. The world is a magic play of continuous transformation. Whenever anything comes into being, something else is passing away. Whenever something is passing away, something else is coming into being. Even the "knower" is part of this transient dance. Contemplating paṭṭhāna encourages a deepening appreciation for this vast and wondrous universe. It can also lead to a thorough transformation of who and what we think we are; from feelings of constrictive limitation, to a sense of spacious freedom manifesting without beginning or end.

New Zealand Tea Ceremony

The idea of Japanese Zen practice often brings an image to mind of black gowned monks, sitting motionless in temple rows engaged in silent meditation. Practice like this is only part of a rich tradition which has turned many of the very ordinary acts of living into a profound art. Tea ceremony is also something that we associate with the Japanese, a colourful relic of a rich cultural past. Traditional tea ceremony has many formalities, but it began hundreds of years ago with friends simply drinking tea together, in a mindful and appreciative way.

Come. Let's drink tea together.

Put on the kettle. While the water heats, let's sit and sense the coming and going of our breath. Allow the body to soften. Touch each moment with kindness. They say a watched kettle never boils. Impatience won't help. In fact, it seems to speed and shorten our life away. Simply relax, touching each moment fully as it comes.....

There, the kettle's boiled. Now, bringing an easeful smoothness to your movements and with a sense of poise and

dignity, feel your body moving through space as you make the tea. Just for this short time, really attend to the thoughts and physical activity of making tea. No hurry. No concern beyond the present moment.

Resting in the universe
...breathing...
while the water
in the tea pot
"breathes"
with the tea.

When you pour for all of us, feel the changing weight and balance of the pot as the liquid flows from the spout into the cups. Hear the tinkling music of tea on cup. See the sparkling of light on falling nectar.

In New Zealand, people often hold their mug of tea with both hands. It keeps their hands warm. Try holding your cup this way. Contact your breathing. Feel your body relaxed and centred on your seat. Observe the steam, swirling mists of soft rainbow, rising, filling the room, moistening the air.

As we wait for the tea to cool enough to drink, open your heart and mind to appreciate some of the factors that support this moment of drinking tea together.

Contemplate the water. It was once a cloud, a river, an ocean, a lake. It has travelled through and mingled with the lives and bodies of countless plants and animals. It has carried innumerable tastes and flavours and, each time the sun's heat draws the water into the sky, it leaves everything but its H₂O essence behind, endlessly purifying.

Think of the tea leaves, the plantations, the soil, the bacteria and minerals. Picture the sunlight, the bees and other insects pollinating the tea bushes, cousins of the camellia. Consider the

people picking in the hot sun, the factory workers packaging, truck drivers driving, truck factories, the gasoline and oil refineries, the shopkeepers. See all of these people with families and friends, with hopes and fears and dreams, each one fed by plants, water, earth, air and sun.

Is your cup ceramic? Let your mind wander in appreciation to the clay deposits laid down by ancient rivers long since gone. Contemplate the story of the cup, of potting wheels, firing kilns and the art of glazing.

As you allow these thoughts into your heart, keep coming back to your breathing. Breathing in gifts of oxygen from living tea bushes. Breathing out CO₂, a gift to the plant. Your breath is in the bush. The bush is in the tea. Who is drinking this tea?

Perhaps your tea is cool enough to drink. Really smell the tea. Now, as you raise the cup to your lips and sip, taste the flavours. Feel where the tasting happens in your mouth. Follow the tea as you swallow, and sense your stomach receiving the gift of tea. Notice the arising of liking or disliking and the desire for another sip. Look around the room and see your friends drinking together. Contemplate how extraordinary it is that life has brought us together, born from our parents, drawn to awakening from all over the world. Appreciate this unique moment. A whole planet drinking tea.

Each time we do this New Zealand tea ceremony, we can discover different connections, wondrous patterns of relationship. Each time, we can both soften and widen the sense of who and what we are.

During a weekend of teaching in Christchurch N.Z., I asked people if they had any observations to share. One woman said she did the tea ceremony with her sons. She said "It was marvellous. Drinking tea will never be the same again." Many people comment that it's the first time they have ever really tasted tea. Even if you don't drink tea, you surely drink something. You can explore this in many ways.

Such a simple thing. My teacher used to say, "For awakening, you have to come to see the extraordinary as ordinary and the ordinary as extraordinary." Every time we "consumers" consume, we have the opportunity to do this.

Brown clay cup
 sparkling tea
 earth of China braiding drops of music
 fluttering silver-like.
 Steam swirling up in the afternoon sun
 wondrous
 still

Eating

Eating is probably the most direct and obvious experience of consumption. Let's explore this a bit. Every time we eat, we are benefiting by someone's death. The death of grass, of beans, of seeds and fruits that never got the chance to live their full cycle. Like the great devouring jaws of the Tibetan Lord of Death, our hungry eyes roll searchingly. Our stomach bubbles with terrifying acids and enzymes, able to dismember the smallest being. Great gnashing walls of cold hard ivory chomp and chew. Our rapacious brain enslaves others to gather more living beings, food for our insatiable appetite.

Most meat eaters kill the animal first and then eat it when it's dead. Vegetarians often eat living beings like alfalfa or bean sprouts. What do they feel as we herd them down the gullet?

The last fifty years have seen an extraordinary change in human experience. We have practically been able to divorce ourselves from the food chain. Of course, we've been trying to do this for millennia. On the one hand we want to eat, but on the other hand we don't want to be eaten. So the Egyptians and other cultures practised embalming. It's bad enough that I die,

but at least no-one's going to eat me!

In the monasteries of Thailand and Burma, the teachers would ask the young eight year old monks, "What is the one?" And all the little novices would chant back, "All beings live by nutriment." Today, many children think that food comes in packages from freezers. Even house cats are sometimes more alert to the sound of the fridge door than the chirp of a bird on the lawn. We live in a pushbutton, sterile food fantasy, of microwave ovens and freeze dried or UHT products. Vegetables come in plastic bags. We don't want to see them covered in mud from the fields. That's dirty. Meat wasn't once part of a sentient creature, a being with hopes and fears and parents and often children. Now it comes in frozen slabs with little sponges to absorb any unsightly drippings. We have stepped back from the food chain and, in the process, are perhaps stepping out from life.

During the summer of 1991, I took a group to Alaska and the Yukon for a Living Exploration course – studying and meditating in the wild. We were in Denali National Park. Denali, which means "The Great One," is the highest mountain in North America.* It towers 16,000 feet above Wonder Lake, floating like an apparition above the clouds. It's an awesome and majestic region surrounded by peaks, endless glaciers and gigantic skies. The terrain, beneath the peaks, consists of windswept tundra, scrub plains and valleys. One day we hiked up Glacier Creek from the Eidson Visitor Centre.

Glacier Creek is a braided gravel river, running over the permafrost. There were many wild flowers blooming: yellow Alaskan poppies, blue forget-me-nots, tall stalked death comesis, all kinds of lichens and many tiny alpine plants. The sun came out and we stopped on the river gravel for lunch and a siesta. As we rested there, three caribou came down the bank from the other side of the river, straight towards us. We continued walking and

* Denali is also known as Mt. McKinley

after a bit I turned back and looking up the bank from where the caribou had come I saw three grizzly bears – a mother and two cubs. We watched for quite some time as the cubs tumbled and played at ambushing their mother. The three of them seemed oblivious to our presence as they looked for ground squirrels and berries ripening in the hot afternoon sun. Eventually, I realised the bears were getting a bit close. It's one thing to see a grizzly behind zoo bars, or to observe large carnivorous animals from a vehicle. It's something else to be standing together on the same open ground. Our cotton clothes and day packs didn't provide much sense of protection.

Deciding that we couldn't return by the river bed because it would bring us too close to the bears, we climbed the steep scree bank and found ourselves on a huge plateau of rolling tundra. In some part of the mind, an anxious intellect was reviewing all it had heard about grizzlies. A hundred kilometre grazing range. We should be okay. On the river flats, we had felt much more secure, as we had a long view all around. Now visibility varied with the up and down terrain. We could only hope.

We were walking up a gentle slope. A friend was about a step in front of me. Suddenly, I heard or perhaps felt her sharp intake of breath. A split second later as I came up to her level, I saw another grizzly sow with two cubs not more than 100 metres away, up wind! My mind went full speed. It wanted to deny the presence of the bears. So improbable. For a split second it actually considered the possibility that they were the same bears that had been behind us, now teleported in front! The intellect just didn't want those bears to be there. The heart was instantly thumping. The senses were on full alert. The body pivoted without even breaking the rhythm of stride. Our heads had bobbed up for a moment and then bobbed down.

Another couple were coming up behind, chatting to each other. I gave them a furious look. "Back!" We walked in absolute silence, guarding the breath, guarding the heart. Stepping gently,

moving fleetly, we went back towards the first group of bears but curved around the hill above the river towards the visitors centre. It felt like being in a grizzly bear sandwich, where the bears were the bread and we were the meat!

We walked for an hour in silence, listening intently, aware of the wind direction. I looked at my body: this physical expression of intelligence and learning; this wonderful human creature; a walking encyclopedia of knowledge, culture and understanding; sensitive, inventive, well-read and well-travelled, with such a brilliant intellect; a member of the most advanced species. All the human chauvinistic prejudices were revealed, none of them acknowledging or valuing the way the bear might see me. I looked down at my body and for the first time in my life I saw it as just so many calories of meat that might help a bear survive the long hibernation of winter.

We saw many animals on the way back. As we crossed the glacial grey, rock-flour river, we all walked in silence. I felt humble, quietened and blessed in that moment as if the bear was a great shaman teaching us about fear, mortality, courage and naturalness. I found myself offering a prayer of thanks.

The indigenous people from every culture have lived with an awareness of their place in the food chain. Hunter societies had to somehow come to terms with taking life in order to support their own lives. Many rituals, meditations and prayers were devised to help people live with the cruel truth that every life is supported at the cost of another. Eating, hunting and growing food were all sacred activities. They were moments of mystery reminding us humans of the great single fabric of being. The buffalo or the salmon or the potato or the corn were members of our family. We asked permission to eat them and gave thanks in return.

Here's a strange question for you. If you had to be eaten, how would you prefer it to be done? By beings who give no

thought to you while they munch a few choice bits and throw the rest in the garbage can, who are talking and so busy with other matters that they have no pleasure or appreciation in tasting you? Imagine they then go out and use the energy of your body to waste their lives, harm other beings and leave a trail of ugliness and destruction wherever they go. How would you feel about this?

On the other hand, you could be eaten, with thanks and appreciation, by beings who really attend to your taste and enjoy your presence in their bodies. You could be eaten by beings who, recognising your sacrifice, aspire to use your transformed energy for creative and compassionate living. Of these two options, can you feel any bias or preference?

Sacrifice means to make sacred or holy. We might gain better understanding if we spelt it 'wholly.' When the animal or plant dies to feed us, is it a sacrifice? Is it a sacred act that deepens our communion with the whole of nature or is it just a mindless slaughter? We humans can be richly aware of how our activities arise and how they affect others. Somehow we must come to terms with the painful truth that our eating in order to live is always at the expense of another's existence. The Buddha said, "All formations are *dukkha*." *Dukkha* means suffering or struggle. Everything eats and is eaten by something else. We all want to eat. Even if we do manage to escape being eaten, our own eating still brings suffering to others. How can one live with this awareness with an easeful conscience and a sense of moral integrity?

No teaching has the final answer to this question, because in the end each one of us has to come to terms with it, according to our own understanding. The way we do so is really a measure of our maturity. The method most often adopted by humans today is hardly inspiring. It's the practice of ignorance, the practice of actively ignoring what we are doing and what is happening in the world. Food comes in plastic containers. We have nothing to do with this pain, death and destruction. And yet, in living this

fantasy as if we were separate from nature, we bring about immense suffering to all our brother and sister creatures of this earth. Ultimately we bring suffering to ourselves.

Grace is often said before eating, to help us receive the bodies of these creatures graciously, with thanks and appreciation. All cultures have had a form of grace. Today, the lack of grace is something of an embarrassment, perhaps a dis-grace. People often feel that it would be good to say grace, to honour the moment, but it feels so old fashioned and, besides, doing the same recitation every meal often degenerates into an automatic and meaningless ritual.

I was raised in a non-church-going family. As children, we sometimes said, "Good food. Good meat. Good God. Let's eat." If we were feeling very daring we would say, "Rub a dub dub. Thanks for the grub. Yea God." I think these were really an expression of our discomfort, some kind of internal ambivalence. In our family, for some reason we didn't say grace but we couldn't forget it either.

Here is a contemplation we often do at Wangapeka. It has many facets. Each time it's done, it gives rise to a deepening sense of appreciation and understanding.

When the food is ready to eat, we join hands in a circle around the table. Eyes open, breathing with the moment, we remain silent for a brief period. Then, after lightly squeezing hands, we get on with the meal.

During the silence, we use the time to come back to the breath, to pause and relax and let go of any rushing that preceded the moment. Looking at the food and the eating place and the people who have come together, we open our hearts and minds as we did in the "tea ceremony." We breathe and appreciate the richness that is weaving this moment. Each time we eat is an opportunity to gain new moments of understanding for this mysterious dance of transformation we call life.

Look at the salad greens. See them growing in the fields. Imagine you are walking through the gardens, gathering what you are about to eat, thanking the plant, the soil, the rain and the sun. Briefly go to the home of each plant and animal now on the table. See them alive and invite them to nourish this open-heartedness.

Note the table, plates and utensils and imagine the story behind them, the forests and the carpenters, the clay and the metal smelters. Note the webs of merchants and transport systems that have helped bring this moment together. Breathe with your friends and appreciate the extraordinary weaving of lives that link us all together for this moment of sharing a meal.

Each time we pause this way before eating, we deepen our sense of expanded being. Hovering with all of it, grasping at none of it. Magical. Appreciative. Present.

*This body of mine is composed of atoms born in stars:
molecules, cells, tissues and organs.*

*It is a union of uncountable viruses, bacteria, fungi,
plants and animals.*

*It is conditioned by family and society,
by thoughts and dreams.*

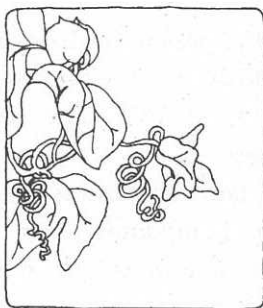
*It is moulded by sun and gravity and
the whole of the ecosphere.*

*It is an interbeing of all these processes
from micro to macro.*

Wondrous! Transient!

May it teach me wisdom!

(from Daily Pūja)



Chapter Eighteen

The Secret Tantra for the Attainment of Profound Satisfaction

*If our belly felt softer and more full of ease,
this addiction to consumption would fade away.*

Eating addictions, so rampant and distressing in the wealthy world, are just a small segment of a more embracive compulsion – the compulsion to acquire or consume more than we need or even want. It's a kind of gut reaction to feelings of emptiness or uneasiness. The belly feels hollow, vulnerable and squirmy. We try to shut down these feelings by tightening the muscles around it, stuffing food into it and, at the same time, distracting ourselves with a continual stream of outer novelty. If our belly felt softer and more full of ease, if we felt more comfortable in that part of our body, perhaps this addiction to consumption would fade away. Of course, today we try to combat something like drug addiction by having a war on drugs rather than finding and filling

the need that drives the person to drugs in the first place. It's the same thing with addiction to consuming. Instead of trying to restrict or control our behaviour, perhaps we should learn to truly nurture ourselves.

Here is a "secret" tantric transmission for the attainment of profound satisfaction. To my knowledge, it's never before been revealed in print. It's sometimes known by practitioners as the Secret Tantra of Pooh Bear. Of course, traditionally, you should be initiated in a small group, so that you could practise together with your spiritual brothers and sisters (preferably in circles in the middle of shopping malls!) However, special dispensation is now given for you to begin practise on your own, having learned it from this book.

Sit very erect on the edge of a stool or a straight backed chair. Have your knees far apart and your feet solidly planted on the floor. Now contact your breathing and, with your eyes gently closed, imagine Pooh Bear sneaking into a cupboard to get a jar of honey and then eating it with great satisfaction. Allow a Cheshire Cat smile to come to your face and gently place both your hands on your belly-abdomen region. Breathing easefully, let your belly, your thighs and the floor of the abdomen soften and relax.

With full attentiveness, take a long, deep inhalation. Feel your belly expanding. Now gently begin to rub your belly with big circular movements. At the same time, slowly rotate the whole upper body from side to side. Exhaling as you do this, utter the "sacred mantra" continuously, until you have run out of breath. 'Tum tum tum tum tum tum tum.....'

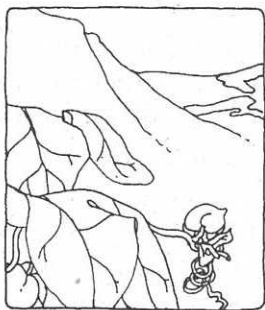
At the end of the exhalation, let your hands rest comfortably on your belly as you draw in another deep inhalation. As you breathe in, let the Cheshire Cat grin increase. Pause at the top

of the inhalation and then let the air out in one great, deep, satisfying sigh of 'Ahhhhhhhhh!'

Again, inhale deeply, resting your hands on your belly. Then, while rubbing the tummy, exhale with 'tum tum tum...' until all the air is expelled. Pause with the hands while you inhale, then exhale with a satisfying 'Ahhhh.' Repeat this sequence for seven breath cycles and then rest in mindfulness of breathing.

Thus, "oh fortunate ones," you have now received the "Secret Tantra for the Attainment of Profound Satisfaction." May it spread throughout the universe for the benefit of all beings!

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Chapter Nineteen

Essential Mindfulness

*Utterly easeful and completely attentive,
this is the art of living well.*

When I was young, a small circus-carnival used to come to our neighbourhood about once a year. There were rides, acrobats, candy floss and sometimes animal shows. And there were also games. One I remember very clearly was the game of fish. We were given a fishing rod with a magnet on the end of the line. For the cost of a ticket, we could dangle this line in the murky depths of a tank and pull up a metal fish with a number on it. The number corresponded to a prize, usually something like a plastic Donald duck, a balloon or a 'kewpie' doll. Somewhere in the pond, however, was the one special fish that would win the giant panda bear! What on earth one would do with a giant panda bear is another question but, regardless, we eagerly cast in our lines, determined to strike it lucky.

I suspect many people approach meditation or spiritual practice as if they were playing this game of magnetic fish. Each session, they cast their line into the depths of being, hoping to

bring up the lucky fish that will win the panda of insight, health, vision or enlightenment. It's almost as if the process of healing and awakening was one of luck rather than developing the art of mindful living. We might go to the carnival once a year to fish, or once an month, once a week or even everyday but, inevitably, we return to the mainstream of our life. One hour a day fishing for enlightenment and twenty three hours a day riding the auto-pilot of unconscious habit patterns! Is this enough to sustain us?

The great meditator and teacher, Kalu Rinpoché, once said that the practice of meditation is a matter of acclimatisation more than anything else: acclimatising to living with truth, getting used to resting in a greater sense of openness and aliveness – relaxing into a larger way of being.

The process of our life is continuous. There really aren't any gaps – times out from living for tea or afternoon siestas. Our heart beats twenty four hours a day. Our cells respire and metabolise continuously. Our nerves transmit day and night, receiving messages, coordinating responses. The living processes unfold in a most natural way, a human ecosystem awakening. Meanwhile, little Tom Thumb me rides in the ear of this great magnificent creature called life, imagining that I am, or at least that I should be, in control.

The "practice of meditation," in the formal sense of sitting and doing a technique, can certainly augment the flow of awakening. Even so, the heart of the meditative life is not formal sitting or religious exercises. The heart of awakening rests on bringing forth a continuous presence of mindfulness; the mind filled to the full, a lucid knowing attentiveness, present in each moment. Sometimes this seems difficult because we are clinging to past moments. To give all my attention to 'now' – to rest easefully in 'now' – I need to let go of 'then.' To let go of 'then' I need to realise the value of what is called non-clinging awareness.

Even the idea of “practising” awareness is a bit odd. It conjures up, for many people, a picture of a critical “watcher” checking up on everything that’s happening. Now I’m bending over – moving in slow motion, trying not to be distracted. Now I’m feeling tired. Now I’m breathing in. Now I’m breathing out.

The continuum awareness of deep healing is not a fantastic effort at self scrutiny and control. It’s more a matter of allowing the friendliness that enquires and the enquiry that is friendly to function. Rather than calling it mindfulness, one might think of it as heartfulness or even nowfulness. To taste each moment fully; to merge and be with each arising, utterly easeful and completely attentive – this is the art of living well.

Practising mindfulness or heartfulness is not about detaching yourself from the activities of life in order to become a kind of disinterested scientific observer. When people try to practise this way, they often have an unacknowledged hope that, if they come to know all about something, they will then be able to control it. They’re not so much interested in knowing truth, as escaping from suffering.

Deep awareness work does require a degree of detachment. But detachment, in the light of natural awakening, really means relaxing the tenacious clinging of ego hope and fear. This is what distorts, obscures and limits experience. Non-clinging allows each moment to fully flower. Total detachment allows total engagement. Every bit of me – body, speech and mind – is free to be involved with what’s arising, right at this moment. A meditator is not a big-brained, cosmic voyeur, looking down from some enlightened overview. To be detached is to have the freedom to be totally present. Being wholly here, moment by moment is to be holy and whole. Dancing and being transformed by the dance – this is the way of the heart.

When practising sounding or body scan there may come a time that the mantra or the step by step instructions seem

artificial or cumbersome, and can actually prevent further deepening. If this occurs, then drop the formal exercise and simply rest in awareness of breathing.

In the *Ānāpānasati Sutra*, the Buddha's teaching on breathing meditation, he identifies 16 different ways of deepening heart-mindfulness through studying the breath. Firstly, we bring a tremendous attentiveness to the coming and going of the breath at the nostrils. We begin to notice that the breathing constantly changes its rhythm, shape and texture. As we continue with this, we study the relationship between the breath and the sensations arising in our body. "Experiencing the bodily formations, I breathe in. Experiencing the bodily formations, I breathe out."

This enquiry into the body can go on for quite a long period of time as we learn to meet the various physical manifestations with a sensitive friendliness. Gradually, by bringing more and more friendly interest to the difficult sensations, they naturally begin to calm. We are no longer fighting against ourselves. "Calming the bodily formations, I breathe in. Calming the bodily formations, I breathe out."

Working in this way, the body begins to feel more easeful. It's a good place to be. We may then begin to experience pleasurable shiverings or thrills of energy moving in various parts of the body, like an electrostatic charge. This is called *pīti* (pronounced peetee). "Experiencing *pīti*, I breathe in. Experiencing *pīti*, I breathe out."

This *pīti*, which could be thought of as the feelings or sensations of the body becoming more alive, eventually opens to a state of deep abiding serenity, an all pervading sense of goodness. These stages are discussed in much greater detail in my earlier book, "Breathing; The Natural Way to Meditate."

As you relax into a deepening concentration, becoming more and more centred in the breathing, you will eventually discover a state of profound stillness coupled with a sense of immense spaciousness. It can be as if the boundaries of yourself and other

objects have softened. Here, you may experience body sensations arising and passing within a great accommodating space of awareness: feelings arising and passing; emotions appearing and disappearing; thoughts emerging and vanishing; everything arising and passing in a great space of open knowingness – the ocean of interbeing. Dwelling in this state, one discovers the simplicity and naturalness of resting in the boundless heart-mind, the heart that can embrace anything and everything, the mind that can know what the heart allows.

As each meditation session comes to an end, see if you can continue this enhanced awareness as you move in simple activities: making tea, sweeping the floor, making the bed, raking the leaves. Appreciate this new sense of easeful engaged spaciousness, in everything you do. See if you can acclimatise to living this way. Awakening is really a life-long work. It's much more than fishing for panda bears. Eventually, we might come to regard meditation as an opportunity to deepen our appreciation for the art of living fully and well.

Approaching the Essence

As you become accustomed to greater clarity and presence in your life, you may find it interesting to explore what happens when the attention is not focused on any particular thing. One way to do this is to lie flat on your back, preferably outside, where you can gaze up into the spacious blueness of the sky. Actually, you could use any posture. Breathe with this for a few moments while scanning the body and allowing a letting go. Then release even the effort to be aware of breathing and without trying to focus on anything in particular, simply note what the heart-mind does when it is not engaged with a specific project.

Sometimes the mind races around from this to that. It must

have something to grasp. Nāma doll is looking for rūpa doll. Sometimes it "moves" sedately and you can easily know its activities. Sometimes it stops all together. Where are you then? Is the knower separate from the known? Is the mind separate from the object of mind? If you answer 'yes', then where is the boundary between them? If you answer 'no', then what is the essential quality of this present knowing? Who is it that is knowing? Does the knowing heart-mind have a location in the spaciousness? In this state, what do we even mean by location and how is this sense of location established? These are just some of the questions that might energise the moment.

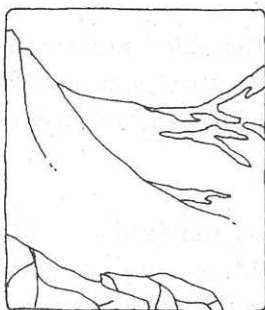
With practise, this exploration will gradually lead into a deep and profound mystery that is known by many names. Some teachings refer to it as "essence of mind" or "nature of being". The mystics pointed towards it with the phrase, "abiding where there is no abiding." The Buddha hinted at it when, after the awakening, he said, "There is suffering, but there is no one suffering."

On a practical note, this resting with no object can only bring insight when the heart-mind is already calm and centred. If you become distracted or find yourself getting lost in some profound and subtle thread of speculation, then go back to breathing or body scan and re-establish a state of relative tranquillity. Then, if you wish, with love and gentle probing, give this exploration another go.

Toronto it's called.
Suburbia, Maple, Richmond Hill.
Ocean sound
Waves of rustling
Breathing gently
Punctuated by crackling leaves
and mouldering sweet rot.
Warm sun touching
Background droning
Still in the bowl-like sea.

The leaves are resting on the ground.
The trees are resting in their space.
The air and bird chirp, hopping bugs,
swish of feet, resting in purpose.
Poem is resting and dancing thought smooth
Looking directly the sphere is clear
Happy right through
You, me, us , it
Now
Speechless

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Chapter Twenty

Creative Experimentation in the Face of Difficulty

*Nature experiments. It's also
the extreme opportunist.*

Once, when Namgyal Rinpoché was speaking on the process of awakening and the many cul de sacs and detours that often lengthen the time spent on the journey, he said that a good ratio for successfully walking the path was 95% pragmatism with about a 5% spiritual bent. Too many people seem to get the proportions the other way around and then struggle with conflict between the call of the "spiritual life" and the demands of the so called "real world."

As the naturalness of awakening becomes more apparent to us, we see that the spiritual life is inseparable from the real world. In life, it doesn't matter how liberated one is, unexpected difficulties will arise from time to time. There are other beings with their own agendas which sometimes conflict with our own.

As I mentioned earlier, there are three key aspects to Natural Awakening. "Friendly enquiry" and "the practice of already here" are the first two. The third I call, "creative experimentation in the face of difficulty."

Some people have great fantasies about awakening. They think that if any difficulties arise it is because of their past bad karma, and if they were really awakened, life would be perfect, without any conflict. Some take this so far as to suggest that if you were truly "enlightened" you wouldn't get ill. I suppose if you were logical about this you would never die!

These ideas are quite contrary to my experience. I have lived very closely with some of the Lamas that have been considered either enlightened or, at least, very great beings. Away from the temples, the glitter of brocade and ceremony, and the formality of venerable titles such as Rinpoché and Holiness, I saw human beings who periodically got the flu, showed frustration when things didn't work out and had to change plans when something unexpected arose. My observation was that these people had plenty of daily challenges and difficulties. After all, the Dalai Lama, leader of a people who are suffering so much, has experienced many setbacks and disappointments. The deeply awakened are not exempt from life's difficulties. The big difference I did observe, though, is the creative and experimental way they meet a challenge.

Many people, when they meet difficulties, fall back on habitual response. They automatically become defensive, or aggressive, or justifying, or just plain exhausted. A tightness comes around their being that seems to prevent them from trying any new options. To live creatively doesn't necessarily mean to be a painter or a composer. One could find a creative solution to a problem.

I'm sure you've been in a situation where you have to make a decision and none of the options is very appealing. You

sometimes end up choosing "the lesser of two evils". Whenever I get into a situation like this, I'm always on the lookout for what I call the X factor – a neglected bit of information or a new unthought of possibility, something that may lead to a creative solution rather than a tired predictable reaction. Sometimes the X factor is just a matter of seeing things from a slightly different point of view.

Do you know the Chinese tale of good luck, bad luck? A farmer won a horse in a gambling game. He brought it home and all the neighbours said, "Good luck. Good luck!" His oldest son went for a ride and broke his leg when he was thrown off. "Oh, bad luck. Bad luck!" Just then, the local warlord conscripted all the eldest sons into the army. Because of the broken leg, his son couldn't go. "Oh, good luck. Good luck!" The army was victorious and all the soldiers were rewarded with riches and land. "Oh, bad luck. Bad luck. You missed out." And so the story goes. One moment's good luck is another moment's bad luck. One moment's bad luck is another moment's good luck. The history of our planet has been a bit like this.

3000 million years ago on our planet, very early life forms used hydrogen for food-fuel. "Oh, good luck." Hydrogen was being emitted in various gas combinations from volcanic vents, but most of it was lost into space as the earth's gravity wasn't strong enough to hold such a light gas. Gradually, these life cycle processes ran out of usable "food." They were suffering a global energy crisis. "Oh, bad luck." Some life cycles "learned," or mutated, to be able to extract hydrogen from water in a very primitive form of photosynthesis. "Good luck." The hydrogen was used as fuel and the oxygen was waste gas that was simply released. Eventually this caused the greatest environmental crisis the earth has ever known. The free oxygen was lethal to most life forms, plus it rusted all the iron. Accumulating in the atmosphere, it transformed many minerals through oxidation

and gradually filled the air with poisonous gas. "Bad luck."

1000 million years ago, this pollution crisis encouraged the evolution of oxygen-breathing bacteria which were much more efficient energy users than the earlier fermenters. It also encouraged some bacteria to co-operate with each other in a symbiosis that gave rise to nucleated cells and the multi-cellular life we know today as fungi, plants and animals. "Oh, good luck!" 245 million years ago there was another disaster which caused catastrophic extinctions. "Oh, no! Bad luck." But this was rapidly followed by the rise of mammals with their sharp eyes and receptive brains. "Good luck." 66 million years ago saw the Cretaceous catastrophe and the extinction of the dinosaurs, "Bad luck", which cleared the way for the development of primates. "Good luck." And so our story goes on and on.

Nature is continuously experimenting. It's the supreme opportunist. It tries this genetic combination and that genetic combination. It merges this life-form with that life-form. Most combinations fail, but some are truly creative and give rise to something that doesn't just survive, but positively thrives in the challenging new environment. This is the X factor.

To me, the whole idea of an experiment acknowledges the likelihood of "failure." In the laboratories of the world, most experiments either "fail" or don't really lead anywhere. But something makes us keep on trying, now this, now that. This doesn't work, okay, let's try something different. We won't make much of a scientist if we fear failure.

Unfortunately, many people who feel they are on a "spiritual" path are not scientists. They are afraid to be wrong. They may be willing to engage in a particular practice, but only if they know for certain it will "work" – that this is the guaranteed solution! Life is full of risks, full of unexpected unknowns. Do they paralyse us or do they call forth a mind of creative experimentation?

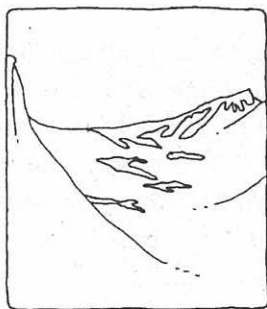
In this society, to call someone an opportunist is often considered derogatory. And yet, the more awake you are, the more vibrantly alive and present you are – not off in worries, plans or fantasies – the more likely you will be able to see the threads of new opportunities in a challenging situation. It may be an opportunity to let go of old baggage or an opportunity to try a new direction. Perhaps the more awake you are, the more you will be an opportunist - someone free to see an opportunity and move with it, rather than freezing into a defensive stance and hoping the moment will pass.

The next time difficulty arises, see if you can approach it in a different way. Bring forth the mind of “friendly enquiry.” Remember the “practice of already here.” Study the web of interbeing that gives rise to this problem.

Try resting with the problem and seeing how it might have some positive aspect. Ask the question. “What limits me?” Enquire into the edges and boundaries of the experience. Where does “it” begin and “I” end off? Where do the physical sensations begin and end? How do they relate to feelings? Who is experiencing this situation?

Above all, pause before reacting and contact your friend the breath. Open your senses and note what is happening immediately around you. Appreciate how you are being nurtured right now, supported by trees and plants, by air and earth, by people, thoughts, memories and habit patterns. Let this pause show you a little more spaciousness, a little more softness. Give the X factor an opportunity to emerge.

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Chapter Twenty-One

Ethics of Awakening

*Precepts are like Zen Koans:
impossible questions which force the heart
to jump into an entirely new way of
understanding.*

Jehovah was a jealous God. He went around telling beings, especially human beings, what to do, and then he would smite them if they didn't behave. He gave Adam and Eve the garden of Eden and then told them not to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge. He didn't like the way things were going, so he caused a flood to destroy the world, and only Noah, his family and a few favourite non-humans were saved. He sent down the ten Commandments to Moses and punished the righteous Job on a bet with Satan.

Like it or not, this figure of Jehovah is a big part of our western religious heritage: an unpredictable, ambivalent, jealous, and at times vindictive and vengeful creator of the whole universe. As if this wasn't bad enough, he seemed to have a fixation on humans worshipping only "Him," even though so much of what he did

was anything but loving and compassionate. This ancient view of God has helped to shape an authoritarian attitude within religion, which sees humans as basically unruly, sinful beings that will only behave themselves when threatened with dire punishment. Thou shalt not, or ye shall be damned to all eternity. It does sound suspiciously like an ill-tempered parent confronting a naughty child.

The trend in western culture, which is now worldwide, has been to move further and further away from the church and its moralising. Science has become the current authority but, by and large, it doesn't address the questions of morals and ethics. These have traditionally been the business of religion. 300 years ago, an uneasy truce was struck between science and religion. Science could question and explore any aspect of the physical universe as long as it left the Church to tell people how they should behave. The Church maintained its authority by being an expert on souls and other things no one was very sure about, and continued to wield control with threats of excommunication, if not eternal damnation.

Gradually this moral tone became internalised in some obscure parental authority figure. Even today, in the age of enlightenment about such things, the age of ecology, the age of humanistic psychology, the age of therapy, the new age, there still flows a deep rooted belief in these processes. The "green" movements and environmental movements still use the Jehovah method of commandments backed up by threats; this time not from Godly whim but from the God of science. Essentially they are saying, "If we don't all pull together and save the planet by the year 2020, we will be faced with a horrifying catastrophe."

Today, not many people are interested in talking about ethics or morals in a deep and probing way. It's the work of liberal philosophers and academics. Somehow it seems dry and boring. Also we're a bit fed up with hundreds of years of being told what to do, by people and institutions who are clearly corrupt

and don't practise what they preach. Although the newspapers are full of stories with challenging ethical implications, for many, the whole question of ethics comes down to a need for stricter rules and more clearly defined grounds for blame and punishment.

In spite of this reluctance to grapple with the question of ethics, many people are being forced to consider aspects of living that demand attention in very pressing ways. How can I, and the beings I love, live well in this world of contradiction and turmoil? How can I live with integrity and harmony in this turbulent age?

These questions are very pertinent and much more involving for people than speculating on the nature of absolute truth or debating some traditional religious view. Where can we turn for guidance in a world that is changing so fast that no new tradition is likely to last in an established form for more than 10 or 15 years?

It is said that the Buddha taught only two things: suffering and the cessation of suffering. He avoided questions concerning absolute truth and ultimate reality and focused on showing people how to live a sane and healthy life. When he spoke about ethics and morals, it was in the context of supporting the deepening of wisdom, compassion and awareness. He frequently showed how a life of easeful presence provided a stable foundation for meditative work. An activity was considered ethical if it supported a state of compassionate awareness in oneself and others, and it was unethical if it didn't.

In Buddhism, there were never any Commandments. Instead, we find five basic training precepts. For example, the first is "*I undertake to train myself not to take the life of any living being.*" Note the language. It doesn't say, "thou shalt not," but "*I undertake to train myself.*" There is a big difference. As a training, there is room to fail. It's not a set-up for guilt. The

deeper purpose of the five precepts is not to tell people what to do or how to live. The deeper purpose is really to create a situation where we become more sensitively aware of what we are doing, trusting that this sensitive awareness will lead naturally to more healthy behaviour.

Many meditation and awareness practices are done sitting still, watching inwardly. The precepts are a form of meditation in which the moment by moment activities of our life become the focus of mindfulness and friendly enquiry. They are a bit like Zen Koans – impossible questions which force the heart to jump into an entirely new way of understanding.

First Precept

"I undertake to train myself not to take the life of any living being."

To follow this we have to ask, "What is living? What is not living? Where is the boundary? What does taking life mean? What is death?" When contemplating with the viewpoint of interbeing, is there such a thing as taking life? As you work with this precept, you come to realise that you take life with each breath. Micro-organisms are sucked in with the air. You may see that all of life is taking life and, although this is a great harmonious dance of energy, for the individual there can also be great fear and pain.

When one becomes ordained as a Buddhist Monk, the first few years are spent meditating on the *Vinaya*, the ethical guidelines for the Order. I remember, shortly after I was ordained, it was very important for me to keep the precepts in behaviour, as well as using them as a focus for contemplation. If a mosquito landed on me, I would gently nudge it and ask it to leave. If it didn't, I would meditate on the arising of conflicting feelings while wishing it "bon appetit." During this time I was living with Namgyal Rinpoché and some others in a

house in Chania, Crete. After being there a number of months, a stray dog and a few cats "adopted" us, discovering that they could get regular food and a place to stay. The dog was pregnant, with puppies due any time. She also had a large number of ticks living on her. Although she could host these ticks and survive, it was unlikely that the pups could. One day, Rinpoché told me to get rid of the ticks.

I sat down with Loshi and tried to gently pull the ticks off her skin. This was impossible to do without squashing the ticks and leaving their teeth embedded. I didn't know what to do, so I did nothing. A day later, Rinpoché asked how the dog was. I told him that I couldn't remove the ticks without tick powder and that the powder would kill the ticks. Rinpoché then said, "I don't care what you do, just get rid of those ticks." I was really quite upset. I either ignored my teacher or I broke the precepts.

Rinpoché must have felt compassion for the turmoil, because he later said, "Look, get the powder. Tell the ticks what you are about to do and that they have twenty minutes to leave and then apply the powder." I had ambivalent feelings about this. Now I could do what he said and be off the hook. I also thought that this was really some rationalisation! Anyway, I followed his suggestion. Loshi was in a box we had made for her. I put on the powder and later, when I examined her and the box, there were no ticks to be seen, either alive or dead. Where were they? Maybe they did leave.

I contemplated this for a long time and began to see that, in the world of eating and being eaten, there are no simple answers. In the end, each person has to determine for themselves how they should act, and this will depend on their awareness of the situation. The first precept challenges us to really appreciate life and to move with a sensitivity that doesn't allow us to become callous. It pushes us to find an integrity of behaviour in the immediate context of our lives.

Although these are training precepts and not commandments, they are still expressed in a negative form. Surely there is more to life than trying to avoid doing certain things. Today, people are becoming somewhat numbed and unresponsive to authorities telling or even suggesting to them what they should not do. There is already so much negativity, so much fear, and so much danger in the world that any kind of moralising tends to shut people down even more. Things have become so terrible, we don't want to be reminded. It rarely does much good to warn people of the disastrous consequences of their unconscious behaviour. Don't buy this. Don't use that. Cut back. Tighten the belt. Should. Ought. Should. Ought.

Today more than ever, we need inspiration, joy and a touching of what's miraculous and beautiful in life. This will allow us to open our senses and unbar the doors to the heart. When we feel our interbeing with all life, how to live with others becomes much clearer.

Over the years, I have often explored with groups of people a positive expression of the five training precepts, ones that raised the question of how to live in an actively inspiring way. This has led to the following expression of the first precept.

"I will train myself to support, extend and appreciate the life of all living beings. I will live with a sensitive and responsible awareness for the whole ecology of life."

In a way, this positive expression is much more challenging than the negative expression. It's fairly easy to follow the negatively expressed precepts. All you need is a bit of obsessionalism. "From now on I won't do this." Some people even pride themselves on their purity, their adherence to the letter of the law but, in the process, they often violate the spirit behind the precepts. To be moved by the positive expression requires a greater degree of life involvement. These are not rules

to be kept but suggestions or guidelines, further avenues of investigation. They require us to use our intelligence and integrity to really explore each arising situation with clarity and wholesome motivation. Then we can act in a way that's best for all the beings concerned.

Second Precept

The second precept draws our awareness to the problems of ownership and property, such sacred cows in the modern world.

"I undertake to train myself not to take that which is not given."

Stated baldly, the precept says, "don't steal!" As we enquire deeply into interbeing, though, we may begin to wonder what is theft? Who exactly owns what? Do my cells own me? Do I own my body? Does the Amazon Jungle feel it's owned by Senor Jose Rich-Man? Can one being own another? If not, how can there be stealing? How can I take that which is not given when it wasn't someone's to give in the first place?

This precept raises some big questions. It recognises that humans "think" they own things. They often identify with their possessions. This may be an illusion, but it's one that causes much pain. Many people who have had their house burgled feel that somehow they have been physically violated, as if their body has been burgled, not just the house.

Following the second precept can look fairly straightforward in terms of conventional property. If you spontaneously give me something, that's within the boundaries of the precept. I could even ask you for it first and then you give it to me. This too follows the second precept guidelines. But there are more complicated situations. What about taking an organism's life in order to eat it? Did it offer its body? How can we do this in accord with the precept? Also, look at the number of times we

have "taken" offence to something another person says or does, when no offence was actually intended. We violate this precept continuously, hurting both ourselves and others. The whole idea of possession seems to set up problems.

Here is a way of approaching this area that may show some interesting possibilities. *I undertake to receive in a way that does not diminish the giver.* Or, taking it a step further, *I undertake to receive in a way that actually augments the giver.* At the ego level, this may be as simple as first asking for something and then giving thanks after we receive it. The person who gave then feels good about giving. At the energy level, we could eat the potato or the fish and turn it into inspiring works of art or compassionate activity so that somehow the eaten being continues to grow in its wholesome effect on the world.

The positive expression of this precept moves from not hurting or diminishing others when we take, to actively developing generosity.

"I will train myself to dwell more and more in the mind of spontaneous generosity. Daily I will give material support, emotional support and an example to others of awakening in action."

Giving is the great loosener. When there is a spontaneous naturalness in giving, there is usually an easefulness in receiving. Receiving allows another to give. Giving allows another to receive. All of this encourages a greater flow of being. All taking involves a receiving. All receiving is connected to giving. These pairs go together, so that when we develop one in a wholesome way, we always deepen the other. When we practise this precept, every time we give or receive we are reminded of the interweaving of life.

Third Precept

The third precept directs our attention to how we use our senses.

"I undertake to train myself to refrain from sensual misconduct."

This precept is often translated as sexual misconduct. In other words, one should refrain from any sexual activity that abuses, exploits or harms any of the beings involved. In Pali, the *kāme* in "*kāmesu micchācārā*" means sensual misconduct, not just sexual misconduct. Obviously sex is a sensual activity, so this precept includes sex, but it refers to a lot more than that, too.

Refraining from sensual misconduct involves training ourselves to avoid using the senses in ways that are unhealthy for ourselves and others. This includes using them to anaesthetise our awareness, in order to avoid what we feel are painful or unpleasant aspects of life. For example, much of our indulging of the senses is to escape, to forget or to cover over. We binge on food, on TV, on music and on sex - not to explore the world, but to blot it out. Many religions seem to be negative about the senses because they are thought to distract beings from God. Sensuality is seen as the epitome of sin and yet life is unavoidably sensual. Our senses are our doorways to the rest of the universe. It's not the sensing that's sinful but possibly the motivation behind it. Expressing this precept in a positive way, we say:

"I will train myself to use the senses to further awakening, explore Dharma, and to come to know the world more profoundly and more compassionately."

Dharma means truth, wholeness and the very process of awakening. This positive expression takes us far from an ambivalent distrust of the senses in the context of a religious life. It shows us that we have an obligation to extend our sensing:

to see new things, or to see old things in new ways; to extend our hearing in range and subtlety; to experiment with new tastes and smells; to touch the universe wholeheartedly with all the doors of perception wide open. This is the basis of a living morality.

Fourth Precept

The fourth precept concerns communication, and highlights an area that is a source of much trouble for many people. How many times have we put our foot in our mouth?

"I undertake to train myself to refrain from unskilful speech."

This training encourages us to be aware of the effect our speech has on ourselves and others. Unskilful or unwholesome speech involves things like lying, slander, and gossip – any form of speech that causes harm to others. Not only the words, but the tone of voice and the accompanying gestures need to be considered. Our use of unskilful speech usually reflects a moment of closed-heartedness or defensiveness in our being. When we can't be open to a particular feeling in ourselves, we often find it difficult to be open to similar feelings in others. Not wanting to recognise our own troubled energies, we project them onto the other person and then verbally slam them for what are often our own shortcomings. It's a form of protection against knowing ourselves.

Another more innocuous example of unskilful speech is simply chattering to fill in time. Not only does this use up life energy that could go into more wholesome exploration, it is sometimes a way of avoiding states that perhaps we ought to investigate further. Put in a positive way, this precept goes:

"I will train myself to communicate in a skilful and compassionate manner."

Fifth Precept

The fifth precept concerns not polluting our being with toxic substances.

"I undertake to train myself to abstain from taking substances that cause intoxication to the point of heedlessness."

This precept is often seen as a prohibition on drugs and alcohol, but it's really an invitation to be more mindful of the effects substances have on the mind and body so that we can feed ourselves in a way that supports awakening. Often, people become quite fanatical about diet, applying the findings and discoveries of other people in different situations, to their own life here and now. This precept urges us towards responsible awareness. Any imbalance of diet can cause an imbalanced mind and body. It's not just a matter of avoiding the classical "baddies." Too much sugar, too much tea, too much anything can lead to imbalance.

Thich Nhat Hanh has pointed out that a lot of advertising and news reports can be as toxic as drugs and alcohol to our system. Whenever we are poisoned, for whatever reason, we withdraw awareness from the outside in order to protect the inner. At times like these, we can be very uncaring towards others. At Wangapeka, we express this precept in terms of refraining from taking substances that cloud the mind and hide the openness of the heart.

As a positive expression, this training goes far beyond avoiding certain substances. It involves clearly recognising what nurtures us and then actively encouraging awakening by reaching out for these foods and activities.

"I will train myself to be ever more directly aware of how nutriment affects the mind and body. I will eat and drink and nurture myself in a way that supports awakening."

Today, a Buddhist monk takes 227 precepts or vows. It's interesting to realise that early in the Buddha's life, there were no vows. It was assumed that the bhikkhu had a certain level of maturity, that they were interested in a life of awakening and were compassionately motivated towards others. There really wasn't any need for vows. The ordination consisted of two words. "Ehi Bhikkhu." Come, wander. "Wander forth for the benefit of the manyfolk." It would preserve the meaning quite well to say, "wonder" forth for the benefit of the manyfolk.

In the early years of Buddha's teaching, to be a monk or a nun was a respected vocation. Society supported the members of the Order by giving food, clothing, medicine and shelter. In turn the monks and nuns would study and meditate and cultivate the heart-mind of wisdom and compassion for the sake of all beings. As time went on, however, the standards must have dropped. People came to get ordained who were not so wholesomely motivated. They were in it for a free lunch, or the fame or respect, or to escape prior obligations. The monks engaged in all kinds of behaviour that got them into trouble with each other and with the laity. These conflicts became a distraction to the life of meditative enquiry. The friendliness disappeared. For some, the "practice of maybe next week or possibly yesterday," replaced "the practice of already here." The Buddha eventually allowed them to have training precepts so that the challenges of everyday life would become an invitation to mindfulness.

There is a story about a newly ordained monk. He came to the Buddha one day and said that he would have to leave the Order because he couldn't keep all the precepts. Not only couldn't he keep them, he couldn't remember them. The Buddha saw that it would be good for this young man to remain

in the *sangha*, so apparently they began to bargain. Perhaps the conversation went something like this:

The Buddha asked him if he could keep one hundred precepts – less than half.

"No, I'm sorry, Venerable One, I don't think I could."

"Could you keep ten? If you stayed in the order with ten precepts, could you do that?"

"No, I really couldn't. I don't think I could even remember ten."

"How about five? Even the laity keep five."

"I'm really embarrassed to say this, but I don't think I could keep five."

"How about two? Do you think you could practice two?"

There was a long pause.

"Well..... I guess I could keep two."

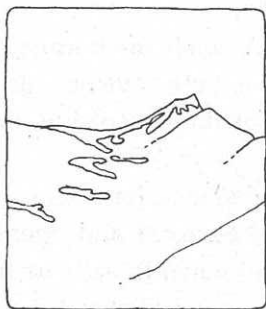
"Excellent." said the Buddha. "Seek wisdom and practice compassion."

And so we see the precepts in their most essential form. Try to live with an enquiring mind and a friendly heart.

In the end, each one of us has to face the question of how to live in this world of constant change and challenge. The Dalai Lama urges us not to harm others. St. Augustine said, "Love God and do as thou wilt." If we are unclear or confused, it is wise to follow the precepts in their negative expression. At least we are less likely to get ourselves into trouble. If we are clear and easefully present, we need only to rely on our ongoing friendly enquiry and then do what needs to be done.

What is a major difference between the awakened and the unawakened? The unawakened walk in the unknown and ever changing world with fear and trepidation. The awakened also walk through the same ocean of impermanence, but with profound friendliness and presence.

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Chapter Twenty-Two

Bathing in Beauty

*At our peril, we may be turning our backs
on beauty.*

In the last 50 years, so many miracles have become common place. We watched men walking on the moon. We've looked into a living human body and developed drugs that have banished many terrible illnesses. We fly around the globe in jumbo jets. We have instant communication all over the world with fax and phone and the inter net. Computers and machine technologies have allowed us to eliminate all kinds of repetitive labour. All these things on their own are quite wonderful, yet in this accelerating rush of technology we seem to have lost touch with a guiding light of living. At our peril, we may be turning our backs on beauty.

Beatus, from Latin, means to bless. Beauty is something that blesses and sanctifies. It moves us towards the holy and whole. The Russian painter and philosopher, Nicholas Roerich, thought that beauty was the fundamental motivating force of the universe; that "equilibrium, truth, compassion, justice and synthesis, all

the good qualities we wish for humanity and the world, are expressions of this aesthetic power." In Kabbalistic teaching, beauty is the centre of the tree of life, linking together all the other branches.

Beauty embraces balance, harmony and a profound sense of right fitting. We feel elevated and opened up in its presence. Something is beautiful when it leads us from the narrow world of ignorance and gives us a glimpse of a larger realm of being. Beauty intimates a wisdom, ripening the world. It reminds us of a greater goodness and lifts us out of mean-mindedness and negativity. Beauty heals. It can teach us something quite beyond words.

Today, beauty is often thought of as cosmetic: decoration and adornment for the rich who can afford it. Instead of communing at the shrine of beauty and love, we dedicate our lives to efficiency, money and powerful techniques. Even in the fields of healing and awakening, beauty is often ignored. We dredge up our past to find memories of abuse and suffering. We bomb the body with invasive techniques and drugs. We "seriously" pursue breathing or insight meditation, having little time for the beauty around us. I sometimes think that glimpses of beauty, far more than learned opinions and skilful explanations, are what nourish and inspire our love and interest for the world. Union with God and nature is beautiful. Joy is beautiful. Forgiveness is beautiful. Profound healing is beautiful. Moments are sometimes so beautiful that tears flow glistening from our eyes and we stand, wonderstruck, grateful to all of life.

Pause for a moment and ask yourself. What is beauty for me? How does it move me? How much beauty is there in my life? Do I value beauty to the point of investing time and energy in beautifying the world around me? Please put the book down and really consider this for a moment.

Everyday, the news media shower us with the pain and ugliness of anxiety – murder happening here, disaster happening there. Following the news day after day often stirs up energies of fear and anger in people, or else it pushes them towards feelings of numbness and a tendency to just shut down. With this constant barrage of gloom and doom it's vital for our health and sanity that we have a daily involvement that refreshes, that counteracts the horror, and brings us back to the wonder and mystery of life. Here is a practice I call "Bathing in Beauty" or "Bathing in Goodness".

Most of us take a shower or have a bath at least once a day. Minimally, we wash our hands and face. For some reason, we enjoy the feeling of being clean. Consider how much time and energy you spend scrubbing the surface of your skin (which by the way, is mostly dead). We're so fastidious about our surface appearance, yet what about the grubby emotions and mindstates; the tensions of anger, jealousy, frustration, greed, pride and so forth that are sometimes festering, not on the surface of the skin, but throughout our physiology, our energy and our mind.

Add up how much time each day you spend washing yourself? Why not set aside an equivalent amount of time for bathing in beauty.

"Bathing in Beauty" can be done anywhere. Position yourself so that you feel comfortable and are facing something that speaks to you of beauty – something that brings you joy, that makes you feel really good. It could be a scenic vista, a garden or a rainbow, in other words, something beautiful from nature. It could be a crafted object, a painting, a sculpture or an arrangement of flowers. Large or small, natural or contrived, it doesn't matter what the object is or why it works for you. It may be its simplicity, its balance, its innocence, its vitality. The important thing is that it speaks to you of beauty.

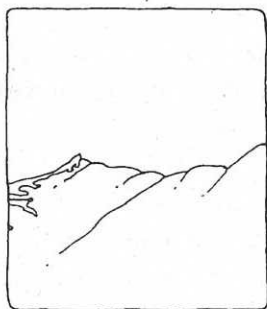
Relaxing in your posture, become aware of your breathing. Breathing in and breathing out with a deep sensitive awareness, feel the air coming and going at your nostrils. Allow your attention to gently rest with the object. Breathing in beauty. Breathing out beauty.

Look deeply into this object and see how its very existence is a weaving of many factors: the shiny green leaves, supported by soil, air, sun, water and so forth; the painting created by an artist, her parents and all her life experience. Softly and attentively, study this object. Closing your eyes a little, bring it inside. Hold it in the mind's eye. Imagine you merge with the object so that you and it mutually blend into a harmonious whole. Sitting easefully, relaxing deeper and deeper into your body, savour and appreciate this special moment.

As you breathe, mentally repeat the following phrase. "Breathing in – bathing in beauty. Breathing out – sharing deeply." Or, if it feels better, "Breathing in – bathing in goodness. Breathing out – sharing deeply." Continue with this for a few minutes or until you feel refreshed.

Pausing a number of times each day to bathe in beauty, will do wonders for your sense of well-being. It doesn't need a lot of time. Take something beautiful to work and, in addition to coffee breaks, refresh yourself with many thirty second "bathing in beauty" breaks.

The exercise is very simple. The hardest thing is remembering to do it when you need it. When you're all sweaty, it's not difficult to remember to take a shower. With practice, it can be just as effortless to bathe in beauty. Lay down the book right now and try this practice. Take a pause to refresh and inspire yourself with the beauty and goodness of life.



Chapter Twenty-Three

SOCCCs and Progress

What's important is the quality of the heart-mind we bring to our life experience.

How can I tell if I'm making progress in my meditation? I don't know how many times I've been asked this question. Sometimes one can almost see the concern written in the tensions around the eyes and resonating in the tone of voice. For many, it is a driving consideration. Our entire western culture is based on the assumption that progress must be "made," from Pilgrim's Progress to the Progressive Conservative Party. But what suffering the idea brings. Often, behind the question, is a compulsive need to compare our experience with that of others. Am I better than? Am I worse than? Am I equal to? In Buddhism, these are called the three conceits. Each one is based on comparison.

Sometimes, we may feel we're not measuring our progress against others, but against some objective spiritual standard. Have I attained the signs of success? Have I realised a particular stage of the path? In this chapter, we'll consider a simple way to answer the question of progress, so that we can know with

confidence, without having to rely on someone else's opinion or judgment. First, though, we need to make a little detour.

Do you usually wear socks? If you do, then there is still hope for you. On the other hand, if you don't, then I strongly suggest you begin to, immediately! Oh dear, here we go with another bit of Tarchin foolishness. But please bear with me. Right now, bend over and take off your shoes and socks. Do this very mindfully.

Afterwards, carefully examine your socks, to see if they have any holes. It's vital for your health and well being that they don't have holes. If they do, don't worry. You will just have to learn the art of darning.

Now, aware of your breathing, mindfully put your socks back on and say the "sacred mantra" as you do. This mantra, by the way, spontaneously manifested from the collective consciousness back in the sixties. Its meaning has remained obscure until today.

Take a full inhalation and then, as you pull your socks on, chant, "OM SOCK IT TO ME SVAHA!" Of course, the spelling of "sock" is not quite right. This is the exoteric teaching and, as such, can possibly be a bit misleading. The profound esoteric tradition spells sock quite differently. There it's written as SOCCC.

Please take another deep breath and mindfully pull your SOCCC on again. "OM SOCCC IT TO ME SVAHA!" If you practise this way for a few mornings, eventually, every time you put on your socks, you will be reminded of something at the very heart of sanity.

SOCCC, of course, is an acronym. It stands for Simplicity, Openness, Clarity, Connection, and Caring. These are five profound indicators of sane and healthy living. If you've got your SOCCCs on, you're for sure in good shape. If they have any holes or tears in them, if any bits are missing, you may have to learn to fix them.

Simplicity

Sometimes our lives seem awfully complicated – so many things to do, so little time, so many conflicting activities. Our thoughts whirl around and around, grabbing at this, pushing away that. Have you ever yearned to be able to simplify things? Oh, for a childlike innocence, with which you could attend wholeheartedly to one thing at a time without having to worry about a whole lot of messy contingencies. What a wonderful luxury!

Simplicity brings a sense of spaciousness and unhurriedness. When we are sweeping the floor, we are just sweeping the floor. When we are washing the dishes, we are thoroughly involved with washing the dishes. When we are eating food, we are completely attending to eating food. “The practice of already here” can return us to the state of simplicity when we have become lost in the rush of busyness. One is present without needing to embellish the moment with hopes or fears or speculations.

Simplicity sometimes has a starkness about it – the beauty of the uncluttered – a kind of emptiness pregnant with meaning. The famous rock garden of Ryōangi in Japan has this flavour. It has a quality of “just this”: the rock, the pine needles, the shadows. Simplicity is a way of being that can render the most complicated situation crystal clear, like the child seeing that the emperor has no clothes.

Pause and breathe with me for a moment. Can you find the taste of simplicity? Breathe with the green plants. Feel this quality and savour its preciousness.

Openness

Openness is the second factor. It reveals itself when we no longer need to build and maintain defensive walls. There is a joy and goodness in meeting life. Our sense doors are wide open in all directions, receiving the world as it is, without distortion.

This same openness allows us to express ourselves outwardly without restraint. It's a doorway that allows traffic in both directions.

Openness also brings a sense of spaciousness. There may be a boundless quality which softens any blocks or limitations and renders them translucent and expansive, rather than heavy and opaque.

Open the door.

Open wide the doors oh daffodil.

Clarity

More and more moments of simplicity, attending fully to just what is happening, lead us into a state of openness. This is a wonderful mystery that reveals itself in the doing. When simplicity and openness come together, they support the arising of clarity.

Clarity is easy to illustrate if you wear glasses. Simply take them off and look around. Do things look a bit blurry? Now, put them back on and look around. This is clarity.

Clarity is really the discriminating quality of mind. When we lack clarity, objects, situations, and understandings muddle together, often with a lot of confusion. There is much less definition. Clarity brings a crispness to perception, a brightness like crystal, a lucid awakesness in the present – moment by moment as it arises.

Connection

Meditative healing will bring an increasing amount of simplicity, openness and clarity into our lives. As these three begin to function more harmoniously together, they will reveal a

wondrous sense of connection wherever we look. The vision of interbeing will move from being an occasional marvellous revelation, to being a more normal everyday way of seeing that enriches each aspect of our life.

I suppose the opposite of simplicity, openness and clarity would be complexity, closed-heartedness, and confusion. As we let go of these defensive qualities and begin to look out from behind the selfish walls, the interconnectedness of life reveals itself in transparent brilliance. Even the looking itself is part of a weaving with no beginning and no end.

Here is a meditation that can bring us back to the interbeing that we are.

"Now, contemplate the essential interbeing of everything. Recognise how each aspect of your existence; body, speech and mind, inner and outer, micro and macro, is interweaving with everything else in the universe. Nothing stands on its own. Everything is created, sustained and supported by everything else. All arisings are mutually shaping.

With this understanding, where is this 'me' that so often seems apart from the rest of the universe? The sense of a separate self is seen as empty and illusory, as awareness opens to the fullness of the present moment. One feels clear, relaxed and vitally awake. Breathe with this for a while. All feelings, sounds and thoughts are like the wind blowing in space – emptiness moving in emptiness."

(from the meditation of Chenrezi)

Caring

With simplicity openness and clarity, we discover connection. Looking at life with these eyes of interbeing naturally brings us to the third C in the SOCCC. We discover a heart response of

caring and compassion. We have a great empathy for others. We feel their suffering. We bubble with their joy and well being. A deep sense of caring flows forth and, from the heart of interbeing, we reach out to others, supporting and sharing.

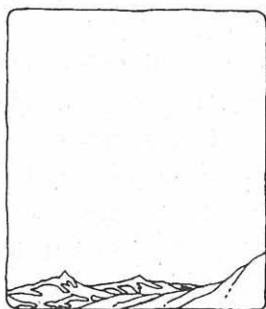
If you want to know if your meditation practice is bearing fruit, then check your SOCCCs. Simplicity, openness, clarity, connection and caring could be thought of as five qualities of a healthy, well functioning human being. When these five are increasing in your daily life, you can have confidence you're on the right track. Continue with the work. It's not the visions and spectacular meditation experiences that show our development on the path. What is important is the quality of the heart-mind we bring to our life experience: more friendliness, more enquiry, more presentness, more SOCCC.

Sometimes we realise we have a hole in our SOCCCs. Something seems missing. Most holes in socks are frayed around the edges. It's a bit like this with our SOCCCs. If we pick any one of these loose threads, the thread of simplicity, openness, clarity, connection or caring and, if we gently follow it, it will inevitably lead us to the rest of the SOCCC. Any one of these five, when cultivated with care and appreciation, will bring us back home.

*Frequently I pause
Mindfully I breathe
Simplicity, Openness, Clarity,
Connection and Caring
Flowering forth.*

(from Daily Pūja)

Sit quietly with awareness of breathing for a few moments.



Chapter Twenty-Four

Natural Awakening

All of nature is awakening.

There is a loud grinding sound filling our small world with continuous noise. In our cabin, there are clangs and groans and occasionally the whole room lurches violently. The brash ice, clinking and chinking in the super-cooled blue black-water is giving way to "growlers," so-called because of the growling sound they make against the ship's hull. Every so often there is an eerie silence as our vessel, the "Frontier Spirit," nudges it's way further south through the Ross Sea. For two days, the Trans-Antarctic Range has been our companion; sharp ice covered peaks silhouetting against the cold clear blue skies. This mountain range, continuous with the Andes, submerges under Drake's Passage, then marches across the southern continent before diving under the sea to emerge as the backbone of New Zealand and islands further north in the tropical Pacific.

This is perhaps the most elemental place on earth. Grey-blue-green continuously rolling seas, azure-blue icebergs in a wondrous variety of shapes and sizes, huge glaciers flowing out

from the Antarctic plateau and, at this time of the year, 24 hours of continuous sunlight. This place is spacious and majestic in both scope and range. Vast distances are shrunk in an illusion of perspective, the dense crystal-like air acting like a magnifying lens, so that mountains 50 miles away seem almost close enough to touch. A few storm petrels and albatrosses still accompany us. Occasionally, schools of Adélie penguins porpoise through the water, looking beautifully sleek and graceful, quite different from their comic waddling presence on the shore. Whales spout frequently – mainly orcas, humpbacks and minke. It is extraordinary to think that the largest indigenous land animal on this vast continent is a wingless fly yet, for all this empty space, there is an amazing amount of life living in or on the ocean.

It's 2 am. I can't sleep. How could anyone sleep being in this awesome place for the first time? I climb to the observation deck and marvel at Mt. Erebus, a huge white volcanic cone soaring into the sky, sentinel and guardian of the south. A wispy trail of smoke drifts from its frozen summit and, for a moment, I sense a dynamic play of fire and ice, a billion year old dance of elemental becoming.

Sailing to Antarctica is like travelling thousands of millions of years back in time. It seems more akin to Venus or Mars than to the Earth we are familiar with. It is a place of fire and water, rock and ice, wind, sun and sky; a place of primordial movement, a manifesting intelligence, revealing its patterns of growth and change in the great vistas of geological time. With few familiar objects for reference, everything seems on a grand scale, vast and magnificent. Watching the night sunlight cloaking the mountain in luminous blue and golden hues, feeling the raw and powerful forces, so inhospitable to all but the most specialised creatures, for the first time I begin to sense that I am truly part of an evolving planet.

We call this place where we live, earth. The other globes in the solar system are called planets. Almost everywhere we go on this opal-blue sphere, we see signs of life and signs of a world

shaped by humans. This morning, at 2 am, in our tiny high-tech life support system, slowly and tentatively feeling its way into these southern reaches where only 150 years ago no human had ever ventured, I have a sense of being on a planet before life, as we recognize it, emerged.

The flow of electrons, the dance of molecules, colliding elements, cells and complex creatures – we are all explorers – exploring on the frontier, the border between the known and the unknown, the place of mystery and growth. Breathing in. Breathing out. Feeling this great ball of rock and water hurtling around a star. Cosmic rays, the alternation of half the year light and half the year dark, the rhythm of tide and wind and weather steadily shaping time-space, material and energy, in a gradual awakening of something miraculous.

What is this awakening? A co-operative question, a supportive responding, chemical chains mutually linking, clothing themselves with membranes, blending light and elements, heaven and earth in rhythmic chemical dance. A planet awakening. A primordial planet birthing and revealing the texture of knowing, eventually even a knowing of the knowing – a universe appreciating itself.

All of nature is awakening. It is a nature-all awakening. A natural awakening. A growing capacity to appreciate and love. An elemental realm birthing and playing with a biosphere. Elements shaping life and life shaping earth. Who is awakening? And awakening to what? Not necessarily awakening to truth or answers or even totality, but an ever increasing awakening of question. The co-operative question, a friendly enquiry.

Later, after returning to New Zealand, I sat one day and evening at Wangapeka contemplating my body as a fountain of elements. The steam from my tea was swirling in the air as the whole periodic table, dancing in the space of awareness, gave rise to this poem.

Curling up
The earth stream, bright and clear
Platelets flashing in cloud-dappled moonlight,
Surging, spiralling
Braidings of suns long spent,
Jewels making magic
Weavings within weavings
Old ancient magic
In the fresh cool night air.

Rising, pausing, spreading
Veins of gold and silver.
Leaf-like, stalk-like
Soft and trembling in the play of shifting light.
A carpet woven deep and thorough,
Colours moulding, music pulsing
Moving the creature creaturing
The feeling forth to know.

I sit in solid daylight
My bum upon the earth
Contemplating fountains in the sky.
The rise and play, drawing me onward
Drawing me into a picture that I painted
Mother painted
Brother painted
You the listener painted,
Reaching out to weave me in

Earth jewels looking through the eyes of God
Lazulite bones
Serpentine hands
Looking to feeling to answering the delicate
unformed question
What does it mean to die?

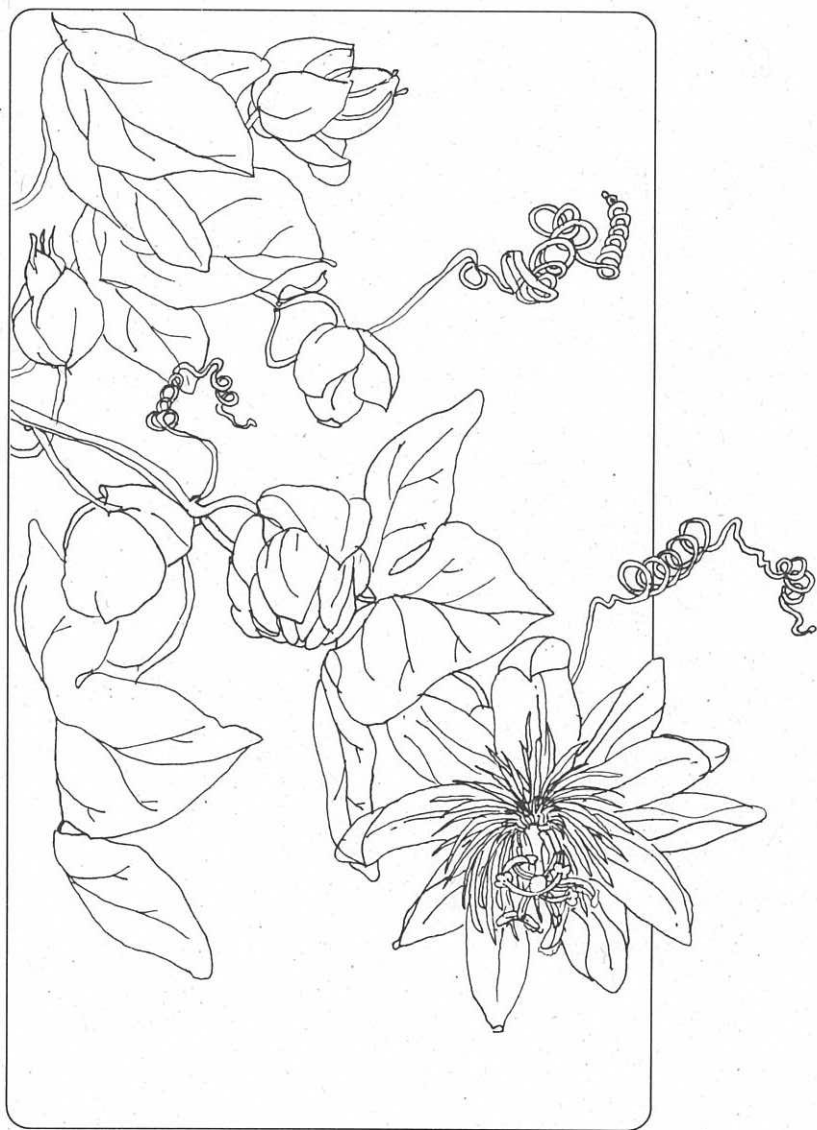
I pace the pathway
Forward and back.
Loving, breathing,
Life moving upon life.
Dust of Sahara
Dust of fires from India
Flecks of stone formed Mastodon
Body of my father
His mother, and further too.

Who is walking on this path?
The thought blossoms spacious and clear.
The Buddha and millions seeking to know,
The earth is walking on the earth,
The first step
Creature crawling from the sea
The shopkeeper, the farmer too
Untold becomings,
Beings who found this way
Shaping this route of earth
dreaming itself awake.

Lightness of ankle bones
Letting go
Breath gone
Trembling
Fracturing into a time-space filigree.
Flowing moisture
Tears of blessed recognition
Awesome
Quaking

The sun is high and
Mind manifests many planes and out of planes.
Ex-plane-a-tions
Thin trickling accompaniment to this heart-
depth symphony
Yet they too perfect the moment.

Sitting here
The heart is softening
Easeful noting
Earth writing lines upon transformed trees
Brother atom in the ink embraces sister on the
page.
A family playing the parts of one
Weavings of strands
Bubbles in the air
Loving the knowing the loving everywhere.



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Epilogue

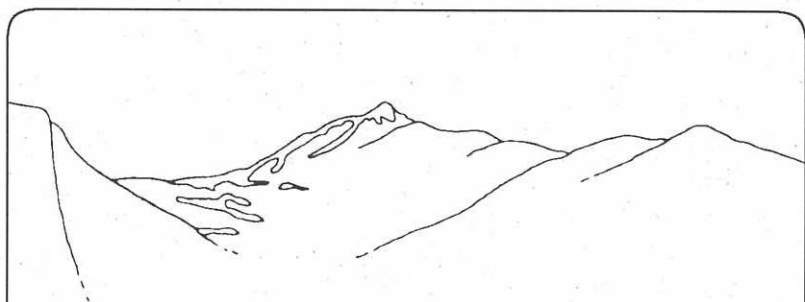
Everything is an appearance – a bit of known supported by a lot of unknown. Like a low lying island in the tropical Pacific, it may look very fragile and close to being overwhelmed by the sea. We might not recognise that it is the top of a huge mountain many miles high and hundreds of miles around the base. Every appearance reverberates knowing which *is* me and you. When that appearance becomes a different appearance, the knowing becomes a different knowing. And me? And you?

Life is a vast mystery, a natural awakening. Our task is to find a way to live well in this unfinished dance of becoming. Every moment is a different viewing, a different knowing. Everything is an ephemeral appearance intimating everything else. Constantly playful, immensely creative – come – let's join the dance.

I dive in a dog and come out a cat.
I dive in a cat and come out a rat.
I drink a glass of water, it turns into the sea.
I jump in to go sailing and what's become of me?

I am a happy dragon
 a rolling in the surf.
I shake my rainbow coils and grin
 and disappear in girth.
Thick and thin, large and small,
 the ocean waves its tune
The dragon's me and
 I'm the sea, so see that you are too.

We are the one that's inside out
 and also up side down
But always we are right way up
 now don't begin to frown!
What really is this dragon me and sea
 that's all around?
It's crystal clear and blissful here
At least that's what's been found.



*"May any merit arising from this
work help all beings to experience
their true nature."*



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Appendix

A - The Exercises

To facilitate your practice, the main exercises are briefly listed here as a point form reminder. Please refer to the appropriate chapter to refresh your enthusiasm for the spirit and details of the work. It takes time to unfold a new exercise. First we have to get over the novelty aspect: simply learning a new sequence of steps. Then we can begin to bring the meditation to life. May your explorations benefit many beings.

Breathing with the Green Plants – Chapter 2

- 1 Sit where you can see living green plants.
- 2 Relax into your seat.
- 3 Feel the texture of your breathing.
- 4 Consider how all the oxygen we breathe comes from green plants. Consider how the green plants breathe in the carbon dioxide we exhale.
- 5 In tune with your breathing, mentally say,
"Breathing in – gifts from the green plants.
Breathing out – gifts to the green plants."

Making Friends with the Breath – Chapter 5

- 1 Pause many times in the course of the day and sensitively feel the breath coming and going at the nostrils.
- 2 Expand the field of awareness to feel all the physical movements and sensations that together make up breathing.
- 3 Without any judgment or criticism, surrender into the sensations of breathing, just as they are.

Breathe for the pleasure of breathing,

Not trying to accomplish anything;

Coming home to the body,

Making friends with the breath.

The Four Divine Abidings – Chapter 6

- 1 Become aware of your breathing.
- 2 As you breathe, imagine in your heart a jewelled flower or a soft globe of light radiating loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity to every part of your body. Breathe with this for a few minutes.
- 3 As feelings of easefulness, spaciousness, and clarity flower in your experience, send the light of these Four Divine Abidings in all directions (front, back, sides, up and down), touching all beings throughout the universe, supporting their health and unfolding.

Sounding – Chapter 8

- 1 Posture: relaxed and alert.
- 2 Aspiration: to bring friendliness and interest to whatever arises.
- 3 Feel the body breathing.
Inhalation is the 'sound of silence.'
Exhalation carries the 'sound of sound.'
- 4 Allow a soft humming on the exhalation.
- 5 Experiment with other vowel sounds. Find the sound that supports the greatest vibration in the body.
- 6 Begin with a low tone and gradually let it get higher. Finish by returning to a low tone.
- 7 Let the 'sound of sound' fade away then sit in the silence, breathing and exploring the texture of being.
- 8 Review the session.
- 9 Share the merit. "May this exploration be of benefit to all beings."

"Ah-ing" – Chapter 8

- 1 Posture: relaxed and alert.
- 2 Aspiration: to bring friendly interest to whatever arises.
- 3 Feel the body breathing.
- 4 Begin to hummmmmm.
- 5 Gradually allow an 'Ah' sound to softly flow out on the exhalation, like a deep sigh.
- 6 Bring a sensitive attention to both the inhalation and the exhalation.
- 7 As you 'Ah,' soften into the feelings and sensations of the body.
- 8 Meet all arisings with compassion, mercy and forgiveness.
- 9 Allowing the 'Ah' to fade, rest mindfully in the silence.
- 10 Review the session.
- 11 Share the merit.

Body Scan in Four Parts – Chapter 12

- 1 Posture: relaxed and alert.
- 2 Become aware of the body breathing, and relax into your seat.
- 3 Aspiration: for healing and wholeness; to meet whatever arises with an open heart and a merciful mind.
- 4 Staying with the breathing, explore the sensations in the area of your face and head, for five minutes.
- 5 Neck and throat – five minutes.
- 6 Chest – five minutes.
- 7 Abdomen – five minutes.
- 8 Go to any part of the body that would like more attention – five minutes.

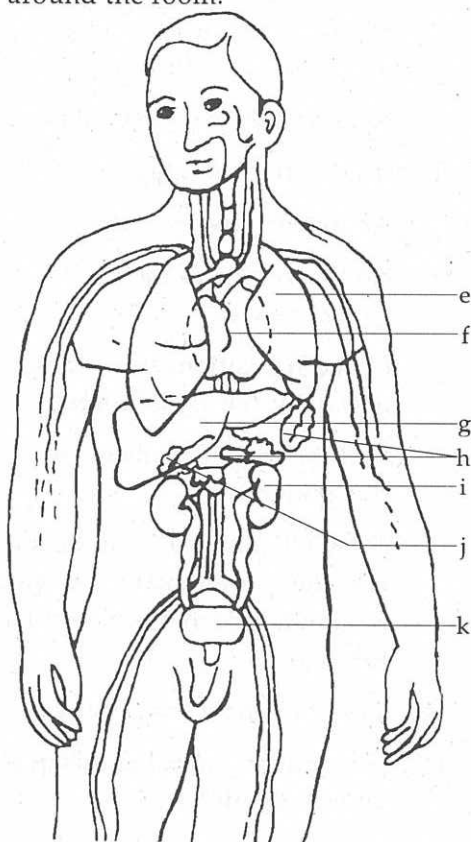
(At each position, allow the gentleness of friendly enquiry to flavour the exploration.)
- 9 Feel the entire organism breathing in and breathing out – five minutes.
- 10 Open all your senses and gently appreciate where you are. Feel the overall quality of being that is present. Is there anything here that is particularly valuable or worthwhile for you?
- 11 Take a moment to appreciate what you have discovered.
- 12 How might you bring this quality more frequently into your daily life?
- 13 Review the whole meditation.
- 14 Share the merit.

Inner Smile – Chapter 12

- 1 Posture: relaxed and alert.
- 2 Rest with the breathing.
- 3 Refresh your aspiration for healing, to meet and know and appreciate your body, just as it is.
- 4 Bali eye dance-glance around the room.
- 5 *Front line.*

Smile into the:

- a) eyes
- b) cheeks
- c) jaw
- d) throat
- e) lungs
- f) heart and circulation
- g) liver
- h) pancreas and spleen
- i) kidneys
- j) adrenal glands
- k) bladder
- l) genital organs

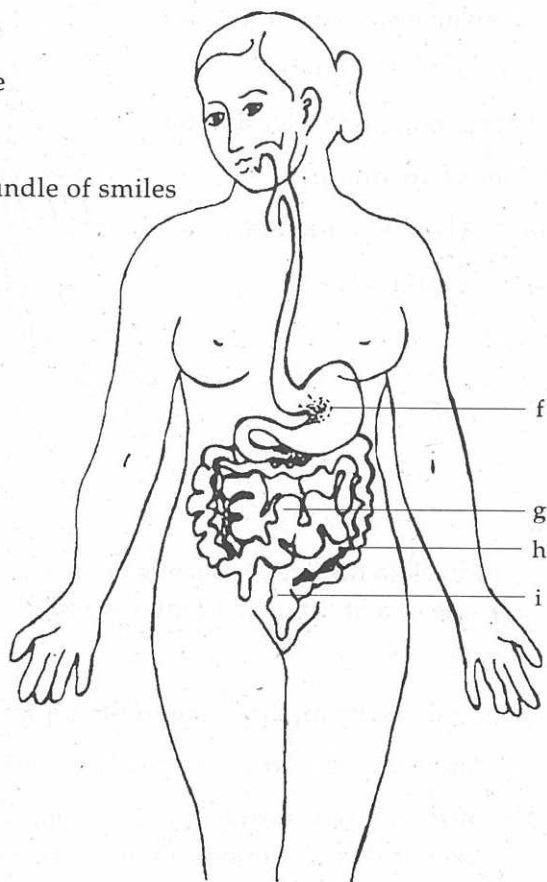


Come back to the eyes and quickly smile down the front line two or three times, like a waterfall of smiles.

6 *Middle line – the digestive system.*

Smile into the:

- a) eyes
- b) roof of the mouth
- c) base of the tongue
- e) teeth and gums
- now swallow a bundle of smiles
- f) stomach
- g) small intestine,
- h) large intestine
- i) rectum
- j) anus

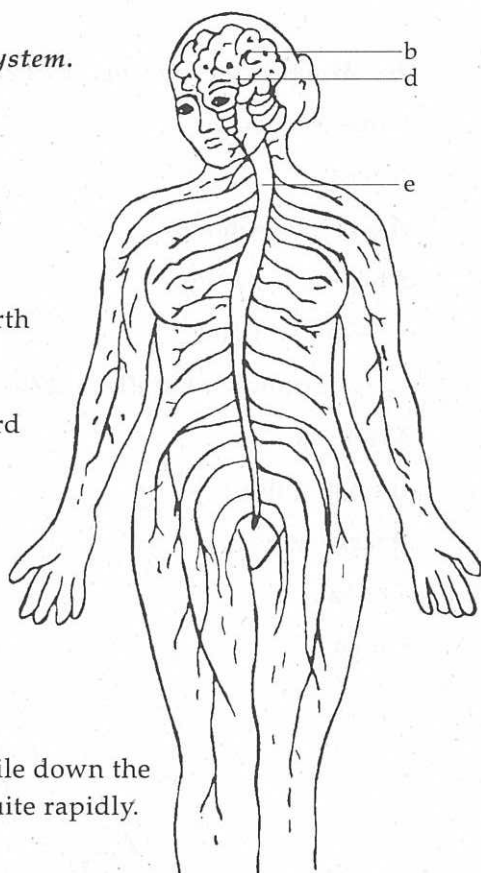


Come back to the eyes and smile down the middle line two or three times, quite rapidly.

7 *Back line – the nervous system.*

Smile into:

- a) the eyes
- b) one hemisphere of the brain
- c) the other hemisphere
- then ping-pong back and forth
- d) the endocrine area
- e) slowly down the spinal chord
- f) down your legs.



Come back to the eyes and smile down the back line two or three times quite rapidly.

- 8 Smile down all three lines quite rapidly.
- 9 Smile into any area of the body still needing attention.
- 10 Turn the smile inside-out. Breathing in. Breathing out. Every cell of your body smiling out to the world.
- 11 Feel the overall quality of energy present for you now. Do you recognise it? Is there something in this present moment that feels particularly worthwhile to you?
- 12 Review the meditation.
- 13 Share the merit.

General tips:

If you lose the smile, go back to the eyes and do the Bali eye dance.

If it helps, use the sound "Ah."

Imagine a smile in your palms and gently touch areas to give more contact and support.

Working with Difficult States – Chapter 13

- 1 When difficult states arise in meditation, pause and come back to the breathing. Just be with what is present and mentally say, "It's okay to be like this."
Make friends with the situation.
- 2 Trade in critical mindfulness for the practice of heartfulness.

Difficult Physical Symptoms – Chapter 13

- 1 See if there are protective emotions, like fear or resistance, wrapped around the physical sensation. Acknowledge the fear, "It's okay to be this way."
- 2 Allow a softening around the edges of the physical tension.

Miming a Difficult Physical Situation – Chapter 13

- 1 Carefully study the physical tension.
- 2 Slowly and sensitively try miming the tension.
- 3 What is this movement and holding pattern trying to accomplish?

Emotional Difficulties – Chapter 13

- 1 Pause and come back to your friend the breath.
- 2 Explore how this emotion shows itself in the postures and tensions of the body.
- 3 Perhaps you can soften around the edges of the physical tension.

Mandala Work – Chapter 13

- 1 Bring to mind the situation you would like to explore.
- 2 Feel it in your body.
- 3 Within the boundary of a circle, draw or paint something from the feeling sense in the body.
- 4 Take a break.
- 5 Meditate on the mandala. Hold it in the mind's eye and feel it in the body.
- 6 Does the present feeling in the body have a name? Has anything shifted from when you started?
- 7 This experience may inspire painting another mandala.

Nāma Rūpa Dolls – Chapter 14

- 1 Take a block of wood or a chunk of clay.
- 2 Break the material in two pieces of similar size.
- 3 Make a doll out of each. One is called Nāma.
The other is called Rūpa.
- 4 Play dolls.

Firstly, Nāma, the knower, expresses all the familiar critical voices or patterns of behaviour towards Rūpa, the known.

After you have done this for a while, then Nāma softens the need to control and begins to relate through friendly enquiry. How is this different?

- 5 Keep the dolls in a prominent location as a reminder.

Heart Sounding – Chapter 15

- 1 Sit a comfortable distance apart.
- 2 Posture: easeful and alert.
- 3 Touch your breathing and body sensations with friendly enquiry.
- 4 The eyes are open so that you can see your partner's chest rising and falling with the breathing. There is no direct eye contact.
- 5 Aspiration: for healing and wholeness; to meet all sensations and feelings arising in your being with friendliness, mercy and forgiveness. Realise that your partner is doing the same.
- 6 Now settle into your breathing, 'Ah-ing' on the exhalation loud enough for your partner to hear.
- 7 After 'Ah-ing' for about 20 minutes, let the sound fade, and rest in awareness of silent breathing for five minutes.
- 8 Expand your field of sensing to take in all of your partner and the surrounding room.
- 9 Review your experience.
- 10 Share the merit.
- 11 If it feels appropriate, share something of your experience with your partner.

The Practice of Already Here – Chapter 16

Pause frequently throughout the day and use the phrase, “The practice of already here” or “already here” to come back to the present moment.

Shirt Meditation – Chapter 17

- 1 Relax with your breathing.
- 2 Take your favourite shirt or any other item that you like and use daily.
- 3 Consider how it is an “interbeing” of many processes. Consider how the state of your body and your mental attitudes participate in the act of appreciating this item. Contemplate how we are all interbeing.
- 4 Rest in the spaciousness of interbeing while gently following your breath.

Tea Ceremony – Chapter 17

- 1 With intense appreciative mindfulness, make a pot of tea.
- 2 While the tea is steeping, contemplate the “interbeingness” of this situation.
- 3 Continue this contemplation as you drink the tea, simply drinking tea with silent appreciation – a whole planet drinking tea.

Eating – Chapter 17

- 1 Before you eat, pause to recontact awareness of your breathing body.
- 2 If others are present, join hands with them.
- 3 Look at the food, the table, the room and the people and appreciate some of the weaving of interbeing that supports this present moment.
- 4 Imagine being in the garden, harvesting the vegetables you are about to eat. Thank the plants and thank the sun and the soil.
- 5 Aspire that the energy from this food be used to deepen wisdom, compassion and awareness in yourself and others.
- 6 Eat the meal with awareness and appreciation.

The Tantra for the Attainment of Profound Satisfaction – Ch.18

- 1 Sit on a chair with your feet planted firmly on the floor.
- 2 Contact your breathing.
- 3 Place hands on your abdomen and smile like a cheshire cat!
- 4 Inhale.
- 5 As your exhale, rub your belly in a circular motion and gently rock your body from side to side while continuously repeating, "Tum, tum, tum, tum, tum....."
- 6 Rest your hands on the belly as you inhale fully.
- 7 Exhale with a deep sigh, "Ahhhhhhhhh....."
- 8 Repeat the sequence seven times.

Essential Breathing Meditation – Chapter 19

- 1 Posture: easeful and alert.
- 2 State your aspiration.
- 3 Become aware of the sensations of inhaling and exhaling at the nostrils. Notice all the different shapes and textures of breath.
- 4 As focus deepens, awareness naturally opens to feel the whole body breathing.
“Experiencing the bodily formations, I breathe in.
Experiencing the bodily formations, I breathe out.”
Meet the sensations in the body with friendly enquiry.
Study the body of the breath: the beginning, middle and end of the inhalation, the beginning, middle and end of the exhalation.
- 5 “Calming the bodily formations, I breathe in.
Calming the bodily formations, I breathe out.”
As we bring friendliness to all arisings, we feel the overall organism calming and settling.
- 6 “Experiencing piti, I breathe in.
Experiencing piti, I breathe out.”
Explore the bliss and pleasurable aliveness of the body breathing.
- 7 As a sense of peaceful spaciousness opens up, observe sensations, feelings and thoughts arising and passing away in this great open heart-mind.
- 8 After formal meditation, extend the sensitive awareness into daily activities.

Approaching the Essence – Chapter 19

- 1 To do this well, you must feel very calm and very clear.
- 2 Lie down and gaze up into the blue sky.
- 3 Breathe and scan the body, letting go of all holding.
- 4 Not trying to focus on anything in particular, observe what the heart-mind does when it's not engaged in a specific project.

What is mind? Who is meditating? What is knowing?

Does it have location? What is location?

Let the essence of these questions carry you deeper and deeper in a non-verbal way.

Bathing in Beauty – Chapter 22

- 1 Posture: easeful and alert.
- 2 Gaze at a beautiful object.
- 3 Bring the object 'inside' and feel it in your body.
- 4 As you breathe, mentally say,
"Breathing in, bathing in beauty.
Breathing out, sharing deeply."
- 5 Do this practice a number of times each day.

B – Posture

In any meditation or contemplative work, it helps to find a posture that supports a sense of natural easefulness and alert wakefulness.

(1) Sitting cross legged

Get yourself a piece of dense foam, or a double thickness of carpet, or a blanket folded in four. This should be large enough so that, if your knees come down to the ground, they rest on the mat. Then find a dense cushion that can be moulded into a wedge shape so that, when you sit, your pelvis will tilt slightly forward. This will cause your spine to be more upright with a minimum of muscular effort.



Sit on the cushion with your legs crossed, tailor fashion, or in a half lotus, or a full lotus. If you chose one of these postures, be sure to alternate which leg is in front or on top, so that years of sitting, don't lead to an asymmetry in the pelvis. Place your hands in your lap, one supporting the other, or let your palms rest easefully on the thighs.

If your knees don't touch the mat, put small cushions under them for support.

Imagine you have a fine thread from the crown of your head, going up into the sky. It is very gently suggesting an upward movement. In response to this, your chin will naturally tuck in.



Let your eyes be gently unfocused looking straight ahead. Closing and lowering them may support greater calm and "inwardness," but you may get a lot of drifting thoughts and verbalisation. Opening the eyes and raising them may support a greater sense of question and alertness, but it can lead to more "outer" distraction and general unsettledness. Feel free to experiment and use the position of the eyes that best supports the energy state of the moment.

(2) *Kneeling*



Some people prefer to kneel. Again, you need a soft but firm pad underneath you. Then, either use a stool with your legs tucked under, or a pile of cushions with your legs at either side. In both instances, the seat should tilt slightly forward. The rest of the posture follows the instructions for sitting cross legged.

(3) *Using a chair*

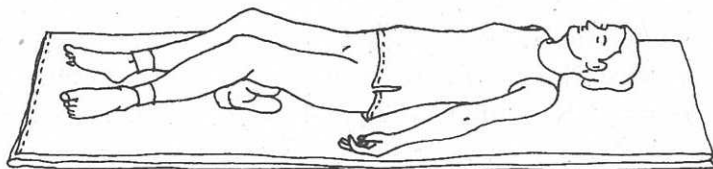
If you like to use a chair, a straight-backed kitchen chair is better than a floppy couch. Choose a seat that allows your thighs to be parallel to the floor. Even in a chair, it helps to use a small wedge approximately one to two inches in height. If you suffer from lumbar problems, put a cushion behind the small of your back.



Sitting in a chair, everything is at 90 degrees. Feet and calves, calves and thighs, thighs and trunk. Have your knees about 18 inches apart. The rest of the body follows the instructions for sitting cross legged.

(4) *Lying down*

Lying flat on your back can be an excellent posture for meditation as long as you don't fall asleep. When you do work with this posture, use as little pillow as possible and don't cross your legs. Let them both lie flat on the surface. If you are subject to lumbar problems, place a firm cushion under your knees. This will relieve back stress.



C – The Five Training Precepts

The five training precepts are an invitation to be more mindful in our daily life. Reading through them periodically, can refresh our aspiration to live with compassion and awareness.

1 Pāṇātipātā veramaṇi sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi

I undertake to train myself to abstain from taking the life of any living being.

I will train myself to support, extend and appreciate the life of all living beings. I will live with a sensitive and responsible awareness for the whole ecology of life.

2 Adinnādānā veramaṇi sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi

I undertake to train myself to abstain from taking that which is not given.

I will train myself to dwell more and more in the mind of spontaneous generosity. Daily I will give material support, emotional support, and an example to others of awakening in action.

3 Kāmesu micchācārā veramaṇi sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi

I undertake to train myself to abstain from sensual misconduct.

I will train myself to use the senses to further awakening, explore Dharma, and to come to know the world more profoundly and more compassionately.

4 Musāvādā veramaṇi sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi

I undertake to train myself to abstain from unskillful speech.

I will train myself to communicate in a skilful and compassionate manner.

5 Surā-meraya-majja-pamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇi sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi

I undertake to train myself to abstain from taking substances that cause intoxication to the point of heedlessness.

I will train myself to be ever more directly aware of how nutriment affects the mind and body. I will eat and drink and nurture myself in a way that supports awakening.

D – Sharing the Merit

In the Vajrayana form of Buddhism, we train ourselves to “share the merit” at the end of every exploration. Essentially this means aspiring that any wholesomeness arising from a particular practice be of benefit not only to oneself but also to others. Here are a few versions of sharing the merit. You can, of course, make up your own.

- 1 Through this meditation, we have watered a few seeds.
May they grow and flourish and be of benefit to all beings.

- 2 May these activities produce happiness and illumination
for the uplifting of the world.

- 3 Through the power of these wholesome activities,
May my life be rich with awakening.
Living thus, may I abandon all unwholesomeness.
Through the endless storm of birth, illness,
old age, and death,
May I help all beings to cross the ocean
of the suffering of the worlds.

- 4 Through these wholesome activities,
May the defilements of myself and others be dissolved.
Idam te puñña kamma
Āsavakkhayavaham hotu

E – Further Reading

The Miracle of Mindfulness – *Thich Nhat Hanh*

Peace is Every Step – *Thich Nhat Hanh*

Breathing: The Natural Way to Meditate – *Tarchin Hearn*

Daily Pūja – *Tarchin Hearn*

Guided Meditations, Explorations and Healings – *Stephen Levine*

World as Lover; World as Self – *Joanna Macy*

Microcosmos – *Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan*

Life Ascending – *Alexander F. Skutch*

WANGAPEKA BOOKS

Other Publications

Growth and Unfolding: Our Human Birthright *by Tarchin Hearn*

Growth and Unfolding leads us step by step to a life that is awake, integrated, joyous and truly universal in scope.

Breathing: The Natural Way to Meditate *by Tarchin Hearn*

Complete instruction for the path of breathing meditation.

Meditative First Aid *by Tarchin Hearn*

Ten easy to learn, easy to do exercises that will help balance your energies and bring more vitality into your life.

Daily Puja *by Tarchin Hearn*

A collection of contemplations and prayers to orient the heart and mind towards awakening.

Stargroup Meditation *by Tarchin Hearn*

A vehicle for exploring the Collective Mind.

Holistic Clearing Meditation *by Namgyal Rinpoché*

Compiled from lectures. An anti-paralytic meditation for human liberation.

The Meditation on Peace *by Namgyal Rinpoché*

Discourses by Rinpoché edited by Karma ChiméWongmo.



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P.O. Box 80-141, Green Bay, Auckland 7, New Zealand



Tarchin regularly teaches small groups of people in many places around the world. He also leads "Living Explorations" to different parts of the planet combining "inner" and "outer" explorations. For current information on his teaching schedule, contact:

*The Wangapeka Study and Retreat Centre
R.D. 2 Wakefield, Nelson, New Zealand
☎ 64-3-522 4221*



*"Life is a vast mystery, a natural awakening.
Our task is to find a way to live well in this
unfinished dance of becoming."*

NATURAL AWAKENING is a book of great inspiration and beauty. The teaching is direct and profound without being complicated. It encourages us to develop friendliness and interest towards every moment of life and to immerse ourselves in what Tarchin calls "the practice of already here." Throughout its pages travel interleaves with poetry, philosophy weaves with meditation technique and science merges with mysticism. Twenty-two practical exercises are included, making a book of great clarity and immediate relevance to all who are interested in health, awakening and the well being of the world.



Tarchin is a skilled meditator and teacher of awakening. He has 25 years of experience in various schools of Buddhism and was ordained as a monk in the Tibetan Karma Kagyu tradition for 12 years. Since 1977 he has taught in many countries and helped establish a number of centres for study and practice. This is his sixth book.

