

***THE GRADUAL PATH OF
CONTEMPLATIVE LIVING
TWELVE WEEK PROGRAM***



NALANDA INSTITUTE *for* Contemplative Science
300 Central Park West, Suite 1D
New York, NY 10024

© JoE Loizzo, M.D., Ph.D., 2004

Table of Contents

Introduction.....3

Week One: Life.....15

Week Two: Death.....25

Week Three: Change.....34

Week Four: Peace.....40

Week Five: Help.....51

Week Six: Empathy.....61

Week Seven: Insight.....70

Week Eight: Humanity.....79

Week Nine: Leadership.....86

Week Ten: Mentoring.....95

Week Eleven: Affirmation.....105

Week Twelve: Inspiration.....116

Resources.....123

Introduction

Purpose of This Manual

This manual is meant to help you ground, sustain and guide a lifelong practice of meditative self-healing, regardless of your outlook and aims, method of practice or level of experience. Whether you prefer to rely on God or science, yourself or others; whether your aim is to enhance your health and happiness or to find greater meaning or spiritual peace; whether your best practice is mindfulness or insight meditation, yoga or imagery, affirmation or prayer; this manual is written to help you get your meditative mind, breath and feet on the ground of a sustainable practice that will help you make a real difference in your everyday life. For most of you, it serves as a workbook for the Twelve-Week Program in Stress-Free Living (SFLP), offered to help you sustain whatever momentum you gathered through the Eight-Week Program in Self-Healing (SHP). As a workbook for this intermediate program, the aim of the manual is to help you through a crucial transition on your way toward a freer, healthier and happier way of living.

The days, weeks and months after we make a move to change the course of our lives constitute a crucial transition in which we might find ourselves on one of radically divergent paths. That period of change could take us smack into a dead end; through a long a winding detour back more or less to where we started, or hopefully, it can help us get decisively on a path that will lead us in the better direction we set out to find. Like the critical adjustment that follows the acute phase of an illness and treatment, the transition from a self-healing program, course or retreat back to everyday life can make all the difference. Perhaps the main reason is that, wherever the new path we have embarked on

may lead us, it is not like a course of medical treatment or a road mapped in the outside world, but is a path of practice that begins, middles, and ends in the ground of our own bodies, spirits and minds. In other words, it is a path that must be worn through the inscape of our lives by actually walking it, over and over again. Once we are deprived of the guidance, support and structure offered by any educational program, whatever daily pressures or stresses it had helped us manage are now unopposed again, unless we have taken all we need to change our outlook, attitude and behavior. As such miracles happen so very rarely, for most of us sustaining the momentum gained once we initiate a healthy life-change will depend on the availability of continued guidance, structure and support. What kind of continued guidance and support do we need? And for how long will we need it? It all depends on our initial resources for change, what we gain through education, and the personal networks and community supports we establish to help us galvanize our healing life-changes. The twelve weeks of the SFLP are designed to give the average student-practitioner the guidance and time it takes to identify changes in outlook, attitude and lifestyle she needs to sustain a healthy behavior like meditation.

In addition to serving as the crucible for self-transformation, another key role the intermediate SFLP and this manual are meant to play is to help provide the missing ingredients needed to galvanize the change begun in the basic SHP. While the prime objective of the basic eight-week program in self-healing is to help people learn how to use basic meditation skills to promote stress-reduction and self-healing, meditation is only one of the core disciplines required to complete meditative life-change. The role of the twelve-week program in stress-free living is to help provide the guidance, support and structure for people to identify and begin the changes in outlook and lifestyle that are

critical to sustaining a meditative practice of self-healing and lifelong learning. Since the skills required for these changes are cognitive and behavioral, the mode of learning in the SFLP is more discursive and interactive than what we normally associate with meditation. In particular, the exercises taught in this program will feel as much like experiments in thought and action as they do like “meditations.” Unlike the manual for the basic SHP, therefore, this manual plays an indispensable and vital role in the intermediate SFL program.

Sources for This Manual

To use this manual effectively, it helps to understand the genre to which it belongs and the logic behind that genre’s development and application. Meditation manuals were developed as aids to teaching and practice in most literate civilizations which felt some societal need to offer groups of students some general, systematic instruction in skills of meditative learning. Although the particulars of the genre vary widely from tradition to tradition, depending on their culturally-specific aims, means and institutions of religious learning, there is a family resemblance between them. The primary source for this manual is an unusual genre designed for use in and around the monastic colleges and universities of Buddhist India, where standardized texts were developed as aids to large group meditation instruction from the 5th century CE onwards. In that context, the most popular form in that genre came to be known as the “gradual path” (*patha-krama*), a comprehensive workbook meant to guide the student through a graduated series of experiments in thinking, meditation and action. A cross between a modern “how-to” and “everything you need to know about” meditative living, dying,

healing and learning, it spanned the whole range of relevant principles and practices from the most basic to the most advanced. In particular, the present manual derives from a popular version of the gradual path literature, developed in the 11th and 12th centuries by Indian Buddhist masters asked to offer the keys of meditative living to mostly illiterate, mass audiences in pastoral Tibet. Over the next five centuries, the Tibetans themselves became masters of the gradual path (*lam rim*) genre, installing it at the heart of what might be considered the world's most ambitious system of meditation-based public education. While the genre is shared by the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism, the present manual derives most directly from the Gelukpa or Yellow Hat school founded by Tsong Khapa (1357-1419), whose proponents today include His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Columbia professor, Robert Thurman. Not surprisingly, this genre has much in common with the meditative literature of the Hindu Yoga, Advaita and Tantra traditions, especially as formulated in the recent writings of Shri Aurobindo and his interpreters. More generally, it also bears a distinct family resemblance to Western monastic genres, examples of which include manuals like *The Sentences* of Peter Lombard, the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius of Loyola and the *Meditations* of Renee Descartes, whose thought-experiments are basic to our modern traditions of schooling philosophical, religious and scientific minds. Other Western sources for this text include practice manuals in the contemporary tradition of standardized psychotherapies. Although psychotherapy manuals are typically written for therapists, one could easily imagine a new genre of workbooks for patients bred by crossing such professional texts with our popular how-to genre. Such workbooks would seem to make the most sense in learning-

based modalities such as cognitive behavioral therapy, some of which already make use of mindfulness techniques to enhance learning.

How This Manual Works

Understanding how this manual works is easier once we recognize that the greatest benefits of meditation derive not from the relaxation it brings but from its positive effects on learning. Traditional Indian practice and modern Western research agree that humanity's meditative techniques not only increase our capacity to relax but also affect our capacity to change by the enhancement of cognitive factors like attention. Both traditions also seem to be in general agreement on three corollary points. First, meditation builds mental factors like relaxation and attention through use-dependent plasticity, the same biological mechanism by which physical exercise pushes our bones and muscles to grow beyond prior limits. Second, meditative learning is state-specific. That is, it works by temporarily altering the state of our mind and brain in ways that may make us more able to focus on hard-to-solve problems, more open to new solutions or, ideally, both. Third, meditative learning may help us make not just temporary alterations in mind-brain "states" but also relatively lasting alterations in mind-brain settings and processes expressed as personal "traits." This is because meditative techniques can make our mind-brains more able to register and commit to innovative insights and skills in ways that help us override prior conditioning, practice alternatives, and eventually replace mindless habits with mindfully chosen patterns of action.

This manual works by familiarizing meditative practitioners with the process by which they can use their daily practice to foster self-healing insight and lifelong learning.

It consists of a series of meditative experiments in thinking and acting, each of which is meant to prime the highly individualized process of meditative self-change. Each experiment is based on the same paradigm of meditative learning. Yet each one focuses on a different aspect of our outlook, attitude and lifestyle. The experiments build on one another in a step-wise fashion that maps a gradual path from the disempowering depths of stress-reactivity to the exhilarating heights of stress-free living.

Before You Use This Manual

To use this manual effectively it helps to understand the specific paradigm of meditative learning it is based on. That paradigm involves a hybrid form of meditative learning in which the non-discursive focus we think of as “meditation” is married to some kind of discursive reflection. The focused part of the mix is called “concentration” or “quiescence;” the discursive part is called “analytic insight” or simply “insight.” In terms of the mindfulness practice introduced in the SHP, one can think of the focused aspect as the culmination of the mental muscle of “mindfulness;” and of the analytic aspect as the culmination of the muscle of “alertness” or “awareness.” In terms of the visualization practice taught in the SHP, the focused aspect stems from the attention paid to mental images; and the analytic aspect from the recitation or contemplation of affirmations, including prayers and/or the poetic formulas called *mantras*. In terms of related practices like Greek Orthodox heart prayer, Hindu *mantra* recitation or Transcendental Meditation (TM), the focused aspect is based on breath-based concentration techniques; and the analytic aspect from the content of the prayer or *mantra*. The traditional simile is that such combined forms of meditation are like a hurricane lamp: the focus technique shields

the mind from the “winds” of distraction, while the analysis illuminates the mind, dispelling the darkness of confusion or dullness.

The scientific rationale for incorporating these two types or modes of meditation lies in the nature of the learning process. In the Indian traditions, the varieties of meditative technique are viewed as aids to the various levels of learning. As in modern neuroscience, the process of learning was viewed in ancient India as a continuum in which one can discern three levels or phases. It starts with the most superficial level, receptive or discursive learning, the initial recognition of fresh information current brain science calls encoding. It then moves to a transitional level, reflective or contemplative learning, the assimilation and integration of the new with what was previously accepted, a phase we now call registration. Finally, learning culminates in visceral or meditative learning, the incorporation of the new alongside or in place of the familiar, a phase we now call commitment. The rationale for incorporating discursive and non-discursive practices into a hybrid meditation is to guide and speed the learning process at each of these levels. For instance, non-discursive practices like mindfulness, quiescence, concentration or imagery can sharpen our attention to new ideas or skills at the first level of learning; they can help us still and calm the mind for contemplation to help the new input register fully and deeply; and they can stabilize and intensify the mind in deep meditation to give the fresh information time to sink in and be incorporated into the fabric of our minds and brains. Concurrently, discursive awareness, analytic insight, prayer or recitation at the first level can help us discern whether thoughts, perceptions, emotions and actions are accurate or inaccurate, healthy or unhealthy, effective or ineffective; at the second level they can help us refine, test and integrate such insights

through repeated problem-solving; at the third and final level they can help us commit our minds and nervous systems to those healing insights and skills by cultivating the visceral and behavioral responses that support them.

How To Use This Manual

Each chapter in this manual applies the basic paradigm of hybrid focused-analytic meditation to one of the “big” questions or challenges of life. Each chapter involves two parts: I.) theory; and II.) practice.

I.) The theory part comes first. After introducing the question or challenge, I explore the answers or responses that typically get in the way of healthy life change, and suggest some healing alternatives for reflection, based on the Indo-Tibetan tradition and/or modern science and psychotherapy. My aim in this initial discussion is to help stimulate your own self-analysis and reflection, as part of the larger process of learning how to initiate, sustain and enjoy a contemplative practice that can foster a healthier, happier, more stress-free life. Since each of you comes with your own history, outlook, attitudes and lifestyle, the generic themes I address are meant as illustrations to help you take a fresh look at the “default settings” you bring to your life and practice. My hope is that these meditative experiments will help you be more conscious of those settings and decide which you want to let go of, and which you want to keep, modify or enhance. The aim of such self-analysis and reflection is to become fully mindful not only of the air you breathe but of all the habits of thinking, feeling and acting that make up your everyday way of life.

II.) Next comes the practice. Once you have achieved a glimmer of insight on the question or challenge raised by the chapter, it’s time to carry that insight over into your

inner, meditative classroom. This process itself has two parts: A) within-session practice; and B) between-session practice. Within session practice, part A) in turn has four phases: preliminaries; discursive reflection; focused contemplation; conclusion.

Preliminaries (Optional). First, you must set up the inner classroom or laboratory in which the experiment will be conducted. Meditators usually do this by a series of steps called preliminaries, whose specifics vary depending on the meditative technique they prefer. Specific preliminaries used in various types of practice are outlined in the following section. Their general aim is to arrive at a state of mind that is primed to learn by heightened motivation, attention and discrimination.

Reflection. Once we have readied the inner laboratory, the second phase is to revive the insight we glimpsed earlier by following the line of reflection that first gave it life. This reviving typically involves a discursive technique like guided self-analysis, prayer or recitation, aimed at combining heightened positive attention with sharpened discrimination in a reflection or contemplation that yields a sustained and decisive insight.

Contemplation. Once reflection has thus borne fruit in an insight that is fresh and clear, the third phase of focused contemplation or registration begins. Here the insight itself becomes the focus of single-pointed mindfulness or concentration, in an effort to give the new direction it offers time to sink in.

Conclusion (Optional). Finally, we conclude the meditation by letting go of the current mistakes or omissions that taint or limit the contemplation, asking for ongoing help to overcome those limits, and dedicating or committing the fruits of our efforts to on ultimate goals.

B) In addition to the four phases of a practice session, each weekly experiment may be supplemented with between-session practice. Typically, this involves trying to stay mindful enough in-between sessions to recognize opportunities to put alternative modes of thinking, feeling or acting into practice in everyday life. Optimally, we can note the outcome of such real-life experiments for use as feedback to inform our next in-session practice.

Adapting This Manual To Your Basic Practice

This contemplative manual is designed to be adapted for use with different types and levels of meditative practice.

If mindfulness is your basic practice, the preliminaries would typically begin with adopting a stable posture and breath-rhythm, and then move onto achieving mindfulness focused on the breath and body. Traditionally, the next steps would involve widening the focus of mindfulness from the breathing body to include more and more of our inner and outer experience: first physical sensation and the sensory environment; then the stream of consciousness and the larger mind-field of collective consciousness; and finally, the contents of one's own mind as well as the minds of others, including emotions, perceptions, thoughts and images. It is here, in the state of fully open or all-encompassing mindfulness, that we have a laboratory in which we can bring discursive awareness and/or analytic insight to bear on the mental contents in question: specific habits of thinking, feeling and acting.

If you prefer concentrative quiescence meditation, typically the preliminaries start as in mindfulness with stabilizing posture and breathing, then move on to withdrawing

attention from sense-stimulation, purging the stream of consciousness of ordinary contents, and finally focusing on a stabilizing object. Whether the object chosen is a positive image, idea, motivation, or the mind itself, it is used to gather, clarify and focus one's concentration until it is more or less single-pointed. Alternatively, one first primes one's motivation and attention using scripted offerings, prayers and/or chants, and then proceeds as above.

If you prefer visualization, mantra-recitation, heart-prayer or some such practice, the preliminaries usually begin with scripted offerings, prayers and/or chants. Typically, these are followed by the imaginative or ritual creation of a protected, purified and inspiring context for reflection and learning. In most traditions, the ideal environment revolves around a personal encounter or identification with an ideal being, envisioned or conceived as God, a divine archetype, a healing mentor, or one's own inner guide, genius or ideal self.

In this manual, the scripted preliminaries and conclusion are modeled on offering sequences designed to support either concentrative quiescence or visualization practice in the Indo-Tibetan tradition. They can be omitted, replaced by other preliminaries/ conclusions, or added to those of mindfulness practice or non-ritual quiescence practice. The "ideal healer" figure around which they revolve should be construed and imagined as the representative of a living, breathing being who embodies your ultimate aims and ideals. Alternatively, s/he may be construed and imagined as your own projected ideal way of being, since in fact s/he is a part of your mind, split off and projected outward to assist you by appearing as the perfect teacher, mentor and coach of your inner classroom.

Using This Manual With Meditation Tapes, CD's or Performance Scripts

Graduates of the eight-week program in self-healing can use the program audio tapes or CD's to support the exercises described in this manual. The simplest way to do so is to use the brief meditation of your choice. If your basic practice is mindfulness, the brief mindfulness meditation can be used as a preliminary to the exercises outlined here. First read and consider the introduction and exploration of the question or challenge of the week, and when you get a glimmer of insight you're ready to meditate on, sit down to a mindfulness session with your manual at hand. Once you have completed the audio tape or CD, turn your attention to the manual and follow the directions laid out in the exercise part of the chapter. If your basic practice is visualization, follow the guided imagery of the brief or extended self-healing visualization tape or CD up to the point where you ask your ideal healer for help, then stop the tape or CD before s/he responds with waves of healing intuition and energy. Then turn to this manual and follow the directions under point 5, imagining that your contemplation and meditation on the insight, attitude or skill in question is happening in the context of a real-time dialogue with your ideal healer. When you complete point 5 in the exercise, return to the tape or CD and follow the guided imagery to its conclusion, in order to "seal in" what you have learned.

If you prefer other meditation tapes, CD's or performance scripts (called *sadhana* in Sanskrit) such as "Calling On the Healing Mother" (see appendix), use the aid in question as a preliminary, following the mindfulness-based format above or as a preliminary plus conclusion, following the visualization-based format above.

Chapter One: Life

I. Theory: Reframing Illness, Loss and Stress as a Door to Life's Value

Our assumptions about human life are typically a tapestry of ideas drawn from different, often conflicting systems, woven together through childhood, schooling and life experience in an intricate tapestry we seldom stop to examine. As moderns and Westerners, our views are woven across the warp and woof of scientific theories and religious doctrines that seem to run at cross purposes. Despite the personal threads that give our views texture, however, the bottom line is that modern science and monotheism both agree that humans have relatively little capacity for self-knowledge, self-determination and self-control. In its more or less radical materialism, modern science teaches that our minds and lives can be reduced to brains and genes about which we have little or no conscious knowledge or choice. In their more or less patriarchal theism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam teach us that we humans are creatures able at best only to please God, never to fully understand or embody His wisdom, compassion or creative power. In general, then, our cultural tendency in the modern West is to underestimate the potential of human life and the power of the human mind, especially when it comes to whether we are free or able to make a real difference for ourselves and our world when we put our minds to it.

Until quite recently the conventional wisdom of Western neuroscience and medicine regarding illness, loss, work stress or social stress, has been consistent with this low estimate of human potential. Outlook, attitude and lifestyle were and still are generally regarded as more or less insignificant in determining how individuals respond

to such uncontrollable events. Although we are raised to believe in the West as the world champion of individual freedom and power, these values are generally thought of as applying in the external domain of political rights and technological control over nature. It may come as a shock, but in fact, most cultures throughout history have had a higher estimate of our individual human potential in the internal domain of freedom of mind and the power to consciously control our behavior and destiny. Still more surprising is the series of current and still poorly understood findings in neuroscience, psychiatry, mind/body medicine and behavioral medicine, building an emerging consensus that internally driven factors like outlook, attitude and lifestyle have a much greater impact on our bodies and lives for good or ill than previously thought. Cutting edge science is beginning to side with the majority of ancient and non-Western cultures in upgrading our dim received views of how much we can change from within by developing an insightful, attentive and focused mind.

One factor in these rising estimates of human potential is the recent encounter between current Western mind science and ancient Eastern mind science. Indian mind/body methods like Hindu yoga and Buddhist meditation are more ambitious, systematic and effective than any practices previously known in the West. Indian yogis and Tibetan meditators have shown astonishing degrees of control of mind/body processes previously thought to be involuntary, including perception, emotion, autonomic tone and metabolism. Not surprisingly, the Asian traditions in which these methods have come to be commonplace have much higher estimates of the potential we humans have to make progress on internal fronts like personal freedom, health and happiness. The expanded view of human nature in these “inner” mind and health sciences is shared by

Indian religious traditions, which tend to view the human mind as perfectly able to realize divine freedom, compassion and creative power. Historically, this “Eastern” view appears to have been a fairly perennial and universal one shared by Western traditions often suppressed as heresies and preserved underground in esoteric Gnosticism, Christian mysticism, Sufism and Kabbala.

Wherever you stand on the issue of your human potential for learning, growth and change, adding meditation to your daily life typically sparks and requires a fresh assessment of your view of life, especially the “inner” life of the mind. An ounce of meditative self-control can quickly shatter the myth that we are powerless in the face of illness, loss and stress, raising a host of difficult questions. Can I make a real difference in the internal state of my body and mind? How much can I change my outlook, attitudes and behavior? What is most efficient way for me to make the greatest impact on my quality of life? How much can strengthening my mind with meditative exercise build my inner freedom, health and happiness? Am I really capable of developing a meditative personality and lifestyle? Typically, we turn to meditation as a last resort in a frustrating, frightening struggle with illness, stress or loss. And almost as often we find that facing even the darkest of these clouds can have a real silver lining. Taking these crises as opportunities to simplify, redirect and revalue life can often leave us freer, healthier and happier than we dreamed possible.

The first step on the path to a sustainable meditative practice and lifestyle is to expose and reform any self-limiting views of the precious value and full potential of this human life. Meditative techniques not only spark this reassessment, giving us pause to reflect on the best we can do for ourselves and how; they also serve as a mirror of sorts,

offering a new perspective from which we can reflect on our blind spots and see beyond our habitual selves. Often central to this new perspective is getting a bigger picture of where our lives fit in the grand scheme of things, a task usually dealt with by mythology story-telling or just plain gossip. How does our potential compare to that of animals or demons, angels or Gods? How does it compare with humans who are more or less fortunate, either in our own culture or in another? The trick to making such comparisons work for us is to use them to build our optimism and empower us, by reminding ourselves of the ways in which we are lucky and helping us accept our limitations without envy, intimidation or shame. The following exercise takes on a few deceptively simple questions that are hard to get our minds around. “How do I see my own nature, and the highest potential I can fulfill in this life?” “To what extent am I free and able to understand or change the workings of my own mind, brain and environment?” “Am I a mere product of evolution, a creature in God’s plan; or a free and responsible agent with the god-like power to change my life and world?” “Where do I come from?” “Who am I?” “Where am I going?” The aim of the exercise is not to arrive at some closure, as if there were one formulaic answer to these questions. Rather, we aim to see our way clear of the preconceived notions that blind us to new possibilities and fresh perspectives. If we can catch a glimpse of our sense of self as the ultimate habit defining the horizons of our life thus far, there is real hope that we can gradually free and open our minds out into a life larger than any we could have conceived or imagined. They say that climbing out of our familiar mindset into that unbounded openness is like finding a jewel in the palm of your hand; this jewel of a life that can fulfill our every wish, for health, happiness, and best of all, unconditional freedom and peace of mind.

II. Practice: Sample Contemplation on Life With Your Ideal Healer

The following exercise is meant as a template for a full contemplative meditation on the value and potential of this human life. It is not at all necessary that you follow it to the letter, although that would be fine. I offer it as a meditative aid on a par with the audio tapes or CD's you may use in your practice. It can stand in for those tapes, serving as a script to guide you through an open-eyed, more or less discursive meditation. Or, you may just want to read through it a few times until you arrive at your own idea of how to replicate the experiment within your own practice, whether mindfulness, concentration, visualization or recitation, guided or not. A middle way very much in keeping with Indo-Tibetan traditions would be to splice this text into your current practice, regardless of your preference of meditation type or audiovisual aids. Detailed suggestions about how to find such a middle way are spelled out in the introduction above, under the headings starting with "How To Use This Manual." The two main headings of the practice are: A) within the actual session; and B) in everyday life in-between sessions. Under the first heading, the actual session is divided into four phases: preliminaries; reflection; contemplation; and conclusion. The first and last phases, designed to enhance and "seal in" whatever is good in your session, are optional. You can replace them with whatever methods you chose to open and close your regular practice; or, for economy, with two simple acts: aligning your most positive, mindful intention with the short- and long-term aims of your practice; and committing any insight, energy or skill gained to the realization of those aims. The heart of the experiment lies in the two middle phases: discursive reflection and focused contemplation.

The point of the discursive reflection phase is to link any glimmer of insight sparked by reading the first part of this chapter, or any other reference, or by your own unaided reflection, with the non-discursive focus we usually think of as “mediation.” In computer jargon, the purpose of this second phase is to “download” whatever fresh input we glean from the “internet” of public dialogue and hold it long enough on the “desktop” of our own inner dialogue so that we can judge for ourselves what to “save” in the third phase, focused contemplation. This second, reflective phase works best when we can prime it by highlighting or annotating particular passages that seemed to our ordinary mind to offer a bit of fresh insight or perspective. Having completed the first, preliminary phase, we may then turn to those passages, to mull them over with a more centered mind. The rumination of the second phase is to see if these snippets in fact help replicate the prior insight, and whether the insight holds up under the scrutiny of clear and sustained reflection. If all goes well, the original glimmer should be a few degrees brighter and more stable now, prompting us to move to the third phase, focused concentration.

The focused contemplation phase is where we try to marry our newly tested insight with our deepest, most stable mindfulness or concentration. The point here is to incorporate the thread of new insight into the tapestry of a life that is not simply a hand-me-down from family or society, but rather a fully conscious work of live art. If we can settle our mind and nerves deeply enough to dip into the peaceful, even blissful “flow” of positive reinforcement, we may be able to commit to the fresh insight not just in principle but in the constantly budding tissue of our brain. This will effectively “save” the new step we have made towards a more conscious life as a bud in a new neural network that may eventually grow to support a whole new way of life. Breakthroughs along this path of

deep contemplation are traditionally described as of two types: spacious and dreamy. The former, technically “spacious equipoise,” describes the insight that sees through our familiar habit of self and so seems to dislodge or dissolve our whole worldview. Once that habitual worldview reemerges, the latter “dreamy aftermath” describes the insight that can see through that worldview clearly enough to revise it, freely and consciously.

A) THE ACTUAL SESSION

PRELIMINARIES

Quick Option: Finding a comfortable place to reflect,
Take a few mindful breaths in and out,
And then do your best to clear and center your mind.
Now try to conceive your most positive motivation for practice
And skip to Reflection/Contemplation sections below.

CD Option: Follow the brief mindfulness meditation to the end
Or the brief healing visualization up to, “ask your ideal healer for help.”
Then skip to the Reflection/Contemplation sections below.

Script Option: If you prefer to use a script for your contemplation,
Imagine yourself in a safe healing environment, on top of the world,
Feeling freely connected to all living beings,
Facing your image of optimal health, envisioned as yourself or another,
And read/reflect/focus on the steps below:

1. Recognizing the qualities I need to heal,
I open my mind to my full potential.
2. All my resources, mental and physical,
I devote to growing a new, healing self.
3. In all honesty I admit my limits and faults,
And vow with help to grow out of them.
4. Abandoning competition for teamwork,
I enjoy healing qualities, wherever they are.

May all life be well. May all be care-free.
May all feel real joy. May all know real peace.

5. From the bottom of my heart I ask for help
Building the insight and skills I need to heal.

Pleased to be asked, my ideal healer smiles with a glow
Like rainbow light from the heart beaming everywhere,
Drawing the wisdom, energy and care
Of all healing beings back to his/her heart,
Then beaming it to protect, clear and inspire my body-speech-mind.

REFLECTION

How do I view my nature and full potential?
Am I a bio-machine, my mind a pointless accident,
An idiot light that goes out when the brain-circuits die?
Am I a creature of God's design, my soul a mere shadow,
Unable to know or attain His true light?
Or am I the most conscious and free of life-forms,
A mind that can know selfless wisdom and love?
Am I not capable of god-like genius,
Of knowing and changing myself and my world?
Am I merely the roles custom assigns me,
A friend or relative, consumer or worker?
Or do I have a higher purpose for being,
A creative freedom beyond social formulas?
Must I measure my worth by wealth or fame,
Or do I deserve this chance to make my life count?
Am I this body that so quickly decays?
A soul to be judged good or bad, like a child?
Can't I make a real difference for me and my world?
Why this reflective mind if not to choose
A path that leads from confusion to peace?
Why waste this wish-fulfilling gem of a mind
By neglecting to cut it with learning,
To polish it with reflection, or to set it
In a meditative life, where it can truly shine?

CONTEMPLATION

Glimpsing my ultimate nature
As total freedom of mind,
And my highest potential
As unwavering happiness,
May I try to keep these in mind
And fresh with each breath until
They appear as still and clear

As a cloud-free autumn sky
 And a rainbow all through it.
 Alternating between these two insights—
 The spacious equanimity of freedom,
 And the dreamy reflection of happiness—
 May I hold the living jewel of my mind
 As a touchstone for this life.
 (Now try to hold your attention
 As stably as possible
 On the insights you glimpsed above.)

CONCLUSION (Optional)

Quick Option: Recognize and forgive
 The shortcomings of your contemplation,
 Then close by acknowledging and committing
 Any insight or energy gained to your total self-healing.

CD Option: Resume the healing visualization to its conclusion.

Script Option: Complete steps six and seven below:

6. Through life and death, until my potential is realized
 I ask the healing presence within and around me
 To never fail me even for an instant.

7. Any insight, virtue or energy gained through this practice
 I commit to developing my full healing potential.
 By realizing my vision of health may I turn fear into mastery,
 And bring myself and my world to a healthier, happier place.

B) BETWEEN SESSION PRACTICE

The between-session practice of contemplating the precious opportunity of your free, human life begins with being willing to “go with” the thought-experiment in the aftermath of meditation and/or in reflective moments through your day. Try to allow your sense of self to expand to include a new version, the you who really *can* meditate and use meditation as a way to heal. Hopefully, you can feel or imagine a rise in self-esteem, a “can-do” sense of efficacy or empowerment that can help you

face the most intractable questions or challenges. You may find yourself reviewing your past and imagining what could have been if you had learned to live a more mindful, meditative life years ago. Don't worry, in meditative life even the past can be revised, as you begin to accept your life so far as the pathway you had to take to arrive where you are now, waking up to the full value and potential of the life you have. Your mind will probably begin to imagine alternate futures than you usually imagine, futures in which the enhanced perspective and peace meditation can bring empowers you to make some of the hard choices you felt were beyond your reach. Perhaps most importantly, you might begin to think about how you could let go of the baggage of fear, frustration or shame and begin to simplify your life so it revolves around the people, places and things that really do matter, that expand your sense of gratitude, meaning and freedom.

Chapter Two: Death

I. Theory: Using Impermanence, Aging and Death to Revalue Life

Although our conception of aging and death is only the mirror image of our view of life, it is a mirror most of us tend to avoid. The quicker the pace of our everyday lives, the more one-sidedly we seem to focus on youth. Our businesses, media, medicine and arts increasingly push the inexorable facts of impermanence, aging and death into the shadows, as if fixed in one mass delusion on the narcissistic denial of sheltered teens, “It won’t happen to me.” So pervasive is this delusion that most of us have forgotten, or worse, never learned, that this state of affairs is both very recent and peculiar to the West’s post-industrial civilization. It often comes as a shock to recall that our own grandparents and their ancestors throughout human history found it helpful, even vital, to keep in the foreground of their day-to-day consciousness the basic facts of life. Indeed, most humans outside the “developed world” still keep the certainty of their impermanence, aging and death more in mind than we, at least to the extent that they can preserve their own cultural traditions from the corrosive influence of the West. So what has brought this recent sea-change in our views of death? In a nutshell, our views of death have changed because the facts of life appear to have changed, thanks to modern Western science and technology.

The material abundance, safety and comfort of life in developed nations topped off by the miracles of modern medicine have raised the curve of our expectations of life, both in quality and in quantity. But this accounts for only part of the change in our mentality. The more we put our faith in science, technology and industrial medicine, the

more we lose touch with the spiritual and humanistic traditions that carry humanity's cumulative wisdom about how to face aging and death. And the more we invest in the hope that science can promise immunity from aging or virtual immortality, the more inclined we are to turn a blind eye to these facts and the traditions that could prepare us for the inevitable. When I said that the facts of life *appear* to have changed, I was referring to two sorts of appearances: 1) changes in degree or in part have been taken for a change *in kind* and *on the whole*; 2) changes in our views of death have been taken for a change *in reality*. Social scientists and social critics today agree that the wealthiest nation on earth performs more poorly when it comes to aging and death than some of the most impoverished. While most people in the West live longer and better, many do not; and many if not most age and die in worse social and material conditions than their cohorts in poorer nations. The reason for this that most concerns us here is the unprecedented way that modern science teaches us to see death.

While the world's spiritual and humanistic traditions are unanimous in seeing death as the most crucial event in life, the materialist science of the modern West is one of the only traditions in human history to see it literally as a non-event. By reducing the human mind and spirit to the brain and its genes, modern science creates the impression that death is a non-event, the flip of a switch. By promising a painless death, modern medicine claims to assure us of final anesthesia at the very worst. Invoking physical evidence that completely ignores the experience of death, this impression and promise of anesthesia fail to address common reports of near-death experience or the common human observation that something immaterial in the human spirit continues after the body's demise. Even if physical science could show that experience stops at death, this

would hardly prove that the inexorable fact that all life as we know it, *my* life, will certainly end at some time and could end in any way at any time is trivial enough to be dismissed as a non-event. Nevertheless, the circular materialist logic of modern science has led our society to dismiss death, *yours and mine*, as insignificant, along with the vast mainstream of human tradition that has held death up as the ultimate moment of truth in light of which each preceding moment in life is best judged. Death seems to have died, along with God, and any evidence that it remains a fact has been relegated to the corners of our lives: the retirement home, the nursing home, the morgue, the statistics.

Why have we allowed ourselves to be deprived of this integral part of our lives? One reason I suspect lies in the war modern science has waged on our behalf against authoritarian religious traditions that often held death like a punitive sword over our each and every choice. It is here that the world's meditative traditions, Eastern *and* Western, offer a little known middle way. The practices of Indian contemplation, Christian monasticism, Sufism and Kabbalah offer alternate life-paths along which impermanence, aging and death are neither shunned in fear nor dismissed in arrogance but faced, even welcomed, as respected guides to the ultimate truth and value of everyday life. Practitioners of such traditions would be no more willing to leave the handling of their aging and death to experts than you or I would be to leave our private affairs in the hands of a royal family or powerful elite. Our course impermanence and death are realities beyond our control, but as such they can help us honestly confront our self-limiting illusions or denial and face the difficult choices over which we have some control. To let go of this life in gratitude and peace, most of us need to feel we have realized its potential in significant ways that give our life true or lasting meaning. By holding our lives up to

that ultimate touchstone, awareness of impermanence, aging and death can help serve to foster mindfulness of our life's ultimate value and potential. By letting these realities take their place in our daily consciousness, we cannot only sober and sharpen our minds, but also keep our mind's eye on the prize that really matters: making this life, breath by breath, really count.

All this may sound rather sweeping or grand, but in reality, the true benefits of death-awareness are very gradual and pragmatic. Those of us who have experienced a life-threatening illness or accident, whether at first or second hand, often think of ourselves as cursed or tested, like Job, wondering why bad things happen to good people. Yet we may have also felt ourselves lucky to taste the uncommon fruits of such wake-up calls: the capacity to put our lives in perspective, to simplify them by letting go of empty pursuits and idle habits, while bringing greater gratitude, resolve or zest to the things that really matter, however intangible or difficult. Every time we make one such step in light of choosing a positive way to age and die, we are in effect making our aging and death good, not only as remote eventualities but also as immanent aspects of this life. In this way impermanence, the fact that everything is continually in flux, in a very real sense becomes an ever-present reminder and invitation to learn to live meaningfully with the final eventuality of death, a doorway to letting go in each single moment, every breath of our lives.

This may be all well and good for seasoned contemplatives, but how should we so long estranged from death start to face it? Here again, there is no one formulaic way to make sense of such intimate, personal experiences, despite their universality. Any little bit of mindfulness we can bring to our own views of aging and death is enough to start

the process and can help in many ways, especially saving the energy we waste in self-defeating denial. A life lived in denial of death is a life ruled by terror; a hellish life of a thousand traumatic deaths in which each uncontrollable stress strikes us as the grave lurking just around the bend. However real their effects on our system, these imaginary deaths are constructed out of the raw material of our unconscious fantasies about the end of life. The one thing Western theories of the afterlife have in common with Eastern theories of rebirth is the idea that in crucial life-transitions our minds play a primary role in shaping our destiny, despite being so much less tangible than our bodies. Sadly, no amount of horror novels, films or killer video games will ever give us mastery over our own minds. We may retract in horror at the fictions created by the world's religions, from being damned to hell to being reincarnated as some helpless prey. From the vantage of a meditative practice and life, however, such narratives become thought-experiments, which help us expose our own unconscious views of death, from the most materialistic to the most spiritualistic. Gradually facing these views and their place in our minds is the first step to taming the ghostly terminator within. With the dinosaur of our own evolutionary killer-instincts tamed, gradually preparing for death becomes relatively light work. And to encourage us, the world's meditative traditions agree that the taste of a death embraced with a sense of gratitude and purpose is in fact the supreme taste of freedom from fear and clinging, the true elixir of immortality.

II. Practice: Sample Seven Step Contemplation on Life With Your Ideal Healer

The following exercise is meant as a template for a full contemplative meditation on the certainty and immanence of impermanence and death. As before, it is not at all

necessary that you follow it to the letter, although that would be fine. Whether you use it as a meditative aid on a par with your CD's, as a script to guide you through an open-eyed, more or less discursive meditation, or as a template for your own contemplative thought-experiment, the preliminary and concluding steps are there to frame the reflection and contemplation process that takes us to the heart of the matter.

A) THE ACTUAL SESSION

PRELIMINARIES

Quick Option: Finding a comfortable place to reflect,
Take a few mindful breaths in and out,
And then do your best to clear and center your mind.
Now try to conceive your most positive motivation for practice
And skip to Reflection/Contemplation sections below.

CD Option: Follow the brief mindfulness meditation to the end
Or the brief healing visualization up to, "ask your ideal healer for help."
Then skip to the Reflection/Contemplation sections below.

Script Option: If you prefer to use a script for your contemplation,
Imagine yourself in a safe healing environment, on top of the world,
Feeling freely connected to all living beings,
Facing your image of optimal health, envisioned as yourself or another,
And read/reflect/focus on the steps below:

1. Recognizing the qualities I need to heal,
I open my mind to my full potential.
2. All my resources, mental and physical,
I devote to growing a new, healing self.
3. In all honesty I admit my limits and faults,
And vow with help to grow out of them.
4. Abandoning competition for teamwork,
I enjoy healing qualities, wherever they are.

May all life be well. May all be care-free.
May all feel real joy. May all know real peace.

5. From the bottom of my heart I ask for help
Building the insight and skills I need to heal.

Pleased to be asked, my ideal healer smiles with a glow
Like rainbow light from the heart beaming everywhere,
Drawing the wisdom, energy and care
Of all healing beings back to his/her heart,
Then beaming it to protect, clear and inspire my body-speech-mind.

REFLECTION

How do I view my impermanence, aging and death?
Am I a bio-machine that just breaks down and stops,
Switching my mind off to anesthetic nothingness?
Am I an actor in God's passion play, my soul facing death
As His final judgment, reward or punishment?
Is this life one pearl in a long string of lives,
My death just the knot that binds me to the next?
Am I an intangible spirit or energy that streams
From this life to another, my death just a shift?
Or am I pure awareness, above life's diverse forms,
A transcendent spirit of selfless wisdom and love?
Am I not capable of god-like self-creation,
Of facing and changing myself and my fate?
Am I merely a factor of natural selection,
A son or daughter, father or mother?
Or do I have a more lasting purpose,
A creative freedom beyond bodily forms?
Must I measure my worth by what I leave behind,
Or is death just my touchstone of self-realization?
Am I this body subject each moment to aging and death?
A soul whose net-worth buys me heaven or hell?
Can't I make a lasting difference for me and my world?
Why this reflective mind if not to choose
A way to face death not in terror but peace?
Why waste this wish-fulfilling gem of a mind
By neglecting to cut it with learning,
To polish it with reflection, or to set it
In a meditative life that shines clear through death?

CONTEMPLATION

Glimpsing my final destiny
As total freedom from fear,
And my highest potential

As a boundless love of life,
 May I try to keep my impermanence,
 Aging and death in mind with each breath
 Until they appear as welcoming and profound
 As a midnight autumn sky
 And the mirrored glow of a moon.
 Alternating between these two insights—
 The spacious equanimity of letting go,
 And the dreamy afterglow of a happy lifetime—
 May I hold the crystal clarity of death
 As a mirror for life's fleeting chance.
 (Now try to hold your attention
 As stably as possible
 On the insights you glimpsed above.)

CONCLUSION (Optional)

Quick Option: Recognize and forgive
 The shortcomings of your contemplation,
 Then close by acknowledging and committing
 Any insight or energy gained to your total self-healing.

CD Option: Resume the healing visualization to its conclusion.

Script Option: Complete steps six and seven below:

6. Through life and death, until my potential is realized
 I ask the healing presence within and around me
 To never fail me even for an instant.

7. Any insight, virtue or energy gained through this practice
 I commit to developing my full healing potential.
 By realizing my vision of health may I turn fear into mastery,
 And bring myself and my world to a healthier, happier place.

B) BETWEEN SESSION PRACTICE

The between-session practice of contemplating the certainty and immanence of impermanence, aging and death begins with being willing to “go with” the thought-experiment in the aftermath of meditation and/or in reflective moments through your

day. Try to allow your sense of time to expand to span your whole life, from your birth and development to your aging and death. Hopefully, you can feel or imagine yourself embracing that whole, with a deep sense of forgiveness and gratitude that can help you handle the thorniest questions or challenges. You may find yourself reviewing your past and imagining what could have been if you had learned to live a more mindful, meditative life years ago. Don't worry, in meditative life even the past can be revised, as you begin to accept your life thus far as the pathway you had to take to arrive where you are now, waking up to the full value and potential of each and every breath-moment. Your mind will probably begin to access the fantasies you have acquired or conjured of what your aging and death will be like, as well as what if anything comes after death. Try not to run from these, but face the hopes and fears they represent, working to see through both to create your own best narrative of where you're headed, why and how. With that narrative as an alternate frame of reference, you will probably begin to see other immediate futures than you have previously imagined, futures in which the enhanced perspective and confidence meditation can bring empowers you to make some of the hard choices you felt were beyond your reach. Perhaps most importantly, you might begin to think about how you could let go of the baggage of fear, frustration or shame and begin to simplify your life so it revolves around the people, places and things that really do matter, that expand the sense of freedom, gratitude and peace that can help you finally let go, here and now.

Chapter Three: Change

I. Theory: How Can I Make a Real Difference for Myself and My World?

What part do you and I play in the grand scheme of things? Do our mental, verbal and physical actions have any real impact on our futures or the world around us? Here again, the message most of us get from our mainstream religious and scientific traditions differs radically from that proposed by the world's contemplative traditions, East and West. Both the materialism of the modern West and the monotheism of the ancient West teach us that our conscious decisions and intentional actions are not an integral part of what makes the world go 'round.

Modern materialism reduces our mind and conscious acts to functions of the brain and the biological processes driving it. Our thoughts, feelings and habits are not working parts of the mechanism of life, but properties that simply emerge from the organization of matter, like icing on the cake of life. Although our science does promise us power over nature if we act corporately with our technological prosthetics, it tacitly or overtly gives us the message that our unaided minds cannot effect any change in our internal or external environments. Traditional monotheism likewise devalues the power of the individual mind by reducing humans to creatures of God, an omnipotent, omniscient being who alone controls the supernatural mechanics of creation, providence and retribution. Our only real choice in this worldview lies in obedience or disobedience to God's will.

The Indian scientific and religious traditions are based on a radically different view of the place of human action in the scheme of things, a middle way between

materialism and monotheism that bears a strong family resemblance to the worldview of ancient Greek science and contemplation. The Indic middle way avoids the materialist extreme by viewing mind and body as two mutually interactive systems both subject to universal laws of causation; and it avoids the creationist extreme by viewing all living beings, from microorganisms to God, as each individually and collectively responsible for the creation of their own destinies and environments. Unlike the modern Western extremes, this outlook is ideally suited to a meditative or contemplative life. Since mind interacts with matter, its acts do not hang loose in a realm apart from emotion, behavior and bodily processes. Since each mind is effective in shaping its own local environment, its acts are not bound to a chain of events determined by any other being, however knowing or powerful. In this way, the order of things is neither “too loose” nor “too tight” for our conscious choices and actions to have a real impact on our lives and worlds.

There may be nothing more crucial to a meditative life than reflecting on the place our consciousness has in the larger scheme of things. While most of us tend to see our minds as passive in the face of the forces of change, we tend to locate the power to change our lives and worlds outside our reflection and meditative discipline. Vital to empowering our meditative practice is relocating the power to change within our mind and its unlocked potential. As our experiments with mindfulness, concentration or imagery begin to challenge the perception that our minds are powerless over the process of change, they open whole new horizons of possibility for us to make a real difference for ourselves and world through meditative learning, reflection and concentration. In so doing, they also open us to the cutting-edge findings of modern science that reality is not

a mass of atoms but a wave-like fabric of sheer interdependence, in which intangible things like energy and mind seem to be as effective as solid matter.

II. Practice: Discursive Reflection and Focused Contemplation

A) ACTUAL PRACTICE

PRELIMINARIES

Quick Option: Finding a comfortable place to reflect,
Take a few mindful breaths in and out,
And then do your best to clear and center your mind.
Now try to conceive your most positive motivation for practice
And skip to Reflection/Contemplation sections below.

CD Option: Follow the brief mindfulness meditation to the end
Or the brief healing visualization up to, “ask your ideal healer for help.”
Then skip to the Reflection/Contemplation sections below.

Script Option: If you prefer to use a script for your contemplation,
Imagine yourself in a safe healing environment, on top of the world,
Feeling freely connected to all living beings,
Facing your image of optimal health, envisioned as yourself or another,
And read/reflect/focus on the steps below:

1. Recognizing the qualities I need to heal,
I open my mind to my full potential.
2. All my resources, mental and physical,
I devote to growing a new, healing self.
3. In all honesty I admit my limits and faults,
And vow with help to grow out of them.
4. Abandoning competition for teamwork,
I enjoy healing qualities, wherever they are.

May all life be well. May all be care-free.
May all feel real joy. May all know real peace.
5. From the bottom of my heart I ask for help
Building the insight and skills I need to heal.

Pleased to be asked, my ideal healer smiles with a glow
 Like rainbow light from the heart beaming everywhere,
 Drawing the wisdom, energy and care
 Of all healing beings back to his/her heart,
 Then beaming it to protect, clear and inspire my body-speech-mind.

REFLECTION

How do I see my own power for change?
 Is my mind only here for the ride on my body-machine,
 With no power to effect change in my life and beyond?
 Is my free will subject to God's absolute power,
 Confined to a black and white "yes" or "no" to His Will?
 Or is my mind part of a mass-energy flow,
 As powerful as the subtle forces of subatomic matter?
 Am I a conscious agent of life, able to make
 A real difference in my destiny and world?
 Am I totally subject to laws from above or below,
 Or free to develop transforming wisdom and power?
 Am I not capable of god-like self-creation,
 Of taking the director's role in my own life-work?
 Am I a passive object of natural selection,
 The vessel of a more or less fit genome?
 Am I a prisoner of my childhood development,
 Stuck with these habits for better and worse?
 Or do my choices have a lasting consequence,
 A creative freedom that overrides laws of matter and mind?
 If my actions co-create life, what laws govern their effects?
 Are there habits of thought, feeling and action that yield pain,
 And positive virtues that yield freedom and happiness?
 Is the scope of my actions limited to this life,
 Or can I expand it to influence the next generations?
 How do I make a lasting difference for me and my world?
 Why this reflective mind if not to choose
 A way to direct change toward health and happiness?
 Why waste this wish-fulfilling gem of a mind
 By neglecting to cut it with learning,
 To polish it with reflection, or to set it
 In a meditative life that leaves everything better?

CONTEMPLATION

Glimpsing my full potential
 As total creative freedom to change,
 And my ultimate responsibility

To improve my own life and world,
 May I try to keep my power
 To effect change in mind with each breath
 Until it appears as boundless and vast
 As a crystal clear autumn sky
 And the warm glow of a radiant sunset.
 Alternating between these two insights—
 The spacious equanimity of freedom to choose,
 And the dreamy afterglow of true health and happiness—
 May I practice making my every act
 A force for deep and lasting change.
 (Now try to hold your attention
 As stably as possible
 On the insights you glimpsed above.)

CONCLUSION (Optional)

Quick Option: Recognize and forgive
 The shortcomings of your contemplation,
 Then close by acknowledging and committing
 Any insight or energy gained to your total self-healing.

CD Option: Resume the healing visualization to its conclusion.

Script Option: Complete steps six and seven below:

6. Through life and death, until my potential is realized
 I ask the healing presence within and around me
 To never fail me even for an instant.
7. Any insight, virtue or energy gained through this practice
 I commit to developing my full healing potential.
 By realizing my vision of health may I turn fear into mastery,
 And bring myself and my world to a healthier, happier place.

B) BETWEEN SESSION PRACTICE

The between-session practice of contemplating your power to effect change begins with being willing to “go with” the thought-experiment in the aftermath of meditation and/or in reflective moments through your day. Try to allow your sense of efficacy to

expand to include every aspect of your life, mental, emotional, physical, and your whole environment, social and natural. Hopefully, you can feel or imagine your self-efficacy expanding out to that whole, with a deep sense of patience and teamwork that will gradually empower you tackle the biggest problems or challenges. You may find yourself reviewing your past and imagining what could have been if you had learned to live a more mindful, meditative life years ago. Don't worry, in meditative life even the past can be revised, as you begin to accept your life thus far as the pathway you had to take to arrive where you are now, waking up to seize each and every breath-moment as an opportunity to start real, lasting change. Your mind will probably begin to access the fantasies you have acquired or conjured of what you can and cannot change, here and hereafter. Try not to run from these, but face the hopes and fears they represent, working to see through both to create your own best narrative of where you're headed, why and how. With that narrative as an alternate frame of reference, you will probably begin to see other immediate futures than you have previously imagined, futures in which the enhanced creative freedom and power meditation can bring empowers you to make some of the hard changes you felt were beyond your reach. Perhaps most importantly, you might begin to think about how you could let go of the baggage of fear, frustration or shame and begin to simplify your life so it is as focused as possible on initiating and sustaining the changes that really do matter; the moment-to-moment acts of body, speech and mind that little by little can add up to enormous gains in freedom, health and happiness, for you and the world around you.

Chapter Four: Peace

I. Theory: Letting-Go as the Door to Unconditional Peace

Once our estimate of our potential for change has been revised to reflect the new mind science and the leverage ancient meditation methods can give, the next step in revising our habitual outlook is to set goals that reflect our highest hopes and aims. The question is: “What new possibilities are open to me if I continue to grow a meditative practice and lifestyle?” Certainly new horizons of health and well-being open up to meditative practitioners because a solid practice helps protect us from stress and also sustain healthy changes in outlook, attitude and lifestyle. Beyond basic health and well-being, many practitioners find they can also use meditation to help make previously inconceivable gains in the scope and quality of their lives. More ambitious yet, some individuals with already full lives find that meditation opens up a larger horizon of meaning, enhancing their ability to face the ultimate reality of death and to look beyond it to their own visions of what follows death, be it an afterlife, the happiness of loved ones or the future of generations to come. Finally, a few meditative practitioners glimpse new horizons of inner peace and contentment opening up, horizons that bring a sense of timeless happiness and freedom of mind within reach of the here and now.

This chapter is designed to help remove mental blinders that limit our aspirations by hiding the human mind’s power to make this life truly meaningful and effective. Most of us are surprised to learn that the contemplative traditions of the world, including the Indo-Tibetan tradition we are exploring, see meditation as a practice with benefits far greater than the immediate boons of relaxation, stress-reduction, mindfulness or

concentration. Even within the narrow scope of healthcare, Indian and Tibetan medicine view the full benefits of meditation as going far beyond temporary relaxation or calm. The thought-experiment that follows is meant to expose common misconceptions of the scope of meditative change and to explore the full promise of a meditative life, culminating in the ultimate personal realization of lasting peace, called Nirvana, enlightenment, spiritual encounter, communion, or liberation-in-this-life.

As it turns out, the modern Western misconception that meditation mainly offers a kind of retreat from the stresses of civilized life are not uniquely modern or Western. The same belief was widespread in the ancient civilizations of the East, as we see from the prodigious efforts made by the Indian traditions of yoga and meditation to counter this belief. Proponents of yoga and meditation, Hindu and Buddhist, traditionally worked to counter this belief because in their view it limited the contemplative life to merely reactive damage-control at best, and escapism at worst. At the simplest level, the false belief that meditation is not also a proactive way to change one's inner and outer worlds may simply reflect a lack of familiarity with more advanced methods that enhance the power of a meditative practice.

If we live in a culture where meditation is hardly known and its advanced methods of self-knowledge and self-control are unknown entirely, we live a culturally underdeveloped life, no matter how well endowed we are with material wealth and power and the freedom and opportunity they bring. The materialist culture of the modern West teaches us that the real benefits of civilization are in understanding and controlling our natural environment. Self-development and self-transformation are either branded as escapist pastimes, entirely overlooked or else flatly dismissed as impractical routes to

better living. Our religious traditions approach contemplative practices like meditation as the privileged domain of a chosen elite and discourage the lay practitioner from aspiring to systematic self-development or self-transformation. Even religious professionals in the monotheistic traditions of the West are discouraged or barred from aspiring to the highest levels of spiritual realization, which authoritarian traditions relegate to superior beings like angels or God.

In contrast to mainstream Western traditions, Indian science and religion have pursued knowledge and control of human nature as the most direct means to improve life, and have gone to great lengths to make systematic methods of self-development and self-transformation available to average Indians regardless of gender, race and class. This approach to the advancement of civilization is so radically different from ours in the modern West that it is routinely dismissed out of hand, as obviously ineffectual or impractical. If India's more inward science and religion really worked, we wonder, why is its civilization so challenged today? Typically we are less troubled by the fate of our own ancestral civilizations in Greece and Italy.

Consider this historical commonplace. Like the history of individuals, the history of civilizations shows that while their outward, material powers rise and fall, their inward achievements in science, technology, philosophy, the arts, and spirituality endure. Long after India's armies stopped Alexander and Columbus set out to access its fabulous wealth, Britain sized the subcontinent as the jewel in its imperial crown. As the "inner jewels" of Indian mind science and spiritual technology begin to reach us, many in the West have come to realize that we still have much to learn from the Indians' complementary approach to health and happiness.

Key to the Indic approach is a map of inner frontiers, new horizons of living better within and among ourselves that promise to complement and enrich our outward peace and prosperity. Just as the American dream frees us to set and pursue life goals of outward success and upward mobility unheard of for most human history, the Indian dream, backed up by meditative science and technology, fees us to set and pursue life goals of inner health, happiness and peace, undreamed of for most of our ancestors in the West. These goals are part of a continuum of life learning that is usually divided into three or four phases or horizons. This chapter is concerned with the first three of these, which cover life's great personal aims: 1) enhancing health and happiness in this life; 2) improving the quality of one's death and of life thereafter; 3) realizing the ultimate good of unconditional peace.

As for the first horizon, a meditative practice can empower us to make the most of this life in ways that complement the material boons of modern science and technology. Mindfulness and awareness can help us override stress-reactive compulsions and let go of self-destructive habits, restoring health and a basic capacity to relax and enjoy the good things in life. Concentration, especially when combined with insight into how the mind works, can help us gradually develop a self-healing outlook, attitude and lifestyle, by building a realistic optimism, a stress-free good will and a constructive way of life that eventually yield incremental gains in our qualitative standards of health and happiness.

The second horizon concerns what we normally think of as generative or spiritual aims of life. Traditionally, this horizon has been pronounced off limits by modern science and is essentially managed for us by organized religions. Discursive reflection combined with focused contemplation can help prepare us to live with the evanescence of life, and

to learn to use glimpses of death as last chances to let go of traumatic memories and eat-or-be-eaten stress instincts haunting even the fullest life. Whether we look towards an afterlife for ourselves, or the happiness of our children and/or of generations to come, discursive reflection that sees clear though death allows us to start improving the quality of life after death here and now, while focused contemplation allows us to invest our future-vision with gratitude, care, joy and love that pay immediate dividends even as they gather interest.

If the horizon of living well through death and beyond is blocked off for us by Western scientific and religious experts, so much more so is the last horizon that opens humanity to the highest dimensions of well-being and happiness. According to Western and Eastern contemplative traditions, the highest good—spiritual peace, euphoric well-being, unconditional happiness—is not only accessible in principle to any motivated human, but is the ultimate birth-right of us all. Called in Indian tradition the “elixir of immortality” and in the West “mystic union,” a contemplative life is not full until it gives us at least a taste of this supreme fruit of human potential, said to be the highest consummation a living being of any kind can attain. Of course, for most of humanity, especially we moderns, such a high-flown idea seems the height of impracticality, if not utterly inconceivable and out-of-reach. Fortunately for us all, the ancient Indians evolved a very pragmatic and systematic way to understand and approach this aim, which the Buddha called Nirvana and the Yoga tradition called Nirodha, meaning the cessation of compulsive thinking, feeling and action. The scientific insight behind India’s mainstream approach to inner peace is that we all have within us equal and opposite capacities for violent self-destruction on the one hand and for peaceful self-development on the other.

As the Greeks knew and Sigmund Freud would rediscover, our prospects for inner peace and civilized happiness hang on each of us finding a way to tame our reptilian killer instincts and fully cultivate our mammalian instincts for communication and cooperation. In this universal struggle, our powerful minds stand center stage either as our inner hero or our worst enemy within. The enormous importance of the Indian traditions of yoga and meditation for humankind is that they offer a path of accessible, culture-neutral daily practice that helps the average human mind-body-spirit gradually emerge from its evolutionary struggle for survival and face the reality that our species has reached the top of the food chain. It is now us who endanger the survival of other species and pose the most immanent threat to the survival of our species and of all life on earth. Rather than the dinosaurs of the past or the predators of today, our vestigial killer instincts and the stress-reactive habits which trigger them represent the single greatest threat to our own health and happiness.

If we are at or near the pinnacle of security and comfort which life can afford, why then is it so hard for us to find inner peace as individuals and world peace collectively? Our inner survival instincts tell us that the reason is because we have not really arrived yet. We still need more: more control of our outer environment; more power over natural or human threats; more economic security; and on and on. The irony is that no amount of outer power, wealth and control seems to be enough to give us an enhanced *sense* of peace. The mightiest, wealthiest nation on earth, the U.S. has a murder rate ten to a hundred times that of other nations. The main reasons for this seem to be psychological. In stark contrast to our material power, perhaps even in inverse proportion to it, our minds seem to be fraught with rising levels of stress, isolation, fear and

violence. There are probably a host of variables causing this, but among them is the extent to which the American dream seems to fix our attention on outward aims, away from the inner factors identified by ancient and modern mind science as key to the human *experience* of peace. In other words, we must be careful not to confuse what it takes to *acquire* the good things in life with what it takes to *enjoy* them. However ambitious or successful we are in the outer world, the fact is that the inner path to gratitude, contentment and peace of mind is the rate-limiting step which determines our ability to enjoy our pursuit of outer happiness and its fruits.

The final horizon of inner peace opened up by the world's contemplative traditions thus offers a whole new dimension for human progress that promises to complement the new horizons of material progress opened up by modern science and technology. This horizon of peaceful progress is not a *substitute* for material progress, but rather a parallel pathway needed to keep human advancement in living balance. As such it seems to be equally vital to insuring the future survival and quality of civilized living, indeed of all life on earth. Our own lonely, scared and driven mind is what most threatens our health and longevity; undermines our higher intelligence and people skills; and kills our life-giving capacities for love, care, joy and peace. This may be why the ancient Indians, like their Athenian neighbors, viewed the goal of unconditional inner freedom and peace of mind as the ultimate aim of life, the consummation of human self-interest. Fortunately for us, the inner science and technology needed to help each and every individual dare to pursue that consummation was not lost with the golden age of the Greeks but rationalized, systematized and streamlined by the Indians in popular traditions of yoga and meditation that persist to this day. However sophisticated these traditions can

be, their active ingredient is a deceptively simple choice: to disarm and tame the dinosaur within, and nurture the kinder, gentler mammal that gives us access to inner peace and the help and understanding of others.

II. Practice: Discursive Reflection and Focused Contemplation

A) ACTUAL PRACTICE

PRELIMINARIES

Quick Option: Finding a comfortable place to reflect,
Take a few mindful breaths in and out,
And then do your best to clear and center your mind.
Now try to conceive your most positive motivation for practice
And skip to Reflection/Contemplation sections below.

CD Option: Follow the brief mindfulness meditation to the end
Or the brief healing visualization up to, “ask your ideal healer for help.”
Then skip to the Reflection/Contemplation sections below.

Script Option: If you prefer to use a script for your contemplation,
Imagine yourself in a safe healing environment, on top of the world,
Feeling freely connected to all living beings,
Facing your image of optimal health, envisioned as yourself or another,
And read/reflect/focus on the steps below:

1. Recognizing the qualities I need to heal,
I open my mind to my full potential.
2. All my resources, mental and physical,
I devote to growing a new, healing self.
3. In all honesty I admit my limits and faults,
And vow with help to grow out of them.
4. Abandoning competition for teamwork,
I enjoy healing qualities, wherever they are.

May all life be well. May all be care-free.
May all feel real joy. May all know real peace.

5. From the bottom of my heart I ask for help
Building the insight and skills I need to heal.

Pleased to be asked, my ideal healer smiles with a glow
Like rainbow light from the heart beaming everywhere,
Drawing the wisdom, energy and care
Of all healing beings back to his/her heart,
Then beaming it to protect, clear and inspire my body-speech-mind.

REFLECTION

What are my prospects for real inner peace?
Does peace come mainly from outer conditions,
Or from disarming and taming the killer within?
Does real peace come as a blessing from God,
As a reward for faith in this life or the next?
Or does it come only when our thirst is quenched,
As a response to outer security and ease?
Or is my mind the deciding factor for peace,
The swing vote that says yes to my life and world?
Am I totally subject to my instincts and reflexes,
Or free to transform them with wisdom and care?
Am I not capable of god-like consummation,
Of fully enjoying my life, as it is?
Am I an evolutionary dinosaur,
Hard-wired with instincts to kill or be killed?
Am I a prisoner of childhood trauma,
Stuck forever reliving my worst hurts and fears?
Or does my awareness have the final say,
The freedom to disarm defenses of body and mind?
If my mindset co-creates life, what laws govern its effects?
Are there forms of thinking and acting that breed discontent,
And can I renounce them and taste lasting peace?
Is the scope of my peace just one lucky moment, one life,
Or can I extend it to many lives or even eternity?
Why this reflective mind if not to choose
A way to complete outer progress with real inner peace?
Why waste this wish-fulfilling gem of a mind
By neglecting to cut it with learning,
To polish it with reflection, or to set it
In a meditative life that yields full realization?

CONTEMPLATION

Glimpsing my full potential
As unilateral disarmament,

And my ultimate responsibility
 To bring peace to my life and world,
 May I reach a meditative life
 Where peace is every breath,
 Until it feels as still and vast
 As an early morning sky
 Clearer than any dusk, night and dawn.
 Alternating between these two insights—
 The spacious equanimity of letting be,
 And the dreamy clarity of unwavering peace—
 May I practice making every breath
 A step from stress to timeless peace.
 (Now try to hold your attention
 As stably as possible
 On the insights you glimpsed above.)

CONCLUSION (Optional)

Quick Option: Recognize and forgive
 The shortcomings of your contemplation,
 Then close by acknowledging and committing
 Any insight or energy gained to your total self-healing.

CD Option: Resume the healing visualization to its conclusion.

Script Option: Complete steps six and seven below:

6. Through life and death, until my potential is realized
 I ask the healing presence within and around me
 To never fail me even for an instant.

7. Any insight, virtue or energy gained through this practice
 I commit to developing my full healing potential.
 By realizing my vision of health may I turn fear into mastery,
 And bring myself and my world to a healthier, happier place.

C) BETWEEN SESSION PRACTICE

The between-session practice of contemplating your potential for peace begins with
 being willing to “go with” the thought-experiment in the aftermath of meditation and/or
 in reflective moments through your day. Try to allow your wish for peace to expand to

include every aspect of your life, mental, emotional, physical, and your whole environment, social and natural. Hopefully, you can feel or imagine your sense of calm expanding out to that whole, with a deep sense of tolerance and letting go that will gradually empower you tackle the biggest problems or challenges. You may find yourself reviewing your past and imagining what could have been if you had learned to live a more peaceful, meditative life years ago. Don't worry, in meditative life even the past can be revised, as you begin to accept your life thus far as the pathway you had to take to arrive where you are now, waking up to seize each and every breath-moment as an opportunity to taste real, lasting peace. Your mind will probably begin to access the fantasies you have acquired or conjured of what will and will not bring contentment, here and hereafter. Try not to run from these, but face the hopes and fears they represent, working to see through both to create your own best narrative of where you're headed, why and how. With that narrative as an alternate frame of reference, you will probably begin to see other horizons of possibility than any you have previously imagined, future vistas in which the enhanced creative freedom and stillness meditation can bring empowers you to make some of the hard changes you felt were beyond your reach. Perhaps most importantly, you might begin to think about how you could let go of the evolutionary legacy of paranoia and defensiveness, and begin to simplify your life so it is as focused as possible on the inner progress that really does matter; the moment-to-moment acts of body, speech and mind that little by little can add up to real gains in lasting peace for you and the world around you.

Chapter Five: Help

I. Theory: Finding Guidance and Support for a Self-Healing Life

Among the factors that narrow our horizons in life, the most limiting are usually the hardest to see. Since our current lives are products of a complex history of childrearing, schooling and adaptation to our cultural environment, the very parts of our past that seem most familiar, safe and reliable to us—the people, ways and communities that have prepared us to live as we do—may ironically pose the greatest obstacles to healing change. To shape a single civilized life, it takes not just a village but a whole civilization. Not that anything is wrong with our civilization, or with the familiar role-models, information networks and social supports it offers us. Our familiar supports are not unreliable, but can only be relied on to reproduce the life we already know, with all its comforts *and* limitations. Typically, when we struggle with those limitations—aimlessness, illness and stress, isolation—we expect ourselves to be able to have what it takes to overcome them all by ourselves, or maybe with a little help from our friends. When we and our familiar supports together fail to produce real change, exasperated we often panic and grasp at straws, trying the latest upgrade, quick-fix or treatment. As quick fixes inevitably fall short, we may become open to the possibility that the limits we have run up against *seem* inexorable because they are side-effects of our whole way of life. Even when we go to the lengths of contemplating or attempting to change our lifestyle, however, all too often the means and ends we find leave us disappointed. The main reason for this, I submit, is that we grossly underestimate what it took to shape our current way of life, and consequently, what it will take to begin and sustain real change.

At some point along the way, many in our global age opt to learn to meditate, do yoga or otherwise explore non-Western alternatives. In my experience exploring and teaching these alternatives, what critically determines a person's ability to expand his or her horizons and make major change is the readiness to find and accept reliable help in an ongoing way. So however exciting it is when students find that meditation or yoga techniques seem to open up new horizons of change and offer empowering, step-by-step practices, I try to temper their excitement by recalling the traditional wisdom that real change is gradual and requires a constant supply of help in many kinds. Among the kinds of help prescribed by the contemplative traditions are healing role-models, information networks and social supports that can counteract the disease-prone patterns unconsciously learned from family, culture and society. As in previous chapters, the reflection and contemplation on help begins with facing and revising our unexamined ideas and attitudes about the amount and kind of help we need to learn, grow and change.

The conventional wisdom about help in our culture stems from two main sources. On the one hand, our ancient religions teach us to seek help from authoritative guides, scriptural traditions and worship communities specific to our particular heritage, while remaining critical or suspect of other traditions. Such exclusivist or prejudicial attitudes are typically reinforced within familial, ethnic and national communities, despite our democratic values of separation of church and state and of tolerance of individualism and pluralism. On the other hand, our modern Western traditions of scientific pragmatism stemming from the European renaissance and enlightenment teach us to be suspect of any and all help that might come from non-modern or non-Western sources. Asking us to put our trust exclusively in the science and technology of the industrial West, this modern

tradition teaches us to be skeptical or dismissive of all prior human knowledge, skill and expertise, especially if it has any links to traditions that may be deemed religious or spiritual. Reinforced by the reformation mistrust of spiritual authority or expertise and the later Protestant Christian insistence on the absolute spiritual autonomy of the individual, these modern Western traditions have the effect of making our mistrust of contemplative figures, traditions and communities “over-determined.” Even with accurate information, scientific evidence and widespread exposure, reliance on non-Western traditions like Indian yoga and meditation goes against the grain of our frontier values, especially our hard-nosed pragmatism and bent towards self-reliance and self-help. Reinforced by isolated cases of cults based on both Western and Eastern traditions, these frontier values tend to make us recoil from the culture shock that inevitably attends any serious encounter with non-Western, non-modern traditions. However adaptive they may have been in our frontier past, such attitudes pose unnecessary obstacles, especially in the present era of interdependence and globalization. In fact, they pose obstacles to finding help from any new avenues or sources, regardless of their cultural content or context.

The programs of the *Columbia Center for Meditation and Healing* were developed in part to help minimize the culture shock of Westerners seriously interested in experimenting with Indian and Tibetan contemplative practices and lifestyle alternatives. Our programs try to do so by translating those practices and lifestyles into the context of contemporary civilization, informed by modern science and technology. Nevertheless, there comes a time when most Western students of Indian meditation want to go to the original sources and cultures if they aim to continue their learning and experimentation.

And this inevitably requires a reexamination of received notions and preconceptions about reliable help.

Fortunately, my work in translating Indic alternatives is made easier by the very nature of India's contemplative traditions themselves. Without getting into the many factors that made ancient Indian civilization so distinct from its sister civilizations to the West, its traditions of yoga and meditation are unique in that they never became the exclusive domain of religion, let alone any single Indic tradition. Early on, Indian science and medicine claimed yoga and meditation as their own, in ways that protected India's contemplative traditions from being confused with any particular set of religious practices or beliefs. Instead, yoga and meditation were considered part of a tradition-neutral mind/body science and technology shared in common by all Indian cultural traditions, as well as by India's mind and health sciences. This attitude of enlightened pluralism in turn seemed to rub off on Indian religions themselves, and was reflected in a pan-Indian tradition of rational individualism and social tolerance of human contemplative or spiritual experience. Rather than requiring faith and seeking conversion, Shakyamuni Buddha for one required that his students critically examine his teachings and accept them only on the basis of reason and experiment, *not* out of faith, revelation or blind obedience. Consequently, Indian contemplative traditions developed within a competitive marketplace of sorts, in which individuals were free to experiment with different traditions and the traditions themselves openly debated and exchanged ideas and methods. To this day, teachers like His Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet advise non-Buddhists not to convert, but rather to take what they can use from his tradition and leave the rest. This may explain why Indian contemplative traditions spread so readily

throughout Asia, reportedly even to the ancient West. It certainly accounts for the ease with which Indic methods and alternatives have adapted to the cosmopolitan marketplace of American spirituality, notably here in the melting pot of New York City.

Within the Indian paradigm, the path of contemplative living is described as journey that takes us beyond our familiar home and lifestyle with the guidance of healing mentors, contemplative maps and alternative institutions. On this journey, each one of us must serve as her or his own inner guide, taking responsibility for identifying our current predicament as well as recognizing the most reliable options to orient and pursue healthy change. What would a better way of life look like? What critical limits—mental, emotional and practical—will I need to overcome in order to change? What qualities and strengths will I need to develop to support my chosen way of life? What are the best available methods for overcoming my critical limits and cultivating healing insight, motivation and skills? Which intellectual and practical traditions available to me can provide the best guidance, methods and social supports on this path of self-healing and self-development? Where can I find teachers and mentors, a network of information and social support systems with the qualities and methods I need to help me along the way? What habits of thought, feeling and action are likely to stop me from finding or fully relying on such healthy supports? And finally, how do I override those self-limiting habits?

Although we may not arrive at conclusive answers to these questions until we arrive at the healthier, happier life we seek, if we want to progress there is no alternative to taking our best shot at them now. Here again, the ancient traditions offer some helpful hints. 1) Take on your most destructive habits first. 2) Without guilt, shame or blame,

look deeply into the causes and conditionings that formed those habits and sustain them.

3) Search high and low for people who see your natural capacity to change yourself and your life, especially those who credibly report first-hand experience changing themselves.

4) Shop among the most promising “guides” for those whose explanations seem the most reasonable; whose practices seem the most feasible; and who are connected to networks of information and support that seem the most extensive and credible. 5) Be willing to critically re-examine any belief, attitude, habit or loyalty that would keep you from committing to a conclusive experiment with the most promising alternatives. In the spirit of the Indian tradition, whether or not we finally take in anything new or change any aspect of our way of life, we inevitably will be enriched by opening ourselves to other horizons from whose fresh perspective we may come to better know and care for ourselves.

II. Practice: Discursive Reflection and Focused Contemplation

A) ACTUAL PRACTICE

PRELIMINARIES

Quick Option: Finding a comfortable place to reflect,
Take a few mindful breaths in and out,
And then do your best to clear and center your mind.
Now try to conceive your most positive motivation for practice
And skip to Reflection/Contemplation sections below.

CD Option: Follow the brief mindfulness meditation to the end
Or the brief healing visualization up to, “ask your ideal healer for help.”
Then skip to the Reflection/Contemplation sections below.

Script Option: If you prefer to use a script for your contemplation,
Imagine yourself in a safe healing environment, on top of the world,
Feeling freely connected to all living beings,

Facing your image of optimal health, envisioned as yourself or another,
And read/reflect/focus on the steps below:

1. Recognizing the qualities I need to heal,
I open my mind to my full potential.
2. All my resources, mental and physical,
I devote to growing a new, healing self.
3. In all honesty I admit my limits and faults,
And vow with help to grow out of them.
4. Abandoning competition for teamwork,
I enjoy healing qualities, wherever they are.

May all life be well. May all be care-free.
May all feel real joy. May all know real peace.

5. From the bottom of my heart I ask for help
Building the insight and skills I need to heal.

Pleased to be asked, my ideal healer smiles with a glow
Like rainbow light from the heart beaming everywhere,
Drawing the wisdom, energy and care
Of all healing beings back to his/her heart,
Then beaming it to protect, clear and inspire my body-speech-mind.

REFLECTION

What are my prospects for reliable help?
How can I really rely on a person or path
Beside the familiar, that seem tried and true?
Must I leave my circle of family and friends,
To transcend the limits of the life I know?
How can I disregard my religious tradition,
By relying on unorthodox methods and views?
It is rational to put my trust in practices
That are neither scientific, modern or Western?
Can I trust anyone or anything outside myself
With my future health and happiness?
Or am I free to experiment and explore,
With anything that can open my eyes and life?
Could it be that what most limits me
Is part and parcel of the life I know best?
Could I be my own worst enemy,
Clinging for dear life to what limits me most?

What are my most self-limiting habits,
 The blind-spots that black out the healthier me?
 What causes and conditions reinforce
 The habitual blinders by which I most limit myself?
 Since none of us can see ourselves completely,
 And my limits may be overlooked even by friends,
 Perhaps a fresh viewpoint can unlock my life.
 What fresh perspective and way of life
 Holds the most promise for my healthy change?
 What kinds of role-models, networks and supports
 Can I rely on to help me most help myself?
 Why this reflective mind if not to choose
 The best guides, maps and team for my life's journey?
 Why waste this wish-fulfilling gem of a mind
 By neglecting to cut it with learning,
 To polish it with reflection, or to set it
 In a meditative life with all possible help?

CONTEMPLATION

Glimpsing my full potential
 As unlocked by true congenial guides,
 And my ultimate responsibility
 To find and accept all the help I need,
 May I reach a meditative life
 Where each challenge
 And each success is shared
 With every like heart and mind
 In every place and time
 Until all blocks to freedom
 Health and happiness are overcome,
 Like a crystal clear autumn sky
 Completely filled with pure, rainbow light.
 Alternating between these two insights—
 The spacious equanimity of self-transcendence,
 And the dreamy clarity of boundless solidarity—
 May I practice making every breath
 A step from self-limitation to shared happiness.
 (Now try to hold your attention
 As stably as possible
 On the insights you glimpsed above.)

CONCLUSION (Optional)

Quick Option: Recognize and forgive
 The shortcomings of your contemplation,

Then close by acknowledging and committing
Any insight or energy gained to your total self-healing.

CD Option: Resume the healing visualization to its conclusion.

Script Option: Complete steps six and seven below:

6. Through life and death, until my potential is realized
I ask the healing presence within and around me
To never fail me even for an instant.

7. Any insight, virtue or energy gained through this practice
I commit to developing my full healing potential.
By realizing my vision of health may I turn fear into mastery,
And bring myself and my world to a healthier, happier place.

B) BETWEEN SESSION PRACTICE

The between-session practice of contemplating reliable help begins with being willing to “go with” the thought-experiment in the aftermath of meditation and/or in reflective moments through your day. Try to allow your wish for effective help to expand to include every aspect of your life, mental, emotional, physical, and your whole environment, social and natural. Hopefully, you can feel or imagine your sense of trust and solidarity expanding out to that whole, with a deep sense of receptivity and confidence that will gradually empower you tackle the biggest problems or challenges. You may find yourself reviewing your past and imagining what could have been if you had learned to get the help you need years ago. Don’t worry, in meditative life even the past can be revised, as you begin to accept your life thus far as the pathway you had to take to arrive where you are now, waking up to seize each and every breath-moment as an opportunity to find and accept genuine guidance and support. Your mind will probably begin to access the fantasies you have acquired or conjured of what may or may not happen if you put your

trust in qualified people, tried and true traditions and healthy communities. Try not to run from these, but face the hopes and fears they represent, working to see through both to create your own best narrative of where you could be headed with all the support you need constantly at your fingertips. With that narrative as an alternate frame of reference, you will probably begin to see other horizons of possibility than any you have previously imagined, future vistas in which the expanded vision and support the right help can bring empowers you to make some of the hard changes you felt were beyond your reach.

Perhaps most importantly, you might begin to think about how you could let go of your own legacy of exclusivity, mistrust and isolation, and begin to make room in your life for the alternative models, traditions and communities that can help make your moment-to-moment acts of body, speech and mind add up to real gains for you and the world around you.

Chapter Six: Empathy

I. Theory: Living Better with Others Through Empathy

In the last two thought-experiments on peace and help, we have been exploring the new horizons of health and inner happiness opened to us by the world's great contemplative traditions. The "inner revolution" these traditions offer us is that, by shifting our aspirations and lifestyles to include the ultimate pursuit of inner peace and happiness, we place our lives on the real superhighway to health and well-being. However peaceful and private, the inner revolution sparked by meditative learning has powerful outward effects in transforming our personal relationships and social lives. Think about it. If the way to real happiness lies not in outer comforts or successes but rather in the internal taming of self-defeating killer instincts and stress responses, what becomes of our pursuit of happiness in our social lives with others?

The answer the contemplative traditions give to this complex question is simple. Inner peace has as its natural ripple effect a "velvet revolution" in our relations with others, however close or remote they may feel. There are two main reasons for this outer, peaceful revolution. First, if each one of us has a mother-load of health and happiness within, our social interactions need not be stressed or strained by insecurity, comparison and competition. Second, the extent to which any one of us finds real happiness within is also the extent to which we can be tolerant, understanding and skillful in handling the unhappiness of others.

The remainder of the exercises in this manual relate to the fourth horizon of meditative living: complementing whatever inner happiness we gain with a stress-free

ease and comfort with others. This chapter and the three that follow are meant to help us expose our own familiar social attitudes that block this fourth horizon and to explore the healing alternatives offered by the world's contemplative traditions. In fact, the four chapters of this middle section in the manual offer a series of attitudinal experiments meant to map the radical shift in attitudes toward oneself and others that can help extend our inner revolution to include all our dealings with others. The first shift we will explore is a shift in our familiar attitudes towards empathy: our natural capacity to see and feel the common humanity we share with others.

For most of us in the West, the skeptical stance we take towards empathy has been shaped both by modern science and by the modern history of Western religions. The dim view of empathy we inherit from science derives from biological and economic concepts of life as a struggle for survival or a competition for scarce resources. These concepts lead us to a one-sided picture of life in which each and every one of us is reducible to an isolated genome, struggling with every other individual for its present survival and future contribution in a war of all against all. This picture tends to portray our capacity for empathy as a rare exception to the harsh laws of nature whose value is limited to tending for kin. When extended more widely or to others in general, empathy is a mark of weakness or vice that threatens to make us unfit.

While at first blush it would seem that Western religions all encourage extending empathy to our neighbors, they also share an exclusivist strain that often limits empathy to other members of the same religious community or sect. While religious ideals like universal compassion may have done more for the peace and cohesion of the West than anything else, there have been and remain glaring exceptions and fault lines where one

tradition or sect encountered another. Perhaps most disturbing are developments in modern Europe, where Protestant traditions tended towards more extreme sectarian limits on empathy. The case of Calvinism, where notions of predestination lead to a kind of spiritual competition for outward signs of God's approval, has been linked to the rise of Capitalism in the West. It is likely that strong Calvinist influence in the New World influenced the common view of the American dream as a competition for limited outward goods like wealth, celebrity or social status. In such an exclusivist climate, others may come to be viewed as competitors for scarce spiritual resources, God's grace or its outward tokens, even when they belong to exactly the same religious community. In such cases, the competitive ethos of modern science may in fact be reinforced, not balanced, by the prevailing religious ethos in the contemporary West.

In stark contrast to the dim views of empathy we tend to inherit from our modern scientific and religious traditions, the contemplative traditions of India and Tibet offer a radical alternative. As meditation exposes our predatory instincts and post-traumatic stress habits as the critical limits on our capacity for inner peace and happiness, it opens up a radical reevaluation of empathy as a powerful untapped force for healing. Understood as the basic capacity to embrace the common humanity of every woman and man, empathy opens a level playing field in which our ability to tame our own killer instincts protects us from the stress responses in others. By taming the killer within, we grow more tolerant and less reactive to others' toxic emotions and reactivity. This protects us from the hypersensitivity and overreaction that makes intimate relationships and public environments like mine fields in which our own stress-response can be triggered in a chain reaction by the stresses of others. However vulnerable it may make us feel,

empathy is the first step in a life-saving art of unilateral disarmament or emotional “kung-fu” through which we can protect the peace of mind and inner happiness meditation brings without having to isolate ourselves from the stresses of intimacy or a competitive society. Recognizing this long ago, the mind sciences and religious traditions of India viewed unconditional or spontaneous empathy as a natural capacity vital to a lifestyle of civilized happiness. Together they developed systematic methods of exposing and transforming blocks to empathy, by cultivating our basic sense of equality, fairness and common humanity. These contemplative methods help flesh out the unconditional value Indian yoga and meditation place on empathy, offering us a clear alternative with a radically optimistic vision of our potential to build our social tolerance and skills through cultivating empathy.

Interestingly, several lines of research in brain science and medicine have begun to bring the current scientific consensus more in line with the Indic tradition. It turns out that the dim view of modern science may be little more than a nightmare, the post-traumatic flashback of a scarcity psychology that dates back to the age of the dinosaurs. While such views reinforce the eat-or-be-eaten killer instincts we inherited to survive lean times, more recent views of social evolution make clear that our mammalian ancestors specialized in social instincts and learning strategies that helped them adapt to and capitalize on conditions of relative abundance. Key to these new social emotions and behaviors is the neural capacity to tame fear and violence, and to replace them with skills like empathy, altruism and social learning. Through mutual tolerance and empathy, mammals create their own social environments within which they cultivate stable conditions of abundance, increasingly doing more with less through collaboration,

innovation and communication. The decrease in baseline stress this new mammalian strategy allows may help explain why a sense of interconnection with others seems to enhance healing and to increase overall health and longevity. If this is so, the traditional methods of overcoming blocks to empathy and gradually extending empathic attitudes of equality and fairness may indeed open a whole new horizon of tolerance and coherence in our personal and social lives.

II. Practice: Discursive Reflection and Focused Contemplation

A) ACTUAL PRACTICE

PRELIMINARIES

Quick Option: Finding a comfortable place to reflect,
Take a few mindful breaths in and out,
And then do your best to clear and center your mind.
Now try to conceive your most positive motivation for practice
And skip to Reflection/Contemplation sections below.

CD Option: Follow the brief mindfulness meditation to the end
Or the brief healing visualization up to, “ask your ideal healer for help.”
Then skip to the Reflection/Contemplation sections below.

Script Option: If you prefer to use a script for your contemplation,
Imagine yourself in a safe healing environment, on top of the world,
Feeling freely connected to all living beings,
Facing your image of optimal health, envisioned as yourself or another,
And read/reflect/focus on the steps below:

1. Recognizing the qualities I need to heal,
I open my mind to my full potential.
2. All my resources, mental and physical,
I devote to growing a new, healing self.
3. In all honesty I admit my limits and faults,
And vow with help to grow out of them.

4. Abandoning competition for teamwork,
I enjoy healing qualities, wherever they are.

May all life be well. May all be care-free.
May all feel real joy. May all know real peace.

5. From the bottom of my heart I ask for help
Building the insight and skills I need to heal.

Pleased to be asked, my ideal healer smiles with a glow
Like rainbow light from the heart beaming everywhere,
Drawing the wisdom, energy and care
Of all healing beings back to his/her heart,
Then beaming it to protect, clear and inspire my body-speech-mind.

REFLECTION

Of what value is my capacity for empathy?
Is it helpful only with family and friends,
But a weakness when extended to others?
Is empathy a moral duty I owe to all,
Or only to those who share my worldview?
How can I feel human-kindness towards others,
Who may feel mistrust or anger towards me?
Does empathy leave me vulnerable to harm
From those who feel nothing or ill-will for me?
Or can it guard my mind from being disturbed
By violent emotions from without or within?
If my ability to recognize others evolved,
What is its natural extent and use?
Can I teach myself to understand others better,
And if so, how will that help me or them?
Can feeling equal and connected to others
Help open and balance my view of the world?
Could it be that what most frightens me
Is a failure to connect with others empathically?
Could I be my own worst enemy,
Clinging to self-fulfilling mistrust and fear?
Can self-centeredness and self-enclosure backfire,
Building a prison of worst-case hypervigilance?
Since we all fear pain and want happiness equally,
Why treat myself and others so unequally?
Since we all are made of the same stuff
And all equally subject to illness and death,
How can I dwell so one-sidedly on me and mine,
Without blinding myself to a larger life-world?

Since none of us can see ourselves completely,
 And my limits may be overlooked by friends,
 Perhaps empathy for other viewpoints can free me.
 Why this reflective mind if not to choose
 The most objective and humanizing attitudes?
 Why waste this wish-fulfilling gem of a heart
 By neglecting to cut it with learning,
 To polish it with reflection, or to set it
 In a meditative life of magnanimity for all?

CONTEMPLATION

Glimpsing my full potential
 As overcoming all blocks to empathy,
 And my ultimate responsibility
 To develop a fair and equal regard for all,
 May I build a meditative life
 In which each breath partakes
 In a free flow give and take,
 Like a single, full moon
 Mirrored in ten-thousand lakes.
 Alternating between these two insights—
 The spacious equanimity of fairness to all,
 And the dreamy clarity of boundless connection—
 May I practice making every breath
 A step from self-limitation to shared happiness.
 (Now try to hold your attention
 As stably as possible
 On the insights you glimpsed above.)

CONCLUSION (Optional)

Quick Option: Recognize and forgive
 The shortcomings of your contemplation,
 Then close by acknowledging and committing
 Any insight or energy gained to your total self-healing.

CD Option: Resume the healing visualization to its conclusion.

Script Option: Complete steps six and seven below:

6. Through life and death, until my potential is realized
 I ask the healing presence within and around me
 To never fail me even for an instant.

7. Any insight, virtue or energy gained through this practice
I commit to developing my full healing potential.
By realizing my vision of health may I turn fear into mastery,
And bring myself and my world to a healthier, happier place.

B) BETWEEN SESSION PRACTICE

The between-session practice of contemplating empathy begins with being willing to “go with” the attitudinal experiment in the aftermath of meditation and/or in reflective moments through your day. Try to allow your empathic awareness of others to expand to include every human interaction and connection in your life, from the most intimate to the most remote. Hopefully, you can feel or imagine your sense of trust and solidarity expanding to include every social attitude and exchange, with a deep sense of receptivity and confidence that will gradually empower you face the most difficult relationships and widespread social challenges. You may find yourself reviewing your past and imagining what could have been if you had learned to expand your empathy years ago. Don’t worry, in meditative life even the past can be revised, as you begin to accept your life thus far as the pathway you had to take to arrive where you are now, waking up to seize each and every breath-moment as an opportunity to overcome empathic blind-spots and build your sense of fairness and humanity. Your mind will probably begin to access the fantasies you have acquired or conjured of what may or may not happen if you gradually open yourself to feeling your connection to all people, one at a time. Try not to run from these, but face the hopes and fears they represent, working to see through both to create your own best narrative of where you could be headed with all the self-empathy you need constantly at your fingertips. With that narrative as an alternate frame of reference, you

will probably be to see other horizons of possibility than any you have previously imagined, future vistas in which the humanity and magnanimity of empathic art empowers you to make some of the hard life changes you felt were beyond your reach. Perhaps most importantly, you might begin to think about how you could let go of your own legacy of exclusivity, mistrust and isolation, and begin to make room in your life for the impartial and unconditional empathy that can help make your moment-to-moment acts of body, speech and mind add up to a win-win for you and your world.

Chapter Seven: Insight

I. Theory: Disarming and Taming the “Dinosaur” Within

With our empathic ability to see through the eyes of others, it is only a matter of time before we begin to get a very different glimpse of ourselves. Empathy opens a window or mirror before which each of us faces the single most important decision in all social life: do I cling to seeing myself subjectively, as the one and only self; or, do I open my heart and mind to getting to know myself objectively, as one self among many, that is, *as another*? It would seem that everything in us should hold tight for dear life to “me, myself and I,” and rail against the dilution, dissipation or loss of self into an endless network of reflections. Life is not a hall of mirrors. And giving up our familiar sense of self would seem to be tantamount to psychological suicide.

But think again. Who are we or would we be without the mirror-like give and take with others that is the life-sustaining element in which we learn, grow and change? Isn't there something within us that prizes loving connection above all else, even our sense of autonomy or uniqueness? Come to think of it, doesn't our ability to empathically connect with others enlarge our autonomy and reveal our uniqueness? Freud believed something like this. The “I” or “ego” is not something fixed at birth, but rather a residue of the psychic investment in others whom we have loved and lost, starting of course with our parents. His current disciples and opponents agree on one thing. If anything, Freud underestimated the extent to which our selves are conceived and develop in and through social relations. Psychologists today believe that the drive to be connected to others is the

single most powerful force in human behavior, the legacy of a fifty million year transition from our first mammal ancestors to our primate and hominid next-of-kin.

So far so good. A biopsy of recent science helps us see why there is a very real part of us that is inclined to let go of our familiar sense of self and to open our hearts and minds to others so completely that we rediscover ourselves and change in the process. This science in fact lends real support to some of the most famous words of Western religion and art: “God is love;” “Love moves the sun and stars;” “All you need is love.”

The question is, what about the other part of us that doesn’t feel safe or inclined to let go? Is this self-protective instinct helpful or hurtful? Is it nature’s way of warning us when it is better not to be disarmed but armed; not to open up but to stay self-enclosed? The aim of this chapter is to explore some of the conflicting messages and attitudes we have learned about our selves in relation to others.

I suggest we begin with the most confounding messages and cultural attitudes towards self and other we inherit as moderns and as Westerners. The line dividing enlightened modernity from the “dark ages” is often drawn through the meditations of French mathematician Renee Descartes. Known for the axiom, “I think therefore I am,” Descartes is credited with displacing God and putting the human ego at the center or foundation of Western culture. In a way, we owe to Descartes our historically novel sense of the individual ego as an indivisible unity alienated from everyone and everything else. This sense of the ego as first and foremost an irreducible atom or fundamental particle of social life informs our modern Western idea of the rational, economic and political “man” as the sort of individual who thinks of, by and for himself, putting self-interest over and against public interest, individualism over and against altruism. With minor caveats, key

moderns like Darwin and Freud extended this idea of the individual as a genetic or psychic atom locked by nature in an instinctive struggle with others for biological or psychological survival.

Although these ideas appear directly opposed to Western religious values of love and compassion, in fact the modern scientific conception of ourselves as atoms alienated from others and the world has its roots in the common religious conception of us humans as discrete souls each made in the image of God. The hidden similarity linking ancient and modern Western concepts of self lies in the popular Abrahamic image of God as a unitary, solitary Self, prior to and wholly independent of the other selves and world He created. This emphasis on absolute unity and autonomy is reflected in the fact that prior archetypes of mother *and* father gods, human *and* nature gods are expunged from Biblical accounts of God and the origin of “*mankind*.” Reflecting the atomistic ideal of monotheism, our souls too were conceived as closed, autonomous units ultimately alienated from others and the world.

In contrast to these peculiarly modern and Western concepts of self and other, contemporary science and philosophy have rejected the Cartesian paradigm while religious scholarship has exposed us to alternate theologies, Western and Eastern. Current psychology and science increasingly favor ideas of the self that are mirror images of our modern self-concept. Instead of a self like an atom, they see a relational or fluid self that is primarily social or public and only secondarily personal or private. In these new images, the atomic ego now appears as a more or less pernicious illusion, perhaps even a primal *delusion*, anchoring the social pathologies of alienation, isolationism, racism and sexism. Likewise, economists in our era of globalization have tempered their notions of

free market competition and think in terms of market synergies, global interdependence and win-win solutions. In medicine, one key study done by psychologist Larry Scherwitz on disease-prone personality styles found that those whose internal dialogue revolves more around themselves than others are more likely to develop heart disease, suffer heart attacks and die from them. These are just a few examples of how current research gives us ample reason to suspect that the natural tendency to cling to oneself and mistrust others may not be rational, pragmatic or healthy at all. In fact, contemporary psychology treats the split off or schizoid self-sense as an archaic vestige of childhood traumas; the hub of most disease prone habits; and a magnet for later stresses that trigger traumatic reactions and the stress response itself. In this sense, the alienated self-sense is the conscious tip on the iceberg of eat-or-be-eaten killer instincts I call “the dinosaur within.”

As scientific views of self are becoming more social, dogmatic views of religion are being reshaped by contemplative traditions that emphasize fluid experiences of self-transcendence or interconnection over rigid concepts of God and the soul. This trend is linked with growing interest in Asian religions, which tend to view our instinctive clinging to self as the prime obstacle to spiritual progress. Fed by the Buddhist insight that freedom from habitual roles and self-enclosure is the door to personal and social well-being, this trend has also lead many to revalue ancient Western ideas of a negative way to experience divine love and peace. In this contemplative context, much as in current psychology, the ordinary sense of self as alienated from others and the world is seen as humanity’s self-limiting demon, the psychological truth underlying myths of an evil demon or devil.

In reflecting on such insights, we may over time grow convinced of the self-limiting or even self-defeating nature of our obsessive preoccupation with self. We may even grow mindful of the knee-jerk way in which that preoccupation makes us magnets for stress and chains us to the worst case fears of our childhood and evolutionary past. Learning how to see through that obsession and disarm our self-enclosing reflexes however is easier said than done. The purpose of this chapter's attitude-experiment is to help prime the mind to see through its own worst-case confusion as well as to help the heart practice letting go of insecurity and opening up to others and the world.

II. Practice: Discursive Reflection and Focused Contemplation

A) ACTUAL PRACTICE

PRELIMINARIES

Quick Option: Finding a comfortable place to reflect,
Take a few mindful breaths in and out,
And then do your best to clear and center your mind.
Now try to conceive your most positive motivation for practice
And skip to Reflection/Contemplation sections below.

CD Option: Follow the brief mindfulness meditation to the end
Or the brief healing visualization up to, "ask your ideal healer for help."
Then skip to the Reflection/Contemplation sections below.

Script Option: If you prefer to use a script for your contemplation,
Imagine yourself in a safe healing environment, on top of the world,
Feeling freely connected to all living beings,
Facing your image of optimal health, envisioned as yourself or another,
And read/reflect/focus on the steps below:

1. Recognizing the qualities I need to heal,
I open my mind to my full potential.
2. All my resources, mental and physical,
I devote to growing a new, healing self.

3. In all honesty I admit my limits and faults,
And vow with help to grow out of them.
4. Abandoning competition for teamwork,
I enjoy healing qualities, wherever they are.

May all life be well. May all be care-free.
May all feel real joy. May all know real peace.

5. From the bottom of my heart I ask for help
Building the insight and skills I need to heal.

Pleased to be asked, my ideal healer smiles with a glow
Like rainbow light from the heart beaming everywhere,
Drawing the wisdom, energy and care
Of all healing beings back to his/her heart,
Then beaming it to protect, clear and inspire my body-speech-mind.

REFLECTION

How reliable is my habitual self-sense?
Is it my hero, shielding me from a hostile world,
Or my worst enemy, turning me against friends?
Is this sense of being all alone in the world real,
Or a flashback from my childhood or animal past?
If I'm really a stranger in a strange land,
What part of me is so alien to all around?
Where is the atom or gene in me alien to all other life,
Or the word, thought or image no other can share?
Isn't my body linked to all other life,
And my mind, a wave in a great sea of mind?
If my spiritual essence or soul is aloof,
Above and beyond other beings and the world,
How can that essence connect with my life
Or find love or peace in my day to day world?
If my health and happiness lies in relationship,
What are the costs of my self-enclosed mind?
Could it be that what most threatens me
Is the reflex to close myself in from the world?
Could that reflex be my worst enemy,
The demon that fills me with shame, fear and rage?
Can self-enclosure lock me in like a suit of armor,
Building a prison of alienation and overkill?
If such confusion shuts me off from the world,
How can I free myself from the demon within?

Once the dinosaur in me has poisoned my mind
 With worst-case terror and the toxins of stress,
 How can I stop to disarm and tame it?
 Am I ready to see through myself,
 Trusting others as mirrors to see my blind-spots?
 Am I ready to let go of mistrust and doubt,
 And trust enough to break out of my shell?
 Why this reflective mind if not to choose
 The most objective outlook and attitudes?
 Why waste this wish-fulfilling gem of a mind
 By neglecting to cut it with learning,
 To polish it with reflection, or to set it
 In a meditative life of self-transcendence?

CONTEMPLATION

Glimpsing my full potential
 As overcoming all blocks to insight,
 And my ultimate responsibility
 To develop an objective view of myself,
 May I build a meditative life
 In which each insight helps
 Expose and dispel my worst demon,
 Like a pure autumn sky
 Cleared by radiant dawn.
 Alternating between these two insights—
 The spacious equanimity of freedom from bias,
 And the dreamy closeness of endless connection—
 May I practice making every breath
 A step from self-enclosure to full openness.
 (Now try to hold your attention
 As stably as possible
 On the insights you glimpsed above.)

CONCLUSION (Optional)

Quick Option: Recognize and forgive
 The shortcomings of your contemplation,
 Then close by acknowledging and committing
 Any insight or energy gained to your total self-healing.

CD Option: Resume the healing visualization to its conclusion.

Script Option: Complete steps six and seven below:

6. Through life and death, until my potential is realized

I ask the healing presence within and around me
To never fail me even for an instant.

7. Any insight, virtue or energy gained through this practice
I commit to developing my full healing potential.
By realizing my vision of health may I turn fear into mastery,
And bring myself and my world to a healthier, happier place.

B) BETWEEN SESSION PRACTICE

The between-session practice of contemplating insight begins with being willing to “go with” the attitudinal experiment in the aftermath of meditation and/or in reflective moments through your day. Try to allow your awareness of your habitual self-sense to expand to include every human interaction and connection in your life, from the most intimate to the most remote. Sooner or later you will feel your self-protective reflexes tainting your whole social attitude and limiting your every interchange. This insight may begin to help you observe the deep sense of isolation and mistrust that pervades most human relationships and social interactions. You may find yourself reviewing your past and acknowledging how a habitual self-enclosed sense has limited your capacity for honest self-analysis and openness to other viewpoints and attitudes. Don’t worry, in meditative life even the past can be revised, as you begin to accept your life thus far as the pathway you had to take to arrive where you are now, waking up to seize each and every breath-moment as an opportunity to overcome this ultimate blind-spot and build your insight and open-mindedness. Your mind will probably begin to access the fantasies you have acquired or conjured of what may or may not happen if you gradually lower your guard and disarm your inner sense of alienation, bit by bit. Try not to run from

these, but face the fears and potentials they represent, working to see through both to create your own best narrative of where you could be headed with all the insight need to see through yourself and climb out of your own traumatized mind. With that narrative as an alternate frame of reference, you will probably begin to see other horizons of possibility than any you have previously imagined, future vistas in which the objectivity and openness of self-insight empowers you to make some of the hard life changes you felt were beyond your reach. Perhaps most importantly, you might begin to think about how you could let go of your own legacy of mistrust and isolation, and begin to make room in your life for the confidence and curiosity that can help make your moment-to-moment acts of body, speech and mind add up to a win-win for you and your world.

Chapter Eight: Humanity

I. Theory: Nurturing the Sociable, “Mammal” Self

Learning to disarm and tame the dinosaur within is helpful not just because it stops the internal rat race of self-driven isolation and fear, but even more so because it takes the brake off the emergence and growth of the trusting, sociable “mammal within.” While the self-enclosing instincts we looked at in the last chapter may be as old as life itself, the sociable instincts on which our humanity depends are just fifty million years old, give or take. Of course, the capacities for empathy and self-transcendence which make mammals so social in turn rest on instincts for love, growth and change as old as life itself. But while these primal life-giving instincts were opposed for most of evolution by equal and opposite killer instincts, the newer, mammalian part of us stems almost wholly from the loving, growing side of our nature. It is a commonplace of civilization that what is most valuable in humanity—our genius for communication and cooperation—critically depends on renouncing violence and extending human-kindness. The purpose of this chapter is to examine that commonplace; to ask whether in fact we fully recognize and exploit the benefits of our mammal selves, or rather underestimate and neglect the “mammal within” at our own expense.

Our reflection and contemplation on insight touched on many of the messages and attitudes that color our perception of humanity. If the Cartesian legacy of the modern West elevated self-centered thinking over altruism, it also devalued the social emotions of love and compassion celebrated by Western religions as the divine spark in human nature. Where the medieval world credited the Christian ethos of love with saving Rome,

modern Europeans blamed it for the decline and fall of the West. As the renaissance gave way to the enlightenment, love and compassion came to be seen as “effeminate” virtues. Instead, the opposing values of calculated self-interest and aggressive action were held up as part of a new, “masculine” ethos of military survival and industrial fitness. While the industrial and colonial nations of Europe rose to world dominance, the culture of Christianity itself was “reformed” by a “protestant” ethos sociologist Max Weber called the “spirit of capitalism.” With this, even Christianity took on a masculine face. Where the medieval tradition had deified Mary as a form of the Mother Goddess the Greeks called Sophia, modern Europe suppressed this feminist devotion and resurrected an older, imperial cult of the crucified Christ. Meanwhile the monastic orders that did so much to tame and school Europe were abandoned as “corrupt” and “effeminate,” because they drained the work force by offering women and men a non-violent lifestyle of contemplative self-development. Eventually, the ancient Abrahamic ethos of love and compassion was denounced by great minds like Darwin, Marx and Freud, as a drug put in the holy water to render the mass of humanity more docile and harmless. Whether we listen to modern science or religion, the puritanical message and attitude most of us inherit as Westerners now is that love and care are a sort of corruption, the fat we may taste but must burn to stay fit.

Although the stance we moderns take towards human-kindness seems simply pragmatic, some recent findings in science and religion suggest that it may in fact be not only a bit cynical but quite impractical. As views of evolution begin to account for Darwin’s observations on the key role of sociability, traits like empathy and altruism are being recognized not as wasteful fat but as the meat and bones of mammalian life,

especially in humans, the most social mammals. Current insights in neuroscience seem to suggest that this assessment is especially true of the “sweet meat” of the human brain, which researchers now view as a highly impressionable or “plastic” organ most fit for social-emotional learning. Neuropsychiatry and stress research agree, showing how stress, trauma, fear and violence all seem to inhibit plasticity and learning, while relaxed and pleasant social stimulation like grooming and petting have the opposite effect: enhancing plasticity, brain growth and learning. In the new fields of neuroimmunology and mind/body medicine, a wide range of findings from diverse research areas increasingly suggest that positive social-emotional states like love, joy and care may help boost immune response, speed recovery and foster survival.

If the revaluation of love and care by recent science persists, it may lend credence to one of the more historic trends in modern religious scholarship and dialogue. Though increasing contact between different religions on our shrinking planet may sometimes be explosive, the meeting of Western and Asian religious traditions is also reinforcing their common emphasis on human-kindness, universal love and compassion. In particular, the contemplative methods these traditions developed to help ordinary individuals build the mammalian emotions of tolerance, trust, love, joy and care are beginning to enjoy a global revival. If it continues, especially with the clarification and support of new science, this revival may promise real gains in the quality of civilized life, in a wide range of areas from social stress-reduction and mind/body healing to education, the media and corporate culture.

The reflection and contemplation that follows will hopefully help you examine your attitudes about love and care and experiment with alternatives.

II. Practice: Discursive Reflection and Focused Contemplation

A) ACTUAL PRACTICE

PRELIMINARIES

Quick Option: Finding a comfortable place to reflect,
Take a few mindful breaths in and out,
And then do your best to clear and center your mind.
Now try to conceive your most positive motivation for practice
And skip to Reflection/Contemplation sections below.

CD Option: Follow the brief mindfulness meditation to the end
Or the brief healing visualization up to, “ask your ideal healer for help.”
Then skip to the Reflection/Contemplation sections below.

Script Option: If you prefer to use a script for your contemplation,
Imagine yourself in a safe healing environment, on top of the world,
Feeling freely connected to all living beings,
Facing your image of optimal health, envisioned as yourself or another,
And read/reflect/focus on the steps below:

1. Recognizing the qualities I need to heal,
I open my mind to my full potential.
2. All my resources, mental and physical,
I devote to growing a new, healing self.
3. In all honesty I admit my limits and faults,
And vow with help to grow out of them.
4. Abandoning competition for teamwork,
I enjoy healing qualities, wherever they are.

May all life be well. May all be care-free.
May all feel real joy. May all know real peace.

5. From the bottom of my heart I ask for help
Building the insight and skills I need to heal.

Pleased to be asked, my ideal healer smiles with a glow
Like rainbow light from the heart beaming everywhere,
Drawing the wisdom, energy and care
Of all healing beings back to his/her heart,
Then beaming it to protect, clear and inspire my body-speech-mind.

REFLECTION

Of what value is my capacity for love and care?
 Are they helpful only with family and friends,
 But impractical when extended to others?
 Are love and care duties I owe all humanity,
 Or only to those who share my interests?
 How can I feel human-kindness towards others,
 Who may feel mistrust or anger towards me?
 Do love and care leave me vulnerable to harm
 From those who feel nothing or ill-will for me?
 Or can it guard my mind from being disturbed
 By violent emotions from without or within?
 If my ability to wish others well evolved,
 What is its natural extent and use?
 Can I teach myself to tolerate others better,
 And if so, how will that help me or them?
 Can feeling positively connected to others
 Help inspire and energize my life in the world?
 Could it be that what most frightens me
 Is a failure to care for myself and others?
 Could I be my own worst enemy,
 Clinging to self-fulfilling fear, anger or shame?
 Can narrow self-cherishing backfire,
 Building a prison of compulsion and isolation?
 Since my life always depends on others' care,
 Why limit my sense of gratitude and concern?
 Since I'm always surrounded by others,
 Won't care and tolerance help me live, practically?
 If higher intelligence feeds on social emotions,
 Won't more joy and care help unlock my true genius?
 Why this reflective mind if not to choose
 The most protective and empowering attitudes?
 Why waste this wish-fulfilling gem of a heart
 By neglecting to cut it with learning,
 To polish it with reflection, or to set it
 In a meditative life of human-kindness for all?

CONTEMPLATION

Glimpsing my full potential
 As overcoming all blocks to joy,
 And my ultimate responsibility
 To develop human-kindness for all,
 May I build a meditative life

In which each breath partakes
 In a free flow give and take,
 Like a single, full moon
 Mirrored in ten-thousand lakes.
 Alternating between these two insights—
 The spacious equanimity of unconditional joy,
 And the dreamy clarity of boundless concern—
 May I practice making every breath
 A step from self-limitation to shared happiness.
 (Now try to hold your attention
 As stably as possible
 On the insights you glimpsed above.)

CONCLUSION (Optional)

Quick Option: Recognize and forgive
 The shortcomings of your contemplation,
 Then close by acknowledging and committing
 Any insight or energy gained to your total self-healing.

CD Option: Resume the healing visualization to its conclusion.

Script Option: Complete steps six and seven below:

6. Through life and death, until my potential is realized
 I ask the healing presence within and around me
 To never fail me even for an instant.

7. Any insight, virtue or energy gained through this practice
 I commit to developing my full healing potential.
 By realizing my vision of health may I turn fear into mastery,
 And bring myself and my world to a healthier, happier place.

B) BETWEEN SESSION PRACTICE

The between-session practice of contemplating love and compassion begins with being willing to “go with” the attitudinal experiment in the aftermath of meditation and/or in reflective moments through your day. Try to allow your tolerance and care of others to expand to include every human interaction and connection in your life, from the

most intimate to the most remote. Hopefully, you can feel or imagine your sense of trust and solidarity expanding to include every social attitude and exchange, with a deep sense of humanity and concern that will gradually empower you face the most difficult relationships and widespread social challenges. You may find yourself reviewing your past and imagining what could have been if you had learned to expand your human-kindness years ago. Don't worry, in meditative life even the past can be revised, as you begin to accept your life thus far as the pathway you had to take to arrive where you are now, waking up to seize each and every breath-moment as an opportunity to build your sense of humanity. Your mind will probably begin to access the fantasies you have acquired or conjured of what may or may not happen if you gradually open yourself to feeling your connection to all people, one at a time. Try not to run from these, but face the hopes and fears they represent, working to see through both to create your own best narrative of where you could be headed with all the self-love and self-care you need constantly at your fingertips. With that narrative as an alternate frame of reference, you will probably begin to see other horizons of possibility than any you have previously imagined, future vistas in which a more inspired humanity empowers you to make some of the hard life changes you felt were beyond your reach. Perhaps most importantly, you might begin to think about how you could let go of your own legacy of isolation, and begin to make room in your life for the unconditional concern for all life that can help make your moment-to-moment acts of body, speech and mind add up to a win-win for you and your world.

Chapter Nine: Leadership

I. Theory: Choosing Your Objective, Magnanimous Self

The final step in the shift from a stress-reactive social life of self-enclosure to a proactive one of social engagement is the most difficult and decisive. After leveling the playing field with empathy, we have been trying to strike a healthy balance between the self-protective instinct to “look out for number one” and the social instinct to see ourselves objectively, as one self among many. Most of us go through life in this way, trying to maintain our balance and/or forward motion, while precariously keeping one foot in the old world of our inner dinosaur and one in the new world of our inner mammal. Typically we like to imagine that we can have it both ways. We think we can give our mammal full play at home, while donning our dinosaur armor each time we venture outdoors to do battle in a dog-eat-dog world. The attitude-shifts introduced in the last three chapters are meant to help us test that unexamined idea and try on for size a mindful way of being ourselves with others. Reviewing the first three steps in this shift helps set the stage for this final, decisive one.

The first shift—away from automatic self-protection towards empathy—helps to reality-check our unconscious assumption that we and our loved ones are somehow different from others and theirs. Feeling our way into more objective attitudes of mutual recognition, fairness and equality towards others opens up the possibility that we may no longer need to wall ourselves off from the rest of life. Developing an empathic sensitivity towards any and all that lives helps us avoid oscillating between extremes of hypersensitivity towards ourselves and insensitivity towards others. With unbiased

observation of our own life and the lives of others, we may begin to notice that the same habitual isolation, resentment and fear that mires us in self-enclosure simultaneously mires those around us in their own myopic cages, no matter how close, indifferent or remote they seem. The first step towards empathy thus helps us try on a more balanced attitude of impartiality from which to reexamine our stance towards ourselves and others.

The second step in the attitude-shift we have explored helps us examine the stress-reactive habits and self-protective instincts I call “the dinosaur self.” Does donning the age-old armor of worst-case expectation and fight-or-flight instincts actually protect us or simply burden us? Although in the final analysis this question must be answered on a case-by-case basis by each one of us, provisionally the attitude-experiments we explored above offer some general answers from current science and the world’s contemplative traditions. The gist of these is that stress-reactive habits and instincts are generally ill-suited to the challenges of civilized life, offering little protection while imposing real burdens. The problem is, they disable the higher intelligence and social skills our lives demand while imposing destructive wear-and-tear on our bodies and minds. The original overkill, they are humanity’s natural form of the cold-war policy of “mutual assured destruction,” only worse, since their chemical weapons are triggered by the slightest stresses and repeatedly released inside us all. The challenge we face in exposing and taming this killer within result from its deceptive psychology and physiology: we identify with our worst-case fantasies of isolation and fear; and are hooked on the endorphin rush by which our inner dinosaur keeps hold of our bodies and minds.

The third step in the attitude-shift we have explored is to reassess the potential of human values like universal compassion and of social instincts for human-kindness. Here again, in the final analysis this assessment must be made by each of us, case by case. The general advice offered by current science and the world's contemplative traditions is that positive social emotions like love, care and joy, along with the love-growth instincts behind them appear better suited to the challenges of civilized life. The deceptive strength of the mammal within is such that it seems to offer more protection and less risk, despite appearances to the contrary. This is because our inner mammal supports our higher intelligence and social skills, while nurturing the kinder, gentler physiology that promotes healing and learning, growth and repair. The challenge we face here is to exercise our kinder, gentler selves in spite of the skepticism of the modern age and how vulnerable it makes us feel in an addictive and competitive world.

The final step in the attitude-shift advised by current research and contemplative tradition is to decisively commit to disarming the dinosaur within and empowering the warm-blooded mammal instead. However logical this step is once we lay the groundwork for it in unbiased observation of ourselves and our world, there is no denying how much it feels like a leap of faith. The challenge here is not to push ourselves to leap, but rather to face ourselves and our world with unflinching honesty. Great shifts in evolution as in everyday life are rarely made in one leap, by making our mind up overnight. Instead, our minds are made up for us by a barely perceptible, cumulative process of incremental changes over long periods of time. Yet as in physics, our minds can and do constantly project the final outcome of these infinitesimal shifts, in a kind of intuitive calculus. Unlike in physics, however, the math we need is a first-person calculus of pleasure and

pain, stress and relief. Is the kinder, gentler path really kinder and gentler to our bodies and minds? Is it really possible or safe to disarm our inner dinosaur, the traumatized child and cornered killer within? As we continue the contemplative experiments that compare and contrast what it feels like to live with others from a reactive inner stance of fear, anger or shame, versus a proactive stance of confidence, tolerance and acceptance, our minds will naturally plot the two trajectories.

The attitude we try on for size in this final step is this. What would it be like to have the clarity and self-confidence to no longer identify ourselves as victims of evolution, childhood or everyday life, but rather as lucky winners? What would it take to make the bold decision to retire our inner survivor and fully enlist the kinder, gentler mammal within as our guide for life? How would it be to live with others through proactive engagement, as if there were no Berlin wall separating “us” from “them?” Of course, when we contemplate this final step in such sweeping terms, it seems hard to imagine. Nonetheless, each of us has a wealth of very tangible experience with this step, although we may not have recognized the full significance and value of that experience. Whenever and wherever we have felt safe and strong enough to take responsibility for any social challenge—whether as students, professionals, parents or just good friends—we have been quietly exercising the mammal within. However diverse the circumstances, our answer to the call of leadership eventually involves growing out of our disempowered, armored stance and growing into a can-do, win-win stance. The results of this step in personal development alone are typically enormous, although most of us set a glass ceiling on how high and far we can rise above our worst-case expectations towards such a leadership stance.

Beyond our own personal experience, a growing number of researchers from various fields are providing us with encouraging news about our human social talent for leadership. Stress researchers like Bruce McEwan are increasingly encouraging us to be bold in our attitudes about stress, arguing that we can break the self-fulfilling cycle of trauma and reach an “end” to its worst-case psychology and physiology. Related to this the consensus of neuroscientists and psychologists like Eric Kandel and Daniel Kegan is that human mind-brain development is a potentially endless, creative process in which we either “use it or lose it.” Making a decisive step toward optimism is a calculated investment that seems to pay off in many domains, including health and happiness, according to Martin Seligman and other “positive psychologists.” In terms of pragmatic disciplines like the law, NYU’s Thomas Nagel urges us to “climb out” of our self-centered myopia by exercising what he calls our “objective selves.” In popular spirituality, scholars like Elaine Pagels have argued that the sharp distinction between our humanity and divinity was a theological convention influenced by the politics of social control in the Roman era. Meanwhile, Indian religious traditions that see the divine potential in each of us as our true self are enjoying increasing acceptance and interest in the West. The purpose of this week’s reflection and contemplation is to help each of you find ways to be your own inner leader and guide, by taking responsibility for your way of being in the world.

II. Practice: Discursive Reflection and Focused Contemplation

A) ACTUAL PRACTICE

PRELIMINARIES

Quick Option: Finding a comfortable place to reflect,
Take a few mindful breaths in and out,
And then do your best to clear and center your mind.
Now try to conceive your most positive motivation for practice
And skip to Reflection/Contemplation sections below.

CD Option: Follow the brief mindfulness meditation to the end
Or the brief healing visualization up to, “ask your ideal healer for help.”
Then skip to the Reflection/Contemplation sections below.

Script Option: If you prefer to use a script for your contemplation,
Imagine yourself in a safe healing environment, on top of the world,
Feeling freely connected to all living beings,
Facing your image of optimal health, envisioned as yourself or another,
And read/reflect/focus on the steps below:

1. Recognizing the qualities I need to heal,
I open my mind to my full potential.
2. All my resources, mental and physical,
I devote to growing a new, healing self.
3. In all honesty I admit my limits and faults,
And vow with help to grow out of them.
4. Abandoning competition for teamwork,
I enjoy healing qualities, wherever they are.

May all life be well. May all be care-free.
May all feel real joy. May all know real peace.

5. From the bottom of my heart I ask for help
Building the insight and skills I need to heal.

Pleased to be asked, my ideal healer smiles with a glow
Like rainbow light from the heart beaming everywhere,
Drawing the wisdom, energy and care
Of all healing beings back to his/her heart,
Then beaming it to protect, clear and inspire my body-speech-mind.

REFLECTION

Can I really choose my sociable self,
Or must I live torn between trust and fear?
Can I really commit to human-kindness

Without opening myself to victimization?
 Without the armor of my dinosaur self,
 How can I face conflict and competition?
 Without fangs, claws or shell,
 Can my sensitive mammal self really thrive?
 Have I really arrived at a good-enough place
 To let go of my worst-case fears and instincts?
 How many successes will it take
 To know that my mammal is smart enough
 And good enough to lead me through life?
 What would it feel like to face others as kin
 And commit myself to acceptance and care?
 Am I strong enough to face others' anger and fear
 And lead the way with tolerance and confidence?
 Could I be the calm person on the boat,
 Who prevails amid dog-eat-dog mistrust and shame?
 Could it be that the struggle we all face
 Is not with each other but with our own past?
 Perhaps I can help shift the balance of life
 Away from self-imposed scarcity to win-win abundance?
 Perhaps if I let go of the burden of self-enclosure,
 I can build the good-will to make a real difference?
 If I commit all my insight and energy from here on
 To the big picture and big heart of my mammal self
 Perhaps I can free my self and world from fear and shame.
 Why this reflective mind if not to choose
 The most enlarging and empowering attitudes?
 Why waste this wish-fulfilling gem of a heart
 By neglecting to cut it with learning,
 To polish it with reflection, or to set it
 In a life of mindful leadership for all?

CONTEMPLATION

Glimpsing my full potential
 As overcoming all blocks to self-transcendence,
 And my ultimate responsibility
 To commit myself to leading all,
 May I build a meditative life
 In which each breath partakes
 In unbounded openness and warmth,
 Like a rising sun
 Dispelling any shadow of doubt.
 Alternating between these two insights—
 The spacious equanimity of an objective mind,
 And the dreamy clarity of a larger concern—

May I practice making every breath
 A step from self-limitation to shared happiness.
 (Now try to hold your attention
 As stably as possible
 On the insights you glimpsed above.)

CONCLUSION (Optional)

Quick Option: Recognize and forgive
 The shortcomings of your contemplation,
 Then close by acknowledging and committing
 Any insight or energy gained to your total self-healing.

CD Option: Resume the healing visualization to its conclusion.

Script Option: Complete steps six and seven below:

6. Through life and death, until my potential is realized
 I ask the healing presence within and around me
 To never fail me even for an instant.

7. Any insight, virtue or energy gained through this practice
 I commit to developing my full healing potential.
 By realizing my vision of health may I turn fear into mastery,
 And bring myself and my world to a healthier, happier place.

B) BETWEEN SESSION PRACTICE

The between-session practice of contemplating our potential for leadership begins with being willing to “go with” the attitudinal experiment in the aftermath of meditation and/or in reflective moments through your day. Try to allow your decisive clarity and confidence to expand to include every human interaction and connection in your life, from the most intimate to the most remote. Hopefully, you can feel or imagine your sense of objectivity and optimism expanding to include every social attitude and exchange, with a deep sense of responsibility that will gradually empower you face the most

difficult relationships and widespread social challenges. You may find yourself reviewing your past and imagining what could have been if you had learned to expand your leadership skills years ago. Don't worry, in meditative life even the past can be revised, as you begin to accept your life thus far as the pathway you had to take to arrive where you are now, waking up to seize each and every breath-moment as an opportunity to build your capacity to outgrow yourself. Your mind will probably begin to access the fantasies you have acquired or conjured of what may or may not happen if you gradually open yourself to feeling empowered and responsible with others, one at a time. Try not to run from these, but face the hopes and fears they represent, working to see through both to create your own best narrative of where you could be headed with all the self-awareness and confidence you need constantly at your fingertips. With that narrative as an alternate frame of reference, you will probably begin to see other horizons of possibility than any you have previously imagined, future vistas in which a more inspired sense of leadership empowers you to make some of the hard life changes you felt were beyond your reach. Perhaps most importantly, you might begin to think about how you could let go of your own legacy of vacillation, and begin to make room in your life for the responsibility for all life that can help make your moment-to-moment acts of body, speech and mind add up to a win-win for you and your world.

Chapter Ten: Mentoring

I. Theory: Using Mentors as Role-Models of Leadership

Assuming we choose the decisive shift from our inner dinosaur to our mammal selves, more contemplative life-paths open up to us. No sooner do we commit to engaging the world by building our mammalian skills for leadership than we face more life-altering choices. How do we want to go about building our leadership skills? The main routes offered by the world's contemplative traditions are two: social and cultural. The social route involves a gradual, incremental shift away from our habitual self-enclosed selves and towards more objective, magnanimous selves able to set a living example for others still mired in stress-reactivity. It works by patiently joining the insight we need to climb out of our own self-enclosure together with leadership skills like tolerance, effort and care, which help us effectively meet the self-enclosure of others. Planting seeds that we gradually nurse until they bear fruit in an organic, new way of being, this route is a labor of love. We must prepare the soil of our hearts and minds, choose what skills to plant there, and nurture each skill separately, one meditation session and one social exchange at a time. Those of you who prefer this slow and gentle path may be drawn to practices like Christian heart-prayer, Theravadin loving-kindness, Tibetan mind-training, Hindu devotional-yoga, or the secular yogas of political activism, random kindness or charitable causes.

What about the other, cultural route to leadership? Rather than moving at the gentle pace of mother nature, this route is the superhighway to effective leadership. It will naturally appeal to those of you who are passionate about what you do, perhaps even a bit

type A. I call it the cultural route because it moves at the lightning speed of culture or civilization, as well as because it involves making a difference that is mass-producible. Rather than simply leading with a more socially skillful way of being, this route prepares one to lead with a better product as well: a more enlightened way of doing business; a healthier, happier style of art, science, leisure or entertainment; a better idea. The point is not the product but the linkage between our untapped social skills and our creativity. This route is faster because, rather than start with the seeds of a more sociable way of being, we start with the fully mature fruit. That is, we start by identifying examples of people who live and work in ways that seem healthier, happier, more visionary or inspired than what we would otherwise imagine for ourselves. Then, using the natural programs for imitation that drive our social learning from parents, heroes, teachers, mentors, we use those people as templates or rather catalysts for our development of social skills.

Because this cultural route starts from the destination and plots the most direct way between where we are now and our goal, our leadership process gets jump-started in several ways. First, in this orientation, we grow leadership by multi-task learning. Rather than plant each skill we need one by one from seed, we start by transplanting an entire farm of skills, already landscaped in an organic whole, then grow them all simultaneously towards one mega-harvest. This not only is more efficient in labor and time, but also gives us more choice and control over the final outcome. Secondly, because the mentoring process provides constant feedback and quality-control, whether by explicit dialogue or tacit comparison, it spares us the trouble of unnecessary trail and error. Finally, because the mentoring process is deeply social in nature, it taps into the deep programs we have as mammals to commune and play, programs like sharing a vision and

inspiration. All of us who have had at least one exceptional parent, teacher or mentor of anything know that a win-win apprenticeship with a master is nature's way of doing more with less. Such role-modeling is the backbone of every culture and civilization. The cultural mode of contemplative practice makes a science and art of that natural process.

If this sounds interesting or even appealing in some way, it helps to examine the internal blocks most of us have to this fast track way of handling social-emotional stress. By far the most common and serious of these is our familiar, habitual self-concept or self-image. For a precious few of us, the problem may be a myopic pride. However healthy the pride we take in all we have learned, gained or achieved through our lives, like most people we may not stop to consider what it all means to the world around us. We may already have resources and skills that could make an enormous difference to others, but never imagine ourselves investing these in our world. A myopic pride blocks us from aspiring to or earning a still larger sense of healthy pride, based on helping not just ourselves and our loved ones but a larger circle of people. Resting on our laurels, we may grow old before our time or cynical about the state of the world, yet never dream that by building our leadership skills or creativity we could keep ourselves young through learning while at the same time making a difference in our world.

For most of us, the problem is not myopic pride but a myopic sense of humility, inadequacy or shame. Brainwashed by our family, culture or religious upbringing to see ourselves as somehow less than someone else, be it a parent, sibling, celebrity or saint, we tend to drastically underestimate our potential contribution to the world. Convinced we are incapable of leadership or creativity, we inwardly shrink from the thought and avoid situations that might stir a buried dream or inspiration. Never feeling good about

ourselves and what we have learned, gained or achieved, we waste our precious potential by trying endlessly to please others or to make up for our supposed deficits. It never occurs to us that most of those around us who seem to feel so good about themselves may in fact have little more to offer or feel just as inadequate inside as we do. We may not recognize that our humility may be nothing more than a realistic assessment of the enormity of the challenges facing any one human being, no matter how great or talented. And we may not realize that our sense of inadequacy could be useful in helping expose the imagined or real limits we must overcome to live in a way we can take healthy pride in.

Of course, most of us live with a self-concept or image that is not written in stone, but may constantly vacillate between these extremes. In a sense, the extremes boil down to one and the same crucial mistake: basing our estimate of ourselves myopically on what goes on in our heads or in our homes, rather than objectively on what goes on in the world. And while these two kinds of myopia may feel fairly different, they both work to limit us in very similar ways. By not climbing out of our own self-enclosure to see ourselves as one human being among a mass of humanity or a whole sea of life, we cling to a fixed estimate of our potential that stops our growth, whether that estimate is inflated or deflated. Once we fix our sense of self on any particular role or place in life, we stop growing, dead in our tracks. This despite the fact that we humans more than any of our mammal ancestors or any other form of life have thrived because we evolved the ability to constantly retool ourselves in response to new challenges. As the consummate mammals, learning, growing and changing *are* our life. Imitating others, leading others,

is who we are. Whatever inside us stops this process, whether pride, shame, or both, stops our life.

The cultural route to leadership through mentoring is not only good for others, but good for ourselves. In the popular obsession with comparing ourselves to “winners” or “losers,” we see our natural tendency to locate ourselves socially gone haywire. Such idle comparisons are one of the ways we reinforce self-limiting shame or pride, along with our own preconceived self-image. The healthiest place to focus our comparing social mind is on those who inspire us to be more than we think we can be; and eventually on those we in turn can inspire. The art of mentoring involves two complementary motions: recognizing in others the social skills we want for ourselves, and recognizing our own capacity to reproduce them with the help of models. Both of these motions reinforce our potential for leadership in different ways, the first overcoming myopic pride, and the second, myopic humility. The art itself sets up a lifeline on which we can safely place our comparing mind, and feed its hunger to set our sights on the next larger role we may fill.

Within current science and ancient tradition, a wealth of insights and practices helps flesh out the wisdom of the cultural route to leadership. Contemporary brain science has overturned the centuries old conventional wisdom that human learning is primarily an intellectual affair. The findings of neural plasticity and learning enrichment mentioned above show that our brains are much more malleable than we ever imagined, and that their malleability or educability is highest in contexts of positive social stimulation and feedback that reproduce childhood. In addition, the new consensus that learning and intelligence operates on many levels at once has transformed our image of how people learn, suggesting that social factors like emotion and interaction are at least

as important to learning as mere ideas. These developments together lend scientific weight to the contemplative tradition that mentoring is the fast track to leadership. Nor is that tradition exclusively an Asian one. The importance of the practice of imitation in the Christian tradition is well known from the teachings of Thomas Akempis and Ignatius Loyola. Initiation is a common human practice, from the Bar/Batmitzvah of Jewish tradition to the rites of passage found throughout the world's shamanistic traditions. In the major world religions, the art of mentoring became increasingly important as one neared more advanced levels of contemplative learning and life, especially in the traditions of Hasidism, Sufism, Christian Mysticism, Hindu and Buddhist Tantra and Taoism. The aim of this week's reflection and contemplation is to help us expose and examine our blocks to this superhighway to quick and effective leadership.

II. Practice: Discursive Reflection and Focused Contemplation

A) ACTUAL PRACTICE

PRELIMINARIES

Quick Option: Finding a comfortable place to reflect,
Take a few mindful breaths in and out,
And then do your best to clear and center your mind.
Now try to conceive your most positive motivation for practice
And skip to Reflection/Contemplation sections below.

CD Option: Follow the brief mindfulness meditation to the end
Or the brief healing visualization up to, "ask your ideal healer for help."
Then skip to the Reflection/Contemplation sections below.

Script Option: If you prefer to use a script for your contemplation,
Imagine yourself in a safe healing environment, on top of the world,
Feeling freely connected to all living beings,
Facing your image of optimal health, envisioned as yourself or another,
And read/reflect/focus on the steps below:

1. Recognizing the qualities I need to heal,
I open my mind to my full potential.
2. All my resources, mental and physical,
I devote to growing a new, healing self.
3. In all honesty I admit my limits and faults,
And vow with help to grow out of them.
4. Abandoning competition for teamwork,
I enjoy healing qualities, wherever they are.

May all life be well. May all be care-free.
May all feel real joy. May all know real peace.

5. From the bottom of my heart I ask for help
Building the insight and skills I need to heal.

Pleased to be asked, my ideal healer smiles with a glow
Like rainbow light from the heart beaming everywhere,
Drawing the wisdom, energy and care
Of all healing beings back to his/her heart,
Then beaming it to protect, clear and inspire my body-speech-mind.

REFLECTION

Can I really speed my way to leadership,
Or must I live with my current strengths and limits?
Can I enlarge my self-concept and social role
Without tying myself to a mission impossible?
Without the niche of my familiar self,
How can I find my way in the world?
Without preconceived strengths or limits,
Can my mammal self really grow endlessly?
Have I really arrived at a good-enough place
To face the challenges of the world at large?
How many successes will it take
To know that my mammal is plastic enough
To keep transforming itself throughout life?
What would it feel like to become my ideal
And commit myself to leading others to theirs?
Am I strong enough to face others' pride and shame
And lead the way with vision and inspiration?
Could I be the pilot for the boat,
Who prevails amid insecurity and blame?

Could it be that the struggle we all face
Is not with each other but with our own limits?
Perhaps I can help shift the balance of life
Away from self-imposed scarcity to win-win abundance?
Perhaps if I let go of the burden of self-limitation,
I can retool myself to make a real difference?
If I commit all my insight and energy from here on
To the big picture and big heart of my mammal self
Perhaps I can free my self and world from false limitation.
Why this reflective mind if not to choose
The largest, most empowered way of being?
Why waste this wish-fulfilling gem of a heart
By neglecting to cut it with imitation,
To polish it with rehearsal, or to set it
In a life of exemplary leadership for all?

CONTEMPLATION

Glimpsing my full potential
As overcoming all blocks to effectiveness,
And my ultimate responsibility
To commit myself to leading all,
May I build a meditative life
In which each breath partakes
In unbounded vision and inspiration,
Like a rising sun
Dispelling any shadow of limitation.
Alternating between these two insights—
The spacious equanimity of a translucent mind,
And the dreamy clarity of pure inspiration—
May I practice making every breath
A step from self-limitation to shared happiness.
(Now try to hold your attention
As stably as possible
On the insights you glimpsed above.)

CONCLUSION (Optional)

Quick Option: Recognize and forgive
The shortcomings of your contemplation,
Then close by acknowledging and committing
Any insight or energy gained to your total self-healing.

CD Option: Resume the healing visualization to its conclusion.

Script Option: Complete steps six and seven below:

6. Through life and death, until my potential is realized
I ask the healing presence within and around me
To never fail me even for an instant.

7. Any insight, virtue or energy gained through this practice
I commit to developing my full healing potential.
By realizing my vision of health may I turn fear into mastery,
And bring myself and my world to a healthier, happier place.

B) BETWEEN SESSION PRACTICE

The between-session practice of contemplating our potential for mentoring begins with being willing to “go with” the behavioral experiment in the aftermath of meditation and/or in reflective moments through your day. Try to allow your admiration for role-models to expand to include every human interaction and connection in your life, from the most intimate to the most remote. Hopefully, you can feel or imagine your sense of direction and energy expanding to include every social attitude and exchange, with a deep sense of responsibility that will gradually empower you face the most difficult relationships and widespread social challenges. You may find yourself reviewing your past and imagining what could have been if you had learned to expand your leadership skills years ago. Don’t worry, in meditative life even the past can be revised, as you begin to accept your life thus far as the pathway you had to take to arrive where you are now, waking up to seize each and every breath-moment as an opportunity to build your capacity to transform yourself. Your mind will probably begin to access the fantasies you have acquired or conjured of what may or may not happen if you gradually open yourself to feeling empowered and responsible with others, one at a time. Try not to run from these, but face the hopes and fears they represent, working to see through both to create

your own best vision of where you could be headed with all the mentoring you need constantly at your fingertips. With that narrative as an alternate frame of reference, you will probably begin to see other horizons of possibility than any you have previously imagined, future vistas in which a more inspired sense of leadership empowers you to make some of the hard life changes you felt were beyond your reach. Perhaps most importantly, you might begin to think about how you could let go of your own legacy of self-limitation, and begin to make room in your life for the responsibility for all life that can help make your moment-to-moment acts of body, speech and mind add up to a win-win for you and your world.

Chapter Eleven: Vision

I Theory: Projecting a Future of Self-Healing Leadership

Once we enter the fast track to leadership by choosing mentors to guide our way of being in the world, our meditative life can take a dramatic new turn. While still working patiently to heal ourselves and to build social skills that bring others along, we also harness our growth to visions and passions that project us into a new, win-win way of being. With our mentoring bond as a gyroscope, it is safe now to reengage the full powers of mind that meditation had previously helped override. Instead of just disengaging the powers of imagination and drive that had forced us into the rat race of stress, our meditative life now includes power-tools that can help us choose images and energies that can safely propel us towards a new life. The key images and energies we need to guide and speed our new way of being in the world are positive images of ourselves as self-healing leaders and the positive motivation that helps us make a real difference for ourselves and others. This chapter focuses on the power-tools we need to let go of unhealthy, limiting self-concepts and images and to cultivate an ideal self-concept and image that empower our growth as healthy leaders. Chapter twelve focuses on the tools we need to build positive energy and inspiration.

To understand the practice of contemplative vision, it helps to survey some recent findings of scientific research and religious scholarship. According to current neuroscience, the molecular circuitry of the brain is not hard-wired but plastic. Its bioelectrical waves are not just passive functions, but an inseparable part of the brain's endlessly malleable "neural networks," much as ambient sunlight and air are inseparable

parts of the life of a plant. As the qualities of the light and air that bathe a plant directly influence the course of its growth, so too the electrical currents and frequencies that encode our mental images of the world shape the way nerve cells “sprout” and “prune” the intricate cell-to-cell connections that make up the brain’s neural networks.

Among the significant findings that support this new view come from studies of brain waves researchers call evoked potentials. These studies show two crucial things. First, the brain treats vivid mental images in the same way that it treats perceptual images of real external objects. Second, vivid mental images such as fire or ice on a finger have similar measurable effects on the physiology of that finger as real heat and cold do, including changes in basic variables like blood flow, temperature and the skin’s response to stimulation. These two findings provide a plausible mechanism for the mind-body healing effects of imagery, as reported in conditions from Reynaud’s disease and psoriasis to depression and cancer. They also help explain why decades of studies of hypnotic imagery have yielded a growing consensus that mental imagery can help the mind gain conscious control of a wide range of otherwise automatic processes like immune response. This is the consensus that began to emerge in the 1980’s with the young field called psycho-neuro-immunology, or PNI, an important research discipline within mind-body medicine.

The new consensus bears a striking resemblance to the two thousand year old consensus of the Buddhist mind sciences. Although the inside-out approach of India’s scientific tradition depends on contemplative methods, the yogic model of the nervous system resembles ours in many ways. It assumes that the subtle microstructure and process of neural pathways, complexes, energies and drops are not “hard-wired” but

plastic, open and intelligent enough to be readily restructured by development or conscious self-regulation. This plasticity holds from the most superficial layers of the mind and nervous system right down to its molecular depths, where mind-encoded energy can alter the shape of neural pathways and the chemistry of neural drops at the extremely subtle level where genetic information is stored. Thousands of years old, the Indic version of our cutting-edge science of imagery is found in the yogic arts of self-transformation linked with its Tantric systems of visualization and recitation.

Psychotherapy has taught us that parental images transferred onto therapists are the most transformative contents in any therapy, a fact reflected in Jung's active use of what he called archetypal imagery. Recent neuroscience has discovered that the human brain's primary memory stores in the hippocampal imaging regions of mammalian cortex are archived by a reference system of social imprints laid down in the context of the parent-child bond. If traumatic habits built into this infrastructure of social perception are ever to be exposed and relearned, one may well expect idealized parent images to be the keys. Like Jungian imagery, Tantric imagery in fact revolves around just such idealized archetypes. Such archetypes help empower people to see through traumatic childhood self-images (Jung's "personas") and reenvision themselves in light of mature, integrated ideals and aims. *Mandalas*, the blueprints for Tantric visualization, are most generally defined as the optimal contexts in which the ideal persons symbolized by such chosen archetypes live and act. Although Jung himself recognized Tibetan *mandalas* as healing visions of integration, his study of them only scratched the surface of the profound mentoring art they depict.

According to the Tibetan tradition, the best way to appreciate the distinctive content of Tantric visualization is to understand what is traditionally called “mentor-archetype yoga.” In this integration practice, mentor and student do not wait for a healing archetypal image to emerge but rather choose one congenial to both parties’ conscious ideals and aims. As part of the contract of their mentoring bond, both parties agree to practice seeing each other through the idealizing lens of that image and to work at treating one another accordingly. In this way, both parties practice filtering out the extraneous, idiosyncratic details of the other in order to focus exclusively on the universal health-and-happiness promoting qualities their bond is meant to enhance. So the archetypal image serves as a kind of transitional object or symbolic uplink, helping both individuals stay connected and focused on the shared task at hand. An added benefit of the archetype’s generic quality is that it serves as a kind of interpersonal filter, protecting its users from idealizing or internalizing one another’s unhealthy quirks along with their healthy qualities. In this way, it avoids the indiscriminate nature of social imprinting in childhood and much psychotherapy, in which we typically have little choice but to take in the bitter along with the better. To complement this selective filtering, the archetype is linked to a personal relationship with a living “mentor.” Such a link prevents the ideal self-image from remaining so generic that it loses the “life-breath” of the mentor’s example or the “moisture” of his human-kindness. In the Western tradition, a similar strategy is used in the art of combining the archetype of Christ with the guidance of living advisors.

Fleshing out the empowering aim of the mentoring bond, the explicit content of mentor-archetype yoga is made to guide both parties through the transformative work of

internalizing the qualities we see in a mentor. A good mentor recognizes our self-healing potential from the first, and this orients all our interactions towards removing blocks to that potential. In this, the contract resembles rites of passage like weddings or graduations in which one is suddenly pronounced to have already made the transition to another phase or form of life. From then on, whatever must be learned—and that might be a great deal indeed—is learned in an affirmative mode like flight-simulation or on-the-job training. This orientation to meditative practice is the essence of the progressive and effective “fruitful mode,” as opposed to the “seminal mode” of most practice. In the Western tradition of Jesuit contemplation, a similar orientation is used in the imitation of Christ by actually imagining oneself as Jesus.

Instead of leaving to chance the internalization of our mentor’s example, the Tantras use repetition of affirmations and visualizations to help the student imagine and rehearse internalizing the mentor’s self-healing insights and skills. This rehearsal is structured as a revision of the student’s personal history to include a transformation that would be inconceivable from the narrow horizon of her prior life. The three dramatic turns in this revision reframe the student’s anticipation of a traumatic death, post-death transition and afterlife into three phases of a heroic biography: death to the old, traumatic self; the transition to a nascent, ideal self; and the full manifestation of an ideal self-healing person, environment and sphere of action. A similar strategy of revision is used in the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola, where practitioners re-imagine their own life history on the model of Christ by envisioning themselves going through the stages of his life as depicted in the New Testament. I find computer metaphors helpful here. By rehearsing this radical self-transformation after the mentor’s example, the meditator

creates a virtual reality simulation of the self-healing life. This simulation allows her mind-brain to “download” and “install” the cognitive-behavioral “software” needed to support the outlook, attitudes and skills of healing self-mastery. To use the language of researcher Marty Horowitz, the therapeutic content of Tibetan visualization involves adopting a whole new cognitive-behavioral “schema” of the world, which revolves around a new “person schema,” a healthier, more empowering model of self. As the term schema suggests, however, the most empowering or therapeutic elements of the new content are definitely not the superficial content of imagery but rather its implicit depth-content: the healing insight and emotion encoded with the imagery.

While the technical aim in Tantric visualization is to create a world of mental imagery that appears as vivid as the external world, the true measure of success is that one can do so while sustaining the new sensibility for long term personal change. The hallmarks of this sensibility are three. I will refer to these as openness; confidence; and naturalness. Openness here suggests an insight that sees through one’s meditative visions of self and world as empty. However vivid, such visions are recognized as healing constructs or virtual simulations whose sole purpose is to help free the mind from traumatic fixations, rather than to limit it by imposing yet another set of fixed images in their place. To be maximally effective, this openness must be unconditional or fully mindful. Its horizons must expand beyond automatic stress-reactive images of self and world, images conditioned by childhood fear, rage or shame.

Complementing this mental openness, we seek an attitude or emotional tone of real confidence. Such confidence is genuine in the sense of being inspired by mindfulness of one’s natural potential, the “native genius” of the Romans and Greeks. I call this

confidence congenial because it is not a kind of egocentric or self-involved genius threatened by others, but rather the naturally social, collaborative genius of the mammalian mind, hence *con*-genial. Traditionally, this confidence is conceived as a healthy identification with the idealized mentor outside us. As such, it helps us acknowledge the natural genius within, building a new identity-sense that “I too am ideal,” traditionally called “divine pride” or “Buddha pride.”

As a final seal of internalization, Tantric imagery aims toward a spontaneity or naturalness equal to the naturalness of our habitual sense of self and the world. The measure of this naturalness is that one’s meditative vision eventually becomes not just a transparent vehicle of openness and confidence, but internalized throughout our thinking, seeing and acting, displacing our traumatic self-world sense. At this point, it is said, the people, sensations and motion around us all begin to appear as the ideal residents, sights, sounds and gestures of the *mandala*, validating and reinforcing our new sense of openness and confidence. This radical transformation reflects full internalization of the mentor-archetype’s way of being, at least at the level of conscious perception and action. Using the computer metaphor, we have replaced the cognitive-behavioral software supporting our virtual simulation of self and world, effectively resetting the mind-brain’s processing bias from traumatic-reactive default settings to a consciously chosen adaptive-proactive alternative. It is just such a dramatic “resetting” that is the focus of this week’s reflection and contemplation.

II. Practice: Discursive Reflection and Focused Contemplation

A) ACTUAL PRACTICE

PRELIMINARIES

Quick Option: Finding a comfortable place to reflect,
Take a few mindful breaths in and out,
And then do your best to clear and center your mind.
Now try to conceive your most positive motivation for practice
And skip to Reflection/Contemplation sections below.

CD Option: Follow the brief mindfulness meditation to the end
Or the brief healing visualization up to, “ask your ideal healer for help.”
Then skip to the Reflection/Contemplation sections below.

Script Option: If you prefer to use a script for your contemplation,
Imagine yourself in a safe healing environment, on top of the world,
Feeling freely connected to all living beings,
Facing your image of optimal health, envisioned as yourself or another,
And read/reflect/focus on the steps below:

1. Recognizing the qualities I need to heal,
I open my mind to my full potential.
2. All my resources, mental and physical,
I devote to growing a new, healing self.
3. In all honesty I admit my limits and faults,
And vow with help to grow out of them.
4. Abandoning competition for teamwork,
I enjoy healing qualities, wherever they are.

May all life be well. May all be care-free.
May all feel real joy. May all know real peace.

5. From the bottom of my heart I ask for help
Building the insight and skills I need to heal.

Pleased to be asked, my ideal healer smiles with a glow
Like rainbow light from the heart beaming everywhere,
Drawing the wisdom, energy and care
Of all healing beings back to his/her heart,
Then beaming it to protect, clear and inspire my body-speech-mind.

REFLECTION

Can I really envision a better way of being,
 Or am I bound by my habitual self-image?
 Can I enlarge my self-concept and social role
 By emulating the ways of being I prize in others?
 Can I stretch the bounds of my habitual self
 To shape a better way of being in the world?
 Freed from preconceived limitations,
 Can I really create a new, win-win self?
 Can I master the tools to revise my own story
 And create a larger self and life-vision?
 How can I die to my shame-based self
 And follow my ideal-mentor's lead
 Towards rebirth in a healthier self and world?
 How would I think, see and act as a more ideal self,
 Whole enough to lead others towards their own ideals?
 Can I see through my own myopic pride and shame
 And trust my life to a vision beyond my dreams?
 Perhaps I can help shift the balance of life
 From worst-case fantasies to super-abundance.
 Perhaps if reset my world-making mind
 On life-affirming images and ideas,
 I can retool myself to make a real difference.
 If I commit all my insight and energy from here on
 To envisioning a self and world I'd love to live in
 Perhaps I can harness my untapped mind-power.
 To a self-made life of integrity and ingenuity.
 Why this reflective mind if not to choose
 My most genuine and impassioned being?
 Why waste this wish-fulfilling gem of a heart
 By neglecting to cut it with affirmative vision,
 To polish it with rehearsal, or to set it
 In an exemplary life of inspired self-creation?

CONTEMPLATION

Glimpsing my full potential
 As overcoming all blocks to real vision,
 And my ultimate responsibility
 To commit to seeing the best in all beings,
 May I build a meditative life
 In which each sight and sound resonates
 With a perfect vision of my self and world,
 Like the sun, moon and stars
 Rising and falling in complete harmony.

Alternating between these two insights—
The spacious equanimity of a lucid mind,
And the dreamy clarity of true vision—
May I practice making every creative act
A step from self-enclosure to pure happiness.
(Now try to hold your attention
As stably as possible
On the insights you glimpsed above.)

CONCLUSION (Optional)

Quick Option: Recognize and forgive
The shortcomings of your contemplation,
Then close by acknowledging and committing
Any insight or energy gained to your total self-healing.

CD Option: Resume the healing visualization to its conclusion.

Script Option: Complete steps six and seven below:

6. Through life and death, until my potential is realized
I ask the healing presence within and around me
To never fail me even for an instant.

7. Any insight, virtue or energy gained through this practice
I commit to developing my full healing potential.
By realizing my vision of health may I turn fear into mastery,
And bring myself and my world to a healthier, happier place.

B) BETWEEN SESSION PRACTICE

The between-session practice of contemplating our potential for positive vision begins with being willing to “go with” the behavioral experiment in the aftermath of meditation and/or in reflective moments through your day. Try to allow your identification with your mentor-ideal to expand to color every thought, perception and action in your life. Hopefully, you can feel or imagine your sense of affirmation and vision expanding to include every social attitude and exchange, with a deep sense of openness, confidence and naturalness that will gradually empower you face the most

difficult relationships and widespread social challenges. You may find yourself reviewing your past and imagining what could have been if you had learned to expand your vision for your life years ago. Don't worry, in meditative life even the past can be revised, as you begin to accept your life thus far as the raw material to be shaped and reshaped into a more genuine and creative self and life. Your mind will probably begin to access the fantasies you have acquired or conjured of what may or may not happen if you suddenly die to your myopic self and take birth in a larger self able to transform others and the world. Try not to run from these, but face the negative and positive fantasies they represent, working to create your own wildest vision of where you could be headed with all the guidance and inspiration you need all around you, in every sight, gesture and sound. With that vision as an alternate frame of reference, you will probably begin to see other horizons of possibility than any you have previously imagined, future vistas in which a real glimpse of leadership empowers you to make some of the hard life changes you felt were beyond your reach. Perhaps most importantly, you might begin to think about how you could let go of your own legacy of self-limitation, and begin to make room in your daily experience for the affirmative vision of life that can help make your moment-to-moment acts of body, speech and mind add up to a win-win for you and your world.

Chapter Twelve: Inspiration

I. Theory: Sustaining the Energy for Self-Healing Leadership

Supposing we have our moments of vision and affirmation, is it really possible for the average person to sustain the energy to follow through with such positive glimpses in everyday life? What makes the difference between peak experiences we never bring down to earth and the creative vision that projects us into a new way of being in every moment? For starters, there is the quality of insight, sensitivity and motivation that go into those lucid moments. It should go without saying that a vision that is unrealistic, unfeeling or misdirected is hard to sustain, no matter how compelling it once seemed. If carefully conceived with the benefit of the sound science and contemplative traditions discussed in chapter eleven, our vision should be more or less free of these deficiencies. Yet no matter how lucid, elegant or well meaning, an affirmative vision for ourselves and our world will never be sustainable day to day without access to the positive energy I call inspiration or pure passion.

If the image of turning our familiar selves and lives over to a vision of a better way of being seems daunting, for most of us the very idea of inspiration or pure passion seems entirely out of reach. But have no fear. Just as the contemplative traditions of the world have broken down the extraordinary process of visionary experience into a series of reproducible steps, so too have they brought inspiration within the reach of systematic practice. And, just as the contemplative art of vision has gained scientific support in recent years, so too have practices of spiritual arousal and sublimation. In what follows, I

hope to expose some common misconceptions about inspiration, and to explore some current science and ageless traditions that make it seem more practical and accessible.

First of all, our common sense that inspiration or pure passion are far out of reach is fed by assumptions from both modern science and Western monotheism. Just as modern science until recently has tried to reduce all visionary states to mere fantasy or hallucination, so too it has tried to boil inspiration and sublimation down to accidents of neurochemistry. In fact, modern science thus far has taught us to look with suspicion on states of euphoric arousal linked with spiritual practice, spinning the data to make it seem that these states are either chemical accidents misread as spiritual achievements or else undiagnosed cases of psychopathology. Individuals who report euphoric experiences of divine inspiration or loving energy, for instance, are routinely diagnosed with epilepsy of the brain's temporal lobes, often without the EEG findings that are supposedly diagnostic. In fact, the Cartesian mindset inherited by modern science is such that any non-ordinary states of consciousness, no matter how positive their experience or effects, are looked at askance, if not flatly diagnosed.

Secondly, the West's mainstream religious traditions are also suspect of altered states of conscious taken to have spiritual meaning or value of any kind. Elaine Paigel's recent study of early Christianity, *Beyond Belief*, shows how the hierarchy defined the new Church in terms of a codified body of scripture and dogma that controlled and marginalized religious experience. Widespread access to the "holy spirit," seen as inspiring visions or speaking in tongues, was increasingly restricted and suppressed in favor of doctrinaire sacraments and priestly rituals. The Jewish Rabbinic tradition and the Mullahs of Islam made similar moves to subject religious experience to social scrutiny

and control. This conservative tendency among the Abrahamic religions was of course counterbalanced by the rise of contemplative traditions like Christian mysticism, Sufism and Kabbalah, although suspicion and persecution of contemplatives remained common in the West.

While the legacy of modern science and Western religious traditions work together to make us suspect of peak experiences, meditative or not, this common legacy of suspicion is increasingly being challenged by current research and spiritual developments. Research on meditation and yoga in various Asian traditions has begun to reveal how the most advanced practices support the self-regulation of primary processes like heart rate, blood flow and metabolism, thought to be beyond the mind's reach. Interestingly enough, these advanced practices not only yield greater degrees of control over a wider range of processes than expected, but they also have paradoxical effects in which profound bodily relaxed is coupled with high positive arousal of the nervous system. Also interesting is the fact that these advanced practices seem to work by reproducing altered states of euphoric inspiration, through joining deep-breathing techniques with recitation of affirmative formulas, prayers or mantras.

The most advanced practitioners studied by Herbert Benson and Craig Heller seem to go into a state in which the body is in near-hibernation while the heart, brain and mind are at a euphoric peak resembling an orgasm or lucid dream. It is likely that in this state, the brain secretes a cocktail of bliss-and-growth inducing chemicals like endorphins, vasopressin and growth hormone, all somehow linked with the internal reward system in the core brain, known to support the biology of reinforcement and consummation. While full control of this system may well be out of reach to the average

practitioner like you and me, some access to what has been called our “second, second wind” may be within reach with as little difficulty as holding our breath or quietly reciting an affirmation, mantra or prayer. If this is so, it would directly challenge our shame-based common sense that we could never live up to our best vision of life because the inspiration or pure passion to follow through with it is out of our reach. The focus of this final chapter’s reflection and contemplation is to face this challenge and explore the real possibility that we can sustain the energy we need for true leadership.

II. Practice: Discursive Reflection and Focused Contemplation

A) ACTUAL PRACTICE

PRELIMINARIES

Quick Option: Finding a comfortable place to reflect,
Take a few mindful breaths in and out,
And then do your best to clear and center your mind.
Now try to conceive your most positive motivation for practice
And skip to Reflection/Contemplation sections below.

CD Option: Follow the brief mindfulness meditation to the end
Or the brief healing visualization up to, “ask your ideal healer for help.”
Then skip to the Reflection/Contemplation sections below.

Script Option: If you prefer to use a script for your contemplation,
Imagine yourself in a safe healing environment, on top of the world,
Feeling freely connected to all living beings,
Facing your image of optimal health, envisioned as yourself or another,
And read/reflect/focus on the steps below:

1. Recognizing the qualities I need to heal,
I open my mind to my full potential.
2. All my resources, mental and physical,
I devote to growing a new, healing self.
3. In all honesty I admit my limits and faults,
And vow with help to grow out of them.

4. Abandoning competition for teamwork,
I enjoy healing qualities, wherever they are.

May all life be well. May all be care-free.
May all feel real joy. May all know real peace.

5. From the bottom of my heart I ask for help
Building the insight and skills I need to heal.

Pleased to be asked, my ideal healer smiles with a glow
Like rainbow light from the heart beaming everywhere,
Drawing the wisdom, energy and care
Of all healing beings back to his/her heart,
Then beaming it to protect, clear and inspire my body-speech-mind.

REFLECTION

Can I really find inspiration within,
Or must it come from nature or God?
Can I learn to tap my second, second wind
By deepening and refreshing my breath?
Can I stretch the bounds of positive thought
To resonate with the depths of my being?
Freed from preconceived limitations,
Can I make blissful openness my new self?
Can I master the tools to address my own brain,
And open its network of healing and reinforcement?
How can I die to my neurotic mind
And merge my spirit with my mentor-ideal's
To take birth in a more inspired new life?
Can I cut through my own neurotic knots
And open my heart to boundless release?
How can I find a transparent self,
Clear enough to touch others' hearts?
Perhaps I can help shift the balance of life
From neurotic shut-down to pure spontaneity.
Perhaps if reset my biochemical mind
In blissful openness and pure passion,
I can refine my fire to light my world.
If I commit all my insight and energy from here on
To channeling a self and world I'd love to be in
Perhaps I can harness my untapped genius.
To a new life of passionate integrity.
Why this reflective mind if not to choose
My most inspired and impassioned spirit in me?

Why waste this wish-fulfilling gem of a heart
 By neglecting to clean it in the fire of passion,
 To polish it with blissful openness, or to set it
 In a translucent life of artful integration?

CONTEMPLATION

Glimpsing my full potential
 As overcoming all blocks to intuition,
 And my ultimate responsibility
 To inspire myself to care for all beings,
 May I build a meditative life
 In which each word and breath resonates
 With the blissful openness of pure joy,
 Like dusk, twilight, midnight and dawn
 Rising and falling in pure harmony.
 Alternating between these two insights—
 The spacious equanimity of a translucent heart,
 And the rainbow energy of blissful openness—
 May I practice making every feeling
 A step from partiality to complete integration.
 (Now try to hold your attention
 As stably as possible
 On the insights you glimpsed above.)

CONCLUSION (Optional)

Quick Option: Recognize and forgive
 The shortcomings of your contemplation,
 Then close by acknowledging and committing
 Any insight or energy gained to your total self-healing.

CD Option: Resume the healing visualization to its conclusion.

Script Option: Complete steps six and seven below:

6. Through life and death, until my potential is realized
 I ask the healing presence within and around me
 To never fail me even for an instant.

7. Any insight, virtue or energy gained through this practice
 I commit to developing my full healing potential.
 By realizing my vision of health may I turn fear into mastery,
 And bring myself and my world to a healthier, happier place.

B) BETWEEN SESSION PRACTICE

The between-session practice of contemplating our potential for inspiration begins with being willing to “go with” the behavioral experiment in the aftermath of meditation and/or in reflective moments through your day. Try to allow your internalization of your ideal spirit to inspire every thought, perception and act in your life. Hopefully, you can feel or imagine your pure passion building to sustain every human exchange, with a joyful openness and spontaneity that can empower you face the most difficult interactions and challenges. You may find yourself reviewing your past and imagining what could have been if you had learned to expand your vision for your life years ago. Don’t worry, in meditative life even the past can be revised, as you begin to accept your life thus far as the raw material to be purified and transformed into an elixir of pure human spirit. Your mind will probably begin to access the intuitions you have acquired or conjured of what may or may not happen if you suddenly die to your neurotic self and take birth in a spontaneous self able to move others and the world. Try not to run from these, but face the obscure and clear intuitions they represent, working to create your own transparent sense of where you could be headed with all the inspiration you need all around you, in every word and gesture. With that pure spirit as an alternate frame of reference, you will probably begin to see other horizons of possibility than any you have previously sensed, future vistas in which a real taste of leadership empowers you to make some of the hard life changes you felt were beyond your reach. Perhaps most importantly, you might begin to think about how you could let go of your own neurotic blocks and begin to make space in your daily experience for the pure passion for life that can help make your moment-to-moment acts of body, speech and mind add up to a win-win for you and your world.

RESOURCES

1. PROVIDERS OF TRADITIONAL HEALTHCARE

Raymond Chang, M.D., Chinese Herbalist/Oncologist
Meridian Medical 683-1221/ 102 East 30th Street, NYC

Claudia Cooke, M.D., M.P.H, Acupuncture/Internal Medicine
212-861-9000 / 133 East 73rd Street, New York NY 10021

Yeshi Dhonden, Tibetan Physician/Marsha Wolf, L.Ac.
Menla Tibetan Medicine 212-741-2727
416 West 23rd Street 1D, New York NY 10011

Mark Epstein, M.D. Buddhist Psychotherapy
212-334-0923 / 52 White Street, NYC

Leo Galland, M.D. and Tom Bolte, M.D., Holistic Health
133 East 73rd Street / 772-3077

Scott Gerson, M.D. P.C., Ayurvedic Vaidya/Internist
212-505-8971 / 13 West 9th Street, New York, NY

Vasant Lad, B.A.M. & Sc., Ayurvedic Physician
Director, The Ayurvedic Institute
505-291-9698 / Albuquerque NM

Woodson Merrill, M.D., Acupuncturist/Holistic Internist
212-535-1172 / 44 East 67th Street, New York NY 10021

Pamela Miles, Rieke
212-496-1499 / West 90th Street near Broadway

Susan Proctor, D.Ay., R.H. Ayurvedic Dietary Counselor
200 West 57th Street, 207 / 581-0101

Tashi Raptan, Tibetan Physician/Tibetan Rheumatology
914-353-1177 / Nyak, New York

Chun Yan Tang, M.D. Traditional Chinese Medicine
Acupuncture and Herb Center
212-684-6154 / 431 Fifth Ave., 4th Floor, NY NY 10016

2. LITERATURE ON MEDITATION & MIND/BODY MEDICINE

Benson, H. *Timeless Healing: The power and biology of belief*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997.

Burns, D. *Feeling Good: The new mood therapy*. New York: Dutton, 1981.

Chopra, D. *Quantum Healing*. New York: Bantam, 1989.

Cleary, T. *The Heart of Zen*. Boston: Shambala, 1997.

_____. *Immortal Sisters: Secrets of Taoist women*. Berkeley: North Atlantic, 1996.

_____. *Vitality, Energy, Spirit: A Taoist sourcebook*. Boston: Shambala, 1991.

Corbin, H. *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi*. Princeton: Bollingen, 1969.

The Dalai Lama. *Mind Science: An east-west dialogue*. Boston: Wisdom, 1991.

_____. *Flash of Lightening on a Dark Night*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1996.

Dhonden, Y. *Health Through Balance: An introduction to Tibetan Medicine*. Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1995.

Epstein, M. *Thoughts Without a Thinker: Psychotherapy from a Buddhist perspective*. New York: Basic, 1993.

Gavin, J. *The Exercise Habit*. Champagne: Leisure Press, 1992.

Goleman, D., editor. *Mind/Body Medicine: How to use your mind for better health*. New York: Consumer Reports, 1993.

_____. *The Meditative Mind*. New York: Doubleday, 1983.

Gordon, J. *Manifesto for a New Medicine*. Reading: Addison Wesley, 1996.

Govinda, L. A. *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism*. York Beach: Weiser, 1991.

Gyatso, G.K. *Clear Light of Bliss: The practice of mahamudra in Vajrayana Buddhism*. London: Tharpa, 1984.

_____. *Universal Compassion*. London: Tharpa, 1988.

_____. *A Meditation Handbook*. London: Tharpa, 1990.

- Gyatso, G.K.. *Understanding the Mind*. London: Tharpa, 1993.
- Heschel, A.J. *The Sabbath*. New York: Farrar, Strauss & Geroux, 1976.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of your body & mind to face pain, illness & stress*. New York: Bantam, 1990.
- Kornfeld, J. *A Path With Heart: A guide through the perils and promises of spiritual life*.
- Lad, V. *Ayurveda: the Science of Self-Healing*. Wilmot, Lotus, 1984.
- Laszlo, J. *Understanding Cancer*. New York: Harper Collins, 1988.
- Lati Rinbochay & Hopkins, J. *Death, Intermediate State and Rebirth in Tibetan Buddhism*. Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1979.
- Lerner, H. *The Dance of Anger: A woman's guide to changing the patterns of intimate relationships*. New York: Harper Collins, 1985.
- Lorig, K. et al. *Arthritis Helpbook*. Reading: Addison Wesley, 1990.
- Losky, V. *In the Image and Likeness of God: Theology of Light of St. Gregory Palamas*. New York: St. Vladimir's Press, 1974.
- Ornish, D. *Dr. Dean Ornish's Program for Reversing Heart Disease*. New York: Ballantine, 1982.
- _____. *Love & Survival: The scientific basis for the healing power of intimacy*. New York: Harper Collins, 1997.
- Pelletier, K. *Mind as Healer, Mind as Slayer*. New York: Delacorte, 1992.
- Rossmann, M. *Healing Yourself: A step by step program for better health through imagery*. New York: Walker, 1987.
- Salzberg, S. *Loving Kindness*. New York: Random House, 1997.
- Schindler, L. *Understanding the Immune System*. Bethesda: National Institutes of Health, 1991.
- Scholem, G. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. New York: Random House, 1995.
- Shah, I. *The Way of the Sufi*. London: Octagon, 1968.
- Shayevitz, M. & B. *Living Well with Chronic Asthma, Bronchitis & Emphysema*. New York: Consumer Books, 1991.

Shimberg, E. *Relief from Irritable Bowel Syndrome*. New York: Ballentine, 1991.

Sogyal Rinpoche. *The Tibetan Book of Living & Dying*. New York: Harper Collins, 1996

Stacy, C. et al. *The Fight Against Pain*. New York: Consumer Reports, 1992.

Steindl-Rast, D. *Gratefulness, the Heart of Prayer: An approach to life in fullness*.

Thich Nhat Hahn. *Peace is Every Step*. Berkeley: Parallax, 1986.

_____. *For a Future to be Possible: Commentaries on the five mindfulness trainings*. Berkeley: Parallax, 1993.

Thondup, T. *The Healing Power of Mind*. Boston: Shambala, 1998.

Thurman, R.A.F. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. New York: bantam, 1996.

_____. *Essentials of Tibetan Buddhism*. New York: Harper Collins, 1997.

_____. *Inner Revolution: Life liberty & the pursuit of real happiness*. New York: Riverhead, 1998.

Weil, A. *Spontaneous Healing*. New York: Knopf, 1995.

Williams, R. & V. *Hostility Kills: Seventeen strategies for reducing the hostility that can harm your heart*. New York: Random House, 1997.

3. CENTERS OF MEDITATION/YOGA TEACHING & PRACTICE

Blue Gate School of Wisdom/Imaginetics (western mysticism, imagery)
16 e. 96th (914) 632-0658 (some workshops in Westchester)

BODHI-Line (Buddhist Information Service re.centers/schedules)
www.infinite.org/bodhiline 677-9354

Friends in Deed (support groups for chronic illness, yoga, meditation)
594 Broadway 925-2009

Friends of the Institute of Noetic Sciences (FIONS)
(consciousness/spirituality studies, lectures, films, discussion groups)
www.fions.com 741-2207

Himalayan Institute (yoga, meditation, nutrition, bookstore)
78 Fifth Ave. (13-14th) 243-5995

IM School of Healing Arts (personal growth/mystical traditions)
159 w 25th 741-8159

Integral Yoga (hatha yoga, meditation workshops)
227 w 13 929-0585 / 200 w. 72nd 721-4000

Island Studio (yoga, tai chi, chi gung)
60 e. 13th #4a 243-6771

Jewel Heart Tibetan Meditation Center
260 W. Broadway Am. Thread Bldg. (enter St. John's Lane)
914-767-0024

Jivamukti Yoga Center (yoga, meditation, chanting, sacred dance)
404 Lafayette (4th & Astor) 353-0214

Kripalu,, Lenox, MA (yoga & personal growth retreat center)
(800) 741-7353

Kundalini Yoga Center
873 Broadway #31 982-5959

Natural Gourmet Institute for Food & Health (cooking & nutrition classes, including
Chinese & Ayurvedic)
48 w. 21 645-5170

NY Center for Self Realization (meditation, readings)
217 E. 28th 689-3622

Contemplative Living

128

NY Insight Meditation (meditation, workshops, retreats)
Tuesday c/o TRS 44 e. 32 / Th. c/o Sufi Books 227 W. Broadway
Friday c/o Quest Bookshop 240 e. 53rd 252-2685

NY Center for Kripalu & Health (yoga, meditation)
147 w. 25th - 8th fl 645-4519

NY Theosophical Society (meditation, tai chi, chi gung, Quest bookstore)
240 e. 53rd 753-3835

Omega Institute (growth workshops, including meditation & yoga)
Rhinebeck, NY (914) 266-4444

Open Center (personal growth workshops, including yoga & meditation)
83 Spring 219-2527

Fran Richey (yoga, meditation classes/workshops)
184 e. 76th 831-1554

School of Practical Philosophy (Indian/Western Spirituality & meditation)
12 E 79th 744-0764

Shambala Center (Buddhist studies, meditation, lectures)
118 w. 22 675-6544

Sharon Smith (meditation, chi gung & tai chi retreat)
(800) HEAL-TAO 212-243-6771

Tao Healing Arts Center (Tai Chi, Chi Gung, nutrition)
27 e. 13th 242-1410

Tibet House (The Dalai Lama's Tibetan cultural center,
educational programs) 22 w. 15th 807-0563

White Cloud (yoga, gyrotronics)
50 w. 65th 579-6825

World Yoga Center (yoga, meditation, breathing workshops)
265 w. 72nd 787-4908

Yoga Zone (yoga w/ meditation)
160 E. 56th 935-YOGA / 138 5th (18-19th) 647-YOGA