

TYPES OF SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

*'Prayer has a form, a sound and a physical reality.
Everything which has a word, also has a physical
equivalent. And every thought has an action.'*

Rumi

Meditation, Concentration and Contemplation

Meditation, concentration and contemplation form a triad of inner developmental exercises. These three practices are "inseparable from one other, yet each forming one part of the mystical triangle which leads to enlightenment."

Meditation is but one dimension of Zen practice. The other two dimensions are "concentration" and "contemplation." The word *meditate* comes from the Latin *meditari*, "to think about, consider, reflect." A good way to meditate is to take a book written by someone spiritually mature and read a few lines, and then ponder on what is said – not so much to understand as to enter into the spirit of what is being said. To concentrate means "to direct or draw toward a common center; to focus." Normally this requires considerable mental effort. The word *contemplation* is associated with the word *temple*, which originally was an "open space for observation." Contemplation requires all the freedom that comes with meditation and all the tautness and firmness that is associated with concentration. Contemplation is the heart of practice. Concentration and meditation give support and aid. When we meditate, it is like rain on a parched land; when we concentrate, we generate great energy against which thoughts beat in vain. But contemplation is pure atonement, without goal, effort or fear of any kind. (1)

In certain spiritual teachings analogies are employed to distinguish between meditation and concentration:

Concentration starts, so to say, from the periphery of the mind and goes to the center; that after all is what concentration originally meant: with (*con*) center. Meditation starts at the center and goes to the periphery. When we meditate on a theme, more and more is integrated around this theme. Concentration relies on the magnetic power of the center. Most of us have read of this power in books about the martial arts, where it is called *ki* or *chi*. Meditation, on the other hand, relies on the magnetic field, so to speak, that surrounds the center. It is like the field which surrounds a magnet, which becomes apparent when iron filings are sprinkled around it. It is this field that enables the mind to establish new patterns, order and hierarchy, and experience vital ingredients in the creative process. (2)

The mental activity of most people is restless and undirected, characterized by a seemingly continuous stream of wandering thoughts and images. Concentration of the mind is an essential prerequisite for higher development and attainment. "To rediscover original unity, which is alive, vital and creative, fixed mental patterns have to be broken up, and to do this, habits of mind must be overcome. For many people, this calls for great concentration."

There are two ways of concentrating: eliminating distracting elements from awareness or maintaining a steady mind in the midst of distraction. When some degree of mind control is established, further concentration exercises may be employed to activate certain 'centers of perception' in the human being. Concentration on these centers can heighten the powers of the mind and lead to extra-dimensional experiences beyond the normal constraints of time and space. However, it is emphasized that these 'purity spots' do not have "a physical location in the sense of acupuncture points but can be visualized for the purpose of transcending normal receptivity."

In most spiritual systems meditation follows after the development of concentrative power. The essence of meditation is the directing of attention on a single, unchanging source of stimulation. The focus of awareness may be an object (such as a candle), the breath, a visualized image, a word or phrase, or a specific part of the body. There are many forms of meditation, both culturally and historically:

The practice of meditation as developed in various cultures of the world and in various cultural eras are quite diverse. The practice may involve whirling, chanting, singing, or concentration on the movement of the breath, on specially posed questions, or on an internal sound. It may consist solely of ordinary activities, imbued with "mindfulness," it may involve prayer in the church, in quiescence, or in unison. There may be an attempt to deliberately separate two coexistent streams of consciousness. Other, more advanced, techniques may involve the control of various "centers" in the body, as in early Christian mysticism, and receptivity to communications beyond the norm. Meditation practices have many, many diverse functions, depending on the nature of the students and of the society. (3)

In traditional spiritual teachings a wide range of meditation practices, involving various modalities, are employed to accord with the individual needs and characteristics of the students:

Meditation involves putting something into the mind, whether an image or a sacred word that is visualized or a concept that is thought about or reflected on, or both. In some types of meditation the meditator envisions or contemplates or analyzes certain elementary shapes, holding them in his mind to the exclusion of everything else. He may ponder such abstract qualities as loving-kindness and compassion. In Tantric Buddhist systems of meditation, mandalas containing various seed syllables of the Sanskrit alphabet – such as *Om*, for example, are

visualized and dwelt upon in a prescribed manner. Also employed for meditative purposes are mandalas consisting of special arrangements of Buddha, Bodhisattvas, and other figures. (4)

One of the most useful preliminary stages of meditation is the practice of following the breath, beginning by silently counting the inhalations and exhalations. Roshi Philip Kapleau discusses this method in the context of Zen Buddhism:

Zazen practice for the student begins with counting the inhalations and exhalations of the breath while the practitioner is in the motionless zazen posture. This is the first step of stilling the bodily functions, quieting discursive thoughts, and strengthening concentration. It is given as the first step because in counting the in and out breaths, in natural rhythm and without strain, the mind has a scaffolding to support it, as it were. When concentration on the breathing is clear and the count is not lost, the next step, a slightly more difficult type of zazen, is assigned, namely, following the inhalations and exhalations of the breath with the mind's eye only, again in natural rhythm. (5)

The regular practice of meditation bestows numerous physical and psychological benefits to the practitioner. In the words of Zen teacher Charlotte Beck: "Sitting after sitting, letting everything go, we become more aware of our personal center. This simple act of sitting, letting everything drop off, has far-reaching effects."

Although there are many kinds of meditation, meditation at its highest is a form of mental and spiritual training that aims at stilling and focusing the normally scattered mind, establishing a measure of physical and mental repose, and then becoming an instrument for Self-discovery. Meditation can also be a method of cleansing the mind of impurities and disturbances, such as lustful desires, ill will, indolence, restlessness, worry and cynical doubt. When the dust of these hindrances are wiped from the mind mirror through disciplined meditation, we come to see things as they are in their true-nature, undistorted by our mental or emotional colorations. A lesser fruit of meditation is the strengthening and calming of the nervous system, and the tapping of physical, mental and psychic energies. This last is analogous to a generator-battery; a special kind of energy (called samadhi power) is generated and stored in the meditator's lower belly, enabling him or her to respond instantly to urgent situations without strain or wasted effort. In correctly practiced meditation, the practitioner develops greater vitality, equanimity, mindfulness, and a responsiveness to the circumstances of one's life. Meditation, then, is a healing practice in which the heart is calmed and the spirit strengthened. (6)

Meditation can be effective even when practiced for short periods of time: "Meditation, after all, can occupy twenty-five seconds as well as twenty-five years. If you are enlightened

enough to know upon what to meditate, then you can focus certain of your mind centers upon this and meditate for a matter of seconds to the total exclusion of everything else.”

Meditation can easily become a repetitive task or even compulsion, rather than a conscious, voluntary exploration of our mind and inner being. Advaita Vedanta master Jean Klein offers an informative analogy:

When a musician wakes up in the morning, he goes spontaneously to his piano and plays. There is no inner intention to it. It is simply for the love of doing it. And a painter in his studio just begins to paint. There is no obligation. Likewise, you should only meditate in your laboratory when you feel drawn to do so. There must be nothing systematic in it. When there is systematic doing, you become stuck to it, and there is the danger that you will simply be repeating old patterns. When the mind knows that there is something beyond it, it will see that there is nothing more to do, and it will give up. This moment, when you are free from the reflex to be somebody, is the highest opportunity to be still. It is the death of a somebody, of an ego, when there is silence. (7)

Meditation follows a natural progression and deepening process in which effort and steady practice eventually develop into a spontaneous, natural and effortless state of ‘meditation in life.’

This is the effortless meditation of Zen and Mahamudra. It is a meditation without any *thing* to meditate upon, the spontaneous and wondrous work of one’s own mind, the pinnacle and essence of all Buddhist teachings. To those who have not entered into the “gate” this is the most difficult, but to those who have already entered this is the easiest of all meditations. All other exercises and practices are merely preparations for it. The critical point of this work is to recognize the nature of one’s own mind, or at least to glimpse it. Once the Essence of Mind is recognized, the yogi will be able to absorb himself in it at any time or place without difficulty. In activity or quietness the illuminating-void consciousness will always shine brightly within him. Although after the recognition, or beholding, of the Mind-Essence there is still a very long way to go, the first “glimpse” is regarded by all Buddhist sages as the most important thing. Once the “gateless-gate” is entered, meditation will no longer be a “practice” or effort. It now becomes a natural and spontaneous act of life. Sitting, walking, talking, or sleeping – all activities and conditions of life become marvellous meditations in themselves. (8)

More advanced meditation practices involve quietly observing thoughts as they arise until a state is reached whereby the mind is free from all thoughts:

As long as you are a beginner certain formalized meditations may be good for you. But for a seeker for reality there is only one meditation – the rigorous refusal to harbor thoughts. To be free from thoughts is itself meditation.

Q: How is it done?

A: You begin by letting thoughts flow and watching them. The very observation slows down the mind till it stops altogether. Once the mind is quiet, keep it quiet. Don't get bored with peace, be in it, go deeper into it.

Q: I heard of holding on to one thought in order to keep other thoughts away. But how to keep all thoughts away? The very idea is also a thought.

A: Experiment anew, don't go by past experience. Watch your thoughts and watch yourself watching the thoughts. The state of freedom from all thoughts will happen suddenly and by the bliss of it you shall recognize it. (9)

At the highest level meditation and contemplation merge into a perception of the timeless, formless reality and unity underlying all existence.

Q: Is contemplation the same as meditation?

A: Deep inquiry leads to contemplation, or prayer. Through dedicated contemplation we can attune to consciousness, the light which constitutes all phenomena. This light is our intrinsic nature. Our being is always shining. Our real nature is openness, listening, release, surrender, without producing or will. Prayer or contemplation is welcoming free from projection and expectation. It is without any demand or formulation. It invites the object to unfold in you and reveals your openness to you. Live with this opening, this vastness. Attune yourself to it. It is love. Ardent contemplation brings you to living meditation. (10)

Attention and Mindfulness

The practice of mindfulness or 'bare attention' is an essential component of many spiritual traditions and the heart of meditation. "Pure attention is absolutely empty of all direction. It is not focused on an object, it is free of any memory. It is simply expanded alertness."

Buddhist psychology or *Abhidhamma* teaches that you are not your mind. You already know that you are not your body. But you do not yet know that you are not your mind, because normally you identify yourself with each thought, feeling, impulse, emotion or sensation that comes into your mind. Each takes you on a little trip. Through the practice of mindfulness, you come to observe the rise and fall, the appearance and disappearance of these various thoughts and feelings, and gradually develop a sense of distance and detachment from them. Then you will no longer become caught in your illusions. This leads to a deep inner peaceful calm. (11)

There are different levels and degrees of attention depending on a person's mindset, expectations and circumstances. Philip Kapleau provides a pertinent example: "There are degrees of attentiveness. If on a crowded train you are watchful that your wallet is not stolen, that is one kind of mindfulness. But if you are in a situation in which you might be killed at any moment – during wartime let us say – the degree of your attentiveness is far greater."

The study of attention is indispensable for inner work. Many spiritual teachings stress the importance of developing awareness or mindfulness and living with a sense of full presence from one moment to another:

Cultivating the capacity to be fully present – awake, attentive, and responsive – in all the different circumstances of life is the essence of spiritual practice and realization. Those with the greatest spiritual realization are those who are 'all here,' who relate to life with an expansive awareness that is not limited to any fixation on themselves or their own point of view. They don't shrink from any aspect of themselves or life as a whole. (12)

In esoteric schools of inner development students are taught to distinguish between conscious, directed attention and mechanical attention. In order to demonstrate our lack of conscious awareness and develop the attentive capacity, some teachings employ an exercise which involves following the moving hand of a watch:

Take your watch and fasten your eye on the second hand; watch as it makes a revolution of a minute and do not let your eye wander. When you are quite sure that you can focus your attention for one revolution you will have begun to develop your power of thinking. Having accomplished this, while keeping the focus of attention on the small hand, count to yourself from 1 to 10 and then backwards. This requires a double attention; one part is on the movement of the hand, the other on the counting. You may find it easy at first, but keep on until it becomes difficult. Having got so far, continue to keep your eye on the moving hand and continue to count mentally, then, at the same time, repeat to yourself a verse of a rhyme. Do it for two or three minutes. (13)

When thoughts and feelings arise in the mind they can be quietly observed and transformed through mindful awareness. Instead of identifying with these mental images we can notice them and then let them go:

Q: During the course of the day or when I sit quietly, many thoughts and feelings come up. How shall I face these?

A: What comes up are residues of the past accumulated through day-dreaming. Remain present to them, free of all motives to suppress them. If the upcomings are referred to a centre they will be pushed into the unconscious or referred to the already known. The residues are given life by association of ideas. All that

comes up is conflict, created by the reflex to take oneself as a fraction, a separate entity. When there is no longer a centre of reference these conflicts come up like bubbles from the bottom of the ocean, and, meeting no obstacle at the surface, they disappear forever in the empty space of your being present. Elimination can never occur through analysis. It can only happen in your full awareness without the obstruction of the mind. Transmutation can only take place in Presence. (14)

The everyday tasks of life provide a perfect opportunity to practise mindfulness and experience the beauty and perfume of living in timeless presence:

If while washing dishes, we think only of the cup of tea that awaits us, thus hurrying to get the dishes out of the way as if they were a nuisance, then we are not "washing the dishes to wash the dishes." What's more, we are not alive during the time we are washing the dishes. In fact we are completely incapable of realizing the miracle of life while standing at the sink. If we can't wash the dishes, the chances are we won't be able to drink our tea either. While drinking the cup of tea, we will only be thinking of other things, barely aware of the cup in our hands. Thus we are sucked away into the future – and we are incapable of actually living one minute of life. (15)

Repetition of Sacred Sounds

The invocation or repetition of words as a means of spiritual development is widely practised in many different esoteric and spiritual traditions throughout the world:

The use of invocation or *mantrams* has been known for thousands of years. It is practised by people of all religions and in all spiritual ways. It is well known in Eastern Christianity in the form of the 'prayer of the heart.' It is well known in India as the *mantram* and in Buddhism by the various invocations and repetitions. The *zkr* is obligatory for all Sufi communities: it is part of the initiation process by which a seeker is received as pupil. The sheikh gives him the appropriate *zkr* at the time of his initiation, at the same time communicating the *Baraka* or energy that enables the *zkr* to be fruitful. The *mantram* is, substantially, the same thing as the *zkr*, consisting of an invocation of a few words that is repeated rhythmically or, in some cases, non-rhythmically, sometimes in time with the heartbeat, sometimes in time with the breathing, sometimes according to some externally imposed rhythm. (16)

Historically, the use of mantras as a means of spiritual development has been a common feature of many world religions. The mantra has been used to control the energies of the mind in a very specific manner: "The mind is a channel, a swift current of thoughts, and a mantra is a dam put up in the way of this current to divert the water to where it is needed."

A mantra is a common device used in spiritual training. One repeats a word or phrase over and over. The etymology of the word mantra is *man*, which in Sanskrit means "mind," and *tra* "to protect." A mantra therefore protects the mind from the effects of the deep schism in the very heart of being by giving a stable centre. A Christian mantra, made famous by the anonymous writer of *The Way of a Pilgrim*, is "Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me." It was used by the Desert Fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries who retired to the desert for a life of solitude and prayer. Hindus, Sufis and Taoists all have their own versions of mantras, and all use beads, or rosaries in the Catholic tradition, as an aid in mantric practice. (17)

When a mantra is properly pronounced, parts of the body which are out of harmony and dysfunctional are re-orchestrated into a unified whole. "Our body is made up of many organs and each organ responds to the vibration of certain sounds."

A mantra in itself has no meaning. Its value lies in the pronunciation, the vibration. Our body is built of vibration. Each organ in the body has its special sound. Medical science will, in future, certainly come to healing through sound. When there is right pronunciation of the mantra, our body is affected by this vibration, and we come to a very deep, relaxed state where there is no directed attention and therefore no longer an observer and something observed; there is only being. (18)

Three factors affect the efficacy of practising a mantra, zikr or other sacred syllable: (1) the intention of the practitioner; (2) faith that the mantra or zikr will work; (3) constant dedication and practice. The proper pronunciation of sacred syllables or sounds is the entrance through which spiritual influences can manifest. "Few know how to pronounce a sound correctly and without the correct pronunciation the sound cannot be effective."

Mantras and zikrs must be performed in a prescribed manner under the careful direction of a teacher: "The number of times of this repetition, and other matters, are stipulated by the teacher in accordance with his perception of the pupil's needs. From time to time the master will assess the disciple's progress and may prescribe other exercises." And when a teacher imparts a mantra or zikr to a student, the teacher also projects a special spiritual energy or *Baraka* which enables the pupil to make optimum use of the sacred sounds invested in the mantra or zikr.

Sacred words and phrases such as mantras have great inherent spiritual potency when recited properly and are a link to the primordial energy of the universe. They are forms or shapes through which spiritual power can manifest:

Q: When a mantra is chanted, what exactly happens?

A: The sound of a mantra creates the shape which will embody the Self. The Self can embody any shape – and operate through it. After all, the Self is expressing

itself in action – and a mantra is primarily energy in action. It acts on you, it acts on your surroundings.

Q: The mantra is traditional. Must it be so?

A: Since time immemorial a link was created between certain words and corresponding energies and reinforced by numberless repetitions. It is just like a road to walk on. It is an easy way – only faith is needed. You trust the road to take you to your destination. (19)

In the Sufi tradition the word *zikr* (or *dhikr* in Arabic) literally means repetition or recital. In another sense it also means remembrance, commemorating or invocation. The phrases which are used in zikrs are usually in Arabic or Persian. They contain an important sound value which is lost when the phrase is translated into another language such as English. “The sound and cadence of these exercises are important, as are their associated breathing rhythms. For this reason they are performed in their original language.” As well, the physical posture in which the zikr is performed is important in optimizing the circulation of spiritual energy during the exercise.

In Sufism the 99 names of God (various attributes of the Creator taken from the Koran) are frequently employed in a zikr. The very first line of the Koran is often used for verbal repetition:

Q: How can we use the 99 names of God in the correct way and is it possible to do so?

A: The 99 names are all attributes, they are all qualities. They can be used in a zikr or recitation or a concentration exercise, in a situation that relates to that quality. You are making a connection or calling on that particular attribute. Use the attribute which is the nearest to what you want or hope to achieve . . . There is never a wrong choice, because since they are all what we call “strong” words, there isn’t any one which is stronger than the other. Nevertheless, there is always one which relates more closely to a particular situation or to a particular activity than another, so it is on this basis that you select. (20)

The recitation of certain zikrs and mantras, under specific circumstances, is believed to produce supernatural power which may be projected for the purpose of healing:

All recitations are performed in a state of ritual purity. *Zikrs* are generally said during the hours of darkness. When a supernatural result is desired, the *zikr* must dwell upon some facet of the Divine power allied to the effect to be accomplished. Thus, when a Sufi wishes to cure illness, he prepares himself by repeating a *zikr* consisting of the Name of God which denotes healing. By this means the Sufi intends to collect in his mind a tremendous potential of mental

force associated with healing. This he projects toward the object of his attention, at the same time concentrating upon the desired result. (21)

Breathing Exercises

Although breathing is an instinctive physiological process, most people need to learn how to relax and breathe naturally. "Grasping air with the lungs goes hand-in-hand with grasping at life."

So-called "normal" breathing is fitful and anxious. The air is always being held and not fully released, for the individual seems incapable of "letting" it run its full course through the lungs. He breathes compulsively rather than freely. The technique therefore begins by encouraging a full release of the breath – easing it out as if the body were being emptied of air by a great leaden ball sinking through the chest and abdomen, and settling down into the ground. The returning in-breath is then allowed to follow as a simple reflex action. The air is not actively inhaled; it is just allowed to come – and then, when the lungs are comfortably filled, it is allowed to go out once more, the image of the leaden ball giving it the sense of "falling" out as distinct from being pushed out. (22)

The process of breathing has great spiritual importance as it is the essential link between body and spirit:

Breathing is the vehicle of spiritual experience, the mediator between body and mind. It is the first step towards the transformation of the body from the state of a more or less passively and unconsciously functioning physical organ into a vehicle or tool of a perfectly developed and enlightened mind. The most important result of the practice of 'mindfulness with regard to breathing' is the realization that the process of breathing is the connecting link between consciousness and subconscious, gross-material and fine-material, volitional and non-volitional functions. (23)

Breathing exercises have been developed to a fine art in the yoga practice of *pranayama* where the inhalation, retention and exhalation of breath are carefully controlled:

Pranayama is a conscious prolongation of inhalation, retention and exhalation. Inhalation is the act of receiving the primeval energy in the form of breath, and retention is when the breath is held in order to savour that energy. In exhalation all thoughts and emotions are emptied with breath: then, while the lungs are

empty, one surrenders the individual energy, 'I,' to the primeval energy, the Atman or Supreme Soul. (24)

The processes of breathing and thinking are intimately related. As breathing slows and stabilizes, mental activity also quiets and settles down:

Thinking and breathing are in very close connection. When our breathing is tense and agitated, thought is as well. Pranayama serves to calm the breathing process which in turn calms the mind. Usually inhalation is a volitional process, arousing tension in the brain and shoulder area. So pranayama should be performed in a relaxed position, without any effort or strain. Let inhalation happen, but don't inhale. Even though this breathing technique may be a beautiful exercise, any attempt to quiet one's thought is purely artificial. Rather than trying to prevent thoughts from arising, we should take note of those times when thought naturally comes to a stop. (25)

Rhythmic breathing is an essential part of many spiritual exercises and has important physiological effects. "With deep and quiet breathing vitality will improve, which will influence the brain and help the mind to grow pure and stable and fit for meditation." Establishing a relaxed pattern of breathing has many physical and spiritual benefits, and is often a prelude to a subsequent exercise or activity:

Breathing is an important ingredient in exercises, either personal exercises or in a group. Breathing should settle down after a while to a certain rhythm. It settles down naturally, it should not be forced into being fast or slow. If you force the breathing you are using energy which can be used usefully in other ways. Allow the breathing to stabilize itself. Be aware of the breathing without being preoccupied with it. Physiologically and psychologically speaking, deep breathing is more beneficial; one is taking in more oxygen. Psychologically, furthermore, deep breathing is symptomatic of calmness, quiet, tranquility, lack of worry and anxiety. Having established a moment of calm around oneself and within oneself, one then aims to achieve the physical calm associated with deep breathing -- a feeling of warmth, quiet and relaxation. (26)

Breathing exercises which involve counting the breaths are very useful for calming the mind and relaxing the body. "When you inhale, quietly count 'One,' and when you exhale, count 'Two,' and so on until you come to ten. Then return to one and repeat. If you lose the count or go beyond ten, as soon as you become aware of this, return again to one and continue again to ten, counting slowly."

A valuable exercise for calming the body-mind and inducing a feeling of deep relaxation, and even bliss, is concentration on the breath by counting the inhalations and exhalations, or simply the exhalations. Since ancient times, breath counting has been considered by spiritual masters the foundation of body-mind discipline. Breath is thus the force unifying body and mind and providing a link between the conscious and subconscious, the volitional and non-volitional

functions. In fact, breath can be said to be the most perfect expression of the nature of all life. (27)

Controlling and regulating the breath is only one type of breathing exercise. A second form, 'watching the breath,' is a fundamental practice in Buddhism, Yoga and Taoism. Simply observing the breath is simple, involves no risk and leads to the slowing of thought and control of the mind. "Neither control nor direct your breath; simply listen to it, be aware of it."

Breathing exercises and breath control are merely one stage on the journey to Self-realization and not an ultimate goal in themselves. The Indian sage Ramana Maharshi enunciates this broader perspective:

Breath-control is a help. It is one of the various methods that are intended to help us attain one-pointedness. Breath-control can also help to control the wandering mind and attain this one-pointedness and therefore it can be used. But one should not stop there. After obtaining control of the mind through breathing exercises one should not rest content with any experience that may accrue therefrom, but should harness the controlled mind to the question 'Who am I?' till the mind merges in the Self. (28)

Authentic spiritual teachings stress that there are serious dangers in applying breathing exercises to oneself or to others without the proper degree of knowledge and expertise. Certain breathing exercises should only be carried out for a specific and limited purpose, and always under the strict supervision of a teacher.

Physical Exercises

Many spiritual traditions stress the importance of body work in their teachings. For instance, physical postures or *asanas* are an integral component of Yoga and have evolved and been practised for countless centuries:

The third limb of yoga is asana or posture. Asana brings steadiness, health and lightness of limb. A steady and pleasant posture produces mental equilibrium and prevents wandering of the mind. Asanas are not merely gymnastic exercises; they are postures. By practising them one develops agility, balance, endurance and great vitality. But their real importance lies in the way they train and discipline the mind. The yogi conquers the body by the practice of asanas and makes it a fit vehicle for the spirit. (29)

Yoga postures are archetypal forms or expressions which reflect the evolution of life. Many of the Yoga *asanas* are named after various forms of natural life – the Fish, the Tree, the Swan. But in a larger sense *every* movement or pose is a posture. "The posture is an archetype.

When you do it correctly, it acts not only on the physical plane, but also on the psychological plane. It brings about a re-orchestration of energy."

In the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali concerning the posture and the breathing, it is said that every pose is a posture, that sitting on a chair is a posture, lying down is a posture. But it must be a real lying down, it must be a real sitting on a chair; generally, there is much resistance when sitting on a chair or lying down, even in bed. It is necessary to explore in order to purify the posture, any posture. But generally when we put our body on the chair there is already resistance somewhere in the ribs, shoulders or stomach. (30)

Ultimately, Yoga is a path of Self-realization and not just a system of physical postures and exercises: "Yoga is right sitting, right doing, right behaviour in the moment itself. It is being appropriate to the situation in all your mental and physical action. Yoga is being united with the present."

One of the purposes in working with the body is to remove blockages and impurities which prevent optimal functioning of the body, mind and senses:

If we take a close look at our body, we soon realize that it is overburdened by residues left over from inadequate feeding earlier in life. It creates an impression of density, and dulls our senses, preventing us from feeling our transparency. It is very interesting to observe that, if we give it the right conditions, the body eliminates these residues . . . Some forms of body movement can help us become conscious of and locate the parts of the body that are overburdened, solid, dense and congested. They help to free us from fixed ideas of what the body is and enable us to nourish our body with breath. All this is of great value, provided it is carried out with knowledge and great sensitivity. (31)

One of the most important purposes of physical exercises is the reduction of the level of physical tension in the body. Unnecessary muscular tension eats up an enormous amount of energy. P.D. Ouspensky, who worked with Gurdjieff, describes an exercise that was prescribed for students in order to relax the musculature:

He gave us many exercises for gradually relaxing the muscles *always beginning with the muscles of the face*, as well as exercises for "feeling" the hands, the feet, the fingers, and so on at will. The idea of the necessity of relaxing the muscles was not actually a new one, but G.'s explanation that relaxing the muscles of the body should begin with the muscles of the face was quite new to me. Very interesting was the exercise with a "circular sensation," as G. called it. A man lies on his back on the floor. Trying to relax all his muscles, he then concentrates his attention on trying to sense his nose. When he begins to sense his nose the man then transfers his attention and tries to sense his ear; when this is achieved he transfers his attention to the right foot. From the right foot to the left; then to

the left hand; then to the left ear and back again to the nose, and so on. (32)

A relaxed body greatly enhances our receptivity to the spiritual dimensions of life. "The body has an organic memory of its natural, unconditioned state. Once you have experienced this relaxed, light body, it will solicit you often and remind you when it is not relaxed."

In getting to know your body-mind, one can discover more clearly the nature of the identification, and so let it go. The relaxed body is a relaxed mind. In a relaxed body and mind you are open to receiving availability, welcoming, open to the openness. The relaxed, light, energetic, *sattvic* body-mind is a near expression of your real nature. It is almost impossible for a conditioned body-mind to be receptive to truth, open to grace. It can happen that truth pierces through all conditioning since the insight into our true nature ultimately has nothing to do with the body or the mind. But it is exceedingly rare. (33)

Body work and physical exercises can be vehicles of self-awareness and self-knowledge. When performed with a sense of openness and exploration they can lead to higher levels of understanding and consciousness:

Q: What is the value of doing the exercises and postures?

A: The approach to the body is to re-orchestrate the dispersed energy, nothing else. It brings you to a state of fitness and clearness, transparency, where you are available for ultimate understanding. As the mind and body are interdependent, the readiness and lightness of the body play a role in understanding. In exploring the body you become more and more able to know the body. In exploring you are completely aware of the body, and it is only in this awareness that the body comes to this re-orchestration of the dispersed energy.

Q: But if the insight into our real nature has nothing to do with the mind or body, what difference does it make what our bodies do?

A: Of course, what we are fundamentally has nothing to do with the body. One can never come to being understanding through the body. But we are trapped in our mind and body and we must become free of this entrapment so that understanding can take place in us. It is commonly understood that the body is a hindrance to awakening, but to disregard the body because of this superficial observation is a mistake. One must discover what is the nature of this hindrance; we must understand it. Because truth can never be attained, only welcomed, we must bring our body-mind to the welcoming state. (34)

Some spiritual teachers emphasize the awakening of the 'subtle energy body' interpenetrating the physical body in their body work exercises. Jean Klein: "The first thing we do in our body-work is to awaken the energy body, to make it an object of awareness. This energy is felt,

it is a sensation. When the sensation of energy is fully alive it brings about a modification of the physical structure. The body-work is one way to bring you to oneness with all beings.”

Physical exercises can never be standardized and must take into account the individual characteristics and stage of development of the practitioner. “In authentic esoteric schools certain postures and body movements are changed every so often to prevent conditioning and training among the adherents.”

Mental and physical exercises are, of course, a well-known part of very many of the world’s religious and especially esoteric movements. With the real Sufi school, however, the movements are never carried out by all members: since each movement is held to correspond with a particular characteristic and a certain stage of the individual’s development. When the exercises become standardized, they lose their developmental effect, and instead serve either to automatize or else to provide a field for imagination. (35)

Although physical exercises play an important role in spiritual development at certain stages on the Path, they are a means and not an end in themselves:

Posture and breathing are a part of Yoga, for the body must be healthy and well under control, but too much concentration on the body defeats its own purpose, for it is the mind that is primary in the beginning. When the mind has been put to rest and disturbs no longer the inner space, the body acquires a new meaning and its transformation becomes both necessary and possible. (36)

Sacred Dances and Movements

For countless centuries dancing has played a significant role in the community life of cultures around the world. The yearly cycle of the seasons was celebrated in planting and harvest dances; and some dances even embodied recipes in their patterns and rhythms. Tasks such as weaving carpets, combing wool and spinning thread were often performed as rhythmic movements to the accompaniment of music.

In some cultures dances and movements are considered a form of ‘moving meditation’ and play an integral part in the life of the community:

The famous Chinese Taoist Movement of *Tai-chi* is an excellent way of practising meditation. This Primordial Movement is a very gentle exercise ingeniously devised to bring the negative and positive forces in the body into perfect harmony, thus automatically taming the mind, controlling the *Prana*, and even bringing one directly to the state of *Samadhi*. This Primordial Movement has now become one of the most popular gymnastic exercises, widely practised by Chinese people in all

walks of life. Despite the marvellous therapeutic value of this exercise, its present application is considered by many Taoist sages to be a degeneration of the Movement, which was originally devised for a much higher purpose. (37)

Sacred dances and movements constitute a vital part of many esoteric teachings and are based on principles discovered in the course of inner spiritual experiences. They can serve as a developmental exercise, a form of communication, or a 'receptacle' for accumulating and holding a certain type of spiritual energy. "Millennia ago sacred dance was essentially a mode of communication, a universal language with its own grammar, vocabulary and semantic usage. Each dance was a book, each sequence or rhythm a phrase, each gesture or posture a word."

In traditional spiritual teachings, sacred dances have other functions in addition to encoding and transmitting esoteric knowledge:

- Exercising the body, mind and feelings in unfamiliar ways
- Developing the power of concentration and attention
- Producing various psychological states corresponding to particular postures
- Preparing students for heightened perception and higher states of consciousness
- Accessing and assimilating a refined spiritual energy

Gurdjieff developed and utilized sacred dances, which were called Movements, as a non-verbal language which encoded and transmitted precise information about cosmic laws and human spiritual evolution:

This language is mathematical, according to exact measure. Every movement has its appointed place, duration and weight. The combinations and sequences are mathematically calculated. Postures and attitudes are arranged to produce definite, predetermined emotions. In these, he who is watching them may also participate – he may read them as a script, in which the highest emotions and higher mind can take part. (38)

One of Gurdjieff's aims in teaching the Movements was to help students achieve balance and integration between body, mind and feelings. Pupils have reported that after practising the Movements for many years they sometimes experienced a transformative state whereby body, mind and feelings were unified and purified:

The Movements show us the profound effect that efforts can have when they are made under conditions created on the basis of precise knowledge. When seemingly insurmountable difficulties are overcome, the inner state of being changes. Fatigue and other obstacles vanish . . . Feelings become more confident, thought clearer, the body lighter. And when the experience is over, the body retains a trace of it. It is no longer quite the same. It has been baptized, initiated. It is in a state of balanced well-being. (39)

In Sufism, dances have traditionally been a key component of conscious, inner development. The 'Whirling Dervishes,' historically associated with the Sufi master Jalaluddin Rumi, claim to attain intuitive knowledge through a form of spinning, when correctly presided over by a teaching master: "The body-mind movements of the Whirling Dervishes, coupled with the reed pipe music to which they were performed, is the product of a special method designed to bring the Seeker into affinity with the mystical current, in order to be transformed by it."

All dervishes, and not only the followers of Maulana Rumi, perform a dance. And a dance is defined as bodily movements linked to a thought and a sound or a series of sounds. The movements develop the body, the thought focuses the mind, and the sound fuses the two and orients them towards a consciousness of divine contact which is called *hal* and means 'state or condition': the state or condition of being in ecstasy. (40)

The dances of the Sufi dervishes are performed in unison as a series of group exercises which are designed to produce a state of ecstasy and spiritual union. They are selected by a teacher for specific individuals in a certain spiritual condition as a 'means to an end.' They are not designed to be applied indiscriminately or in a non-spiritual context:

The rhythmic (and arhythmic) movements called dances are used in many Orders, always in response to the needs of the individuals and the group. Sufi movements can thus never be stereotyped, and do not constitute what is elsewhere called dance, calisthenics or the like. The using of movements follows a pattern based upon certain discoveries and knowledge which can only be applied by a teaching master of a dervish Order. (41)

Sufis believe that the apparently simple dervish dance is actually "an incredibly sophisticated instrument which can only happen at certain times and under certain circumstances." However, they stress that the proper use of sacred dance and movements as a method of interior development requires the correct alignment of 'people, time and place.'

Rumi, for instance, organized his "dances" in accordance with what he considered to be the best way of developing in his disciples the Sufic experiences. This was done, as ancient records show, in accordance with the mentality and temperament of the people of Konia. Imitators have attempted to export the system outside of this cultural area, with the result that they are left with what amounts to a pantomime, and the original effect of the movement has disappeared. (42)

Sacred Music

Sacred or transcendental music is an important form of objective art. This type of music is based on mathematical laws governing sound vibration and its relationship to the human

psyche: "Objective music affects all people in the same way. It not only touches the feelings but transforms them, bringing the listener to a unified or 'harmonious' state within himself and thus to a new relation with the universe which is itself a field of vibration."

A number of examples drawn from different cultures and time periods have been proposed:

- Christian Gregorian chants
- Indian ragas, including contemporary exponents such as Ravi Shankar and Ali Akbar Khan
- The songs of the harmonic throat singers of Tuva and Mongolia
- Sufi *zikrs* or recitations and the ecstatic singing of the late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan
- Tibetan Buddhist chanting
- Western classical music, including Bach, Beethoven, Mozart and others
- The music of Gurdjieff and Thomas de Hartmann

Gurdjieff alluded to the many traditional stories and legends illustrating the power of sacred or objective music in talks with his students:

Objective music is based on 'inner octaves.' And it can obtain not only definite psychological results but definite physical results. There can be such music as would freeze water. There could be such music that would kill a man instantaneously. The Biblical legend of the destruction of the walls of Jericho by music is precisely a legend of objective music. In the legend of Orpheus there are hints of objective music, for Orpheus used to impart knowledge by music. Snake charmers' music in the East is an approach to objective music, of course very primitive. Very often it is simply one note which is long drawn out, rising and falling very little, but in this single note 'inner octaves' are going on all the time and melodies of 'inner octaves' which are inaudible to the ears but felt by the emotional center . . . The same music, only a little more complicated, and men would obey it. (43)

The origins of sacred music can be traced to Neolithic times when ancient shamans used their voices and rhythmic instruments to heal and initiate others, and connect with the spirit realm. This type of music can also be found in some of the root cultures of the ancient world such as Egypt and especially India, which might be considered the "mother source" for many later expressions of sacred sound such as mantras and chants. In the sixth century B.C., the esoteric school of Pythagoras in Greece codified many of the mathematical properties of music (vibration, the octave), a knowledge that was later transmitted to other countries of the Western world.

The proper performance of sacred music requires certain conditions and a precise knowledge of the human psyche. For instance, different spiritual effects are produced by string instruments and by wind instruments. The tuning of the musical instruments needs to take into

account a number of important factors, including local geographical conditions, atmospheric pressure, ambient temperature, the form and dimensions of the interior space where the music is performed and the quality of energy, both individually and collectively, of audience members.

Scientists now recognize the relationship between the properties of music and certain psychological and physiological effects on the listener. In recent years there have been a number of scientific studies, confirming personal experience, which show that different components of music influence different aspects of the human being. Rhythm moves the body, melody and harmony touch the emotions and musical form and structure appeal to the intellectual mind.

In a more subjective sense, sacred music can take the listener out of the normal human condition to a new level of experience of an evolutionary nature. We see glimpses of a larger universe, imbued with higher meaning and purpose.

At Gurdjieff's school in France in the 1920s, his student Thomas de Hartmann would play Gurdjieff's music on piano almost every afternoon and evening. The effects on the students were profound:

Some of them were so moving as to be almost unbearable, and the tears would stream involuntarily down our cheeks; one had to remember oneself with all one's might in order not to have to go out. Hartmann said that he himself found some of the pieces almost too difficult to play. One of the pieces consisted of slow and solemn chords of the most divine harmony, and in the overtones one could hear a sort of joyful singing as of the voice of a seraph. I have never heard anything like these hymns of Gurdjieff, except perhaps some of the very early church music such as can be heard in Notre Dame, and some of that of Bach, who at times touches the higher emotional centre. (44)

Some of Gurdjieff's pupils believed that his music touched and ennobled their inner essential being. They have attested to the profound effect of the simple recurring melodies he played on his hand-held harmonium, music which seemed to have pierced the depths of their being: "This was the music of prayer – haunting, disturbing, indescribably beautiful, a music calculated to arouse the deepest longings hidden in the human heart." The music also had a remarkable healing quality. Student Charles Nott recounts an incident where his negative emotional state was dramatically altered by listening to Gurdjieff's unusual music:

For a few minutes we just sat quietly, then he took up his hand-harmonium, and keeping his eyes fixed on me with a look of deep compassion and power, began to play a simple melody with strange harmonies, repeating and repeating yet all the time with different combinations of notes. Little by little I became aware that he was conveying something to me both through the music – the combination of notes – and by the telepathic means which he understood so well. A change began to take place in me, I began to understand something, and a feeling of conscious hope and conscious faith began to displace the dark hopeless depression. (45)

Music and sound can have a special function in elevating human consciousness that goes far beyond an emotional effect. However, participation in such “higher” musical activities is limited to those who can actually benefit correctly from the experience, based on circumstances and need. Without proper preparation and consideration of ‘time, place and people’ the employment of music in an esoteric sense is of limited value and may even be harmful. In the words of the classical Sufi master Bahaudin Naqshband:

Music, heard in the right way, improves the approach to the Consciousness. But It will harm people who are not sufficiently prepared or of the correct type, for hearing and playing it. Those who do not know this have adopted music as something sacred in itself. The feelings which they experience while indulging in it they mistake for sublime ones. In fact they are using it for the lower purposes of arousing sentiment, emotion which is no basis for further progress. (46)

The contemporary Western understanding of music disregards several important considerations regarding the process and dynamics of composition, performance and appreciation:

Q: I am very fond of music. I feel that the great composers and orchestras give us an additional dimension in life, something which is very precious to me. Can you tell me something about the place of music in teachings designed to awaken higher consciousness?

A: Always remember two things. First, that people get out of something the nutrition which they are equipped and prepared to receive from it. Second, that music which is a product of a certain kind of mind, or a mind in a certain condition, will reflect that mind. I find that contemporary musicians and lovers of music take virtually no interest in these factors, if indeed they have ever heard of them. Music can be used, and has been so used, to increase the milk-yield of cows. This is a factor which operates in the case of cows. In other instances, where human beings are concerned, there is merely the sensation that the music ‘gives’ something. In some of these cases, what the music is ‘giving’ is a vehicle or instrument whereby emotional tension can be released. In order for music to exercise a function in the formative or developmental area, it must be composed and performed, and experienced, on the basis of knowledge of its value for such a process. This brings us to the question of the understanding of music as a very much more important phenomenon than most people realize. Music can be used, and is in fact sometimes used, merely as a training or ‘conditioning’ element, linked with certain emotions. The individual writing, playing or hearing this music may conclude, largely through social habit, that he is deriving something from the music which may, in fact, be far removed from what he is actually deriving, or could derive. Music can only be understood and participated in, by higher perception, by a mind which is capable of getting out of the music what it really contains. This can only happen if the person:

Knows about this fact;
Knows how to listen and understand;
Listens at times and under conditions suitable for the desirable development. (47)

Prayer

The inner function of prayer is not generally understood by most people or cultures. According to the Sufi al-Ghazali, "In prayer there is a secret significance. The exercises of prayer mark hidden elements." What are now known as religious prayers may have originated as special exercises of an inner developmental nature.

The effect and value of prayer depends very much on the preparation and attunement of the participants. "Prayer depends upon knowledge of how to pray and what it is for. The usual idea of prayer is merely emotional, and performs a conditioning function."

When prayers are carried out among people with a certain preparation, and when due regard is taken for such things as correct attunement, there will be one effect of prayer. If people are encouraged to pray without these or other elements, their prayer may become a psychotherapeutic tool: immensely valuable, but nonetheless at a lower level than its optimum function. (48)

Certain prayers of ancient origin encode knowledge of a higher order which can be revealed when recited with a sense of reverence and presence:

Most prayers have nothing in common with petitions. I speak of ancient prayers; many of them are much older than Christianity. These prayers are, so to speak, *recapitulations*; by repeating them aloud or to himself a man endeavours to experience what is in them, their whole content, with his mind and his feeling. In Christian worship there are very many prayers exactly like this, where it is necessary to reflect upon each word. But they lose all sense and all meaning when they are repeated or sung mechanically. (49)

In order to be effective, prayer must be repeated with conscious presence and an awareness of the inner meaning of the words. Gurdjieff stressed the importance of our intention and attitude when praying:

Your prayer should not be automatic. You must pray with your presence and with all three of your centres concentrated on the same thing. You must pray with your head, your feeling, your sensation. Do not pray to tranquilize yourself. Man, in general, prays only with his thought. He was never told how to pray and it never occurred to him that the state of the feeling and of the presence should correspond to the movement of the prayer. (50)

The very act of praying focuses the mind and produces a change of consciousness and inner perception that has a beneficial influence on the world:

Vowing, or praying, involves consciously directing attention and thought in a certain manner, fostering a particular frame of mind. In this sense Buddhism refers to faith as a faculty that can be developed into a power; it is a means of focusing the mind, whereby a certain type of power is concentrated, just as a magnetic power is concentrated by aligning the charges of the molecules in a mass of iron. Note that the vow or prayer for enlightenment outlined by Zen master Dogen is made on behalf of all beings. This attitude is a necessary basis of the aspiration for enlightenment as understood in Mahayana Buddhism. Dogen makes it clear that he is not talking about ritual performance, but a "psychological technique" designed to affect consciousness in a specific manner. (51)

Ritual and Ceremony

Ritual and ceremony have been an integral part of religious and spiritual practice since the beginning of recorded history:

Every ceremony or rite has a value if it is performed without alteration. A ceremony is a book in which a great deal is written. Anyone who understands can read it. One rite often contains more than a hundred books. Indicating what had been preserved up to our time, G. at the same time pointed out what had been lost and forgotten. He spoke of sacred dances which accompanied the "services" in the "temples of repetition" and which were not included in the Christian form of worship. (52)

Few people understand the proper use of ritual, ceremony and worship in a spiritual context. The most common misperceptions are that they are remnants of an outdated tradition or simplistic instruments of conditioning and engineering of belief:

Q: I still do not understand the point of ritual and worship in Zen. Isn't that a kind of conditioning?

A: This question cannot be answered satisfactorily in a few words. First of all, we must remember that there are different types of people, some of whom must be appealed to through the mind, others through the emotions, others through physical sensation, still others through symbols, and so on. Furthermore, ritual has nothing to do with conceptual thinking and cannot be explained conceptually. Some things, perhaps most things, we can only know by doing. Finally, implicit in your question is the modern fear of conditioning. Yet the answer to conditioning is not to resist conditioning, but to be mindful. (53)

Rituals are more than symbolic – they are concerned with inner spiritual activity. When properly performed under the guidance of a teacher they provide a form and structure through which spiritual truths may be expressed and understood:

At a time when many followers of traditional Western religions appear to have no significant understanding of, or relationship to, rites and ceremonies, it is well to remember that formality need not be an empty shell. For where gratitude, reverence and other genuine spiritual feelings are present they can be deepened and made more significant when expressed through a formal pattern, just as movement can be made more meaningful when turned into dance, or sound into music. (54)

One important instrument of ritual is the rosary or *tasbee*, consisting of 33 stones or beads on a string. According to tradition the rosary can accumulate a certain kind of spiritual energy or power. One of the functions of the rosary (or a crystal) is to absorb, ground and discharge negative energy. Gurdjieff used the rosary in work with some of his students:

One day Gurdjieff gave to each one of us in the group a chaplet of large black beads of some curious substance, upon which we were to do a special sensing exercise as we passed the beads between thumb and index finger. He told us how in the old times such chaplets were known as the Inanimate Helper and that many kinds of inner work, far more difficult than our current exercises, were done with their aid . . . Some special holy men, initiate of course, could move mountains if they wished, just sitting still, working with their chaplets, seeming half asleep. (55)

The chanting of sutras (precepts) and the words of realized masters are an integral component of many spiritual traditions. In Buddhism “chanting forms the vocal ground on which every ritual, ceremony, and rite of passage is performed, setting a tone through which participants acquire heightened awareness and receptivity to what is being enacted.”

Chanting must be distinguished from reciting. The latter may be nothing more than repetition of an account or passage. Chanting, however, is generated deep in the belly, and when performed egolessly has the power to penetrate visible and invisible worlds. Mind is unlimited; energetic chanting done with a pure mind, with single-minded involvement, is another form of zazen (meditation), another mode of learning the Buddha-truth in a direct, non-conceptual way. Performed in this manner, chanting is also a means of strengthening samadhi power and of helping to bring about awakening. (56)

Many forms of ritual, ceremony and symbolism are the outer manifestations of a deeper, spiritual truth even though they may have been diverted or adapted to lesser ends (display, entertainment and so forth):

Q: We see people from all over the world deriving satisfactions from ritual. How can we get beyond ritual?

A: Initiation and celebratory rituals carried out by religions, societies and other groupings can have various – very different – origins, purposes and functions. We might liken all these purposes, origins and functions to, say, the various processes which are known to and carried out in any given science. In chemistry, distillation is not the same as fermentation; the use of alkalis is not the same as the use of acids. There is both industrial and research chemistry. In the case of the ‘science of man,’ there are similar distinctions. When the knowledge of these distinctions disappears, ritualism takes over, or else the limited use of such processes. When the use and possibility is limited, the effect is slight: it may even be harmful. (57)

People who are obsessed with ritual and ceremony are incapable of using them in a spiritually developmental way. “When you hear their eager and sometimes persuasive explanations – that they do not feel ritualistic at all – know that you are hearing automatic self-justifications seeking to protect an acquired taste.”

Ritual can be important. The last people to be encouraged to take part in ritual, if the intent is genuinely to help raise mankind, are the ritualistically-minded. Real ritual, you see, is functional, while ritualistic individuals, whatever they imagine, in reality live for the vehicle, not the content . . . It is a major task of real learning to understand the ‘idolatrous’ processes which, however hallowed by ‘tradition’ (repetition), are inimical to the true development of man. (58)

Psychological and Other Exercises

In many spiritual teachings, ancient and modern, a wide variety of psychological and other inner exercises have been employed for developmental purposes, both individually and in group settings:

- The exercise of non-judgemental ‘self-observation’ allows a person to see his or her behaviour and reactions as they occur throughout the course of the day. “Self-observation is very difficult, but it can give you much material. If you remember how you manifest yourself, how you react, how you think and feel, what you want – you may learn many things.”
- ‘Remembering’ is a recollection exercise in which a person examines past situations and their reactions to people and events. The aim is to try to understand the influence of conditioning and past experiences, and to see how one might have acted differently under the circumstances.

- In the 'Reviewing of the Day' exercise, a person uses their memory to recall the events of the past day before going to sleep. "Try to picture oneself impartially – getting out of bed, dressing, having breakfast, going to the office in the bus, meeting people and so on, and so to bed – as if we were watching a not very interesting film, otherwise we might get identified with it. Don't think about it, as thinking will falsify the picture."
- An important psychological exercise is to contemplate the nature and quality of the relationships with significant others in one's life, with the intention of healing the past, understanding the present and enhancing the future. Through this process one can potentially make amends for past mistakes and misunderstandings, acknowledge and accept the state of the current relationship, and create the foundation for a more fruitful relationship in the future.
- One thought-provoking, but very challenging and difficult exercise, employed in schools of higher development is 'Relating the Story of One's Life.'

Let everyone of you in the group tell about his life. Everything must be told in detail without embellishment, and without suppressing anything. Emphasize the principal and essential things without dwelling on trifles or details. You must be sincere and not be afraid that others will take anything in the wrong way, because everyone is on the same position, everyone must strip himself; everyone must show himself as he is. (59)

- By performing certain mental exercises such as memorizing words during physical labour, the normal flow of automatic and mechanical associations can be broken:

Usually when one observes oneself during physical labour, particularly work consisting of repetitive movements like digging and scything, one's thoughts wander freely in directions that have nothing to do with the labour. Associations flow, following one another in complete disorder, without goal and without results. When these memory exercises were added during just such work, there was no room for leaks of wandering associations. At times it was necessary to stir oneself and direct attention to the digging itself, which at other times became almost unconscious. But the characteristic feature in all this was complete collectedness. Not a single bit of consciousness wandered away beyond the limits of the person. Everything was concentrated within. (60)

- Fasting is a useful exercise in the spiritual sense when applied under certain conditions and circumstances (right intention, setting, duration, activities). Fasting not only eliminates bodily toxins but can also purify the mental and emotional 'bodies.'

- Many spiritual traditions employ visualization as a method of mental concentration and to achieve higher states of consciousness and perception. Visualization is also effective in calming and healing the mind-body of the practitioner.

Visualization is one of the best exercises for mastery of the mind and *prana*. In Tantrism hundreds of different visualization practices are provided for different individual needs and for special applications. Visualizing a static object or a picture outside of the body is generally considered as a preliminary and preparatory exercise; visualizing a moving object circulating in a definite orbit within the body is regarded as a more advanced practice . . . Certain specific effects may be achieved by the different colours, forms, shapes, positions and orbits of movement of the objects visualized. (61)

- The 'Divine Pause' is the traditional name given to the 'Stop' or 'Halt' exercise associated with schools of the Fourth Way. One of the purposes of the exercise is to bring into awareness the automatic nature of most of our movements and postures. "When a person is at an intermediate stage between one action and another, he or she can free themselves from the limitations of ordinary thought-processes." This particular exercise can only be carried out under the strict direction and guidance of a teaching master: "The teacher, at a special time, calls for a complete freezing of movement by the students. During this 'pause of time' he projects his *Baraka* (spiritual power) upon them."

At any moment of the day or night, he might shout: "Stop!" when everyone within hearing distance had to arrest all movement. First the eyes were to fix upon the object of their gaze. The body was to remain motionless in the exact posture at the moment the word 'stop' was heard, and the thought present in the mind was to be held. In short, every voluntary movement was to be arrested and held. The stop might last a few seconds, or five, ten minutes or more. The posture might be painful or even dangerous ; but, if we were sincere and conscientious, we would do nothing to ease it. We had to wait until Gurdjieff shouted "*Davay!*" or, "Continue!" and then resume what we had been doing before. (62)

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