

OBSERVING HUMAN FUNCTIONS

'To learn to see is the first initiation into self-knowledge.'

Jeanne de Salzmann

Observing Thoughts

When a person first begins to study the working of the mind and intellect the results are quite revealing, as it shows that much of our thinking is associative, repetitive and unnecessary. "Thought has its place and is a most useful tool. It is a marvellously obedient servant, but a cruel, ruthless and inefficient master."

The study of intellectual functioning is difficult. A man who tries to see this functioning notices that he does have a certain power to direct his thoughts at the start: he can sometimes keep them for a little while in the direction he has chosen. But, sooner or later, often quite soon, they escape him and he is distracted. Besides, in his ordinary life, he seldom makes use of his power to direct his thoughts except in rare moments; his mind never stops working and ideas are always there, arising automatically as a result of outer and inner stimuli about which a man can do nothing. They are automatic reactions of the intellect in various conditions which follow one after another in a chain of associations. And in the same way that we have physical habits, so do we have habits of the mind, habitual ways of thinking which, without our knowing it, are also rather few in number. (1)

When we begin to observe our thoughts we realize that "thoughts are just thoughts" and not the actual reality they merely represent. "By watching your thoughts without being drawn into them, you can learn something profoundly liberating about thinking itself, which may help you to be less of a prisoner of those thought patterns."

By observing the very process of thought itself, you get to see how such tiny and transitory "secretions" in the mind, which have no substantial existence and which are often completely illusory or highly inaccurate or irrelevant, can nevertheless be so consequential, how they can dramatically affect our states of mind and body, influence our decisions with potentially devastating downstream consequences for ourselves and others, and in any event, prevent us from being present with things as they actually are in any given moment. The practice of watching your thoughts from moment to moment can be profoundly illuminating and liberating. (2)

When we observe our thoughts we realize that they are impermanent, without any lasting substance or significance:

As you begin to see thoughts as formations, and to observe them – just as you do with bodily formations – you see that they're quite mechanical. They're extra-

ordinarily repetitive. We go over the same conversations again and again, keep inventing new ones which will never happen. We have well-worn ruts in our brains. They're conditioned by our culture and by our personal history. Many of them come right out of things we've been told by our parents and teachers. We nevertheless take tremendous pride in our thoughts and give them great authority in our lives. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that we worship thought . . . We are virtually enslaved to them. Yet they are just thoughts. They arise and pass away and have no more reality than a sound we hear or a pain in our leg. Once you see that, your passion for thought begins to fade away. You can see when it is called for, see when it is helpful, and otherwise drop it. This isn't to discredit the many marvels created by thought. It is to put it in its proper place. (3)

When thoughts are carefully observed over a period of time, they reveal a pattern of tension and psychological stress that conceal the natural clarity of mind:

As you inquire into your own thoughts, you discover how attachment to a belief or story causes suffering. The mind's natural condition is peace. Then a thought enters, you believe it, and the peace seems to disappear. You notice the feeling of stress in the moment, and the feeling lets you know that you're opposing what is by believing the thought; it tells you that you're at war with reality. When you question the thought behind the feeling and realize that it isn't true, you become present outside your story. Then the story falls away in the light of awareness, and only the awareness of what really is remains. Peace is who you are without a story, until the next stressful story appears. Eventually, inquiry becomes alive in you as the natural wordless response to the thoughts that arise. (4)

The incessant chatter of the mind obscures our deeper self – conscious presence – which is our natural state of complete oneness with Being. “When a thought subsides, you experience a discontinuity in the mental stream – a gap of ‘no-mind.’ At first, the gaps will be short, a few seconds perhaps, but gradually they will become longer. When these gaps occur, you feel a certain stillness and peace inside you.”

Q: What exactly do you mean by “watching the thinker?”

A: The beginning of freedom is the realization that you are not the possessing entity – the thinker. Knowing this enables you to observe the entity. The moment you start *watching the thinker*, a higher level of consciousness becomes activated. You then begin to realize that there is a vast realm of intelligence beyond thought, that thought is only a tiny aspect of that intelligence. You also realize that all the things that truly matter – beauty, love, creativity, joy, inner peace – arise from beyond the mind. You begin to awaken . . . So when you listen to a thought, you are aware not only of the thought but also of yourself as the witness of thought. A new dimension of consciousness has come in. As you listen to the thought, you feel a conscious presence – your deeper self – behind or underneath the thought, as it

were. The thought then loses its power over you and quickly subsides, because you are no longer energizing the mind through identification with it. This is the beginning of the end of involuntary and compulsive thinking. (5)

When we observe thoughts without interference or evaluation, the thoughts slowly disappear as the witness state emerges and gains strength. "When you do not get involved with the thought process or the flow of words, or the flow of mind, you are not the mind."

There must simply be a quiet looking at what composes the mind. In discovering the facts just as they are, agitation is eliminated, the movement of thought becomes slow and we can watch each thought, its causes and content as it occurs. We become aware of every thought in its completeness and in this totality there can be no conflict. Then only alertness remains, only silence in which there is neither observer nor observed. So do not force your mind. Just watch its various movements as you would look at flying birds. In this uncluttered looking, all your experiences surface and unfold. For unmotivated seeing not only generates tremendous energy but frees all tension, all the various layers of inhibitions. You see the whole of yourself. Observing everything with full attention becomes a way of life, a return to your original and natural meditative being. (6)

The very act of observing our thoughts can transform our attitude to them and provide a distance that allows a deeper dimension of mind and being to emerge:

If we begin to listen to the stream of thought as thought, to attend to thoughts as events in the field of awareness, and if we develop a certain calmness and quiet outwardly, we come to see our thinking much more clearly. We are able to listen to it and see exactly what is on our minds, and how much of it is just mental noise. Once we know that, intimately, up-close and personal, we can begin to develop new ways of relating to it. We may be shocked at what we discover, at how much of our thinking is chaotic and yet at the same time severely narrow and repetitive, shaped so much by our history and habits. Yet it is probably better to know this via firsthand experience than not to know it. When unattended, our thinking runs our lives without our even knowing it. Attended with mindful awareness, we have a chance not only to know ourselves better, and see what is on our minds, but also to hold our thoughts differently, so they no longer rule our lives. In this way, we can taste some very real moments of freedom that do not depend entirely on inner and outer conditions. (7)

The very act of observing our thoughts releases a transformative energy:

The act of seeing is an act of deliverance. When I see what is real, the real facts, the very perception, is deliverance from it. I need to disengage from all the powerful value I give to knowledge, to my opinions and theories. The very act of seeing something as a fact has an extraordinary effect by itself without the participation

of the thinking. If I can remain in front of the reality without reacting, a source of energy appears that is not the thought. The attention becomes charged with a special energy that is liberated in the act of perception. But this state of observation can come only when there is an urgency to understand and to see, and my mind gives up everything in order to observe. Then there is a new kind of observation, without any knowledge, without belief or fear, with an attention that remains firm and stays in front in order to know. It is an attention that neither denies the fact nor accepts it. The attention simply sees – going from fact to fact with the same pure energy. This act of pure seeing is an act of transformation. (8)

Observing Emotions

Observing emotions is much more challenging and difficult than observing thoughts or bodily sensations. “We live with nothing but automatic emotional reactions, feelings which follow each other in rapid succession at each instant of our lives and cause something in each circumstance to please us or displease us, attract us or repel us.”

Of all the many areas of our experience, both in meditation practice and in the rest of our lives, emotions are often the most difficult to understand and to be with in a free way. Two factors contribute to this difficulty. First, emotions as appearances in the mind are amorphous; they have no clear boundaries, no definite sense of beginnings and endings. They are not as tangible as sensations nor as clearly defined as thoughts. Even when we feel them strongly, we may not be able to distinguish among them clearly. The second obstruction to our understanding of emotions is the fact that we are deeply conditioned to identify with them. When you are in the midst of some powerful feeling such as love or anger, excitement or sadness, notice the strong sense of self, of “I,” that usually comes with it. We can learn relatively easily to see the passing, impersonal nature of bodily sensations, and even thoughts, which come and go so quickly. But how much harder it is to see the impersonal or nonpersonal nature of emotions. Indeed, to many people the notion of nonpersonal emotions may even seem an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms. Emotions are often seen to be the most personal aspect of our experience. (9)

Rather than calmly watching emotions as they arise and play out, we identify with them and relate them to our personal identity and history:

Whatever emotion comes up is “what is.” When we live in separation, the mind tends to get hold of these sensations and turn them into stories. The last thing the mind wants to do is to let emotions simply be present, to be seen by the watcher, which is pure awareness. It wants to possess that emotion and turn it into a story that will convince you that the mind will work out the problem and somehow find a solution. Instead, simply rest in “what is,” whether it is the taste of marmalade

or tea, the emotion of fear, or the noise of a car going by. All these apparent happenings are simply consciousness manifesting the invitation in every form. So let those things be as they are by simply seeing it all with awareness. It's very simple. Christ said that the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed. It is tiny and ordinary, and is arising as "this." (10)

Emotions are usually more difficult to observe than thoughts because of their energetic power. Most people become completely identified with strong emotions, making it difficult to observe them calmly and dispassionately:

An emotion usually represents an amplified and energized thought pattern, and because of its often overpowering energetic charge, it is not easy initially to stay present enough to be able to watch it. It wants to take you over, and it usually succeeds – unless there is enough presence in you. If you are pulled into unconscious identification with the emotion through lack of presence, which is normal, the emotion temporarily becomes "you," Often a vicious circle builds up between your thinking and the emotion: they feed each other. The thought pattern creates a magnified reflection of itself in the form of an emotion, and the vibrational frequency of the emotion keeps feeding the original thought pattern. By dwelling mentally on the situation, event, or person that is the perceived cause of the emotion, the thought feeds energy to the emotion, which in turn energizes the thought pattern, and so on. (11)

The ability to observe powerful emotions such as anger or jealousy is very challenging but crucial in the work of self-transformation:

We can practice observing ourselves becoming angry, the arising thoughts, the bodily changes, the heat, the tension. Usually we don't see what is happening because when we are angry, we are identified with our desire to be "right." And to be honest, we aren't even interested in spiritual practice. It's very heady to be angry. When the anger is major we find it hard to practice with it. A useful practice is to work with all the smaller angers that occur every day. When we can practice with those as they occur, we learn; then when the bigger uproars come that ordinarily would sweep us away, we don't get swept away so much. (12)

Emotions can only be understood through creating an "observing space" which allows their pure naked energy to be seen exactly as it is. This approach avoids the two extremes of either suppressing emotions or expressing them without control or thought:

We are speaking here of becoming *one* with the emotions. This is different from and in contrast to the usual approach of suppressing them or acting them out. If we are suppressing our emotions, it is extremely dangerous because we are regarding them as something terrible, shameful, which means that our relationship to our emotions is not really open. Once we try to suppress them, sooner or later

they are going to step out and explode. There is another possibility. If you do not suppress your emotions, then you really allow yourself to come out and be carried away by them. This way of dealing with the emotions also comes from a kind of panic; your relationship with your emotions has not been properly reconciled. This is another way of escaping from the actual emotion, another kind of release, a false release. It is a confusion of mind and matter, thinking that the physical act of practicing emotions, of putting them into effect, supposedly will cure the emotions, relieve their irritation. But generally it reinforces them, and the emotions become more powerful. The relationship between the emotions and mind is not quite clear here. So the intelligent way of working with emotions is to try to relate with their basic substance, the abstract quality of the emotions, so to speak. The basic "isness" quality of the emotions, the fundamental nature of the emotions, is just energy. And if one is able to relate with energy, then the energies have no conflict with you. They become a natural process. So trying to suppress or getting carried away by the emotions becomes irrelevant once a person is completely able to see their basic characteristic, the emotions as they are. (13)

When we are mindfully aware of our emotional states we create an open space which prevents the complete identification with the emotion. "When people are able to discern and understand their own emotional ebb and flow, they can operate it and not it them."

Q: How do we deal with anger, jealousy, hate, and so on?

A: They are all concepts. Once you understand the principle, you can transpose it to every dimension of life. When you feel anger, don't judge it or name it. Make it an object of perception free from the interference of the intellect. Thoughts may come and go but if you give them no hold, you come to no conclusion. Sustain looking without conclusion and you will feel space between you and what you call anger. This space is not a psychological feeling but a genuine global body sensation. The more you become interested in the real anger, the more objective it becomes, a perception you observe rather than an emotivity you are lost in. You will see it is only fixed energy with none of the qualities the mind calls anger.

Q: What if the emotion emerges suddenly and uncontrollably?

A: When the crisis is over you must recollect in tranquility. Go back to the situation. Let it live again in your objective attention. (14)

Negative emotional states can be transformed and purified when observed with dispassion and acceptance. "If we know how to live every moment in an awakened way, we will be aware of what is going on in our feelings and perceptions in the present moment, and we will not let knots form or become tighter in our consciousness. And if we know how to observe our feelings, we can find the roots of long-standing internal functions and transform them."

Our feelings play a very important part in directing all of our thoughts and actions. In us, there is a river of feelings, in which every drop of water is a different feeling, and each feeling relies on all the others for its existence. To observe it, we just sit on the bank of the river and identify each feeling as it surfaces, flows by, and disappears . . . If we face our unpleasant feelings with care, affection, and nonviolence, we can transform them into the kind of energy that is healthy and has the capacity to nourish us. By the work of mindful observation, our unpleasant feelings can illuminate so much for us, offering us insight and understanding into ourselves. (15)

Awareness and attention are the means that transform negative emotions. “It isn’t important that we are upset; what is important is the ability to observe the upset.”

In clear, undivided attention, anger melts away – it loses its fuel and momentum. Its fuel and momentum are self-centered, dualistic thoughts, and the chain of reactions and counter-reactions they trigger throughout the organism. When there is attention at the moment of provocation, then listening takes the place of habitual reaction. When images are clearly detected and understood, provocation loses its power to provoke. Can you discover this for yourself? Not just words, not just anger, but the root source of it all? This is the very essence of this work of looking into oneself wholly, honestly, openly, gently, beyond all words, explanations and resolutions. (16)

With practice, negative emotional states can actually be transmuted by calmly observing them as they arise and grab hold of the mind:

When emotional states arise, catch them as they happen and discipline yourself to ask the question “What is this?” Then label it as hatred, sensuality, restlessness, whatever it is. Because you are a human being you are stuck with wanting love, security, the breast, etc. But it’s not ‘your’ fear; it’s not ‘your’ sensuality; it’s not ‘your’ problem; it’s the whole range of human experience which you can transmute if you are calm. If you push away and pack down the emotion of fear, or whatever, it will become a powder keg which will eventually explode. The only way to work with what appears to be unwholesome, is to know it, to see it fully. There is a point where the flow of fear or hatred has to be raised or transmuted and used for a higher purpose. (17)

Observing the Body

Most of the time, we are out of touch with our body and unaware of the nature of its functioning. “The body – as a living being – rarely comes into the field of our consciousness. We are for the most part simply oblivious of its presence as an existential reality – as a living entity having its own intelligence and sphere of awareness.”

What is it that is closed in us? Our senses are closed, our bodies are closed. We spend so much of our time lost in thoughts, in judgment, in fantasy and in day-dreams that we do not pay careful attention to the direct experience of our senses – to sights and sounds, to smell and taste, to sensations in the body. Because our attention is often scattered, perceptions through the sense doors become clouded. But as awareness and concentration become stronger through meditation, we spend less time lost in thought, and there is a much greater sensitivity and refinement in our sense impressions. We also begin to open the body. Often there is not a free flow of energy in the body, and as we direct our awareness inward, we experience in a very clear and intimate way the accumulated tensions, knots, and holdings that are present. (18)

Observing the body can be very useful as a method of self-knowledge. “It may help you to become more familiar with, and more sensitive to, the various kinds of unnecessary muscular tensions in your body and the various uneconomic uses of energy. It may also help you to see how closely your physical behavior is connected with the movements of your emotions and your thoughts.”

In a certain sense it is easier to observe our physical body than our thoughts and emotions, which are more fleeting and ephemeral, lacking the solidity and stability of our physical nature. “Our first work is with the body, with inhabiting and awakening the body. Work with postures is primary. Postures are physical, heavy; not like thoughts, feelings, impulses which are light, mercurial, difficult to really experience first-hand.”

If we wish to study our body, or at least, to begin with, its moving function, its movement, we must first of all be related to it. What relates us to the body is the sensation we have of it – the inner perception of my physical being, the physical sensation of myself. But sensation has an even greater importance because, if our aim is eventually to develop a stable presence in ourselves, the sensation of our physical being is an inherent part of this. It is the most concrete and easily controlled part. We always have some sensation of our body; otherwise our postures could not be maintained, our movements would be made haphazardly, or not at all. But we are not conscious of this sensation, we are unaware of it, except in extreme situations when an unusual effort is required or when something suddenly goes badly or goes wrong. The rest of the time we forget about it. In order to know and observe ourselves and to study our body we need to have this sensation. This calls for a new relationship to come into existence in me: I – conscious of – my sensation. (19)

Unless self-observation is focused and stabilized on the energies and sensations of the body it will remain as a mere mental and psychological note-taking exercise, devoid of any real developmental value. “The awareness of the body grounds us literally in the immediate, brings us into time; otherwise, living in abstraction, I, my attention, is out of time, in a kind of psychological time, not grounded in the actuality of the physical.”

It is only by grounding our awareness in the living sensation of our bodies that the “I Am,” our real presence, can awaken. Though we are told that full, complete self-observation ultimately depends on being open to a higher energy, a higher consciousness, we were also told that it begins with voluntarily putting whatever attention is available to us on our own somatic state in the moment. Gurdjieff makes clear that it is only when our ordinary attention is actively occupied with experiencing the present moment that the higher energy of awareness can appear, an awareness that relates us simultaneously to our inner and outer worlds. For those of us wishing to study ourselves by means of Gurdjieff’s method of self-observation, the starting point must be the overall sensation of the body. It is through this sensation, a kind of three-dimensional perceptual backdrop, that we can discern the various movements and energies of our own inner functions. Without the stability of this sensation, our efforts at self-observation will quickly turn into identification with whatever thoughts, feelings, daydreams, and so on are occurring. (20)

The wordless experience of one’s physical presence can act as an anchor holding the attention firm in the midst of mental and emotional distractions. “During the course of our lives, we have become so accustomed to having our attention taken by other things that we have simply lost touch with this. It is there if we can find the way to it. And it is like a sort of solid rock you can sit on in the middle of activity of different kinds, which enables you to be much more firmly based inside.”

We need to become friends with our body and to become sensitive to it, especially as it is so closely linked with our intellectual and emotional life. There are other reasons too for becoming more sensitive to the life of the body. When we see clearly that one of our troubles is that, when we do come to ourselves during the day, we relapse into the semi-hypnotic state of sleep so easily and so quickly, we see it is a real problem how to stay with oneself when one comes to oneself. Here, bodily awareness has proved to be one of the best ways of anchoring the attention so that it is not robbed all the time by impressions and the associations they arouse, or by random memories that come up in the mind and the associations they arouse. (21)

Observing the body is one of the easiest ways to stay present in daily life. “Through this internal contact with our body we come alive within our own skin, at the same time that we experience ourselves as open and unified with everything around us.”

Our body is quite obvious as an object of attention, not subtle like thoughts or emotions. We can stay aware of the body easily, but only if we remember to do so. The remembering is difficult, not the awareness . . . You do not have to practice walking meditation, or any other mindfulness of the body, for hundreds or thousands of hours to feel the benefit. Just patiently practice feeling what is there – and the body is *always* there – until it becomes second nature to know even the small movements

you make. If you are reaching for something, you are doing it anyway; there is nothing extra you have to do. Simply notice the reaching. You are moving. Can you train yourself to be there, to feel it? It is very simple. Practice again and again bringing your attention back to your body. This basic effort, which paradoxically is a relaxing back into the moment, gives us the key to expanding our awareness from times of formal meditation to living mindfully in the world. Do not underestimate the power that comes to you from feeling the simple movements of your body throughout the day. (22)

An important aspect of self-study is the observation of habits, postures and movements of the body. When we carefully observe the body we can study our gestures, how we walk, how we sit, how we hold a pen and so forth. This reveals the habitual nature of our physical being and the conditioning it has undergone:

Even at first attempt to study the elementary activity of the moving center a man comes up against habits. For instance, a man may want to study his movements, may want to observe how he walks. But he will never succeed in doing so for more than a moment if he continues to walk in the usual way. But if he understands that his usual way of walking consists of a number of habits, for instance, of taking steps of a certain length, walking at a certain speed, and so on, and he tries to alter them, that is, to walk faster or slower, to take bigger or smaller steps, he will be able to observe himself and to study his movements as he walks. If a man wants to observe himself when he is writing, he must take note of how he holds his pen and try to hold it in a different way from usual; observation will then become possible. In order to observe himself a man must try to walk not in his habitual way, he must sit in unaccustomed attitudes, he must stand when he is accustomed to sit, he must sit when he is accustomed to stand . . . All this will enable him to observe himself and study the habits and associations of the moving center. (23)

Study and observation of the physical body reveals areas of unnecessary tension which tend to deplete the system of energy and vitality. One of our first discoveries is how much unnecessary tension we hold in our face, neck, shoulders and other body parts:

There is the quite unnecessary constant tension of the *muscles* of our organism. The muscles are tense even when we are doing nothing. As soon as we start to do even a small and insignificant piece of work, a whole system of muscles necessary for the hardest and most strenuous work is immediately set in motion. We pick up a needle from the floor and we spend on this action as much energy as is needed to lift up a man of our own weight. We write a short letter and use as much muscular energy upon it as would suffice to write a bulky volume. But the chief point is that we spend muscular energy continuously and at all times, even when we are doing nothing. When we walk the muscles of our shoulders and arms are tensed unnecessarily, when we sit the muscles of our legs, neck, back, and stomach are tensed in an unnecessary way. We even sleep with the

muscles of our arms, of our legs, of our face, or the whole of our body tensed, and we do not realize that we spend much more energy on this continual readiness for work we shall never do than on all the real, useful work we do. (24)

The food we eat has a profound effect on the body. Through open observation we begin to discriminate between foods which produce states of restlessness or heaviness and foods which lead to a relaxed, vital state of being:

Q: In many of the teachings of different traditions, we are encouraged to live with a certain amount of measure in our lives. For example, nothing in excess, the Middle Way, and so on. Or we are told to pursue a certain diet or way of life. What do you think about this?

A: On the physiological level, one could say you are what you absorb. As soon as you come more into contact with the workings and sensations of your body-mind, you will see how the things you absorb act on you. You will notice how what you take in, not only by the mouth but also through the skin, affects how you wake up in the morning. You will be interested in how the body appears to you before going to sleep at night, or after a nap in the afternoon. But all this calls for observation, not the concentration of a hunting dog, but a relaxed observation without any intention. Then, in this observation free from reaction, you will act intelligently. Where you feel a lack you will make an addition of certain elements, and where you feel a heaviness you will omit certain things, until you come to the organic body, where the expanded, light, energy body is freed. No system can bring you to know yourself in this way. Only reaction-free observation, seeing the facts as they are, can do this. (25)

Our physical body stores and reflects the experiences we undergo in life and can be restored to its natural state through awareness and silent observation. "The regeneration and purification of the body is attained by establishing a discriminating attention which will dissolve and destroy all our set patterns."

Your body is your vehicle, it's your tool. You must explore it. In exploring it you will see it is conditioned through previous action, previous reactions. What we call our body is mainly only a field of reactions from previous situations, childhood and so on. So when you face your vehicle, your body, you will see that there are residues of resistance in it. Explore where the resistances are – emphasizing the accepting itself – and there comes a moment when you are free from this resistance and will use your body in a completely different way. We were often angry yesterday but today we are not angry, yet there are still residues of the anger very deep in the body. Face these tensions directly without analyzing their origins. (26)

Many people identify with physical pain or fatigue. Simply observing the body without identification, judgement or the desire to escape or change, transforms the physical state through pure awareness:

There are several ways one can deal with pain. Certainly we tend to evade or direct it in some way, but then we are involved in it through an effort of will. When we simply observe and the pain is allowed to express itself, the energy fixed as pain becomes fluid. In pure looking there is nobody, no directing ego, and this energy, finding nowhere to localize, reintegrates with the whole. It is important for you to learn how to live with pain. Never conceptualize it. I will give you an example of what I mean. If you feel tired and tell yourself, "I'm tired," you instantly identify with fatigue. This identification makes you an accomplice to this state, and thereby sustains it. But if you lie down and allowed the fatigue its liberty to speak, it becomes an object of your observation. And, as you are no longer an accomplice to it, the tired feeling quickly dissolves and you are completely refreshed. (27)

In her book *The Practice of Presence*, Patty de Llosa describes the benefits of meditative sitting and relaxation of the body. "In order to live in a more balanced way, we need to come back as often as possible to the realities of our bodies and study states of openness and closure. Our intellectual and emotional life passes through our bodies."

At the beginning of each morning I take the time to sit quietly, intentionally become aware of my physical tension wherever it may be, notice where it is strongest, and investigate limb by limb and part by part. When the body is invited to a deep relaxation, a real change may take place. But it's not a question of forcing a release. I place my best attention on my physical parts and enter into a dialogue with them. This sitting is also a practical preparation to noticing the many times during the day when I'm hyper-tense in action, when I use my hands with much more force than needed for a particular job they are doing; when my shoulders are a couple of inches higher and tighter than they need to be. (28)

The sensation of one's physical presence can be an entry point into deeper levels of being. As the observation of the body and its energies deepen, a sensitivity develops that contacts more subtle levels of the manifestations of the body. "Through the wordless experience of one's physical presence, you will approach a gateway which is connected with the experience of the other side of that gateway, by which one knows that one doesn't only live in one world, that beyond that world one reaches something that has no limitations in time and space."

Underneath all the activities of our different centers, underneath that which animates this organism, there is the ground of being. This ground of being is that upon which the whole of our personal life rests, but it is not in itself personal. The personal aspect of our being is, so to speak, put on top of it like icing on a cake. But this ground of being *is*. It does not change, it does not become. All the personal aspects of our lives are a perpetual becoming of different kinds, the passage of

one form of energy into another, whether you speak about thought, feeling, action, whatever. But the ground of being is not like that. It is therefore to our ordinary minds a very mysterious kind of thing. But there are several ways in which we can approach this mystery, which forms the foundation of our whole existence and activity. One is this silent, wordless feeling of physical presence. Already when one experiences that, one's experience, although it is a sense of physical presence, is not bound by one's body. It is like a light that is shining through one's body, but shining steadily, without fluctuation. (29)

The conditioned idea that "I am the body" and identification with physical sensations, habits and memories are superimpositions on the primal, natural state of the body:

The only way to become free from conditioning is to look without memory, without the accomplice to the conditioning. Let whatever feelings appear within you come up without visualizing or concentrating on them. In letting the feeling appear before the witness "I," before attention without periphery or center, the body goes through several degrees of elimination, for all the superimposition dissolves before the witness. You will observe a letting go of the conditioning. The emphasis that was wrongly put on the conditioning so as to reassure the person, now switches to the observation, to the witnessing, and you will soon find yourself to be the light beyond the witnessed. This is your natural state of total expansion which is energy, open and light. At first the new body sensation will be fragile and you may be solicited by the old patterns. But the body has an organic memory, a memory of its natural state of ease, which, once reawakened and sustained, will sooner or later become permanent. The old sensations will become foreign to you. You may even find it difficult to recall them. Then you will realize that the body appears in you, in awareness, and that you are not lost in the body. (30)

Sensing the Inner Self or Being

With increased sensitivity it is possible to contact, harmonize and communicate with one's inner or essential being, sometimes known as 'listening to the inner voice.' One of the significant benefits of spiritual development is "to be able to develop a predictive ability: one develops a nose, a flair, for predicting a little bit in advance what one's reactions might be to a particular thing, person, place or circumstance."

It is within himself that the seeker must seek for truth. It is his inner voice, his inner certainty, that he must, as it were, rediscover and cultivate. It is in these that the secret of his full humanity always lay, and these that reason and instinct have combined to distort. If his first task on setting out on the path is to discover,

not what one learns, but how, then his best beginning is to become aware of his own reactions, listen to his inner voice. (31)

Certain habits of mind mask the perception of deeper, subtle, inner communications. "The mind needs to be developed to perceive things which are subtle as well as those which are obvious and, in addition, to introduce entirely new concepts for the mind to work with."

The student is encouraged to practise 'listening' to his intuitive sense in the attempt to perceive whether this or that word or action was indeed correct in a wider context. If he is, for instance, prompted to alternative action, he can evaluate its reliability by reviewing his day's life in retrospect. The success of this monitoring will depend upon its frequency and honesty, but will be clouded if it becomes obsessional. (32)

Many messages from the inner being are ignored or disregarded because the form or signal is not as expected. "When you are looking at or communicating with the deeper being, you should be conscious of the fact that that your conditioned reaction to certain stimuli may be quite different to the reaction of your inner being."

Nobody is closer to oneself than one's own being. The being knows what is going on, knows what influences are impacting on a person. The inner being signals to a person and the signals are very often ignored because of conditioning. When people only consider themselves to be rational and intellectual beings, they will only assimilate properly rational persuasions. The signals or feelings which come from the inner being are often ignored because they are not presented in a sophisticated enough way. For instance, when they come from the inner sensing or inner hunger, and don't exactly present themselves in the same way that the other senses do, they are ignored, even though they may be very obvious. (33)

In order to connect with subtle spiritual energies we need to be in a state of quiet attention, openness and receptivity:

Attention is the conscious force, the force of consciousness. It is a divine force. The search is for contact with an energy coming from the higher parts of our centers. At times we have an intuition of it that is less strong or more strong. This intuition is the action on us of higher centers from which we are separated by our attachments to our functions. When this action is felt, it affects the body which then receives more subtle and alive sensations. It affects the thought, which becomes capable of holding under its look what is immediately present. It affects the emotions, giving rise to a new feeling. But this action, coming from the higher centers, is not to be sought from outside or brought about forcibly by some function of the lower centers. In order for this action to be felt by my body, mind and feeling, there must be a certain state of availability. Here is the

obstacle, the barrier. The quality of energy of the lower centers must correspond to the vibrations of the higher centers. (34)

When the surface mind is quiet and relaxed it becomes receptive to the perception of finer, more subtle states of consciousness and awareness:

To be, just *be*, is important. You need not ask anything, nor do anything. It means that for the time being you are free from the obsession with 'what next.' When you are not in a hurry and the mind is free from anxieties, it becomes quiet and in the silence something may be heard which is ordinarily too fine and subtle for perception. The mind must be open and quiet to see. (35)

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