

# Meditate in Safety

Theory and Practice of  
Disaster Prevention and  
Repair

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# 1 - INTRODUCTION

## Is Meditation Dangerous?

Meditation is no more dangerous than rock climbing or skiing, activities which I greatly enjoyed and from which I benefited in my youth. I was fortunate in that I had good instructors and had a temperament that was stable and did not take unnecessary risks. As is well known, accidents, sometimes fatal, do occur in these sports. The same is true of meditation, which forms a part of the instruction and practice in many Yoga classes, and normally is of great benefit.

Meditation is a powerful and valuable tool both for stress relief and for spiritual growth. The majority of those who practise it have discovered that, when performed with integrity and under sound guidance, it will produce many benefits, including a clearer insight into our personal nature and identity, into the meaning and teaching potential of the events that befall us, and into our purpose in the universe. Above all, it will help us to attain a genuine inner tranquillity and peace of mind that will lead us into an awareness of the presence of the 'transpersonal' (or in religious terms - the 'Holy') in our lives. And yet - there are instances where bad experiences have occurred in or following meditation, and even cases of psychic disturbance calling for professional therapeutic treatment. Why should this be? - Why should meditation occasionally seem to go sour and cause distress?

This booklet will consider the factors that are essential to ensure that meditation may be beneficial. It will examine some of the problems that occasionally arise during meditation, either during practice or subsequently. It will endeavour to explain the reasons for them, how to distinguish between those that should be accepted as teaching lessons and those that should be avoided, how to heal those aspects of our personality that may have been the source of distressing experiences, and how to know when and from where to seek help. Nevertheless one can say, thankfully, that these problems are not common and that the great majority of people practising meditation will never encounter them.

## How I got involved

In 1988 I was asked by the editor of Yoga and Health to read a letter she had received from a reader who was suffering considerable distress

as a result of meditation. When the letter arrived, it explained that the writer was hearing demonic voices after meditation. It told me something of the lady's background and also offered, by reading between the lines, some clues as to the possible causes of the trouble. I discussed her case with her over the telephone and spent nearly an hour going over: the techniques that she had been taught, her attitudes to and relationships with others, the extent of her psychic sensitivity (which turned out to be unusually high), and all the other factors that seemed to be relevant. I was able to make some 'first aid' suggestions that seemed to resolve the problem, for I subsequently had a couple of letters from her to say that all was now well and continuing so.

The editor asked me to follow up with some detailed research. This took many months, I learnt much from it and during the course of it more readers' problem letters were sent for me to answer. Some were not concerned with meditation as such, but more with the general problem of hearing voices.

One of the most fascinating and instructive was from a lady who in her youth was distressed by a continual, quiet muttering. She wondered if she was going mad and was very relieved that it stopped when they moved house. Although no longer plagued by the phenomenon, she wrote to ask whether, out of interest, I could throw any light on the problem. Her experience struck a chord in my memory and I replied asking her to tell me what her **DENTAL** health was like at the time and how near was the local radio broadcasting station. She was obviously puzzled at my questions but replied that she had several amalgam fillings and that the radio station was a few hundred yards up the road. My hunch was correct! She was suffering from what might be called 'cats whisker' syndrome - in other words the metal in her mouth was behaving like a tuned radio circuit and her skull like a sounding board, and if she hadn't moved, the solution would have been to have her metal fillings replaced by a more suitable ceramic material. There is a moral to this story. If you hear voices, check first that there is nothing physical that might be causing the problem before seeking a psychological or spiritual cause. Indeed, always look for the simplest and least psychically oriented solution before delving deeper.

Another writer had been enjoying Hatha Yoga for several years, but that changed after moving on to the 'advanced' class. After working there for a few months, some of the classical symptoms of psychic trauma: inexplicable feelings of fear, a frightening paralysis during relaxation, loss of appetite leading to severe loss of weight, agoraphobia and hallucinating hostile voices - began to manifest. Unfortunately her

teacher did not have the necessary background of knowledge to explain the reasons for my client's problem and was unable to offer any help. It became very apparent that the trauma was caused by the interaction of very powerful Hatha Yoga and Pranayama exercises with a psychically vulnerable personality. The result of this interaction was a completely uncontrolled manifestation of Kundalini. Our conversation made it clear that at the back of my client's mind was the continuing desperate need to understand what had happened and to put the experience into the context that would make it intelligible. This I was able to do.

## Hearing Voices

When the everyday mind is not concentrating on a specific and demanding mental or physical task, it behaves, all too frequently, like a debating society or a quarrelsome committee, with its chairman - the core of the ego - struggling to retain control. We all may observe at such times the many 'voices within' competing for attention and sometimes seeming to tear us apart. A name given to them is the 'role-playing sub-personalities' and one preliminary objective in meditation is to reconcile them to each other and bring about a state of re-union and integration.

However, when people talk of 'hearing voices', they will be referring, most probably, not to this everyday occurrence, but rather to one of several other and less usual types of experience.

Before considering any of them in depth, it must be remembered that in the field of psychiatry generally, the first thing is always to check that there is no physical cause. Surgical or medical treatment would be required for a patient whose symptoms were due to a fever, a tumour on the brain, a tooth abscess or the side effects of a drug or vaccine.

Similarly, one has to be certain that hearing voices is not a misunderstood case of tinnitus or, as in the example described on page 4, the result of metal tooth fillings acting as a tuned circuit receiving signals from a nearby radio transmitter.

Having considered these possibilities, attention can now be given to the voices that are of genuine psychic origin:

## The Voice of the Holy

Before describing the pathological manifestations, mention must be made of the authentic voice of the Holy - the still silent voice that is

spontaneously encountered as genuine religious experience. It is the voice that comes to warn us in moments of crisis or to command us as and when it is necessary. It comes unemotionally, without praise or abuse, and without repetition, as it did to the patriarchs and prophets in the Bible, or to such people as St Francis of Assisi who heard just a simple command "Build my Church", and were driven to act upon it. This is the flow of Holy energy and thought form that flows down the continuum of consciousness that links the transcendent to the human, and is mediated to us as a voice by the transpersonal Self. It comes to us in its own time and in its own way.

It is this that Martin Buber had in mind when he translated the words 'AHYEH ASHER AHYEH' from the book of Exodus, not as the conventional 'I am what I am', but as:

*"I shall be there as I shall be there, that is - you need not conjure me for I am here, I am with you; but you cannot conjure me, for I am with you time and again in the form that I choose to be with you time and again; I myself do not anticipate any of my manifestations; you cannot learn to meet me; you meet me when you meet me"*

There is no special activity of our own that can precipitate it, nor is it a phenomenon that we can anticipate. Meditation may make us receptive to the possibility, but by no means can meditation force its manifestation. If it comes, we may be spurred to action, and then remember it for the rest of our lives as a turning point and a blessing.

## Unholy Voices

There are voices, however, that are of an entirely different nature. They are charged with violent emotion, they are repetitive and destructive. In the case of the lady whose letter initiated this investigation they were swearing and abusive. They seem to be both within and outside - sometimes to inflate the ego by telling it of its importance - more often to tell it how utterly worthless it is. The victims wonder what has taken possession of them. The answer is not clear cut and there are several possibilities, all of which we must investigate:

The voices may come from specific role-playing elements in our personal subconscious. This may be the result of a faulty psychic protection system causing bombardment by the forces of the unconscious.

Meditation cannot in itself cause schizophrenia, but if there is a latent tendency to psychosis, it may be activated and thus be brought out into the open by virtue of the particular meditative technique used. It should be added that sufferers from schizophrenia sometimes exhibit symptoms that might suggest possession. This is the paranoid form where they claim that they are being attacked or possessed by influences outside them, even including electronic equipment. Sometimes it helps to treat it as though it really were a case of possession but as in all cases of pathological disturbance, this calls for expert professional help.

## The Way Of Asking For Trouble

One cannot afford to play 'games' with meditation, for its real purpose is the transformation and spiritual growth of the personality structure. It is neither for entertainment through exciting experiences nor for the satisfaction of a morbidly unwholesome curiosity.

There is a particular danger in using esoteric techniques ripped out of the context of the culture in which they are naturally relevant and in which there are built in stabilising forces. For example, techniques which a Hindu or Buddhist can use safely, may be dangerous for the undiscerning Westerner who is not attuned to the mind of the Orient. Intense meditation on the Chakras, Kundalini and the Siddhis are best left to those who can safely integrate them into their personal religion or philosophy.

One has to ask whether the techniques that one is using include a thorough spiritual, intellectual and physical preparation? Are they concerned with ethical aims and objectives (Yama and Niyama)? Do they include an adequate 'grounding' in the return to 'normal' awareness (see further on page 26)?

One has to establish what is the personality of the person meditating: their Integrity of purpose and motivation, emotional and intellectual balance, ability to discriminate, the general nature of their psychic structure, ability to form balanced relationships, and what is currently happening in their life.

## The Responsibilities of the Teacher

Western presentation of Hatha Yoga is somewhat different to that taught in the Orient. It is seen here primarily as a technique for total therapy and as a means of using the body as a focus for meditation. We

recognise it as a series of spiritual techniques. Firmly rooted in our own religious traditions, we learn the lessons of the Bhagavad Gita and apply them to our lives through Karma and Bhakti, the Yogas of 'Fulfilment through service' and 'Devotion to ideals'. Those of us who are teachers tread much more cautiously, and with very good reason, in any excursions into the more esoteric aspects of Yoga such as Raja - the Yoga of Mastery of Psychic control of the mind, or stimulating the Kundali energy.

Nevertheless, there are occasions when our responsibilities as teachers may be tested to the extreme. Someone who has been spiritually or psychologically traumatised may come to us for help, and when that happens, compassion calls upon us to respond urgently. The individual may be distressed because of an aspect of their psychological constitution that makes them vulnerable to practices that would have no effect on the majority of us.

For these reasons, Yoga teachers have to examine their integrity of purpose, breadth of vision, intellectual honesty and sense of responsibility. Are they seeking their students' growth or are they playing the 'magician' and manipulating them? They need to have some understanding of the theory underlying esoteric physiology and psychology in order that they may adopt safe teaching practises, and to respond compassionately when a student comes to them in desperation with a cry for help, even if only to offer first aid or to direct them to someone more qualified to assist. (see also pages 28-29)

## 2 - AN INSIGHT INTO THE THEORY

### The Nature and Vulnerability of the Formative Body

We are accustomed to thinking of the physical nature of Man in terms of a body; but in reality there are a number of bodies interpenetrating each other and supporting each other's functions. At the grossest level there is the skeletal body - of which the fossilised remains are all that survives many years after death. Then there is the muscular body, responsible for all movement and powering various functions; the digestive and eliminative body; the circulatory and respiratory bodies and the organic body.



But after we have considered all these, we become aware of two other bodies more subtle in their nature. The first of these is the chemical body: the endocrine system whose hormones influence our metabolism, moods, mental energy levels, immunising response to disease and our response to stress conditions. The second is the electro-chemical body: the nervous system whose sensory components serve as gatherers of information about the internal and external world, transmitters of consciousness and triggers of activity throughout the structure of the body. All these bodies are accessible to study by physiologists.

There is, however, one more body, even subtler in its nature, which must be considered. This is the formative body. Its reality has been scientifically demonstrated through Kirlian photography and it is probably a manifestation of an electro-magnetic phenomenon. Pre-scientific thinking that relied on intuition for its concepts, and metaphors for its expressions, called it the aura or etheric counterpart, and those in whom extra-sensory-perception is well developed describe this aura as a shimmering coloured cloud of luminescence around the gross physical body, with striations of pattern concentrated in certain areas.

This formative body moulds its more solid counterpart by providing the life force, energies and patterns that maintain cell metabolism and govern growth and healing. Just as the physical body requires food and oxygen for its functioning, so does the formative body require Prana (the name given in Yoga science to the life force gathered in by the breath) for its well being.

This formative body serves as the interface between the mind and the gross physical body and is the means by which body and mind are inter-related. When it is temporarily ruptured, the phenomena of out of body or near death experiences occur. It is, of course, permanently ruptured at death. When it stretches, disorientation is experienced. Hence the importance of grounding and chakra closing exercises at the end of any meditative or healing work .

Yoga physiologists describe both the energy field and the organising patterns of the formative body's structure in detail. They give the name "chakras" to the latter. Many of the attributes ascribed to these are metaphorical rather than actual, and have no relevance to human physiology, but there remain two vitally important functions that must be mentioned.

They give structure to the subtle energies of the formative body and are essential for the self-healing processes of the gross physical body. Yoga

physiologists correlate the seven principle chakras with specific nerve plexi and endocrine organs (the producers of hormones), and suggest that they take an active part in the normalisation of their functions in order to ensure physical and emotional health. This underlies the rationale of the Yoga Asanas (Static and dynamic postures).

The chakras also have a filtering function that controls the influence of the forces of the unconscious upon the mind. They are metaphorical gateways that can be open or closed. In the closed state of normal consciousness, they protect the mind against invasion, so that we may not be subjected to stress-making psychic noise. It is quite possible that it is failure of the chakras to act in this manner that causes psychic derangements such as schizophrenia. In meditation they may become partially and spontaneously open to give a heightened awareness of the superconscious. Normally they close of their own accord at the end of meditation and during the return to normal consciousness, when they revert to their normal filtering function. However, in the case of the psychically sensitive and, thus vulnerable, person, this may not spontaneously occur. To avoid even a minor sensation of feeling disoriented or strange, or the danger of an euphoric “high”, it is wise to perform a symbolic exercise to assist in closing the chakras (discussed in detail on page 29 ).

### **Kundalīnī - a metaphor for latent energy**

Our human wholeness calls for the elimination of those complexes or psychic knots which plague most of us, which block the free flow and expression of the vital force through our physical and psychic being, and which hamper our spiritual growth to maturity. The systematic discipline of Yoga may be regarded as the science and technology of consciousness. As science, it is the study of the evolution of consciousness in the human race. As technology, it is the means for promoting the growth of consciousness within the individual.

The evolution of consciousness in the human race is inextricably linked with the development of language and with its limitations. As language evolves, it becomes capable of expressing abstract concepts in a manner denied to the primitive mind, and finds its expression ultimately in writing. Language uses metaphors to give an insight into mystery. Even though the mystery in itself cannot be grasped by the mind, the metaphor provides a focus by which the energies that are created by thought can find therapeutic expression.

In the Indian esoteric tradition, the concept of Kundalini is a metaphor that both conceals and reveals the mystery of that evolutionary life force which is the archetypal drive underlying human and personal growth. In the individual, it is regarded as lying dormant in the formative force field. The word means “coiled” but it may more accurately be translated as “latent energy” in that it is a potential that can be released into dynamic actuality. Hindu symbolism, which loves to portray the archetypal forces of the unconscious in animal form, represents Kundalini as though it were a coiled and sleeping serpent at the base of the spine which, upon being awakened, straightens itself as it strikes up the spinal column.

Traditionally, the latent Kundalini is portrayed as having three and a half coils. The coiled mainspring of a clock when fully wound has latent energy. If this is released under control in a slow and steady manner by an escapement mechanism, the clock will perform its duty of recording the time. But if the escapement mechanism failed, the coiled spring would straighten out with a sudden release of energy that might destroy the clock. So it is with the Kundalini. As evolutionary life force, it manifests in its own way and in its own time, as and when we are ready for it. We have our ‘Spiritual Guardians’ who drive us when we are ready to be driven or when we need to be prodded into growth. But if we are tempted to force for ourselves the pace of Kundalini by the magical exercises that are taught by some schools of psychic development which lack integrity, the forces released can shatter the personality and do untold damage to the health: physical, mental and spiritual.

The significance of Kundalini in human spiritual development can best be understood by taking an analogy from nature. If we look at the growth of a butterfly, we see four distinct stages:

First the egg. This is pure potential - latent energy awaiting development.

Second the caterpillar. This corresponds to the infant and adolescent stages of growth.

Third the chrysalis, where the caterpillar spins itself a shell, and within it, **breaks down** its original structure.

Fourth and final stage, the butterfly, fully formed and matured, that emerges from out of the chrysalis and takes wing in all its beauty.

In the human being, the transition from spiritual adolescence to spiritual maturity is rarely as peaceful and free from trauma as in the butterfly. The counterpart of the chrysalis stage of the butterfly in the human being is the spiritual crisis in which the old psychic structure centred around the ego is broken down and re-centred around the Self. This is Kundalini working in its own time and in its own way under the direction of our inner guardians, placing us under those tensions that will initiate growth and bring us to maturity.

### 3 - UTOPIA - DREAM OR NIGHTMARE

#### Crisis

There is much to be said for 'The Wisdom of Uncertainty'. It is a sign of the freedom from dogma that comes with maturity. Nevertheless many of us go through periods in our lives when the harsh realities of existence get too much for us and we are precipitated into a spiritual or existential crisis.

In the face of these we are tempted to demand the comforting reassurance of certainties rather than the overwhelming challenges of life as it is. Too often, however, these throw into confusion our understanding of time, of meaning and of relationship.

It is opportune to reflect for a moment on the meaning of this word 'crisis' and to remember that the Chinese pictogram (letter symbol) corresponding to it is composed from two constituent symbols - Danger and Opportunity

Considering each of these in turn:

Danger is the possibility of breakdown.

Opportunity is the potential for converting breakdown into breakthrough, and also of recognising the real possibility that there is a guiding hand and a meaning behind the growing pains. This is where creative introspection, as a therapeutic form of meditation, is so important as a means for getting events into perspective.

#### The Existential Response

The creative answer to the existential crisis is found in the practices of Karma and Bhakti - the Yogas of unconditional action and unconditional love.

A great personal inspiration to me has been the prayer of Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev who died 200 years ago, (shortly before the birth of Soren Kierkegaard, traditionally, regarded as the founder of modern existentialism).

*“Master of the Universe! I do not beg you to reveal to me the secret of your ways - that would be too much for me - I could not bear it.*

*But show me one thing, show it to me ever more clearly and more deeply. Show me what this, which is happening to me here and now, means to me. What it demands of me. What it is that you, Lord of the World, are telling me by way of it.*

*Oh! it is not why I suffer that I wish to know, but only whether I suffer for your sake”.*

A Sanskrit poem that also expresses this theme well is the following:

*“Look to this day, for it is life, the very life of life*

*In its brief course lie all the varieties and realities of your existence.*

*The Bliss of growth, the glory of action, the splendour of beauty .*

*For yesterday is already a dream, and tomorrow is only a vision*

*But today well lived, makes every yesterday*

*a dream of happiness and every tomorrow a vision of hope.*

*Look well therefore to this day, such is the salutation of the dawn”.*

## Spirituality and Yoga

There are no special exercises of body or of mind, no techniques, no tensions or relaxations of the soul that can of themselves induce spiritual Yoga. But to those who are truly Spiritual, who live each day in the knowledge of the ‘Presence’ in their life, there is no rung of being, no human activity, no particular branch of Yoga which is irrevocably non-spiritual and in which spirituality cannot be found when the lights in us are right.

The spiritual becomes non-spiritual, the non-spiritual becomes spiritual when the lights in us are changed. The most uplifting practice of mystical thought and experience can degenerate into a 'black art' if it is prostituted.

When the lights in us are wrong:-

**Raja Yoga**, the mastery of the thought patterns of the mind degenerates into mere magic, the manipulation of the unconscious elements of the psyche.

**Gnana Yoga**, the intuition of man's place in the Universe and of the true nature of his being degenerates into idle curiosity or sterile speculation.

**Karma Yoga**, the creative fulfillment of man's destiny and the consecration of his work degenerates into a mere occultist concern with fate.

**Bhakti Yoga**, the devotion to spiritual ideals and to the development of the compassion of the heart degenerates into idolatory or fanaticism or guru worship.

But when the lights in us are right, even that most apparently physical of all Yogas: Hatha, can transcend the merely physical, it can transcend even the psychosomatic and by spiritualising body and psyche it can become a truly spiritual activity - as truly a spiritual Yoga as any of the other forms of which I have spoken.

Hatha Yoga becomes spiritual when one recognises that the purpose of its techniques is to render body and psyche as fit and healthy vehicles for the fulfillment of the destiny of the spirit in the outer world of everyday action.

The postures cease to be merely the manipulation and conditioning of the body, but become the symbolic outer expression of an inward attitude of being.

The breath is no longer a mere ventillation of the cardio-vascular system, nor even the vitalisation of the nerve system in the body through Prana; but becomes the symbol of the ebb and flow of the Divine Spirit in man, the outer expression of the moments of acceptance of the life of the Universe and of the moments of surrender of the personal identity to the greater organic whole of which it is a part.

Asana and Pranayama become an activity of the body meditating, for body can meditate as well as mind.

Prayer and Meditation are two of the working tools of Spiritual Yoga. Although they are distinct activities they do meet and merge one into the other in meditative prayer. Moreover meditation can be used as a prelude to prayer.

And how should one regard prayer? Angelus Silesius, a medieval Christian mystic, defined it thus:-

*"True prayer is that when he who prays is inwardly transformed to that he kneels before".*

## Utopia and The Cult Problem

To the truly religious person, the existential 'Practice of **the Presence**' is the practice of the **Present**. But when the religious impulse becomes neurotic in the moment of crisis, we are exposed to a grave danger. We get into a worried state of mind about the future or the past and lose contact with the importance of the present. One reaction to our psychological vulnerability is depression; the other is the desire for 'Utopia' - craving for heaven and for a radiant future on the one hand and, on the other, harking back to a 'Golden Age' in the past.

One of the goals of authentic religion is the endeavour to find a balance between the two vital polarities of spirituality and community.

Spirituality is concerned with the personal relationship with God, the Holy One, the Numinous, or call it what you will.

Community is concerned with the prophetic demand for compassion and social justice within the religious community of the aspirant and, through it, with the national and global community.

The twin dangers of the Utopian dream, that turn it into a nightmare, are that it seeks:

An escape from the mundane community in favour of the artificial community of a cult. To find a safe immersion in conformity – the surrender of the individual will to the special collective.

A desire to escape from history, with all its burdens of free will, failure and improvisation, into a spiritual or transcendental world.

It has been said that Utopia is for those vulnerable and uncertain seekers after certainty who are willing to risk being exploited by power seeking charismatic dictators.

## Reason and the Cults of the Irrational

Vivekananda, one of the pioneers of the modern Yoga revival, wrote: -

*“To get any reason out of the mass of incongruity we call human life, we have to transcend our reason, but we must do it scientifically, slowly, by regular practice, and we must cast off all superstition. We must take up the study of the superconscious state just as any other science. On reason we must lay our foundation, we must follow reason as far as it leads; and when reason fails, reason itself will show us the way to the highest plane Real inspiration never contradicts reason, but comes to fulfil it and to be in harmony with it”.*

There is all the difference in the World between ‘transcending reason’ and ‘pursuing the irrational’ (that is fleeing from reason) - In this ‘age of the breaking of vessels’ when old forms of spiritual expression are giving way to new ones, those associations which are concerned with the progressive evolution and scientific study of man's true nature and potential have a special responsibility in protecting the public from the ‘cults of the irrational’ by systematic education in personal responsibility for spiritual growth..

The personality cult is offensive because it encourages an unhealthy symbiosis (that is a mutual nourishment of each others ego) between a schizoid cult leader and a neurotic cult follower. Neurosis is essentially the state of being overwhelmed and oppressed by mundane reality, while psychosis, as found in the schizoid personality, is essentially the state of being unable to accept mundane reality and of seeking a return to the ‘Absolute’ state of the womb where the unborn foetus is omnipotent, omniscient and in bliss. In neither case has the personality learnt to meet and relate to the essential Self in other personalities. The major difference between the two is that the neurotic is conscious of their neurosis and wants to be helped to become whole, while the schizoid has no desire to be other than they are and will not acknowledge their sickness.

The schizoid personality is to be found in the more authoritarian political systems and religious sects and in the extreme case he wants to be God or God's special messenger. Unfortunately his spiritual sickness is not always apparent until too late. When he has a charismatic personality, that is when he is what might be termed a ‘spell binder’, he may become: the great dictator, the ruthless business tycoon, the



messianic politician, the religious fanatic or the magician, or a combination of these. In particular he may become the leader of a cult. The cult phenomenon is expressed in many different forms, but often these are based on a fascination with psychism.

Psychism is that state of mind which makes a religion of the pursuit of psychedelic experience. It is the deliberate withdrawal and surrender of the rational faculty resulting in exposure of the central personality to the full force of the archetypes of the collective unconscious. It is the invitation to external entities to take over and use the personality - a form of submission to possession..

The 'Siddhis' or psychic powers that well up from out of the occult, or hidden aspects of the psyche include such phenomena as:

**Clairvoyance** (the ability to perceive the Aura or to visualise that which the 'normal' senses cannot perceive),

**Clairaudience** (the hearing of instructions or advice within the Psyche) and

**Clairtactility** (the ability to feel the human aura or the presence of underground lines of force etc). This is closely related to the powers of Healing with the Hands.

All these phenomena are perfectly natural gifts that can be developed in the service of Man like any other talents, but all of them can be perverted to egocentric ends.

These powers often come quite unexpectedly and completely unsought. They may be experienced as a blessing or a curse depending upon the recipient's ability to control or veil them. In the case of Clairvoyance or Clairaudience there are occasions when people may fear that they are suffering from Schizophrenia when they are really suffering from an uncontrollable overdose of psychic sensitivity that needs curbing.

Quite often these powers are experienced unexpectedly by those who have devoted themselves to spiritual development in the seclusion of monastic orders or as hermits.

The genuine masters of Yoga remind us that even when these 'powers' come unsought, they are liable to deflect us from true spiritual progress and turn out to be sterile paths. Scriptural accounts describe them as temptations to pride. When they are deliberately pursued as being something intensely desirable in themselves, they can result in spiritual retrogression.

## Healing and the Magician

It might be considered that many cases of pain or disease are manifested as lesions or distortions in the electrostatic force field or aura of the human body. Just as some people can relieve pain by massaging the physical body itself, so can others correct these lesions in the aura by massaging it and transmitting human electrostatic energy with their hands. Yet others can heal through the psychic energies of concentrated thought.

These are quite natural gifts and their techniques of application can be developed like any other talent. However they must be treated with a mixture of humility and compassion and in a spirit of genuine scientific enquiry if the phenomenon is not to degenerate into a cult.

The danger of a technique that often gets spectacularly successful results at the physiological level is that it may blind us to the far deeper spiritual needs that may lie beyond the superficial symptoms. The disappearance of a physical symptom may be no guarantee that the patient has been made spiritually whole. It is only the beginning of the process.

Healing becomes a cult when the magician appears in the guise of the healer and uses their gift to obtain a psychic domination over the patients. Physical cures may well be effected because the magician is particularly able to channel and focus energies. But there can be no true healing, that is making spiritually and psychically whole for either the magician or the patient, for instead of being **person** drawing out **person's** inherent ability to unfold, they become **individual** manipulating and thus merely curing **individual** of a symptom, At best there is a mere mutual satisfaction of the ego.

## 4 - THE OCCULT TEMPTATION

### The World of the Occult

*The things that are hidden belong to the Lord your God. The things that are revealed belong to you and your children for ever that you may do all the words of this Torah.*

*Deuteronomy 29.28*

The word 'Occult' means hidden, and it is very clear from the above quotation that these things were hidden, not because they were in themselves evil, as so many suppose, but rather because they were too

holy for man to profane. The Bible was to be a guide for action rather than for speculation.

Amongst those who are mystically inclined, there has always a certain longing for an experiential intimacy with God, and this has driven some to endeavour to 'tear through the veils'. In its more sinister manifestations, the motive behind dabbling with the 'occult' has, in too many cases, not been a longing to 'know God' so much as a desire for possessing power, or esoteric knowledge. And this has been the cause of the madness that destroys the trespasser.

## Lessons from the past

*Now it came to pass . . . that the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God . . . the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel the priest . . . and the hand of the Lord was upon him.*

*And I looked and, behold, a great cloud, with a fire flashing up, so that a brightness was around about it. . . And out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures . . . and everyone of them had four wings . . . and when they stood, they let down their wings.*

*And above the firmament that was over their heads, was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone; and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness of a man upon it above.*

### *Ezekiel - Chapter 1*

There is an ancient Jewish legend (related in the Talmud - Chag. 14b) which tells how in the second century CE, four Rabbis undertook an inner psychic journey of a highly esoteric nature. It was a spiritual exercise in what was known as Merkavah mysticism and in the words of the Talmud : "They ascended into Paradise". Of the four: Rabbi Ben Zoma lost his reason, Rabbi Elisha ben Abuyah lost his faith, Rabbi Ben Azzai lost his life, and only the great, wise and saintly Rabbi Akiva ben Joseph, returned enlightened.

Merkavah mysticism is based upon the strange arcane vision of the prophet Ezekiel, (quoted above). The Biblical account in the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel concerning the four creatures and the throne is interpreted by the scholars and mystics to be an ecstatic vision of the throne of God, also referred to as a chariot. However, over the centuries it became heavily overlaid with Gnostic thought and

interpretation. The Ascent of the Merkavah was a mystical (or possibly magical) exercise in which an attempt was made at entering an altered state of consciousness. The objective was to enter the supernal dimensions, achieve a state of ecstasy and behold the throne/chariot of God.

It is of value to speculate on the reasons for the differing fates of the four Rabbis.

It has to be remembered that although we are enjoined to develop our spirituality to the highest possible level, at that point we must stop and remember the Divine purpose in creation, which is to be fully of and in this world.

Rabbi Akiva journeyed into the paradise of spirituality and returned unscathed because his holiness and learning was such that he knew that those moments when we retreat from the world are for no other reason than to refuel and enrich the soul, and that they can only be temporary. He entered paradise with the intention of returning. It is interesting to compare this with the very wise Chinese teaching that the final stage of true meditation is to 'ride the bull into the market place'.

But one must ask why did the other three rabbis meet with disaster?

## The Nature of Mysticism

Mystical endeavour within religious tradition falls into three discrete categories, each of which has its virtues and each of which has its dangers. These may be described as ecstasy, theosophy and theurgy.

**Ecstasy** - In some branches of Christianity and in oriental disciplines such as, for example, Raja Yoga, it is the state of consciousness where one has lost oneself in total mystical union with God. In Yoga the state of consciousness attained is known as Samahdi. In some religions and philosophies, it is the supreme objective of religious endeavour. But the danger is that it may be mistaken for, and used as, a philosophy that regards the mundane world as no more than a world of appearances or even illusion, which the oriental mystic calls 'Maya', and which is to be rejected in favour of a 'Real world' that is purely spiritual.

Rabbi Ben Azzai yearned so greatly to become fully at one with God that his soul could no longer function in this world, and he was unable to return. Maybe the drive into spirituality, away from people and material interests, can become an ego trip, and the rejection of material concerns

can be no more than an escape from the real task of man, which is to face, heal and hallow the forces of the market place by bringing something of the Holy into the world. He appears then as the ecstatic who wanted to behold the face of God. But it is clearly stated in the story of Moses' encounter with God in Exodus 33.18-23:

*And Moses said: "Show me, I pray You, Your glory". And God said "You cannot see My face for Man shall not see Me and live. But while My glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with My hand until I have passed by. And then I will take away My hand and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen".*

And so Rabbi Ben Azzai could no longer live.

**Theosophy.** This is the speculative aspect of mysticism in which an attempt is made to understand and describe the inner workings of creation. In Yoga it is known as Gnana and it is the foundation of the doctrine known as Gnosis. This reached its zenith in the Gnosticism of the Greek and allied cultures two thousand years ago and which has had a revival in present times in what is known as 'New Age Religion'.

So here we see the problem of Rabbi Elisha ben Abuyah who lost his faith and became a sceptic? In his case, perhaps he tried to enter paradise, not for love of God as did Rabbi Ben Azzai and Rabbi Akiva, but merely in a spirit of intellectual curiosity.

**Theurgy and the Nature of the magician.** As defined in the dictionary (quoting Longman's Modern English which is more helpful than the Oxford English), theurgy would appear to be little other than a lofty form of magic:

"The power possessed by a human being to secure or prevent divine intervention in nature or human affairs, eg in a miracle, especially the magical power which certain neo-platonists believed might be acquired by long training, self purification and esoteric learning and practices".

The magical impulse takes a variety of forms, too many to describe. Here the definition is limited to – 'causing changes in consciousness in accordance with the will'. As such it is in itself neither holy nor profane. What makes it good or evil is the response of the practitioner to the demand for integrity:

At its best, Magic may be witnessed in:

the ordained minister of religion who, through his sensitive use of traditional liturgy and ceremonials during public worship, transforms the consciousness of those of the congregation, who are able to respond.

the healer, who brings a new wholeness to their patient.

the hypnotherapist, who helps their patients free themselves of their phobias.

the psychotherapist who, in guided meditation, enables their client to gain a new awareness of the content and potential of their mind.

In all of these, power is completely transcended by love and compassion.

However, there is a potential element of 'the magician' in all of us amongst our role-playing sub-personalities. It is characterised by love of ritual and ceremonial, a desire to heal others and - let us be truthful - the urge to manipulate them 'for their own benefit'. It is generally balanced by other elements amongst our sub-personalities and thus kept relatively harmless.

But if this 'magician' in us becomes dominant in a charismatic personality that is on a 'power trip', and if this takes control of the ego, a monster is produced that can do great harm before Providence steps in to call a halt. This is what happens in the extreme case of the 'black magician' who sets up events in which powerful energies are released so that he or she may feed on them and inflate himself. In so doing the magician has no regard for the Karmic needs of the people that he or she is influencing. Power, and personal power at that, is the objective and compassion has no place in the work..

Unfortunately, the field of Yoga is by no means free of the black magician. Here he or she may pose as a guru and use their charisma to gather a crowd of devoted disciples around them on whose energies (and cash) they may feed, and whom they can make dependent on them in order to satisfy their various appetites (including sexual ones).

Their techniques of recruitment include promises of:

power without responsibility

secret knowledge without study

wonderful psychic experiences rather than the still quiet voice within

instant enlightenment without the hard slog of spiritual growth

They flatter and manipulate, telling their followers that they are the elite, the elect or the saved, that they are the guardians of the great 'secret'. They may pour scorn on healthy inhibitions and on the value of reason. They are the complete antithesis of the genuine guru who seeks their student's growth so that they may grow into independence.

In a way, the self-proclaimed Satanist is the least dangerous, for they are so obviously perverted that no-one who is not already spiritually sick will take them seriously. Far more dangerous are those who infringe the third of the Ten Commandments:

***“You shall not invoke the name of the Lord your God for evil; for the Lord will not hold guiltless one who invokes his name for evil”.***

This commandment was specifically directed against two evils: one minor - the swearing of false oaths with intent to deceive, and the other much more serious – the perverted use of the Holy Name for purposes of conjuration or magic. Unfortunately there are many who are doing the latter by setting up religious cults of dubious morality, or by offering courses of ‘spiritual education’. The scandals concerning certain American television evangelists, and an Indian Guru who was deported from America because of the corruption that he was generating, are cases in point. It must be remembered that an archetype remains an archetype even when the one who conjures it and uses it calls it by the Name of the Holy.

One of the favourite techniques of black magicians is to encourage orgiastic forms of meditation in their followers whilst standing back from personal participation in them. In doing so, they get them to produce the energies for their own needs. Just as prayer can release creative energies into the universe, so can evil energies, thoughts and deeds produce destructive energy vortices that radiate from their originator. These energies attach themselves to the psyches of those with whom the evil doer has been in contact and may have corrupted. They resonate with a vulnerable sub-personality to inflate it and possess it. Innocent people as well as foolish ones may thus be infested with demonic energies that feed on them and, if not checked, may destroy them. Their plight calls for compassion and expert help so that they may be healed.

Other examples of the 'Black magician' at work in turning a crowd of individually intelligent people into a mass of slogan shouting zombies are seen in those political demagogues who, by their charisma, can work up passions of hatred against ethnic minorities etc, and also certain types of 'rock musician' who use heavy rhythm underscored with subliminal messages.

Here we see the fate of Rabbi Ben Zoma who became demented and lost his reason. Maybe we witness the instance of a man whose integrity and motives were suspect? It would seem possible that he had yielded to the magical temptation and was making the ascent with the intention of learning the secrets of heaven. This would imply that he was endeavouring to seek power over the spiritual world in order to manipulate it for his own ends so as to obtain supernatural powers on earth. In his case, the experience destroyed his reason because Providence could not tolerate his motives.

### Lessons for today

The story of the four rabbis is more than just an ancient legend or a homiletical tale. It has direct relevance to present day problems regarding certain cult phenomena that pose a perennial threat to authentic spirituality.

**Cults of Ecstasy.** The Pentecostalist movements - speaking in tongues, and the Toronto blessing cult - swooning into unconsciousness, are extreme manifestations of an ecstatic revivalism. This periodically afflicts the more extremely evangelical churches. These movements are dangerous in that they involve opening the participants uncritically to possession by the forces of the Unconscious without testing whether they are malevolent or benevolent. The techniques of contrived excitement produce a state of pathological hysteria in the members of the congregation. In these states, reason and discernment are suspended with individuals passing into trance states resembling possession.

**Cults of Psychic Development.** There are a number of organisations that offer to teach their clients how to develop their psychic powers. Typical of these was the movement founded by Gurdjieff, which has many successors and imitators. It is of historic interest that a number of



his disciples eventually lost their reason and committed suicide. They are the spiritual heirs of Rabbi ben Zoma.

One client, in a case of 'hearing demonic voices' that was referred to me, acknowledged that his terrifying experiences of psychic attack were a direct consequence of participating in such a course with the ulterior motive of improving his gambling chances.

**The Psychedelic Drug Culture.** Part 2 of this booklet explained the function of the chakras. It referred to their normal and essential filtering action in which they protect us from the forces of the unconscious. There are certain occasions where, under strict discipline, this filtering action is superseded temporarily, and they become controlled gateways to the supernal realms. This would have been the case in the journey of Rabbi Akiva. The essential part of the termination of any disciplined expansion of awareness is, as explained on page 10, the closing of the chakras so that they resume their normal filtering function.

Drugs are a synthetic way of expanding the consciousness without the control of a religious or Yogic discipline. The drugs of the nineteenth century, such as opium, were a way of escaping the horrors of a poverty stricken world and living in a dream land. The drugs of the 1930's, such as the Mescaline used by Aldous Huxley, were a way of replicating mystical experience and trying to achieve an oceanic experience of the Universe. Indeed, some writers and artists claimed that it fostered their creativity. The drugs of the 1960's, such as LSD, were used in a very similar manner, but they were marked by an increasing number of very frightening experiences amongst their users, a variety of the experience of Rabbi ben Zoma.

The drugs of the 1990's were very much more subtle and in a way even more potentially dangerous. One reason given for taking the drug called Ecstasy was said to be that it gives one a mystical feeling of loving everyone. The physical dangers of death through water imbalance have been highlighted in the press, and have been largely ignored as statistically the risk is low. The psychological effects also have been examined and many cases of induced manic depression and paranoid schizophrenia reported. The spiritual danger has not been addressed, but is very real.

The author Colin Dexter, in one of his Inspector Morse stories, postulates a fictional drug that is sold at raves and that causes a number of suicides. In the story, it is discovered that in every case the after-effect

of the drug was acute depression, and that it stemmed from a feeling that having had the sublime experience of heaven, the thought of having to endure a mundane existence was unbearable. The drug was fictional, but the chemists are on their way to making it a possible reality. If they succeed in their perverse endeavours, and no doubt they will, their clients would be, in a strange way, the heirs of Rabbi ben Azzai, who could no longer bear to live.

## 5 - PUTTING THEORY INTO PRACTICE.

### *Aligning Body and Mind*

In normal consciousness the physical body, to a considerable extent, influences the psyche and it is the task of the formative field to maintain the alignment of the two.

However, in some forms of meditation, in very deep relaxation, and also in advanced Hatha-Yoga and Pranayama exercises, the relationship between the gross physical body, the formative body and the psychic structure, is modified from that which is found normally.

The grounding effect of the gross physical body is reduced because the formative body allows a partial separation from the psyche to take place. The chakras may partially and spontaneously open to become gateways and to give a heightened awareness of the superconscious. By this means, the intuitive faculties are allowed to operate, and psychic gifts may be manifested.

Normally they close of their own accord at the end of meditation, but it is wise, if not essential, to perform a symbolic “closing the chakras” exercise so that they may not remain in the open state.

Inevitably, one's reaction to meditation depends largely on the way one is constituted. The reason for different reactions to the same meditation lies in the fact that some people, by their nature, experience a much greater degree of separation of physical body and psychic structure than others.

For example, in deep relaxation, one person may experience himself as quiescent with the faintest feeling of contact with the floor, while

another may be conscious of floating up to the ceiling and looking down on their own body from above. If the student does not know about the possibility of this occurring, it can come as a shock; and the return to the body may seem violent, with a subsequent feeling of extreme disorientation and distress. This will inevitably be thought of as a bad experience.

However this phenomenon of the consciousness disassociating itself from the body is no more than a spontaneous example of what some occultists seek to perform in what they call astral travel. It is not often encountered, but that does not mean that the possibility may be ignored. Nor however is it one for which one should strive, for if we are tempted to force for ourselves the pace of Kundalini, the forces released can shatter the personality and do untold damage to the health: physical, mental and spiritual.

There are people who have a natural psychic sensitivity and can express their abilities in various constructive ways. This is where the chakras change their function from filtering to open gateway in such a way that they continue to protect the person at all times from the uncontrolled intrusion of malevolent forces of the unconscious while they are using their gifts. On the other hand, there are others, who have the same sensitivity, but who cannot control it. They have difficulty, and possibly even acute distress, because their chakras do not always return to their filtering function when they should. To them, their psychic sensitivity is a curse and not a gift.

Psychic sensitivity and psychic gifts are not in themselves spiritual, although they can be spiritualised, as indeed can any of the human faculties. However these same psychic gifts can also be used to inflate the magician in us and separate us from the Holy.

## Kundalini and Hatha Yoga

Most teachers in the West present Hatha Yoga as a therapeutic tool and/or as a form of meditation that calls for concentration on the movement of the body and the use of it as a focus for attention. In the East it is used very often in a completely different manner, namely as a means for accelerating the arousal of the Kundalini force. To the Westerner who, in general, does not take naturally to occult practices, and who has a radically different cultural and spiritual background, this can be very risky and can lead to psychic disturbance.

In particular, there is danger for those people who have an excessive natural psychic sensitivity, but who are not aware of it, nor able to control it. If they move on from normal gentle Hatha Yoga, which they find very beneficial and enjoyable, to a so called advanced Yoga that demands very powerful postures and breathing techniques they may be over-stimulated. Some of these techniques could be potential dynamite to a psychologically sensitive person with inadequate natural psychic protection.

For example, an unusual case that was referred to me differed from those that had previously come to my attention in Hatha Yoga. Neither meditation nor occult dabbling was the cause of trauma. The student had been enjoying Hatha Yoga for several years, but that changed after moving on to an “advanced” class. After working there for a few months, some of the classical symptoms of psychic trauma, (inexplicable feelings of fear, a frightening paralysis during relaxation, loss of appetite leading to severe loss of weight, agoraphobia and hallucinating hostile voices) began to manifest.

The student's own teacher did not have the necessary background of knowledge to explain the reasons for my client's trauma and was unable to help.

During our conversation, it became clear that at the back of my client's mind was the continuing desperate need to understand what had happened so that she could put the experience into some context that would make it intelligible, and enable her to understand the trauma in greater depth. It became very apparent that her problem was caused by the interaction of very powerful Hatha Yoga and pranayama techniques with a psychically vulnerable personality. The result of this interaction had been a completely uncontrolled manifestation of Kundalini.

## The responsibilities of a teacher

The Yoga teacher must be sensitive to the needs of students who are psychically vulnerable in this manner and must understand:

that some students can be traumatised by exercises that others take in their stride. In particular this would apply to those with a schizoid or pathological personality, and those suffering from bipolar, depressive or epileptic psychotic episodes.

that a traumatised student needs compassion and care from their teacher. However, above all else, they need a sympathetic and clear

explanation of what has happened to them, and why. Only thus can their minds be put at rest.

It is for these reasons that, before guided meditation, a teacher or therapist of integrity should take care to prepare the class or individual client, and will give them:

A thorough appreciation of the content of the meditation into which they are going to be led, and the emergency exit by which they can leave the meditation if suffering distress, before they are guided into any altered state of consciousness.

A warning of the possibility, however remote, of a disassociation between mind and body that may lead to extra-physical experience of the nature described above.

An explanation of the reasons for, and the technique involved in, the routine of closing the chakras which is described in detail below.

## Closing the Chakras

At the end of any period of extended meditation, one should always remake one's connections to the world of mundane reality by a grounding or closing exercise. This is necessary to ensure that there is no feeling of residual disorientation. Prior to the session, the teacher or therapist should explain to the client or the members of the class the nature of the relationship between body and mind, and should warn them about the slight possibility of disassociation from the body during relaxation, of feeling strange after meditation, or even of a euphoric feeling of being "on a high". They should explain the reasons for the grounding technique that should always be used as a safeguard at the conclusion of any relaxation or meditation session where the client or students have been guided into an altered state of consciousness.

It has been demonstrated that a symbolic or ritual closing exercise has a profound effect on stabilising the energies released in meditation and avoids any sensation of disorientation afterwards. Once I was introducing my Yoga class to a very simple guided meditation for the first time and thought that maybe, on this occasion, it was somewhat pretentious - so I omitted it from my routine. After the return from the meditation I did my usual round of checking, to make sure that everyone was re-oriented, and found that two ladies were slightly disoriented. I immediately asked them to relax and took them through the closing of the chakras, after which all was well. A couple of weeks later, one of the two concerned told me how she had learnt the

Maharishi's TM technique before she joined my class and practised it every morning. She had frequently felt disoriented at the end of her TM session and was becoming concerned about it. After my demonstration of the technique, she had used the closing routine at the end of each of her TM sessions and now disorientation was a thing of the past.

There are various possible symbols that one can use at the end of the meditation, when one has started to regain consciousness of one's physical body and one's surroundings. In each case, the routine must be performed, in turn, over the area of the body associated with each chakra starting from the top. Some examples out of the many possible are as follows:

Imagine oneself drawing with one's finger a circle and cross of light.

Visualise the bolt of a door being shot home into its keep.

Visualise a fully open (coloured) flower closing into a tight little bud.

In the class situation, the teacher would give this as an instruction. Taking for example, the third of the alternatives listed above, the teacher might read out the following:

*“Visualise an open flower gently closing in turn over each of the energy centres that act as interfaces between mind and body:*

<i>Over the crown of the head</i>	<i>a violet flower</i>
<i>Over the forehead</i>	<i>an indigo flower</i>
<i>Over the throat</i>	<i>a blue flower</i>
<i>Over the heart</i>	<i>a green flower</i>
<i>Over the solar plexus</i>	<i>a yellow flower</i>
<i>Over the sacral plexus</i>	<i>an orange flower</i>
<i>Over the groin</i>	<i>a red flower”</i>

After which it would be necessary to check there is no residual feeling of disorientation amongst any of the participants. A powerful earthing movement such as stamping the feet may be useful in such a case.

In exceptional circumstances, where there remains some disorientation, the teacher should ask the student to lie flat on the back. Then talk through the visualisation as before but at the same time should accompany the words by a corresponding rotation of the flat palm of the right hand, very slowly and deliberately, about 10 - 15 inches above the corresponding point on top of the student's body. Finally, the teacher

should check that the student is now completely re-orientated and, if not, should repeat the process. For personal protection, the teacher should then rinse their forearms and hands under running water.

## 6 - FIRST AID AND PROFESSIONAL RESOURCES

### Bad - Traumatic versus Bad - Evil

Some forms of meditation may have unexpected consequences. They may bring to the surface problems that have been festering in the unconscious and that need ventilation. Getting to know ourselves as we really are is a first step on the journey of spiritual growth, but sometimes it can be a traumatic one. If we can perceive the painful elements in meditation for what they often are - essential teaching as well as healing experiences - they can be of great value, and their badness seen to be apparent rather than real or evil in such cases.

There are, however, other experiences that have occurred to people that are of a more alarming nature. This is the case in those who are overly psychically sensitive, and which were considered in detail in the first two parts of this series. It is particularly true for those who have been caught up in the hands of dangerous cult practitioners. There are a number of possible reasons why painful experiences may occur and they would require professional help in depth to ascertain: which one or combination is the cause, what corrective measures should be taken and what lessons should be learnt from them.

Many problems of psychic attack are manifested as auditory phenomena. However, it should be emphasised that not all occur in this way. There are many people who have experienced phenomena that have been visual or tactile, and especially cases where they have experienced unidentifiable feelings made manifest only as a formless dread. These have often been the consequence of drug abuse. An unwise, possibly even only a single, use of a hallucinogenic drug may have produced a terrifying ordeal in a psychically sensitive person. This may have caused them to resolve never to touch drugs again. Nevertheless, even many years after such an experiment, the residues of the drug, which can remain in the body indefinitely, may be reactivated

and cause traumatic hallucinations. Engaging in ethically dubious psychic development courses has also been the cause of 'demonic possession' in several cases where I have been consulted.

### First aid before anything else

Before attempting to establish the cause of the problem, there are certain actions that one can take immediately:

Firstly, in the case of ill effects after meditation, one should stop practicing the specific technique that has been causing the problem. Maybe even to the extent of stopping all meditation for a while.

In one's Hatha Yoga one should be cautious about doing any extended fast deep breathing such as the Pranayama techniques of Kapalabhati (diaphragm pumping) or Bhastrika (the thoracic bellows breath), and avoid any alternate nostril breathing technique that involves more than four or five rounds of breathing. This can cause bad experiences in a psychically sensitive and thus vulnerable person.

On the positive side – one might ground oneself thoroughly by getting one's fingers in the soil; weeding by hand, planting, and handling seedlings and small plants are all highly therapeutic. Bread making is a great tonic for jaded spirits, whilst plenty of fresh air and good country walks also help.

Again on the positive side – one should get involved with the seemingly humdrum side of the social work of the community - the religious community if associated with one.

If one has a good book of prayer, one should explore it and understand that others have had to face up to similar problems and learnt how to deal with them.

One could practice a simple relaxation, using music rather than imagery, to help the healing process. The music should be chosen carefully. Some music, and Chopin's is notorious for this, can induce morbid moods. That of Mozart is probably ideal in that it lightens the spirit.

### The integrity of the teacher or therapist

In seeking professional help, it should be appreciated that the ideal therapist, guru, healer or counsellor, is one who has the ability to listen to the client without pre-judgment, to feel the other's pain without



being emotionally overcome, and to isolate the memory of their own painful experiences so that they do not anticipate them in every case that they encounter unless there is good cause. They need to be modest and broad enough of vision to acknowledge paths to healing other than their own, and they need to be free of delusions of self importance and self righteousness. They require the wisdom to acknowledge when a case is beyond their scope and the humility to be ready to refer the client on to a therapist better qualified to deal with it. Their concern must be to encourage the client to grow into freedom, to counsel by listening and feeding back rather than advising, and never to play at being the all knowing 'parent' or 'nanny'.

Such a paragon is rare indeed, and in this real and imperfect world the client has to recognise that the therapist, who is working with them and doing their best to help them, is as human as they are, with all the hopes, fears, limitations and potential for growth such as they have. It is however the responsibility of the client, or their family, to ensure that they are placed in the care of someone who is competent and who possesses the integrity to give them proper support.

In orthodox medicine and surgery, nobody can practice without risk of prosecution unless they are qualified graduates of a recognised medical school. If they are negligent, they can be struck off the register and thus be rendered unable to practise.

In complementary healing, the regulating bodies are, in general, unable to protect the public in a similar manner. The reputable and accredited training schools do excellent work in producing competent graduates, but this is compromised by the fact that there is no legal protection to stop anyone advertising themselves as a therapist, healer or counsellor. Thus it is possible for a client to find them self working with someone whose enthusiasm is greater than their understanding and whose experience is minimal. This can lead to many difficulties as the relationship develops.

In the extreme case, the client might even find them self in the hands of a self styled guru on a power trip, or those of a plausible eccentric whose ego has been inflated by the belief that they have been directly entrusted by their 'God' with the secrets of spiritual healing and a unique mission to spread the 'gospel'. The process of training an accredited and qualified therapist by a reputable training institute goes far in its endeavour to ensure that these dangers are avoided. The training is designed so that their students achieve a balanced understanding of their own nature before they are permitted to be registered as qualified.

Even after qualification, they remain under supervision, and a senior and more experienced overseer monitors their casework. This reduces the possibility that the therapist, counsellor or healer may retain personality hang-ups in general, and the 'Procrustean bed' syndrome in particular.

This latter expression requires some explanation. Procrustes was the brigand of Greek mythology who imprisoned travellers in his stronghold. There he forced them onto the guest bed, which was a perfect fit for Procrustes himself. If they fitted it, they were lucky. If they were too long, he would hack off their legs until they were the right length. If they were too short he would apply the rack and stretch them.

One example of this is the obsession in the mind of a therapist or counsellor that a specific type of childhood trauma is the cause of all adult psychological distress. This may have disastrous effects not only on the client but also on their families. It has been suggested that not even the great pioneer, Sigmund Freud, was immune from this syndrome.

It is one that all reputable schools now guard against very carefully in their training; but there is nothing to stop an unregistered, inadequately qualified, and psychologically immature therapist or counsellor from putting up their 'brass plate' and claiming falsely to be offering the system of therapy that is taught by an authentic school. Such people may not have the knowledge and balance to avoid projecting their own hang-ups onto their clients. So with them, the client comes into therapy, the therapist relaxes them so that they are suggestible, and then fits them onto their 'Procrustean bed', imprinting their hobby horse by forcefully directing the dialogue, using their powers of suggestion, possibly even using hypnosis to impress their theory into the memory banks of the client. The latter is thus induced to fantasise the memory of an event that, in actuality, may never have happened. This has nothing to do with the natural tendency of the mind to distort or colour genuine memories and brood over past experiences, getting them out of context in the process. The latter is something from which we all suffer.

From this it will be appreciated why it is so essential to seek fully qualified professional assistance from an accredited source when expert help is needed.

## Resources for professional help

### Homeopathy and the Bach remedies

Some of the higher potency Homeopathic remedies are particularly suited to dealing with problems of this nature. However they do call for prescription by a highly qualified Homeopathic practitioner.

The Bach flower remedies, on the other hand, are eminently suitable for home administration. They are readily available, together with an instruction leaflet, from branches of Nelsons, Weleda, Boots the chemist, some other chemist's shops and the majority of Health food shops.

Mechthild Scheffer's book 'Bach flower therapy theory and practice' published by Thorson gives much valuable information on all the remedies and is well worth reading.

The ones that are particularly relevant (Quotations taken from the above) are:

**Aspen** – “for personalities vulnerable to the influences of the emotional and astral planes of the collective unconscious and the archetypal forces. They are flooded with unconscious impulses that the waking consciousness is unable to place. This gives rise to the eerie kind of fear that creeps up one's back. Worst of all, it blocks them from making contact with their Higher Self. It is the ideal remedy for people who have become too 'opened up' by certain group meditation techniques as well as anyone who has been through horror trips due to drugs”.

**Star of Bethlehem** –“for those who are in a state of inner numbness and remain in a mental and spiritual half-dream. It is indicated for all the consequences of physical, mental and spiritual traumatic experience, however ancient they might be in their origin. It specifically mentions that there are many indications that these people carry a Karmic burden, with magic, misused ambition and drug abuse playing a role”.

**Meditation Essence** should also be considered. This is one of the Australian Bush Flower remedies supplied by:

Nutri Centre 7 Park Crescent, London, W1N 3HE,  
Telephone 0207 436 5122.

One should request their **Nutrition Update** when ordering.

## **Psychosynthesis**

This therapeutic discipline is one of several included under the general heading of transpersonal psychology. Each member of this family has its place in the healing spectrum, but Psychosynthesis, the system pioneered by Dr Roberto Assagioli, is the one most relevant to the subject matter of this article. In particular it is the pre-eminent tool in the case of the person whose 'voices' are a product of the tensions caused within their psychic structure by the spiritual growth process. Where professional help is needed, the following organisations should be approached, either for direct assistance or for the names of accredited and fully qualified local practitioners:

The Psychosynthesis and Educational Trust  
92-94 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2TH  
Telephone 0207 403 2100

The Institute of Psychosynthesis  
65a Watford Way, Hendon, London, NW4 3AQ  
Telephone 0208 202 4525

## **Acupuncture**

Because the phenomena of schizophrenia and possession are so linked with energy imbalances and Chakra mal-function, it seemed reasonable to suppose that they might be alleviated by acupuncture treatment. I asked a senior tutor at the College of Traditional Acupuncture for his opinion, and he confirmed my supposition. He told me that these phenomena are discussed in detail during the three-year training period for student practitioners, and that methods of treatment are taught as part of the normal routine. In order to seek help from the most experienced practitioner in their own particular area, he advised that victims of either of these phenomena should write to or telephone the college and ask for the appropriate practitioner on their list. The college has an excellent national and international reputation; and its address is:

Warwickshire College of Traditional Acupuncture  
First floor, Unit 9a, Hatton Technology Park,  
Hatton, Warwickshire, CV35 8XB, [Tel:07713 159365](tel:07713159365)

There are other excellent training colleges, many of whose graduates are fully qualified and competent to treat patients suffering from these phenomena, and there has been established a central

organisation linking all of them. This may be contacted for help in finding a practitioner, and its details are as follows:

The British Acupuncture Council,  
63 Jeddo Road, London, W12 9HQ Telephone 0208 735 0400

### **Exorcism**

Amongst less scientifically oriented people, the 'casting out of demons' by means of exorcism has been practised by shamans, medicine men and the like since the dawn of history. Not surprisingly, they get exceedingly good results, for the tremendous emotions generated through powerful ritual have a profound psychological impact. Whether the 'demon' takes the form of a powerful psychodynamic energy, or whether it manifests as a malevolent entity with rudimentary intelligence, exorcism will undoubtedly work. The impact of a very powerful positive emotion will disperse the effect of the previous negative emotion from the infested sub-personality.

Exorcism in modern western civilisation is potentially as effective as ever. However there is a proper way to go about seeking it. There are charlatans (as in every sphere of such matters) of whom one must beware. It calls for the experience and charisma of the ordained priest, rabbi, imam, or other minister, who has the recognition of a stable religious community, and who can tell the difference between possession and schizophrenia. Such a man will know when to invite the cooperation of a psychiatrist. Cooperation between the two disciplines can yield valuable and interesting results. I discussed the problem of possession with one rabbi, who told me of an occasion when a congregant came to him complaining of possession and requesting exorcism. The rabbi felt very strongly that the client was actually suffering from schizophrenia and brought a psychiatrist onto the case. The latter agreed the rabbi's diagnosis, but nevertheless recommended that he perform the exorcism that the congregant had requested, as an essential part of the healing process.

In both the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches there is, in every diocese, a priest who is very experienced in these matters and who is appointed to be officially responsible for dealing with any case that requires exorcism. I am informed that the proper procedure in all cases is firstly to contact one's own parish priest. He will need to make comprehensive enquiries because the apparent problem may actually be masking something quite different and possibly unexpected. He will also, if necessary, invoke the cooperation of the medical profession as

mentioned earlier. Then, if the problem is clearly not of a pathological nature that calls for psychiatry, the priest would contact the area or rural dean, who would either give the name of the church's approved advisor on the paranormal, or else would refer the client to the Bishop who would contact one of his advisors. My informant emphasised the importance of following these safeguards of procedure for the benefit of all concerned. He did mention an occasion where these guidelines had to be breached because the local priest, through lack of knowledge and experience, was unhelpful. In that case the problem was overcome by making a direct approach to the Bishop.

Within the Jewish community there is no corresponding official exorcist. There are some rabbis who have much greater understanding and experience than others and so, as in the church, one would ask one's own rabbi for advice as to whom to turn for help.

### **Spiritual Healing**

The information that I obtained from friends associated with spiritual healing indicated that the problems discussed were within the competence of some healers, but not the majority. They suggested that the various governing associations would have lists of those members who had the necessary understanding and experience, and who could give help.

The National Federation of Spiritual Healers could be approached for advice at:

Old Manor Farm Studio, Church Street, Sunbury on Thames,  
Surrey

### **Hypnotherapy.**

It is possible that a client may not have been fully 'dehypnotised' by the teacher after a meditation session, and may have been left in a 'fuzzy' state of mind when they ask for advice. In such a case it might be appropriate to refer them to a qualified hypnotherapist.

Information can be obtained from the following websites:

<http://www.general-hypnotherapy-register.com/>

<http://www.ukcp.org.uk/about-us>

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# Meditate in Safety

## Theory and Practice of Disaster Prevention and Repair

There are many excellent books available on Meditation and its techniques. There are also sources of information on the Internet concerning ‘Meditation Dangers’, as will be found in the Google reference to this subject, which introduces several very instructive websites.

This booklet stands, as it were, between these two areas of vital interest to fill an important gap in the information available. It was written to serve as a source of advice for teachers and their students, not only on what can occasionally go wrong, and why, sometimes with frightening consequences, but also precisely how to avoid such calamities.

It is based on the work that I did after an urgent request, some twenty five years ago, from the editor of the magazine “Yoga and Health”, for help in dealing with a distressed client who had experienced demonic voices immediately after a meditation session with an inexperienced teacher, and which continued to haunt her. This was followed by a request for a series of articles in “Yoga and Health”. Subsequent to the publication of these, I was consulted by several victims of meditation sessions that had turned very sour, and whose teachers were unable to help. This led to some serious research work on the subject and the publication of booklets, now out of print.

This present booklet is in response to a serious need to update and re-publish the essential material from the previous work.