



By Dr. Tan Kheng Khoo

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After practicing for thirty years in various spiritual paths and having read hundreds of books and learning numerous methods and techniques, I am able to formulate a simple method of practice. The well known religions that are prevalent in Asia are 1) Theravada Buddhism 2) Hinduism 3) Zen Buddhism 4) Taoism 5) Islam and 6) Christianity. Only in the first three religions are there practices (saddhana) for

awakening. The popularity of these three has induced many lay people to go and seek these paths. In Theravada Buddhism you really have to be a Buddhist monk to successfully practice the path. In the Zen lineages and Hinduism, one is behooved to have a guru, who is responsible for one's enlightenment, and the guru himself must be enlightened. However, I know that nobody can enlighten another person. In Taoism, there is no way one can practice to be a sage except in the mountains of China. The ordinary temples of Asia and Taiwan do not have the conducive environment for one to practice to be a sage. As far as Islam is concerned the only practice is to be a Sufi, which a fair number of the orthodox Muslims do not recognize. Lastly in Christianity, only the Catholic monks and nuns in a monastery are encouraged to practice to be united with God. Both the Muslims and the Christians do not believe in enlightenment anyway. Going back to the first three religions, the practices are extremely difficult---they are more than a profession and vocation combined. The intricacies and difficulties in these three spiritual paths have produced hardly any 'saint' or 'enlightened' person lately. In a monastery or ashram, one has one's monastic duties to perform everyday. Also there are many colleagues with whom one has to interact. I met John Blofeld some years ago in the countryside in Thailand, near Bangkok. He was employing two Thai girls to do his daily chores, and therefore was physically free to do his practice. He said he would never go back to a monastery to practice. He had no responsibility in his own household and did not have to interact with his colleagues. After eating his simple meals, he had all the time in the world to practice. His example was a revelation to me. In his case he used money to facilitate his practice.

On the opposite side, you read books by Eckhart Tolle and Tony Parsons. They insist that they were awakened without any recognized form of spiritual practice (saddhana). Tony Parsons even quoted a housewife who was 'awakened' driving her car on the way to the supermarket or somewhere. According to him, one just suddenly realizes that one is part of 'Oneness', and not separate from others. All of a sudden one awakes to the fact that one is nothing, nobody. All those wasted years looking for enlightenment! But we will never know what Tolle's and Parsons' realization is like, especially compared to the well-known characters like Ramana Maharshi, Dogen etc.

In my simplified definition, one's practice must progressively bring one to a state of no desire and no fear. In the course of the day, one's mind should be endowed with peace and bliss. Most times the mind should be empty, and if thoughts and emotions arise, one instantly would know about them. As soon as one is aware of one's anger or frustration, one is able to deal with them. One can then deal with them as commodities to be disposed of without anger or perturbation. The daily peace is brought upon by being totally aware, when the mind is free of thoughts. That means the practitioner is constantly in those intervals between two thoughts or better still in that "interval with no thoughts." or in the "space with no thoughts." In this wide expanse of Voidness, one realizes that one is nobody. There is no one there in place of the "I". This realization is a sudden one, as if a veil has just been peeled off from one's eyes. At one stroke, one is in non-duality. But after some time in non-duality one has to return to earth. These periods of non-duality are repeated many times after that, and each time the period of non-duality gets longer and longer. After some time, there will be

constant peace, silence and stillness. Everything is part of One. Nothing is separate from the One.

In this simple practice, one needs to have a **philosophy**, a period of time for **meditation** and **mindfulness** in daily living.

PHILOSOPHY

The philosophy must embrace faith and belief. There should be some expectation of everlasting peace and happiness. The ultimate goal is to have no desire and no fear. Not adhering to a religion or God, one can literally take a page out of Taoism. In the modern context, Taoism can be equated to Universal Consciousness and every human, animal, insect and vegetation is interconnected to this Universal Consciousness. Nothing is separate, and every item mentioned above possesses a varying amount of the same consciousness: it is a matter of degree.

His main aim is to keep a very low profile, and he must at all events be inconspicuous. His involvement in daily affairs must be kept to a minimum. Having no greed in his character, he does not need much. He just needs enough to live a simple life without luxury. Status must be vigorously avoided so that he can become a nonentity.

In the spirit of Wu-Wei (non-action), it is said that “*The Tao does nothing and yet nothing is left undone.*” Wu-wei is not to be taken as inertia, laziness, laissez, or mere passivity. The true meaning is not forcing or not going against the grain. Wu-wei is a combination of wisdom and taking the line of least resistance. It also means that it is better to curb ambition, to slow the tempo of life, and not to despise working with the hands. Most importantly, one must not go against nature. One must swim with the current. There is no great love of life or hatred of death. The individual does not experience great joy when he was born and there is no resistance when he is about to die.

If one were to live as outlined above, one really does not have to follow the Buddhist Five Precepts, the Christian Ten Commandments or the Five Pillars of Islam. The way of life as outlined above does not necessitate the incurring of these religious tenets. Similarly, one also does not need to incur the principles of Wu-wei and Ying-yang of Taoism. Just live as simply and as humbly as one can. This alone will bring out the characters of compassion and love in that individual. Equanimity will come with the additional practice of meditation.

Meditation and Stillness

“The recluse's heart is a placid lake unruffled by the winds of circumstances.”

For the meditation to be effective, one must live frugally with no longings of wealth and fame. When desire or passion arises, treat it as your enemy and quietly abandon it. Take things as they come. Try not to worry or be anxious of what negative incidents are going to take place. Do not regret what has already taken place. Block all these items off your mind. Having turned away all these disturbances, one should be able to meditate better. In the past, most of my students kept on waiting until they retired before they start to meditate. That is wrong, some of these procrastinators died before they retired. They are afraid that life will be quite empty, but as a matter of fact, life becomes the greatest joy when one is just being or “*to be*”.

Real Meditation

Posture and Gaze

The only posture that is not allowed in meditation is to lie down, because one tends to fall asleep in this position. Otherwise any posture will do. The ideal position is the sitting one. Should one sit in the straight up position as in Zen? Not necessary. As long as one is sitting, one is even allowed to slouch. It is even allowable to put a cushion between one's back against a wall. One can either cross one's legs or straighten them. The hands are best left on one's sides, but putting one hand over the other on the lap is quite in order.

Does one close or open one's eyes? This is entirely left to the meditator. If one finds it more restful to shut one's eyes, then shut the eyes. However, if one tends to fall asleep when the eyes are shut, then open the eyes. So there are no hard and fast rules in this respect. In some disciplines, the eyes are half open. Whatever one does, one must be relaxed and be able to be with 'what is'. The body, eyes, hands and mind must be so relax that one can settle into that non-state of emptiness without falling asleep.

Sitting Meditation

This meditation technique is not a technique. There is no method in this meditation. There is no goal in this path. This real meditation is to finally arrive at that state of “to be”, where there are no thoughts. As long as there are no thoughts, we will be left with that **pure awareness which is the Witness of everything that arises and subsides.**

When one starts to meditate, one's mind is filled with thoughts, emotions, sensations, memories and sounds, etc. **Do not focus on any of them. Do not concentrate on anything. Let all of them pass on.** It is like standing on the side pavement watching cars pass by. Do not see who are the passengers of the cars, and do not identify the make of the cars. Keep watching the cars until the late of the night, and then until the early morning. One watches until there are no more cars. This is the time when there

are no more thoughts and emotions: you are at the threshold of the primordial consciousness, which is part of Universal Consciousness. One has to work much harder at this juncture in silence and stillness. Once one descends into the primordial consciousness, it is the Absolute Self. This is the Ground of Being. This state is bliss, silent and still. You have arrived at pure awareness without using effort. There was no control or manipulation. Awareness, stillness and silence are the characteristics of this primordial Universal Consciousness. One can merely relax in this non-state and be rejuvenated and enriched without effort or activity. In this non-state one can literally heal anything in the body. In this primordial non-state, one can witness the arising and subsiding of all objects and emotions. The witness is part of the Unborn Self, which is never born into dualism.

Some of you are complete novices and some of you maybe very experienced meditators. Whoever you are, you must start letting go of all your previous techniques or methods that you have learned. Your previous techniques could be either watching your breath, repeating mantra or visualizing. Drop all these techniques. Just be aware of where you are and realize your surroundings as they are. Then shut your eyes and simply watch your thoughts and emotions. If there are any sensations or sounds, merely note them without deciphering what they are. Do not hang on to them and do not try to work out any solutions. Meditation is not the time to solve problems. Just let them pass.

Be still, and lay aside all thoughts of what you are and what is the Tao; all concepts you have learned about the world; all images you hold about yourself, let them all go. Forget all things we ever learned, all thoughts that we had, and every preconception that we hold of what things mean and what their purpose is. Let us remember not our own ideas of what the world is for. We do not know. Let every image held for everyone be loosened from our minds and swept away. Be innocent of judgment, unaware of any thoughts of evil or of good that ever crossed your mind of anyone. Empty your mind of everything whether true or false, or good or bad, or every thought it judges worthy, and all ideas of which it is ashamed. Hold onto nothing. Do not bring with you one thought the past has taught, nor one belief you have learned before from anything. Forget this world, forget this path, and come with wholly empty hands into the Primordial Consciousness.

After some time, there will come a period when there are no more thoughts or emotions. This is the entrance to the ultimate Ground of Being. Go deeper and enter this realm in which state, bliss, silence and joy reside. This is your natural state and not an altered state. There are numerous altered states: ecstasy, sadness, happiness, merging with the cosmos and feeling the expansion of your consciousness. These are not natural states. The natural state is innocent and uncontaminated. The natural non-state is light, relax, still, silent, joyous, blissful and delicious. Nothing in the world can compare to this. One would like to remain in this Ground of Being as long as possible, but one has to return to duality after sometime. So start this simple practice of innocence from the beginning. Be aware of where you are and what the body is doing. Empty the mind without clinging to any thoughts and emotions. Do not bring on board

any luggage. Do not solve any problems. Just remain alert, awake, relax and natural.

In this way, one is getting rid of the intellect, concepts and ideas. No ideology, religious or otherwise, no ideas, no precepts, no commandments or mantras are allowed into the mind. There should not be any attachment to the contents of the mind. In this emptiness, wisdom will arise on its own. Wisdom will arise *in* the empty mind and not *from* the mind. The wisdom on its own may or may not solve your problems. Wisdom mostly is to teach you to let go. Concepts, rational thinking and ideas do not give rise to wisdom. Wisdom can only arise through an empty and silent mind in which there are no contents to block it. It is this great act of faith in which we sit while accepting everything as it is. There is no discipline in this Ground of Being. In this silence, a certain light with vitality will slowly arise on its own. It is beautiful, innocent and uncontaminated. This is the natural home of the Unborn Self. It is that great expanse of our Being, which was seen before only as intervals between thoughts. Now that there are no more thoughts, we are left with only that uncontaminated expanse of the Absolute, which is Cosmic or Universal Consciousness. All the wisdom of the world is in this layer of Cosmic Consciousness.

Meditation without Effort

Although the meditation is without effort, the empty mind must remain clear, vivid and alive. It must not be hazy and dreamy. That means a minimum of effort still needs to be applied. Otherwise one goes to sleep. So one must exercise that minimum of effort just to keep one in that state of vividness and clarity. If one puts in too much effort, one becomes too tight. So one has to find out for oneself what is the correct amount of effort needed.

The Void

In this state of Void, the tendency is to awaken. Before that happens all our repressed material has to surface and be dealt with. You may have anger or sadness arising. There could be pain or weeping. The surfacing of all these negative emotions happens when we stop suppressing these memories in the unconsciousness. What arises is mostly unresolved conflicts that we never allowed ourselves to experience them fully or never allowed ourselves to feel the pain fully. At the reappearance of these conflicts, we must not suppress them again into the unconsciousness. We should just experience them and then let them pass on. Then finally one should detect whether there is any residual unresolved conflicts. If there are, then one should allow them to come up again for disposal. Only after we have cleansed out all the repressed emotions that insight and wisdom can arise to awaken the meditator. If this awakening is repeated often, the practitioner will automatically be able to let go of much more and finally the subconscious can be completely emptied of repressed conflicts. In fact these conflicts will let go of themselves. The practitioner does not have to do anything. Just remain in the Void. He can now arrive at that state summarized in the philosophy section: low

key, low profile, no desire, no want and no fear. Wealth and status will be strenuously shunned.

Awareness

In this state of pure awareness, one will find that awareness is very fluid and dynamic. It can be at one's fingers or at one's head or at any part of the body or at a sound that just arises. Or the awareness may also fall into silence and stillness and it can remain there for sometime. The awareness may also go global, in that it can travel all over the world with alacrity. There is no stopping its flow: in fact one should not stop its flow. This awareness has an intelligence of its own. We have to follow its flow: wherever it wants to go, whatever it wants to experience and whatever it wants to feel, we follow it. This is the way "to be". Finally one may arrive at a fully awakened state.

Mindfulness in Daily Living

Sitting meditation alone does not get us very far. One must continue to meditate when one is out of sitting meditation. All that bliss and silence is left behind on the cushion once one stop sitting. So one must learn to retain that emptiness of mind when one comes out of sitting meditation. Be aware and be mindful whatever one is doing. This is the most difficult part of the whole exercise. In order to help you perform this task, you just have *to let everything be as it is*. While driving a car, let the congested traffic be just as it is. Do not express disappointment at the traffic jam. Do not curse the weather when it starts to pour. Let everything be as it is. Note your feelings when you meet your enemy. Do not run away when you see your enemy approaching. Stay with it. Watch those ill feelings arising and subsiding when one greets the enemy. Note all those feelings of reaction as if they belong to someone else. Do the same when one meets a loved one. In this way one is practicing meditation in daily life. There is now no difference between 'daily life' and 'meditative life'. This seamless way of life is the only way to practice. After some time, we discover that our natural consciousness will allow everything to be as it is. Consciousness does not resist. There is no opposition at all to anything that is existing. Whether one is having a good day or a bad day, our true nature allows it to happen. So one must live our daily lives exactly as one meditates. By accepting everything as it turns up we continue to be in that very potent state of Ground Zero---Primordial Consciousness. In this state of surrender, insight and wisdom will inevitably arise. In this space of Cosmic Consciousness it is given to us what we need to see. As one progresses it is in this ground of Primordial Consciousness that one will be awakened and finally, it is here that realization will take place. This is the stage when we realize that we are the Unborn, meaning that we are part of the Universal Consciousness which can never be born into a single individual.

To reiterate, one must be mindful from moment to moment during the activities of one's daily life. While one is focused on a specific task that one is doing, there will also be a general awareness of one's surrounding environment. Driving a car is a good example. The focus is mainly on the driving and the road. One knows that any major

distraction to the driver is dangerous. However, one can easily be distracted when one is doing something mundane or routine like eating. The wandering can be so severe that one may not even remember what one has just eaten. While one is traveling in a train one must be with the moment by noticing the direction of the train and what the countryside looks like and what are the names of the stations that the train is passing through. All these facts can be gently noted without strain. During the journey if a problem crops up, deal with it in the mind promptly without agitation or panic. All these exercises are to stop the mind from flitting about and to be at the moment. The habit of day dreaming must be apprehended at all costs, but again without tears. So if one is mindful without judgments and without likes and dislikes, an inner peace and silence will ensue. This will lead to equanimity. This is the true practice of sitting meditation and daily activity without aversion and desire. If one can remain in this state all the time, then with luck there maybe a cessation of suffering. This is every spiritual practitioner's goal. So with a silent mind, one is able to look, listen, feel and relate to everything with equanimity. And emotions and thoughts can be dealt with calmly. It is only with equanimity can mindfulness and concentration transcend attachment and detachment. Equanimity is not equivalent to detachment, as detachment may lead to indifference and subsequent rejection. Equanimity without likes and dislikes will go beyond attachment and detachment and accept everything as they are. There is now **silence in the heart, emptiness in the mind and equanimity in all activities**. The awakening here is as good as enlightenment. The most important point here is not to fall back to the previous state of non-mindfulness and non-vigilance. As the Zen masters insist: one must continue to meditate for the rest of one's life whether enlightened or not. That means the state of awakening must be maintained and not allowed to slide backwards.

