PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC FACTORS OF NATURALLY OCCURRING LONG-TERM MEDITATION

by

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Abstract

Various forms of meditation are being used by an increasing number of people in North America. Practiced both within the context of an overarching spiritual path and as a self-regulation strategy, meditation is sometimes a supplement to traditional forms of psychotherapy. At other times, meditation, as part of a spiritual practice, is used as an alternative approach to mental health and well-being.

A multiple case study research format is used to understand the pattern of experience involved in long-term meditation from the perspective of the meditators. Five meditators were interviewed for their accounts of their experience with meditation over a minimum of ten years.

The interviews were organized into five narrative accounts and summarized as a general account which in turn revealed twelve common themes. The stories take the form of a movement from alienation and estrangement, through struggle and problem solving, toward an eventual consolidation of meaning and engagement with the world. This movement is accomplished through the resolution of three major tasks: the clarification of the relationship with the teacher; mastery of the techniques involved; and a cognitive restructuring based upon the optimal resolution of the first two tasks.

Theoretical implications of the study, such as various relationships between meditation and psychotherapy, are presented. Finally, the practical implications of the study for general counselling, counselling with meditators, and counsellor growth are discussed.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

General topic

What is the role of intensive and long-term meditation in the mental health field? Do people begin meditating to gain relief from particular types of personal problems just as others turn to mental health practitioners? What are the benefits, if any, to one's clients of such a practice?

At the most elementary level, mental health may be readily equated with pure and simple happiness. That all beings seek happiness and avoid suffering seems almost too obvious a fact to warrant stating. Nevertheless, the quest for happiness continues to motivate us even while its attainment seems to elude us. As aids on this quest, meditation and psychotherapy have been developed as just two of the many vehicles within the many different cultural contexts that humans have created.

Meditation, in various forms, has been touted as everything from a great panacea for psychological distress and a path to Maslow's "peak experiences" and optimal well-being on one hand, to a recipe for "neurotic regressions to union with the breast" or intrauterine states, narcissistic neurosis, or artificial catatonia.

An increasing number of individuals is turning to some form of meditation, either as an adjunct to other forms of personal change or as a substitute for them. Katz and Rolde (1981) suggest that despite apparent theoretical contradictions among these systems, consumers are putting together their own "treatment packages" to satisfy more of their felt needs. "In creating such a package theoretical conflicts are ignored, de-emphasized or reshaped into a more complementary pattern" (Katz and Rolde, 1981, p. 374).

Given this situation, counsellors and other mental health practitioners need a map to be able to understand not only the benefits and drawbacks of a long term regimen of meditation but also some typical patterns of such long term practice. The aim of this study is to understand the pattern of experience involved in meditation practice from the perspective of long term meditators.

Before proceeding, it may be useful at this point to clarify a few terms. The word meditation has come to have a variety

of connotations. The meaning of the word varies according to the particular spiritual tradition involved, the context in which it is applied, and the translation system used, which itself involves all the complexities of cross-cultural understanding.

In this study, I will be following Walsh's (1982) generic definition of meditation as "the conscious training of attention aimed at modifying mental processes so as to elicit enhanced states of consciousness and well-being" (p.77). Since the study will be focused upon meditators who have been practicing within a Buddhist traditions (due to both researcher familiarity with this tradition and in an effort to delimit clearly the degree of external validity of the study), some words on the nature of this tradition may be in order here.

All schools of Buddhist meditation recognize the complementary processes of calming the mind (shamatha), on one hand, and developing insight into the nature of phenomena (vipassana), on the other. Calming the mind requires overcoming the contradictory tendencies of mental agitation and dullness. Insight is developed through investigation of both self (subject) and other (object) and relies upon both rational/cognitive and intuitive/ experiential approaches.

The goal of Buddhist practice is to overcome suffering in all its forms through the balanced development of wisdom and compassion. Of wisdom, the Dalai Lama (1984) states, "there are in general many types of wisdom; the three main ones are conventional wisdom realizing the five fields of knowledge, ultimate wisdom realizing the mode of subsistence of phenomena, and wisdom knowing how to help sentient beings. The main one ... is the second, the wisdom realizing selflessness."(40) Of compassion, he affirms that "the main theme of Buddhism is altruism based on compassion and love" (p. 32). In the Buddhist tradition, wisdom and compassion are philosophically and experientially complementary, interdependent and ultimately inseparable.

The psychotherapeutic approach to personal change is similarly rooted in a philosophical and assumptive system, though its values may sometimes be implicit rather than articulated. For example, some theory within the mental health field still seems to rest upon the Freudian bedrock assumption that humans inevitably suffer from conflicts inherent in the human condition. (This recognition of the primacy of suffering is shared with the Buddhist view but is less optimistic as regards the ultimate outcome.) For example, in the introduction to a recent report of the current theory and practice of psychotherapy, Bruno Bettelheim (1990) articulated the primary goal of therapy as being, "...to free the patient from having to suffer from

the unnecessary hardships of life, so that he will have the strength to cope successfully with the unavoidable hardships of life."

Generally speaking, for the purposes of this research, the definition of health will follow that of the World Health Organization as adopted by Mental Health for Canadians : Striking A Balance (Turanski, 1988): "Health is state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease...the ability to live harmoniously in a changing total environment is essential." (Turanski, 1990, p.5).

Counsellors and other mental health practitioners are involved in community health care in each of its three levels of application: prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation (Turanski, 1990) of mental health problems. While many psychotherapeutic paths have been developed which are purported to lead to these goals, the starting point of human suffering and dis-ease and the goal of optimal well-being alike are remarkably similar to those posited by such spiritual traditions as Christianity and Buddhism.

The Dalai Lama (1984), from the perspective of Buddhism, uses a traditional medical analogy to describe the quest for well-being: "suffering is like an illness; the external and internal conditions that bring about the illness are the

sources of suffering. The state of cure from the illness is the cessation of suffering and of its causes. The medicine that cures the disease is true paths." (22)

Through in-depth exploration of the long-term meditation experience of Westerners, this study will contribute to the effort to understand the relevance that meditation practice may have for mental health practitioners and their clients in the quest for collective mental health and well-being. (The author assumes that the meaning and course of meditation practice within the Western sociocultural context may well be different from those which it possesses in the societies in which the practices originated.) The importance of the cultural setting of this study can be highlighted through reference to a recent article by Eugene Gendlin (1987).

In "A Philosophical Critique of Narcissism", he is responding to a wide-spread disparagement of the so-called "Awareness Movement" (see, e.g., Lasch, 1979 ; Foucault, 1984) which includes the practice of meditation as well as psychotherapy, and views all such practices as forms of "narcissism". Gendlin suggests that such a sweeping generalization derives from an overvaluation of the ego as "the extant social and political order, imposed upon a purely individual chaotic body consisting of mere autistic 'desires'." His critique leads through an argument in

favour of the enhancement of "experiential intricacy", the order of which emerges through a process of steps and is not an already formed order that is merely "discovered".

Given that proponents of meditation as a mental health practice still struggle with arguments that it is essentially narcissistic, the article is suggestive of the ways in which psychotherapy and meditation may find a common ground and support each other as liberatory processes. Against the alienation, fragmentation and nihilism (Levin, 1987) of our time, these practices may well prove complementary, sharing "the process of growing beyond limited views of self towards a greater vision and realization of what it is to be human." (Welwood, 1984, 63.) This exploratory study, it is hoped, will be suggestive of such a complementarity. In the next section, the writer will present reasons for considering meditation as a viable adjunct or alternative therapeutic practice.

Rationale for investigating the "psycho-therapeutic" effects of a "spiritual" practice

More and more individuals in Western society, eschewing their traditional religious and mental health practices, are experimenting with alternative approaches to psychological well-being. Egan (1990, 1986, 1982) and others suggest that

problem resolution and fulfillment of unused potential are the starting point of the helping process. Over the past several decades, there has been a proliferation of approaches such as twelve step groups and spiritual approaches based on various meditations all purporting to offer solutions to problems as well as enhancement of living.

Catalogues of individuals and organizations offering to resolve and satisfy these needs are available today in most North American cities. A perusal of Vancouver's "Common Ground" provides an example of the full panoply of psychotherapists, body therapists, channelers, spiritual healers, psychics, and holy men who are competing on the mental health market.

William Butler Yeats may well have presaged this current situation in his poem of 1921, "The Second Coming": 'Things fall apart; the center cannot hold'. In this age of paradigm clash, intensified cross-cultural interaction, and widespread disillusionment with traditional social, political and economic forms, it comes as little surprise that the traditional reliance upon the socially sanctioned mental health practitioners (psychiatrists, psychologists) may be weakening. (Some research suggests that as many as 30% of all clients do not return to a second visit with counsellors and psychologists (Sue and Sue, 1990).)

Katz and Rolde (1981) noted a trend among mental health consumers to prescribe their own customized combinations of therapy. They examined how traditional psychodynamic approaches to mental health could be combined with various alternative approaches. They argue that consumers of the various approaches make pragmatic decisions and combine essentially theoretically incompatible systems in an effort to evolve meaningful personal programs of change. They call for research to determine the effectiveness of various "treatment packages" based on such variables as high and low involvement, sequence of involvement, and time scale of the approach.

In later work, drawing on Fijian and !Kung cultures, Katz (1982, 1986) develops a concept of healing as "a process of transitioning toward meaning, balance, connectedness and wholeness". From the !Kung and Fijian data are extrapolated "models of psychological development education, and community, at whose crux are transformational experiences." What have been described elsewhere by Frank (1974), Torrey (1986) and others as alternative mental health paradigms, (shamanism, etc) are here presented in terms of a "transcultural" model of community mental health. From this perspective "health" is informed and maintained via access to a transpersonal realm which is then developed as a model of psychological development, guided by a transformational

education and resulting in a transformational, or "synergistic" community. (The work of Stanislav Grof (1987, 1989) and his associates in the area of "spiritual emergency" - the reframing of psychopathology as a crisis of personal or spiritual transformation - is particularly relevant to this shift in understanding.)

Katz (1982) suggests several general principles found in the !Kung approach to transformation which he feels may be relevant to our own approaches to mental health and illness which may be relevant for our question. 1) "Becoming a healer depends on an initial transformation of consciousness, a new experience of reality in which the boundaries of self become more permeable to an intensified contact with a transpersonal or spiritual realm" (p. 301). 2) The experience of transformation does not remove the healers from their community. 3) This power is developed as a service to the community. 4) The transformation sets in process an inner development which does not change external status. 5) It is qualities of heart, such as courage, which motivate the healers. 6) The specific results of a healing ritual are secondary to its role in re-affirming the community's self-healing capacity.

Torrey (1986) developed another transcultural approach to mental health which may aid in understanding the path of meditation. He suggests that psychotherapy and such

indigenous healing systems as shamanism share four common structures: a worldview shared by consumer and provider; personal qualities of the therapist; expectations of client/consumer; and emerging sense of mastery in the client.

In his attempt to describe features common to all forms of psychotherapy and mental health practice, Frank (1974) also described four central elements: a particular type of relationship between patient and help-giver, including factors of confidence, social-sanction, caring and empathy; settings designated as places of healing which arouse the patient's expectations for help; an explanatory rationale or myth guiding assumptions about illness, health, deviancy and normality, all of which permit the patient to make sense of his or her symptoms; and finally, a set of procedures or tasks to be undertaken by the patient and care-giver.

The cross-cultural studies which helped Frank identify these factors also led him to postulate commonalties underlying the potency of mental health practices. The four identified elements influence the patient in five interrelated ways: they provide new opportunities for both cognitive and experiential learning; they enhance hope of relief; they provide success experiences; they help overcome alienation from others; and they arouse the patient emotionally.

Katz, Torrey and Frank have thus attempted to systematize the consistent and relevant transcultural factors in mental health practice. In this quest, they have been responding to a variety of historical imperatives. It is a quest which we shall take up in this study. Given the large number of North Americans and Europeans now practicing some form or another of meditation, we still lack any real understanding of its place in mental health practice.

While the interest in alternative approaches to mental health and well-being has been growing, mental health practitioners still lack a cohesive approach to working with the clientele who are either practicing these alternatives or are interested in their applicability to their own situation. Despite the many studies exploring various aspects of the psycho-physiological processes involved in meditation, there have been few focusing upon the meditator's experience of the process over time. As a result, practitioners have been working primarily with a combination of traditional interpretations of the Eastern traditions, anecdotal accounts, and speculation. There continues to be a need to clarify the experience of long-term meditators to find out how and whether meditation might become a useful adjunct to, or substitute for, traditional

counselling and psychotherapy. Before proceeding further, it may be useful to consider previous approaches to meditation research.

Previous investigations and research focus

The most common topics in academic meditation research have been in the field of psychophysiological responses. Murphy and Donovan (1988), in an excellent bibliography of scientific studies of meditation, list over 1000 entries, the vast majority concerned with such topics as respiration, oxygen consumption, heartbeat, blood pressure, and brain wave activity. Accordingly, much of previous research has been framed within the context of behavioural management, altered states and stress reduction (Shapiro, 1980; Shapiro and Walsh, 1984).

From these perspectives, meditation has become a technique closely allied with other "self-regulation" methods of the cognitive behaviourists. While the majority of studies taking this approach support the benefits of meditation, the various practices have thus become largely decontextualized from both the spiritual systems in which they have been imbedded and communicated and also from the life-world of the meditators themselves.

Engler (1986) highlights this problem succinctly:

> ...in being transplanted to the West, meditation

> has been lifted out of its larger context of a culture permeated by Buddhist perspectives and values where it is also part of a total system of training (bhavana) and a way of life. When this therapeutic context is eliminated, meditation is practiced as an isolated technique, with disregard for many other important behavioural, motivational, intrapsychic and interpersonal factors such as right livelihood, right action, right understanding and right intention. (29)

While the institutions and cultural structures which support this holistic approach are largely absent in the West, meditation as practiced nevertheless remains embedded in complex contexts of meaning and social interaction. These largely neglected factors deserve attention if we are to fully understand how long-term meditation can actually be of benefit.

The tendency within both research and practice to ignore these social and cultural contexts is highlighted by the work of Bergin and Jensen (1990). They suggest that while the value system of mental health practioners minimizes the importance of client spirituality, for up to two thirds of the population secular approaches to psychotherapy may represent an alien values framework. "A majority of the population probably prefer an orientation to counseling and

psychotherapy that is sympathetic, or at least sensitive, to a spiritual perspective...Thus, while professional opposition to a spiritual framework is still evident, it is hard to justify." (6)

There has been limited research on the mental health implications of naturally-occuring (i.e., non-experimental), value-oriented long-term practice of meditation in the West. This study addresses the general question: "What role does long-term meditation play in the psychological life of the meditator?" To answer this overarching question, it will be necessary to discover a means by which the experience of long-term, intensive meditation practice can be described and understood. Related questions arise concerning the appropriateness of meditation as a substitute or adjunct for other techniques and methodologies for the maintenance or enhancement of mental health and well-being.

While meditation has received increasing support as a technique of self-management for relaxation and stress-reduction, there has been a tendency to ignore the implications of the broader relationships between meditation, the practitioner's lifeworld, and the socio-cultural environment as background. As Engler (1986) and others have suggested, there may well be both negative and positive results of ongoing practice. Largely because most studies have relied on short-term and experimental designs,

current research has thus far been unable to understand and explain these disparate results. There is therefore a need to extend the research in new directions.

Approach

To gain a thorough description and understanding of the experience of long-term meditation practice, a combination of phenomenological and hermeneutic approaches will be utilized. Multiple case-studies will be conducted to elucidate the experiences of a number of long-term meditators. The meaning of these case studies will then be interpreted through the construction of a generalized story. The case study method is distinguished from other research methodologies (Yin,1989) in studying a contemporary phenomena within its real-life context, while remaining open to a wide range of variables, and permitting the inclusion of a broad range of data or evidence.

This approach, in contrast to an experimental design, enables a greater congruence with and fidelity to the phenomena. Each case becomes a lens permitting a range of views which in turn can coalesce into a gestalt or hologram of the phenomena. By shifting the focus away from an isolated technique of meditation (of whatever variety) to the unfolding of a meditative way of life over a number of years, it becomes possible to understand more fully and more rigorously the role that meditation might play in the mental health field.

The case history itself, as are other non-experimental designs (e.g., phenomenological, hermeneutic) is developed through a meditative or primarily reflective stance. Data collection proceeds with questioning and listening in an effort to understand the experience or life-world of the informant in all its richness. The sifting through and analyzing of this data is similarly undertaken in a spirit of meditatively living with it.

A reflective questioning thus lies at the beginning of the case history and forms the connective web on which the final fabric is laid. This questioning differs from the "calculative" approach (Heidegger, 1966) of positivism. If meditation is merely, or primarily, a technique, which can be applied by anyone and which therefore leads to certain pre-ordained results, then an experimental approach may be in order. If, however, meditation is seen more as a creative attitude, "a growing awareness of what our existence is a saying to and asking of us" (Batchelor, 1990), then our approach should perhaps mirror this attitude with as much fidelity as we can permit. If it is true, as Batchelor suggests, that "insight, wisdom, compassion and love all come from a source other than that of technical mastery", to rely on a methodology dependent upon manipulation of independent variables seems inappropriate. A different type or level of control is called for.

"The core of a meditative attitude is questioning itself... Meditative questioning enquires into no individually discernible detail of life, but into the whole". (Batchelor, 1990, p.43) Interestingly, one of the world's great meditative traditions, that of Rinzai Zen, relies upon use of a case history approach. "The Chinese, with their combination of devotion to antiquity and a scrupulous regard for recording history, compiled many collections of anecdotes, sayings, and instructions that illustrate moments of sudden awakening. These episodes are referred to as 'public cases,' which is the literal meaning of the sometimes misunderstood term kung an, or in Japanese pronunciation, 'koan'" (Batchelor, 1990, 43).

Summary

The approach in this study should provide a much needed exploration of the experience of naturally-occurring long term meditation. The recognition of the value-laden nature of such practice will assist counsellors to remedy the "religiosity gap" noted by Bergin (1988, 1990). "The potential for a change in the direction of greater empathy for the religious client is underscored by the surprisingly significant levels of unexpressed religiosity that exists among mental health practitioners...Perhaps this "spiritual humanism" would add a valuable dimension to the therapeutic repetoire if it were more clearly expressed and overtly translated into practice" (p.7) (and perhaps into research, as well.)

More generally, the author hopes to contribute to the theory, practice and research directions seminally suggested by Frank (1977). He recognized the parallels between the scientific and the religio-magical approaches to psychotherapy, which he referred to the "two faces of psychotherapy", and suggested that "the ideal psychotherapist of the future should be able to use methods of either or both when appropriate, thereby enhancing his psychotherapeutic effectiveness." (1977, 6)

CHAPTER TWO:

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter Two will provide the reader with a framework for understanding the approach taken to understand the question raised in the preceding chapter, namely "what is the pattern of experience involved with long-term meditation?" Due to the great variety of types of meditation, their associated purposes, goals and meanings, this framework covers much ground. An attempt will be made to provide an extensive overview of the concerns which have so far been of most interest to researchers studying the psychotherapeutic factors of meditation.

These concerns and perspectives vary widely, depending upon one's therapeutic theory, one's view of human nature, one's understanding of spirituality, one's cultural identity and one's own psychological awareness and development. The chapter will review the main theoretical and research approaches to the phenomenon of meditation, with special attention paid to both the related issues of expectation and outcome and to the factors which make meditation effective.

To date, there have been well over a thousand articles and numerous books written on various aspects of the meditation from the perspective of Western psychological science. Many of these articles are framed by an assumption of paradigm clash. Walsh, et al (1980) similarly suggest that "many traditions view consciousness as their central concern and make several claims that run counter to Western assumptions. These include statements that (1) our usual state of consciousness is severely suboptimal, (2) that multiple states including the "higher" states exist, (3) that these states are attainable through training but, (4) that verbal communication about them is necessarily limited." (p.37.)

Meditation, generally, is perceived and presented as representative of an Eastern, religio-magical, intuitive and traditional world view. Conversely, psychology is portrayed as a practice of the West, and as such as scientific, rational and objective, transcending subjective and parochial values with universal truth. Some (e.g., Walsh, 1982) suggest that since phenomenological changes are the very raison d'etre of meditation, that the inherent positivism of the "scientific method" is in itself an inadequate approach to the subject. Fortunately, the validity of "phenomenological" approaches is being increasingly recognized within the research community (e.g., Polkinghorne, 1988) This issue will be discussed further in the chapter on methodology.

In the opening chapter, we saw briefly how these contrasting paradigms have been framed and syntheses suggested by Torrey, Frank, Katz and others. As well, there have been many writers within the Western scientific tradition who have been influenced by the insights arising from within the "perennial philosophy" or wisdom traditions of both the primitive and classical traditions of the world. The most obvious representatives of these are Carl Jung and Roberto Assagolio within the depth psychological tradition but psychologists working within the cognitive and behavioural schools as well have been inspired by the systems proposed by the "consciousness disciplines".

As noted in Chapter One, meditation will be defined as "the conscious training of attention aimed at modifying mental processes so as to elicit enhanced states of consciousness and well-being" (Walsh, 1982, 77). In the following review, while the varieties of meditation under discussion will be noted, little attention will be devoted to the relationship between meditation type and outcome. To do so, while of great interest, would be of little value in what is basically exploratory research. Instead, it is more important at this point to summarize the existing research to throw light upon the question of the patterns of experience of long-term meditation.

Temporality and the significance of duration

As suggested in Chapter One, there has been an emphasis upon short-term and experimental approaches to the study of meditation. While this approach has enabled researchers to examine certain aspects of the phenomenon with precision, it also has certain limitations. As mentioned previously, it decontextualizes meditation from the life context of the practitioner and it has also limited the time frame in which meditation can be studied. The general importance of time in personality change and development is succinctly described by Horowitz (1986):

> Schemata are inner working models that contain information abstracted out of and generalized from earlier experiences. Mental development means elaborating existing schemata into new forms as well as nesting schemata into useful hierarchies. Memories are reworked in the process, and different plans for self-expression and gratification or avoidance of threat, are formed. Time, whether in psychotherapy or meditation, is required for such personal reformulations. (p. viii.)

A major limitation of the vast majority of meditation research in the empirical tradition has been the time scale of the studies. Most experimental subjects have practiced amounts of meditation that would be considered miniscule by most meditative disciplines. Studies can be found using durations as short as two weeks, during which time subjects may be meditating only half an hour a day or less. The majority of studies seem to run for three to six months and it is rare to find studies that extend for longer than two years. In contrast, in the spiritual traditions from which these meditatitive practices come, many years (or even lifetimes) of intensive practice are indicated for the attainment of optimal results.

Traditionally, practice tends to be undertaken not for short term, self-regulatory, symptom relief goals, but rather with a motivation of transformation, growth or development. Meditation undertaken for growth and self-transformation is a long term affair. Thus, for long-term practitioners there have often been life-style changes (behavioural/ethical) concomitant with meditation which act as both support and result of one's practice.

For example, in the Indian Buddhist tradition, a norm of twelve years of intensive practice was set by the enlightenment stories of the 84 Mahasiddhas of the medieval period. This twelve year period subsequently became a model

within the Vajrayana tradition which thereby differentiated itself from the Mahayana tradition which held that enlightenment could be gained only through practice over incalculable lengths of time. The three-year training retreats in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition reflect a division of this original twelve year period into a more managable set of four.

This with the traditional view is reflected in the Dalai Lama's (1984) statement that, "differences are not seen at once, but over time. If we cultivate the altruistic intention to become enlightened slowly and steadily and, *after five or ten years* (emphasis author's) have passed, consider the changes that have occurred in our way of thinking and actions, the results of our efforts -the improvement- will be clearly discernible (143)". This approach to time may well reflect a profound cultural difference.

Not only is there a very clear quantitative difference in the time and energy committed to meditation, there is some research that indicates that both culture and gender have an impact on time factors. Walsh (1981) and Engler (1983, 1984) using Rorschach tests as a post test measure both suggest that Westerners are slower in achieving meditative concentration (so called "access states") than Asian practitioners.

Some of the Rorschach studies (Brown & Engler, 1986) suggest that rapid progress with meditation on the dimensions of personality growth and change (trait factor change), and concomitant alleviation of suffering, is likely quite rare, if it is even possible. "After three months of continuous intensive daily practice, about half the Ss showed very little change, at least as defined in terms of formal meditation. The other half achieved some proficiency in concentration. Only three perfected access concentration and began to have insights similar to those described in the classical accounts of the insight series of meditations" (p. 216).

The time factor alone and the subsequent limitations posed by the experimental approach suggest the value of retrospective investigations despite their limitations. Although confounded by problems of memory, history, demand characteristics, etc., such approaches permit a more thorough exploration of the phenomenon.

Motivations, expectations and goals

Individuals begin meditation for a variety of reasons and with a range of expectations. Some begin for health reasons, to control uncomfortable levels of stress and

anxiety, or to manage pain (Kabat-Zin, 1990). Even within the Asian traditions, various motivations and goals were posited. For example, Kapleau (1965) pointed out that there were five different goals (and hence, types of practitioner) within the Zen tradition alone: improvement of physical or mental health; development of supernormal powers; individual liberation; liberation of others; and coalescence of goal and path. The Japanese psychiatrist Kan'ichi Kishimoto (1985) suggested that therapy for neurosis must encompass each of five dimensions of being human; four dimensions - physical, psychological, natural and social - as objective, and spiritual, as a subjective dimension.

Wilber (1977), one of the leading theorists of the Transpersonal Psychology movement suggests that the goals of both meditation and psychotherapeutic practice can be categorized into three types: therapeutic, dealing with the healing of that which is wounded; existential, coming to terms with core and unavoidable facts of Being and Non-being, such as freedom and death; and soteriological, relating to salvation or liberation from the suffering and terrors of the reference points of the two preceding types.

Not surprisingly then, there have been vastly differing approaches to the understanding and application of meditation, any or all of which may have relevance to the experience of long-term meditation practice. From the

viewpoint of some sectors of psychology, most notably the behavioural, the emphasis has been on the alleviation of symptom and behavioural self-management. From others, such as humanistic and transpersonal psychology, there has been a greater emphasis on what Wilber has called the existential and soteriological goals. As well, the concepts and language of depth psychology, including psycho-analysis and object relations, have been used by a number of researchers to understand the process and results of meditation.

Behavioural approaches

This is possibly the area with which readers will be most familiar since it represents some of both the earliest and the most widely reported research. Researchers and therapists with a behavioural perspective have generally conceived of meditation as a "self-regulation strategy", related or analogous to such techniques as self-hypnosis, progressive relaxation and their applications to cognitive and behavioural change. From this point of view, the goal is to modify maladaptive behaviours and/or inculcate and enhance more adaptive ones.

Research in this category falls into areas which tend traditionally to be treated with behavioural approaches: clinical, health- and stress-related concerns, such as anxiety reduction (Delmonte, M.M., 1985; Girodo, 1974;

Shapiro, 1976) and hypertension (Stone and De Leo, 1976); phobias (Boudreau, 1972; French and Tupin, 1974); drug and alcohol abuse (Shafii, Lavel, & Jaffe, 1975; Benson, 1969; Benson and Wallace, 1972; Marlatt, et al, 1984; Shapiro & Zifferblatt, 1976); and psychosomatic disorders (e.g., Woolfolk, 1975). Meditation is deemed successful if it aids in reducing the target behaviours.

The evidence for success in these areas varies in validity. Shapiro (1977) reviewed the research to date and found disparate results. The use of meditation for the treatment of hypertension seemed quite unequivocal, consistently indicating "a reduction in blood pressure in the treatment group, a reduction in the use of hypertensive medication, and a reduction in the reports of somatic symptoms" (p. 63). Partly as a result of the simplicity of the dependent measure (blood pressure), the findings concerning treatment effect were relatively clear when compared with some of the research on substance abuse which relied primarily upon retrospective accounts and longitudinal designs.

Similarly unequivocal were the thirteen studies on fears, phobias, stress and tension management reviewed by Shapiro (1977) as all the studies reported successful outcomes on the dependent variables used. This success is generally attributed to the relaxation response as indicated by a variety of physiological changes during meditation. Goleman

(1971) suggested that a related but alternate mechanism was a form of global desensitization: that negative imagery and cognition surface during a state of relaxation, permitting both desentization to and reappraisal of the stimulus.

Psychodynamic theory

Psychoanalytically oriented therapy in its various forms (classical Freudian, Jungian, object relations) is organized in large part around the concept of the unconscious. From this perspective, psychotherapy consists of uncovering repressed material and making it accessible to consciousness in order to strengthen the ego and enable it to successfully mediate with reality. Psychoanalytic approaches to meditation, when they have acknowledged any validity to meditation at all, have tended to regard it in terms of regressing and lowering defense mechanisms (Boals, 1978; Maupin, 1972; Shafii, 1973; Fromm, 1977), opening primary process thinking (Davidson, 1977; Fromm, 1981), and generally making unconscious material, including repressed memories, more accessible.

As a result, some researchers suggest that meditation is contraindicated for some people. For example, Amodeo (1982) discusses the case of a woman who experienced dissociation and fear during vipassana meditation. To account for these

symptoms, he suggests that "an excessive de-repression seemed to occur which accounts for the fear of being overwhelmed." (p. 149.) On the whole, traditional psycho-analytic literature carries a negative bias towards meditation. However, object relations theory has been fruitfully applied to transpersonal psychology which will considered below.

Humanist-existential approaches

Within the wisdom traditions that give rise to contemplation and meditative practice, there is a general and over-arching concern with meaning and value. These concerns are shared with the schools of existential and humanist psychology.

Therapists and researchers following the humanist tradition emphasize the "self-actualizing" tendency of organisms and generally view meditation as a means to tap into this tendency (Sallis, 1982). The existential goals include contact with "inner" sources of meaning, self-responsibility, and self-reliance. Interestingly, a number of influential Buddhist writers including Herbert Guenther (e.g., 1984) and Stephen Batchelor (1983, 1990) have used existentialist concepts to translate Buddhist principles into contemporary thought.

The core conditions of therapy - empathy, positive regard, genuineness - as identified by Rogers and arising from existential thought can be seen as both aspects of technique and as therapeutic goals in themselves. Humanistically oriented researchers have studied the development of empathy (Lesh, 1970; Leung, 1973; Sweet and Johnson, 1990), particularly in the context of counsellor training. Lesh's (1970) study suggested that empathic ability and degree of self actualization both developed significantly over a relatively short period of four weeks of zen meditation. Leung's (1973) results suggest that zen meditation heightens empathy by increasing awareness of verbal and non-verbal cues and increasing the ability to concentrate on specified material.

Compton and Becker (1983), using the POI, also explored the relationship between zen meditation and self-actualization. They were interested in the amount of time required to develop competency in practice and suggested that a learning period was necessary before the expected results could manifest. The results therefore also suggest that meditation/self-actualizing studies not using trained meditators must be questioned.

The impact of meditation on the related concept of self-esteem has also been explored. Seeman, Nidich, and Banta (1972) used the POI to measure the characteristics of self-

actualization among meditators using TM. They found enhanced inner-directedness, spontaneity, self-regard, acceptance of aggression, and capacity for intimate contact. These results were replicated in a follow-up study by Nidich, Seeman, & Dreshin (1973). Similarly, Hjelle (1974), in a comparison of experienced and prospective meditators found that the meditators were significantly less anxious, more internally controlled, with greater spontaneity, self-regard and capacity for intimate contact.

Gergen (1983) in a comparison of Zen and psychological science suggested that some of the main benefits of meditation may lie in the development of new approaches to understanding the world. Zen meditation is seen as a promising way to explore the states and benefits of non-conceptual or intuitive thinking and the application of direct, experiential understanding to cognitive patterns and culturally shared understandings.

Transpersonal psychology

Transpersonal psychology is that offshoot of humanistic psychology which attempts to integrate the theoretical and knowledge base of any or all "three forces" (psychodynamic, behavioural, and humanistic) of Western psychology with the theories, insights and practices deriving from altered

states research and the various wisdom (or spiritual) traditions of the world. As well, transpersonal psychology attempts to integrate the three disparate concerns of healing psychological woundedness, discerning meaning and value, and spiritual liberation through the agency of the transpersonal.

There are two principle formulations of the relationship between mind and spirit within the transpersonal approach: the developmental approach of Ken Wilber (1980) and the dialectical approach of Michael Washburn (1988, 1990). Wilber suggests that humans develop from infancy through a sequence of levels marked by greater and greater integration and complexity. We develop from an initial state of uroboric fusion with the mother, or primary narcissism, through the "egoic" level of "normal" adulthood through to the higher states described by the world's wisdom traditions.

In this model, psychotherapy is appropriate to individuals who are "stuck" in a lower level of structural development, while meditation is the vehicle of choice for those who have reached ego integration and wish to progress further, in the direction of Maslow's "self-actualization", Jung's "individuation", or Buddha's "enlightenment".

This "ladder-to-oneness" developmental approach has been contested by Washburn (1990) who has proposed a "spiral-to-

integration" dialectical model. The following table illustrates these differences in perspective.

Two Contrasting Views Within Transpersonal Psychology

DEVELOPMENTAL (Wilber)	DIALECTICAL (Washburn)
Transcendence of ego is a straight forward ascending movement.	Transcendence involves a reversal and return to origins before ascending
Development proceeds directly from level to level, in a purely progressive fashion.	A regression to earlier levels is necessary for movement to higher, or transegoic, levels.
Transcendence is awakening to higher, immanent, potentials.	Transcendence is a return to psychic and spiritual potentials which previously active, but now suppressed.
Transcendence of ego leads to expansion of the self.	Transcendence leads to transformation of the self.
Self-realization implies trans-cendence of self, or "no-self",	Self-realization is an in-tegrated duality of a

a state of undivided oneness.	transpersonal Self (God) and a psychological subject (ego).

These two contending positions represent the current views within the field of "Transpersonal Psychology" which attempt to integrate the otherwise disparate fields of psyche and Spirit.

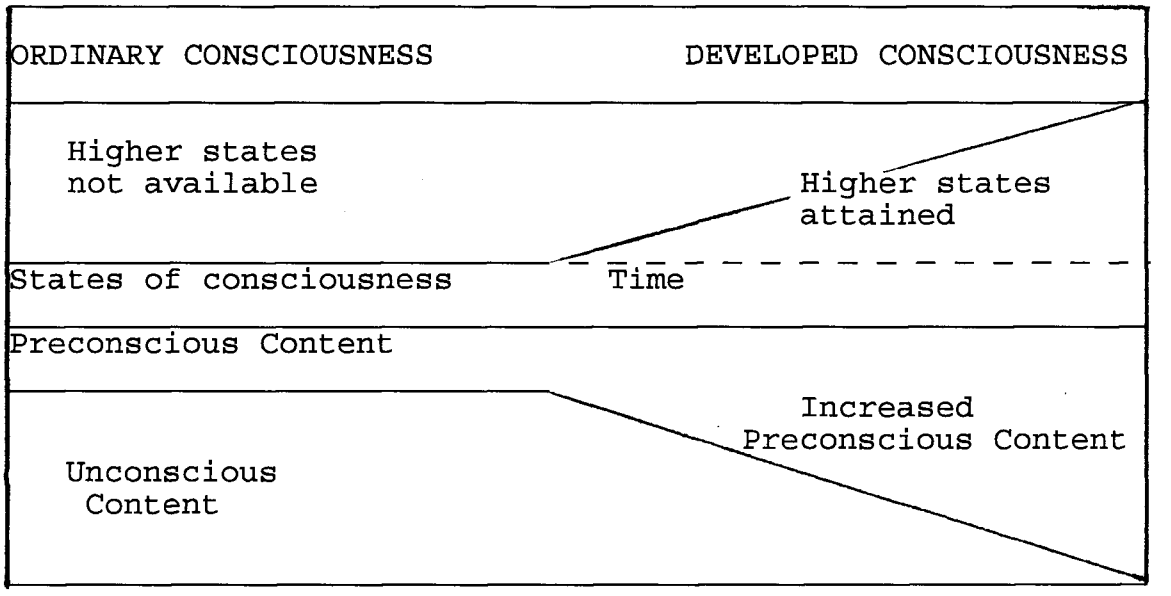
A third and related approach, while not as fully developed, is presented by Russell (1986). Russell cites a range of sources, both Eastern and Western, psychologists and meditators, to suggest that therapy and meditation perhaps need not and should not be integrated in the rigourous way attempted by Wilber and Washburn. He argues that meditation should not be regarded as psychotherapy, at least in the sense of alleviating particular psychopathologies.

He contends that the Eastern traditions (of both Hinduism and Buddhism) have no knowledge of "the unconscious" and no practice for uncovering and resolving conflictual material. Nevertheless, he acknowledges the power of the Eastern systems to provide access to "higher" states of consciousness culminating in the experience of "enlightenment" as variously described by these systems. Psychotherapy

and meditation have different uses and address two separate and distinct aspects of the human psyche. He portrays this difference graphically as follows:

PROPOSED TYPOLOGY OF THE RELATIONSHIP OF CONSCIOUS STATES TO

THE UNCONSCIOUS CONTENT AS RELATED TO PSYCHOLOGICAL GROWTH



(Russell, 1986, p. 67)

"In this topology, it is conceived that personal development may occur either through bringing more unconscious material into consciousness to reside in the preconscious or in experiencing increasingly higher states of consciousness (1986, p.68)." In suggesting that the higher states and the unconscious may be largely unrelated, but that they may act synergistically to promote growth, Russell differs from both Wilber (1980) and Washburn (1988, 1990).

Intriguing theoretical discussions concerning the therapeutic effects of meditation result when meditation is viewed through the theoretical lens of object relations theory (Engler, 1983, 1984; Epstein and Lieff, 1981; Epstein, 1986.)

Following object relations theorists (Kohut, 1971, 1977; Kernberg, 1975, 1976), Engler (1984) differentiates between the severe clinical syndromes (e.g., autism, psychosis, borderline states) and less severe (psychoneurotic), depending on the developmental genesis of those states. He ponders the relevance of Buddhist meditation (the goal of which is realization of non-existence of self) in relation to the basic goal of therapy in the severe disorders, namely, the integration of a stable and enduring self-representation.

Epstein (1986, 1990) takes issue with the widespread notion (e.g., Engler, 1984, 1986) that meditation can be therapeutic only with those individuals who already have a well developed ego structure. He suggests that meditation may have a role in transforming narcissistic character structures. Using the object relations concepts of *ego ideal* and *ideal ego* (Hanly, 1984) he argues that both traditionally oriented analytic psychologists and transpersonal psychologists may be simplifying the

situation, with the analysts seeing meditation as only gratifying the ego ideal and the transpersonalists neglecting the fact of narcissistic character structures in meditators.

He contends that while concentrative types of meditation (with concomitant feelings of bliss, harmony and tranquility) may indeed actually reinforce the ego ideal, that insight meditation (focusing upon impermanence and insubstantiality) may undermine the ideal ego. "Thus, the idealized image that the ego has inevitably held of itself since its infantile origins must now be extinguished, an event that is without parallel in Western dynamic theory" (153). Buddhist meditation is thus presented, in theory, as a therapeutic methodology which can balance the "experiences of the ego ideal with those that confront the ideal ego. It is only when this balance is achieved that both may be abandoned and narcissism, itself, be overcome" (156).

This interpretation of the Buddhist path is supported by Fontana (1987) who offers a conceptualization of a movement initiated by meditation, from self-assertion, through self-negation, to self-affirmation; by Wilber (1980) with his developmental schema; and by Washburn's (1988) "dialectical" approach.

Brown & Engler (1980) suggest that Westerners tend to become fixated at a "psychodynamic" level of experience, one that is dominated by primary process thinking and such "unrealistic experience as fantasy, daydreaming, revery, spontaneous recall of past memories, and derepression of conflictual material, incessant thinking and emotional lability, including dramatic swings in mood (M. Sayadaw, 1973; Walsh, 1977, 1978; Kornfield, 1979.) Epstein (1990), while not viewing this as a generic problem for Westerners, notes that an obstacle in the early stages of practice is a refusal to progress on the path of concentration but rather getting caught up in fascination with psychological material but with no resolution of psychological conflict.

As well, Engler (1984) notes the arousal of strong transferences to teachers and relates these to Kohut's idealizing or mirroring types. "In the first, a need for a source of accepting and confirming "mirroring" is revived in the context of the teacher-student relationship; in the second, a need for a merger with a source of "idealized" strength and calmness emerges (Kohut and Wolf, 1978)."

The transpersonal approaches to meditation are most explicitly concerned with what Wilber calls the soteriological. Soteriology refers to the art and science of salvation from the vagaries of conditioned existence as they

have been traditionally defined in the world's wisdom traditions.

The traditional province of meditation is not therapy but liberation, not the personal but the transpersonal. The relationship between these two praxes is problematic and indeed, is the underlying concern of this project. Some writers have attempted to clearly differentiate the two and emphasize the importance of maintaining a distinct separation (Welwood, 1983) while others see them as more complementary (Kornfield, Ram Dass, and Miyuki, 1983). Whatever the approach, it is important to bear in mind that meditation itself is traditionally regarded not in terms of "psychological adjustment", but in terms of liberation.

Brown and Engler (1982) on the basis of extensive research involving both self-reports and Rorschach studies with both South Asian and American meditators, suggest that "meditation <u>is something very much more than stress reduction or psychotherapy</u>...not exactly a form of therapy but a soteriology, i.e., a means of liberation. It is said to be an extensive path of development that leads to a particular end: total liberation from the experience of ordinary human suffering and attainment of the genuine wisdom that comes from the true perception of the nature of mind and its construction of reality."(216)

Kishimoto's (1985) therapy of neurosis, while addressing the objective dimensions mentioned above, culminates in spiritual, or "self-awakening" psychotherapy. He provides several case studies exemplifying this approach which utilizes a combination of readings of and reflection on a particular sutra (or classic Buddhist text); the repeated calligraphic writing of personally significant portions of the text; depending on the sectarian background of the patient the use of either zen or nembutsu meditation. Through this self-awakening therapy "one who establishes one's subjectivity by one's religion can naturally recover from physical and mental diseases...(and) suddenly or gradually attain self-awakening and realize subjective freedom, resolution, independence, originality, individuality, dignity and creativity of spirit." (94)

The closest that Western psychology has come to a soteriological conception of therapy seems to be Maslow, with the theory and practice of "self-actualization". Various writers (e.g., Sallis, 1982) have used this conception to translate the aim and goal of meditation. From this perspective, psychological adjustment is clearly secondary to the transcendent function of liberation or freedom from the sufferings contingent upon conditioned existence.

Epstein (1990) warns against a tendency of using meditation as a psychological defense, and argues that "it is precisely those areas that appear therapeutic that are...potential obstacles to spiritual development for those of us who seek and set up a psychotherapeutic model for what is being sought." What Epstein seeks, through recourse to object relations theory (as mentioned above), is to articulate meditation as a path/process that is neither therapeutic nor non-therapeutic. Using the conflicts of narcissism (Mahler, 1972; Guntrip, 1971) as a compelling paradigm for the human struggle between isolation and fusion, between meaningless and inherent perfection, Epstein (1990) sketches an approach to meditation which embodies the Buddhist ideal of the Middle Way between the extremes of nihilism and eternalism:

> The meditative path, through its experiences of terror and delight, of confrontation and bliss, of concentration, mindfulness and insight, seizes these psychic predispositions, engages them, and gradually works a piece of understanding that obviates both extremes. Culminating in the appreciation of emptiness (*sunyata*) and egolessness (*annatta*), the meditative path is not without obstacles, generated in the most part by these two relatively intransigent notions of all or nothing. (p. 20)

Thus, Epstein (1990) presents a clear picture of the development of meditation from the early stages of concentration meditation in which psychological material comes forth, to the blissful, highly focused and seductive later stages of concentration, through to the paths of mindfulness and insight in which the ego or self is illuminated as it really is - empty of inherent existence. This realization is the culmination of the Buddhist path and is accomplished through the successful navigation of a long series of psychological traps, "the psychological tendencies of meditators at every stage of development to err on either side of absolutism or nihilism" (p. 17).

Various writers (e.g., Shapiro, 1980; Walsh, 1983; Tart, 1990) have described their personal experiences with meditative practices from the perspective of liberation or opening to an expended sense of Being. Walsh (1983) reports an initially increased awareness of the structure of daily thought and fantasy as well as a pattern of underlying fears, along with increased affective lability, eventuating in sensations of peace and quiet, enhanced perceptual sensitivity, and increasing degrees of trust and openness.

Shapiro (1980) noted that meditation provided him with a "vehicle by which (I) could learn to accept what I could not control", a positive factor from both a psychological and spiritual perspective.

Levin (1988) recorded his experience with a particular meditation practice from the Nyingma tradition of Tibet, the so-called Dark Retreat. He describes the retreat as "a rich and deeply therapeutic experience...I emerged from the archetypal womb of darkness feeling nourished in spirit and more deeply integrated, more whole and complete than when I entered it...I have reason to believe that the benefits I have noted are real and that their significance for my life - and in particular, for my visionary propensities and habits - will be enduring" (484).

The literature reviewed has been suggestive of a range of outcomes. The therapeutic, existential and soteriological approaches to meditation overlap. What are the factors involved in the various types of meditation which make it such a powerful and all-encompassing method of change? The following section presents some of the findings relevant to this question.

Variables involved in successful outcome of meditation

One of the difficulties in meditation research is determining exactly what it is that is being studied. Nominally, the researcher is studying the effects of meditation. However, there are several different types of meditation and each one consists of a variety of factors.

Which one is being used? What is the quality of application (e.g., how much time in an actual meditation session is spent meditating? and conversely, is there time outside of formal practice that can and should be considered meditation)?

Traditional sources suggest that there are three categories of meditation: concentrative, receptive (or awareness) and combined (Goleman, 1977; Walsh, 1982). Each of these types can be further subdivided. For example, while concentrative practices focus upon one particular object of attention at a time, that object could be physical, sound or mantra, visualization, a concept (e.g., emptiness of self), a feeling-toned mental state (e.g., love and compassion), or breath. Receptive meditations, while leaving the "mind" open and attentive to any and all stimuli, similarly have different foci. For example, vipassana meditation as taught in the South-east Asian traditions initially maintains this openness regarding body awareness, while the Mahamudra and Maha-Ati traditions of Tibet, culminate in an openness to Being itself. These latter traditions could also be more accurately regarded as combined, since any attentional focus (concentrative) is held to be simultaneously open or empty of self-nature (receptive).

Epstein (1990) makes the point that varying stages of meditation require varying tasks, "the primary task of the

preliminary practices (being that) of adaptation to the flow of inner experience...allowing a kind of inner space to be created...a "transitional space" that "contains" all of the products of the psyche that are revealed through meditation.

Mechanisms involved in the production of observed findings

Any phenomenon can be described from a variety of perspectives and is conditioned by a variety of causes. For example, human behaviours may involve psychological, physiological, and chemical mechanisms. The linear model of cause (and hence mediating mechanism) and effect has been thrown into question as the single epistemological process by quantum physics and systems theories. It has become increasingly clear that the search for a single determinative factor underlying any physical or psychological phenomena is limiting at best, and more often will be both fruitless and meaningless.

The problems of searching for mechanisms is summed up by Walsh (1983): "it is not clear how appropriate it is to think in terms of certain mechanisms as mediating the production of meditation effects, since in a complex interdependent system, the very concept of mechanisms may be

suspect, and there is always the considerable danger of reductionism" (26).

Numerous mechanisms have been posited, each with varying degrees of validity, none of which singly seeming to account for the range of responses. Among the factors suggested are the process of progressive heightening of awareness of, and subsequent disidentification (Walsh, 1977, 1978) from, mental content (cf. in heightened form, abreaction, catharsis (Maupin, 1962; Carrington and Ephron, 1975)); psychological and physical relaxation (Benson, 1975); global desensitization (Goleman, 1971); counterconditioning and a variety of other cognitive mediating factors (e.g., "loosening", in construct theory terms, (Kelly, 1955), information processing (Brown, 1977), self-instruction (Shapiro & Zifferblatt, 1976); reduced metabolism and arousal (Delmonte, 1979, 1985); adaptive regression; hemispheric lateralization (Pagano & Frumkin, 1977; Bennett & Trinder, 1977); brain wave resonance and coherence (Haymes, 1977); deautomatization and bimodal consciousness (Deikman, 1966, 1971); and a shift in the activating and quieting components of the autonomic nervous system (e.g., Goleman & Schwartz, 1976), among others.

An example of the desensitizing effects of meditation is given by Wortz (1982) in a discussion of his therapeutic practice which includes a case study. He instructs his

clients to practice meditation as an adjunct to gestalt and behavioural approaches as a way to "reduce labeling and thereby achieve some detachment from words and phrases...(and) to change the direction of attention and interest toward the discomfort rather than avoiding it."

From the theoretical perspective of Ken Wilber (1980), meditation can be viewed as a developmental catalyst, assisting the individual to complete earlier unresolved tasks and to move to higher, more inclusive, states of integration. Tart (1975) suggests that different types of meditation can assist in the development of various components of consciousness, such as attention, emotion, or identity.

Developments in research methodology, both quantitative and qualitative, permit the examination of multiple mediating mechanisms. For example, Osis, et al (1973) used factor analysis to more clearly define the major dimensions of the meditative experience. Four experiments were conducted and significant common factors of the experience were determined through factor analysis of questionnaires. These factors included Self-transcendence and Openness, Mood Brought to Session, Intensification and Change of Consciousness, Meaning, Forceful Exclusion of Images, and General Success of Meditation.

Delmonte and Kenny (1985) suggest a developmental model combining behavioural and psychodynamic concepts. They argue that there is initially a relaxation response, which is subsequently conditioned to a stimulus (mantra, breath). This permits derepression of both memories and short term concerns which are ideally desensitized "via a process of covert reality testing" leading to lessened anxiety, better sleep, and a maintenance of a positive feedback cycle. They hypothesize as well that meditation practice "may be associated with formation of more adaptive constructs (Kelly, 1955) in terms of external reality."

Shapiro (1980) agrees that a reliance on a single mechanism is unsatisfactory. Arguing for greater precision, he suggests that "what seems necessary is to work toward developing a hierarchic, multi-level, interdependent biopsychological model for mediating mechanisms...(that) would need to be applied to each meditation technique separately, depending both on the effects being measured, as well as the different levels within the technique being experienced." (249) He suggests that both antecedents of meditation as well as the actual behaviours within meditation need to be articulated and examined, both singly and in relation to each other. Among the latter, he suggests that the role of physical posture, attentional focus, and regulation of breathing be examined.

In comparison to the mechanisms suggested above, those listed by Shapiro (1980) remain much closer to the mediating elements recognized within the meditative traditions themselves. In the writings of both Jack Kornfield (1989, and Goldstein & Kornfield, 1987), a clinical psychologist and meditator, and those of Tibetan lama, Chogyam Trungpa (1976), we find an attempt at fidelity to the concepts and language of the original transmissions. Similarly Goleman's (1971, 1972) approach to the literature of Buddhist meditation remains faithful to the traditional concepts.

This variance in approach on any of these dimensions is problematic. In examining either the goals of meditation, its context or its practice, there is a distance between the understanding of traditional-spiritual and contemporary-psychological approaches. In comparing them, we enter the domain of cross-cultural studies. The two approaches represent vastly different cultures with differing languages, world-views, values, orientations to time, space and meaning.

Walsh (1982) suggests that research of stimulus dimensions of meditation are in their infancy and suggests a need to move from "a uni-dimensional to an increasingly multi-dimensional conceptualization, towards increasing specificity of description of component stimuli, and to more precise control such that experimental and control subjects

differ on fewer stimulus dimensions" (78). He hopes that research will be able to identify "those subjects who will respond optimally, those at risk for negative effects, and possible means of enhancing favourable responses" (80).

What are the relevant variables which affect the range of responses found in amongst meditators. There are two classes of independent variables: those associated with the subjects, such as age, gender, intelligence, and personality factors; and those not so associated, such as demand characteristics, experimenter expectancy, etc. Experiments designed to control for these factors would theoretically assist in determining which individuals would most benefit from meditation. It is likely that there are a number of mediating mechanisms at play in any given type of meditation and with any particular meditator. Numerous other variables cloud the issue: age, duration of practice, frequency of practice, skill in practice.

Some studies that have examined these variables include those by Smith (1978) using factor analysis which indicated that the ability to persist in meditation was related to the degree of psychological stability and honesty. We have seen above (Amodeo, 1982; Engler, 1983, 1984; Epstein, 1986, 1990) some other accounts of personality factors that bear on the meditative process, including the borderline and narcissistic conditions.

Osis et al (1973) attempted to minimize experimenter effect by inviting participants to assist in the item construction of their questionnaire. This effort to isolate a range of "variables" typifies the approach to meditation as a "scientific" enterprise. In some sense, it seems a curiously redundant enterprise and at the very least, raises again the issue of paradigm clash.

Traditionally, for example, the motivation and cognitive context for practice has been very rigourously defined. The centrality of altruism as a motivational force in Mahayana Buddhist meditation cannot be ignored. It is cited as the essential condition for successful practice. If this condition is not present as context, we will have departed from meditation as it was understood and practiced and we would be working not with meditation as traditionally understood, but with something different.

Meditation and Life-path development

In addition to the research which has focused on meditation per se, there is a growing body of relevant research which has been stimulated by narrative approaches to psychology, a reconceptualization of career, and a refinement of developmental theories. This body of literature uses a relatively long-term time frame and is concerned with

meaning, goals, and identity and the symbolic structures that shape these into coherent structures. Metzner (1986) presented a summary of metaphors, symbols and analogies that have been used both historically and currently to provide coherent structures to contain and embody the transformations of self through the course of life.

Nino uses Augustine's narrative to develop a paradigm for the movement from fragmentation to self-restoration. He applies Kohut's (1977) theory of self-psychology as an interpretive system to the Confessions and argues for an extension of the theory that includes a transcendent function. "The narrative of Confessions indicates that the experience of empathy, in the many forms it can take outside of the clinical situation, particularly through a genuine experience of the transcendent, is crucial to the psychological and spiritual restoration of the self" (17).

Nino tracks Augustine's restorative process through five key themes: the experience of fragmentation; a realistic appraisal of life through scrutiny of memories and acknowledgement of guilts and failings; the construction of a narrative which exposes the self in an act of faith, clarifies confusion, and structures past, present and future into a meaningful whole; a reordering of the meaning and

structure of relationships; and, "a creative response in continuity".

This last factor is further divided into four elements: "a critical change in the inner world of the individual, effectively sustained through time"; an involvement with life utilizing the resources of a transformed self"; "an effort to attain a congruent image of the self in the minds of others"; and "a new sense of time, implied in the compelling metaphor of life as a pilgrimage." (16) Nino suggests that the narrative may assist clinicians who are working with clients when questions of ultimacy are foremost and that the approach may assist others in understanding "the psychological and transcendental dimensions of the self".

Using the metaphor of journey, Shapiro (1989) presents his own understanding and practice of Judaism as a vehicle for psychological and spiritual transformation. His goals are threefold: to present a revisioning of the Judaic tradition; to present a symbolic system of "common dimensions" whereby various spiritual and psychological traditions can be more clearly compared and understood; and, to explore "the interface between psychology as a human science, and religion" in order to expand the former's understanding of optimum health and well-being.

The common dimensions suggested include a starting point of theory ("beginning the journey"), a clear goal ("where are we going?"), the obstacles on the journey ("what stops us from reaching the Promised Land, stages in the journey through the Wilderness), assessing progress ("where are we?"), and techniques ("means for reaching the Promised Land").

With very different focus, Shapiro and Nino both work with an interpretive narrative to clarify commonalities of the religious and psychological approaches to well-being. The use of narrative as a research tool will be further explored in Chapter Three.

Summary

This review has covered a representative sampling of some of the more compelling studies of the past twenty years. It has generally not included traditional approaches to meditation from within the various Buddhist lineages such as the Visuddhimagga (the "Path to Purification") (Goleman, 1972a, 1972b) or Mahamudra (the "Great Seal") (Dorje, 1981; Rangdrol, 1989), the tradition with which participants in this study are primarily involved.

There are a number of themes and approaches which stand out through the course of this review. One element which runs as an underground current through all is the clash between two paradigms or world-views, the traditional and the "modern". As one seasoned meditator, who is also a psychologist (Welwood, 1983) writes, "I used to speculate that psychotherapy could be a Western equivalent of meditation and other Eastern paths of liberation. But after practicing meditation for many years, their similarities do not seem as great to me as the following major differences between the orientation of therapy and meditation" (p. 46): expanding identity vs. letting go of identity; building meaning structures vs. dissolving meaning structures; and goal orientation vs. letting go.

In this chapter we have seen a little of the complexity of the issues facing us in examining the relationship between psychotherapy and meditation as they relate to the development and maintenance of mental health. The outcomes of meditation vary depending on both the goal involved and the definitions used by the particular discipline or tradition involved. Temporal factors (duration and intensity) have significant effect on the outcome. The actual mechanisms involved also vary widely even within a single meditative approach. They range from expectations and other psychological factors to the physiological and chemical factors resulting from stimulus reduction and relaxation. Independent variables, such as subjects age, gender and psychological factors all play a significant role in outcome.

I hope to build upon the foundation of research that has been conducted so far, but also to return to basics: the lived experience of meditation which embodies the vast range of data and speculation outlined above. By working with a small number of deeply committed meditators, I hope to look with fresh eyes upon the relationship between meditation and mental health. And hopefully, this research will contribute to clarifying the relationships between the two practices of meditation and psychotherapy, both of which seek in their own ways to lead to greater degrees of mental health, well-being and happiness.

CHAPTER THREE:

PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

Chapter Three is traditionally reserved for the explication of the research methodology to be used in the study. However, the logic of the methodology being presently employed is perhaps better served by usurping this location for the bracketing of the personal perspective of the author. The reasons for this will become apparent in the folllowing chapter in which the research design will be presented. Suffice it to say that the explication of the author's personal perspective is critical to both the clarification of the questions to be asked and to the approach used. I request the indulgence of the reader for this departure from the regular form.

My history with meditation begins over twenty five years ago. As a teen-ager, I felt generally alienated from others. I had a small circle of male friends and one or two best friends, but with these friends as with others, I often felt as if I was on the outside looking in. I had a close female friend with whom I could have intimate conversations, but she was romantically uninterested in me and had a boyfriend in his 20s. I was in an "accelerated class" in secondary school, which placed me, along with my class-mates, at odds with and further alienated me from my age mates. I had long been conditioned to a life of aesthetics and intellect with concomitant expectations of university.

But this preparation seemed to place me at odds with my peers, the more popular of whom were actively involved in sports, particularly those team sports which as a result of my relatively small stature were inaccessible to me. It is against this background that my interest in meditation first developed.

I was already defining myself as different, as an outsider, so I readily gravitated to the social currents which reinforced me in that position and put me increasingly at odds with the values of the majority of my friends and family. At core, I was deeply unhappy, though I believe that I was denying that to myself at the time, and developed a very critical stance toward the inferior values that I saw around me.

Several sets of questions continued to churn for me. I was preoccupied with questions and confusion regarding my own uniqueness. These erupted in such concerns as "are my physical perceptions of the world the same as the next person?"; "is the pain that one person feels greater or different from that another person feels?" And in my isolation, I also questioned the makeup of my world: "was there somewhere someone who would love me and fulfill me?"; "how can I change the world into a place where I/we can get the love/attention/wholeness that we seek?"

As we moved into the 60s, others seemed to be sharing these concerns. At least, I seemed to find my concerns reflected and validated by what I was seeing on television, in the movies, in music: a restlessness and disatisfaction that was soon to become known as the Youth Culture. The world as it was currently constituted was profoundly wrong and there had to be some way to set it right.

Adolescence crystallized for me struggles that about belonging, love and meaning that had likely been brewing since infancy. On the one hand, I was confused about my own subjectivity, what was this mind that experienced the world as something over and against, or outside of itself. Who was I? And on the other hand, how could I step back and pull away from a system, an entire culture, that seemed not only incapable of providing any answers, but seemed to be forcing me into a posture of constriction. Certainly, my reading of the Romantics during high school reinforced some of these postures.

Books had always been my friends. I had started reading early and relied more readily upon books than upon my family and friends to help me make sense of the world. Some would say that I was substituting an ideal world for the real one and indeed, one of the "charges" commonly directed at me was that I was an "idealist". At any rate, several of my high school teachers directed me towards literature and other

writings that reflected my disaffection from the dominant culture and its mores.

My first contact with the concept of meditation came through my reading of Alan Watts. I had been led to Watts through an early contact with the Beat writers suggested by my teachers who also introduced to me the intellectual tradition of not only the Beats but also the existentialist writers, primarily French. My friends and I manifested a strange eclecticism: Dada and Surrealism, French New Wave, Sartre, Camus, and the Beats, particularly Ginsberg and Kerouac.

Due to my involvment with the accelerated program in high school, I began University at seventeen and immediately began associating with others who delighted in marginality, "the artsy-fartsy" bunch who were "into" civil rights, anti-nuclear activity, and experimentation with various approaches to consciousness alteration, including at that point, marijuana. Meditation, as it appeared in the writings of Watts and others at that time, seemed to offer something mysterious, out of the ordinary. It seemed to promise a confirmation of my superior understanding of what life was about. Since the answer wasn't here, in 1960s North America, perhaps it lay in the traditions of the East which, in the imagery of self-immolating monks in Vietnam was powerfully injecting itself into our awareness.

The first experience with "meditation" that I can recall was staring at an empty green wine bottle in my room in the Peace House at 3148 Point Grey Road. I'd been reading Watts and D.T. Suzuki and was trying to figure out what this "emptiness" was that they kept referring to. I think now that what I succeeded to do in that room was to strip away the name "bottle" from the object, and perhaps, for a moment, recover or uncover a perception of "bottleness" perhaps the way a preverbal child would view it.

I was decorating my room with copies of Sung prints, using old rice crates for furniture, and burning cheap sandalwood incense, all from Chinatown. I had a sense that there was something to this "meditation", that it would help sort out both of my sets of problems - what is this self, this mind, all about?; and, as I read about the "bodhisattva" vow which talked about compassionate work for others, how could we make this world a better place? - but I really didn't know what I was doing. I hoped that somehow I would be able to meet someone to teach me, someone with whom I could develop a personal connection, someone who would be able to enlighten me and hence ease my sense of being a stranger in the world.

At this same time, I began to explore the world of the counterculture, including its various sacraments. Experiences with LSD, peyote and mescaline in particular opened up perceptual realities that I had never before imagined. Again, the works of Watts and of Alpert, Metzner and Leary, provided me with guidance. I became intrigued by this world, in which the distinctions of inner and outer seemed to collapse. The 60s phrase "we are all one" at some level was quite clearly true, and yet my own personal suffering and the suffering of my friends was equally true. It was a time of intense confusion.

I sensed that drug use, while providing glimpses into a world that glowed with energy and a sense of higher truth, was a dead end. I longed for a "natural" way to "get high" and took to heart Watt's comment on psychedelics, "when you get the message, you hang up the phone." Thus, psychedelics furthered my desire to find a teacher of meditation. As well, certain visions which I had in altered states which suggested that Eastern, specifically Tibetan Buddhist forms, might provide me with the vehicle that I was seeking.

My initial motivation then, was a longing for intensity, for the feeling of being intensely alive, something that could break through this ongoing sense of being outside, fragmented, in turmoil. And I wanted to feel alive without the luminosity of LSD and other psychedelics shifting to

experiences of mind-numbing terror, which had happened on occasion. I first tried Transcendental Meditation because it was available and worked for some time with the mantra given me by a middle-aged chain-smoking North American woman. At least, I was assured, there was a direct transmission from the master, Guru Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, with whom the Beatles were also connected.

Finally, in 1972, I took refuge, the formal induction into the Buddhist faith, with a Tibetan lama, Kalu Rinpoche. I had wanted a teacher, someone on whom I could rely to provide me with a genuine path, a path which would eventuate in a life filled with meaning and purpose, and basically, I suppose, with vitality, contact. I felt that with this traditional Tibetan teacher that I had finally connected with an authentic lineage.

I began enthusiatically, taken up with the exotic qualities of Tibetan Buddhism, enthralled with the sound of the language, the richness of the rituals which were accompanied with the strange sounds of Tibetan music and chanting. I learned prayers and chants in Tibetan and in particular began the meditation practice associated with Chenrezig, or Avalokitesvara, the most popular "deity" of Tibet, who is held to be incarnated as the Dalai Lama. As well, I threw myself (literally) into the foundational practices, or Ngun-

dro, consisting of a hundred thousand repititions of prostrations, various mantras and prayers.

I felt that by following these practices I would experience states of mind that would be illuminating and make me into a wise and compassionate person. As well, I felt that I was gaining access to priviliged information, secret and sacred practices. And although I wasn't consciously setting out to do this, what better way to mark my uniqueness. In 1974, after two years of practicing diligently, I journeyed to India and Nepal, hoping that I could recieve even better teachings, have more personal contact with my teacher(s), and I told myself, see how real Buddhists (Tibetans, in this case) actually practiced this religion which I had embraced.

I was, in retrospect, living a truly split existence. Travelling with me to India was my partner and her five year old son. We had discovered that she was pregant prior to our departure but decided to make the trip anyway. From the perspective of our relationship, the trip was disastrous. Our daughter was born in Nepal and died there, at about two and a half months. Both of us were thrown into grief but I held myself together to support her. I was feeling incredible guilt. Soon after our return, she became pregant again. Within months, we separated.

I continued to meditate and within the context of my meditation, two trends are apparent: meditation and the accompanying belief structure became a means of avoidance. I was supported in my own sense of spiritual correctness, inflated with a sense of my trip to India, albeit with its tragic consequences. That too, I could weave into my persona of spiritual seeker. On the other hand, the practices of prostration (physically and psychologically painful in its invocation of devotion) and of Dorje-Sembha, which involved a sense of confession and of forgiveness, were both very sobering, at times surfacing both the grief I felt about the death of our daughter and the guilt about our separation.

During this same time, I started a relationship with another woman, my present wife, who in short order became pregnant. While each continuing a practice of mediation, we began to do some therapy in group contexts. Humanistically oriented, it involved gestalt and other experiential approaches. I became aware of how much pain people carried, imbedded in their bodies and psyches. I was terrified at the prospect of revealing myself to others, afraid that they would see me as a fraud, or worse yet, a nobody. I watched from the sidelines as others screamed out their rage or grief and if I did do any work, I felt it was weak or false or inauthentic. I was still embedded in a structure of guilt

and self-loathing. I looked to my new partner to save me. She didn't.

Instead, she left me and went to Hawaii to give birth to our son. I went to the interior to teach as a high school teacher. I continued to meditate but I also started to look at who I had become. My world had collapsed. Death had become real. I was revealed as a phony, I was worthless. My sojourn in Merritt was a purgatory of self-examination.

A few months after the birth of my son, my wife returned to Canada and we began to reconstruct our relationship. The fifteen years of our marriage has been critical in my growth and development. I have had to recognize and struggle with habits of withdrawal and distancing learned in my nuclear family. I have unlearned some of the authoritarian and perfectionsitic patterns of childraising which I had brought into my previous relationships.

Through all these years, I have maintained my meditative practice, sometimes more and sometimes less intensively. My relationship to both my teacher and to the sangha or spiritual community has also changed over the years. While I have been both the editor of the community newsletter and president of a branch organization, I am currently rather peripheral to the organization, while many of my closest friends are practicing Buddhists. Part of my distance from

the organization resulted from my teacher's death on the one hand, and on the other, from a sense that his representative in Vancouver was acting in ways prejudicial to the essence of the teachings and their availability to the broader public community. These facts have given rise to feelings of loss, grief and betrayal. There is still, at this time in our community the need for much healing.

Nevertheless, the practice of meditation, the ongoing contact with exemplary teachers, and the support of Buddhist friends who share my experiences and perspective have all contributed to my wish and ability to continue on the path which I started twenty or more years ago.

During these many years, while continuing to regard Kalu Rinpoche as my "root" teacher due to his kindness in opening the door to the Buddhadharma (or Buddhist teachings), I have studied with numerous teachers, most of them Tibetan. The meditations include both shamatha, or concentrative, and vippasana, or insight practices. I have worked with a number of the so-called Foundational Practices of Tibetan Buddhism including the Guru Yoga of Padma Sambhava, as well as numerous deity practices and the practice of Pho'wa or preparation for ejection of consciousness at the moment of death.

The preceding provides some sense of my background and the interweaving of my "personal history" with a spiritual path. Throughout, meditation has been simultaneously a grounding, in a physical and existential sense, and also a way of securing myself psychologically, giving me a sense of identity.

It is impossible in this short space to do more than provide the flimsiest of outlines of the impact of meditation upon my life. Nevertheless, I will try to summarize the essentials here. My central motivation for undertaking this research lies in the fact that I have undergone profound changes in the course of my practice. These changes have taken place slowly and seem to have accumulated over a long duration of sporadic, sometimes frustrating, but ultimately persistent effort. With this research, I wish to bring the strength and clarity of the human sciences to bear on my experience and those of the many serious meditators who practice in this rather discordant world-age.

I have experienced the following through the course of my practice of meditation :

(1) enabled me to focus my mind and allow it to rest on an object with facility and clarity: this experience arises not only within the context and confines of a meditation session but also in post-meditation, daily life situations.

(2) has provided me with an experiential reference point for the development of patience in difficult situations: through cognitive reframing of a situation. This ranges from interpersonal strife in the home and workplace through to anguish, rage and helplessness toward world events.

(3) has provided me with the reference point of death and impermanence: similar to Don Juan's (Castaneda,) use of death as companion and teacher, the disciplined contemplation of death and impermanence clarifies the value and meaning of life. Practices associated with these contemplations have been profound and cathartic bringing home to me the extent to which I love and value my family, friends and associates and thus reorganizing my priorities in relationship to them.

(4) humility: the practice of prostrations, in particular, generate feelings of awe, reverence and devotion. My own sense of self-centredness (or egocentricity) collapses in reference to the sources of refuge in the Buddhist tradition.

(5) structure of meaning and goal: meditation practice is grounded in a particular view. This traditional reference point of the potential of liberation from suffering for self and others provides a clear sense of direction and meaning in life. Specific practices designed to arouse compassion

and loving-kindness for self and others gives meaning to suffering and pain.

(6) practical method of achieving and maintaining sense of peace, well-being and balance in the form of regular practice; regular practice seems to cut through problematic situations via a combination of many of the mechanisms (processes) mentioned in the literature review: including the relaxation response, disengagement from negative thoughts, and the reframing of experience into a meaningful structure.

These various effects are each related to particular meditation practices or combinations thereof. The Buddhist tradition of Tibet provides an extensive range of these practices which might be efficacious in a variety of situations. My experience with these practices, however slight, suggests that meditation, given proper context, can profoundly assist individuals in overcoming suffering of various types and be of profound benefit to one's "mental health" broadly conceived.

At the same time, I feel that in my own progress in meditation has been hampered by "psychological" factors. For example, it has occurred to me that one of the factors

in my lack of discipline and consistency in practice is related to psychodynamic factors, for example, by an underlying dynamic of shame. I experience this as a subtle aggression against myself, a punitive voice (with or without words), as a will turned in, against "me", suggesting that whatever I do is not good enough. This pattern becomes clear with certain types of meditation. The progressive resolution of this dynamic seems to result in the benefits listed above. Overall then, meditation seems to provide a space within which I can relax and observe this pattern without reacting. The insights arising from this change can be carried into "post-meditation" experience, also known as everyday life, though there seem to be inveterate tendencies often working against or impeding this transference.

A particular instance may illustrate. During a meditation on compassion, in which one is instructed to imagine oneself as a young child and to generate feelings of love and compassion for this child, I found myself obstructed by feelings of worthlessness: as the child, I didn't really feel deserving of love, of warmth; there was something wrong with me; I was bad, wilful, deserving of whatever pain and punishment I experienced. This block in a flow of love, this inability to connect feelingfully with tenderness toward the child that I was raised feelings of frustration, confusion, and ultimately, numbness.

This instance highlights a central difference between psychotherapy (and its various theortical constructs) and Buddhism. Our "Western" view would seek the source or cause, of this blockage, this shame, historically. We would likely ascribe its origin to our parents' childraisning practices and may, in the process set in motion or reinforce patterns of blame and victimization. From the Buddhist perspective, such a problematic mental event would be noted (from a position of psychophysiological calmness) and experienced in its fullness as existing in the present. Following that, an appropriate antidote in the form of a particular meditation would be applied. The antidote would focus specifically and precisely on the quality of the mental event as such and be oriented toward the resolution of the problematic thought/feeling in the present and for the future.

Thus, I continue to find areas of contradiction, conflict and confusion between my background and upbringing as a Westerner and my training in the Tibetan tradition. One of my teachers, Chagdud Tulku, Rinpoche, recently confirmed this distance between psychological approaches to suffering and Buddhist are very great. Each perspective tends to reify and reduces the other. Chagdud Rinpoche suggests that one of the greatest differences is in the two systems' understanding of cause, as suggested in the example above. I feel like I suffer in the gap between these extremes.

Whereas psychology tends to locate the source of various types and degrees of suffering in experiences in infancy and childhood, Buddhism holds that such experiences were themselves merely conditions or effects of previous causes. Rather than attempt to unravel the source of suffering in past experiences then, Buddhism seeks to understand mind as it is presently structured and to apply appropriate antidotes to remedy the current (and future) causes of suffering. Meditation, in its various forms, is such an antidote.

I feel myself stretched between these views, swinging at times from one pole to the other. Presenting a biographical narrative of my life, as above, creates a context and a reality structure in which a psychological approach makes sense. I can (imaginatively) percieve patterns of thought and behaviour in my life which seem to mirror "psychological" and interpersonally generated material from my infancy and childhood. At the same time, taking the Buddhist viewpoint and applying meditation as an antidote, such conceptualizations fall away and are replaced with an immediate sense of calm and clarity. It seems as though I am caught with a postmodernist dilemma of stance and position akin to Aristotle's utterance, "if I had but a place to stand, I could move the world".

Indeed, it is not possible for me at this time to neatly circumscribe a personal "story" with discrete beginning, middle and end. Each of these elements continues to shift and take on new meanings, validating the relevance of the hermeneutic circle. The "end" is located only in the quality of presence which I experience in each succeeding moment. And within each of these historical moments, the meaning and very "location" of beginnings and intervening moments shifts and changes.

This very brief summary of my history with meditation is presented directly, naively. I have not attempted to understand my own experience for a psychodynamic or developmental point of view. The structure of the story seems to involve a development from confusion and lostness to meaning and coherence. It would be possible to extend and elaborate the story and to imbed it within the larger life history of my autobiography. With that perspective, an interpretation of my experience with meditation would be related to the holistic movement of my life in its entirety and hence may well reveal a different picture and a different structure of meanings. It will be my task as this research progresses to describe and interpret the long-term meditational path of others, not to "study" them as much as to learn from them and to better understand the role that meditation might play in counselling practice.

This brief description of my own experience with meditation (and, by extension, a reflexive relationship with it) will hopefully assist both myself and the reader to clarify my expectations and hence establish a greater degree of distance and objectivity than would have been possible otherwise.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

Having outlined the general area of interest in the Chapter One, reviewed the relevant literature in Chapter Two, and clarified my familiarity with the phenomena, I will now present the qualitative methodology - multiple case study - that will be utilized for this study. The question will be restated. The design of the study, including sampling procedure, data collection, data analysis and results, will then be presented. Finally, issues of the validity and reliability of the study will be addressed.

Research question

Having reviewed the relevant literature and explicated my assumptive world, the question which I wish to answer has been clarified: given the widespread use of meditation as an alternative or adjunct to other views/methods of personal growth and change, I want to understand the pattern of experience involved in the practice of meditation from the perspective of long-term meditators. A review of the literature to date has not provided this.

Once this pattern or set of meanings by which the participants understand their experience has been described,

other questions concerning such subjects as motivation, therapeutic aspects and transpersonal aspects of meditation, may be illuminated.

DESIGN

The choice of research design is dependent upon the question asked. Since the question posed here involves complex issues of meaning and purpose which possibly change through time, a methodology is required which can provide a rich and detailed description of individual experience, coupled with an interpretive understanding of those descriptions.

Given a concern with understanding the meaning that certain behaviours have for the individuals involved (Agar, 1986), the methodologies broadly described as ethnographic are most suitable. An ethnographic approach emphasizes an understanding of cultures through a description of the ways that specific groups of people organize and/or create their "reality". The group with which we are presently interested is that set of individuals who have grown up and been acculturated in North America in the latter half of the Twentieth Century and who have long practised one of a number of forms of psychological/spiritual training transmitted from Asia and popularly known as "meditation".

The assumption implicit in this approach is that a rich and accurate description of the lived experience of a small

number of these people will contribute to an understanding of the phenomena. In order to reach this level of understanding, this investigation will utilize a variety of field research known as the multiple case study. This approach utilizes in-depth interviews with knowledgeable informants (and corroborative material when available) and the interpretation of these retrospective accounts.

The multiple case study has been chosen as the most appropriate design. Yin (1989) suggests that the case study asks "how", "why" and "what", focuses on contemporary events, and does not require control over behavioural events. It is holistic, capable of presenting a phenomenon as a dynamic totality, or a sum of parts, rather than as isolated fragments; it presents a phenomena as it is experienced and lived by the subject in the world and attempts to grasp the meaning of experience for the individuals involved; and thus, it facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the essential pattern of the experience under investigation.

The multiple case study relies on a logic of replication, analogous to that used in multiple experiments. Each case "is considered akin to a single experiment, and the analysis must follow cross-experiment rather than within-experiment design and logic" (Yin, 1989, p. 53). Each case is selected for its ability to confirm a particular theory or

pattern by either revealing the same pattern - "literal replication" - or by contradicting it in a predictable or logical way - "theoretical replication".

This process of pattern-building or pattern-matching is central to the analysis of the case studies. Each case study reveals particular patterns of the subject of interest which are then either confirmed or not in subsequent cases. Patterns that are confirmed (as well as deviations from such patterns) among individual cases can be presented in narrative format as a general account or story. When the patterns among the individual cases match, the internal validity of the study is strengthened.

The results of the multiple case study include a presentation of these patterns of both individual/ particular and general experience of the phenomenon in the context of the life story. This will permit an understanding of the phenomenon of long-term meditation in the context of mental health and counselling.

RESEARCH STEPS

Having detailed the research questions and outlined the general approach to the problem, the research design will be presented in detail. The process begins with the review of the literature and ends with the presentation of the results to the research participants for corroboration and validation. The design includes the following steps:

1. Literature review
2. Clarification of the author's presuppositions
3. Development of interview issues
4. Interviews
5. Construction of co-researcher's stories
6. Validation of individual stories with co-researchers
7. Construction of the general story
8. Validation of general story with co-researchers and independent experts.

The role of the literature review

Completion of the literature review marks the first step in the research method. The literature review helps to define the problem, enables assessment of data, sharpens the capacity for surprise, creates distance, and provides a set of expectations the data can confirm or disconfirm

(McCracken, 1988). Secondly, the literature review begins to establish the range of information being sought by the interviews, specifying categories and organizing classifications of data and relationships between them. In short, the literature review establishes both the framework for the interviews and the background against which they will be examined and understood.

The role of personal perspective in the research program

A unique quality of ethnographic work is reflexivity, the reciprocal influences among the researcher and his or her "informants". Reflexivity refers to the fact that one's own stance as expressed in questions to the informants will not only influence and shape their responses, but also that their responses will influence one's own understanding and subsequent enquiries.

Qualitative research therefore requires a clarification of the investigator's stance, which may itself undergo transformations as the research proceeds. McCracken (1988) refers to this clarification as the "review of cultural categories":

> The object of this step is to give the investigator a more detailed or systematic appreciation of his or her personal experience with the topic of interest. It calls for the minute examination of this experience. The investigator must inventory and examine the associations, incidents, and assumptions that

surround the topic in his or her mind. (32)

In phenomenological investigation, Husserl termed this clarification a "bracketing". It is a common practice in anthropological and sociological field work and aids in setting a context and in providing both the general reader and the research community with an understanding of the "horizon of the life-world" of the investigator.

This explication consists of a self-questioning which seeks to lay bare the fundamental assumptions that the investigator brings to the research, thus bringing to awareness his own presuppositions and biases.

This self-questioning is not finished once and for all. As the research proceeds through the phases of literature review, data collection and analysis, the initial explication of the researcher's assumptive world continues to shift and change. It enters a dialogue, as it were, with the varied voices of previous researchers and with those of the informants, and is changed thereby. In the latter pages of the research document these changes can in their own turn be explicated. As the author's history with meditation is quite long and involved, it requires considerable elaboration. For that reason, he has made the decision to include this statement of personal perspective as the separate chapter preceding this one.

CO-RESEARCHERS

The selection of a sample is a critical part of any social science research. In research such as this which is based on an ethnographic and qualitative approach, the sample that is selected is not based primarily on its ability to statistically represent a larger population. Indeed, the traditional language of "sampling", including the term "subject", may be inappropriate here.

A distinction has been made between the respondent as a co-researcher as in phenomenological research (Colaizzi, 1978) and as a subject as in traditional experiental research. The focus in the former is on mutual participation and exploration of a common concern. Since the author regards this study as such a project, the term co-researcher will be used.

Following the replication logic of the multiple case study, the author sought out individuals who could provide exemplary accounts of the phenomena which could then be compared to reveal both common and contradictory patterns. The final accounts should be significant, complete, clear, and engaging (Yin, 1989). The important factor in the selection of the co-researchers is the special knowledge which they have by virtue of their unique experience of long-term meditation.

There are many traditions of meditation. The author assumes that each tradition may present different patterns of experience. In order to increase the likelihood that one particular pattern will be revealed and because of his familiarity with one of these traditions in particular, he has made the decision to limit his co-researchers to practitioners of one type of meditation, that of the Vajrayana Buddhist tradition of Tibet. By thus narrowing the focus, the author hopes to provide a solid base against which other traditions may be measured, compared and contrasted.

Co-researchers were sought who have been engaged in a practice of meditation for a minimum of ten years. Each of the co-researchers in this study has been involved with one or more of several Tibetan Buddhist centres in the Vancouver area and was chosen for his or her ability to articulate the experience. Four of the five were personally known by the author prior to the study and the fifth was introduced to him by one of these four. The five co-researchers were chosen to include both men and women representing a range of socio-economic and educational backgrounds, as well as a variety of ages (a range of thirteen years). This variety was sought to provide as broad and as definitive an interpretation of the phenomenon as possible. Theoretically, the number could have been increased indefinitely

increased indefinitely but at a certain point no new and revelatory information would be forthcoming. Research approaches a saturation point at which themes of experience begin to repeat.

Co-researcher descriptions

Dylan is forty years old, born in Winnipeg, Manitoba. He comes from a Jewish background and is the oldest of two boys. He is single, well-educated (with three degrees) and works as a Chiropractor. He has been meditating 13 years and at the time of his involvement with the research project was meditating approximately two hours per week. Since 1987, he had been involved in psychotherapy which he described as "humanist transpersonal".

Augusta, daughter of a Roman Catholic mother and Anglican-humanist father, was born in LaFleche, Saskatchewan. An eldest daughter, she has two younger brothers. She is married with one child, a daughter. She has a Bachelor of Education and is a painter. She has been meditating since 1971, twenty years and currently meditates seven to ten hours a week. She has been intermitently involved in a variety of therapies, including relationship and personal counselling, over the past eight years.

Hamish is 45 years old and was born in Toronto, Ontario to

United Church and Anglican parents. He is the older of two children, with a sister eight years younger than himself. He is divorced and recently remarried and has two children and one step-child. He has a total of twenty-one years of education and works as a family therapist. He has been meditating for twenty-one years, since 1970, and currently meditates between five and seven hours each week. He has been involved in gestalt therapy intermittently over the past four years.

Sid is 34 years old. He was born in Sudbury, Ontario and is the eldest of three brothers. He describes his parents as "sort of Christian". He has a high school education. He currently works as a carpenter but is about to continue his education at the post-secondary level in the field of Child Care. He is engaged to be married. He started meditating fourteen years ago and currently meditates seven hours a week. He has participated in the traditional three year retreat of the Tibetan system of Buddhist training. He has been involved in counselling and dreambody work for the past one and a half years.

Jane was born in Charlotte, North Carolina, to Episcopalian parents, 47 years ago. She has one sister, ten years older than herself. She divorced and remarried, and has one son. She has an M.A. in Education and graduate training in Writing and Literature. She works as a therapist and

writer. She started meditating eighteen years ago, in 1973. Currently, she averages 2 hours of meditation per week. She has been involved in three discrete sets of counselling: two relatively brief sets of marriage counselling and a year and a half process of recovery and co-dependency therapy.

The participants as a group include three men and two women whose ages range from 34 to 47. Four out of five are eldest children. Their meditation experience ranges from thirteen to twenty-one years, with a mean of approximately seventeen years. Each of them has been involved as a client with counselling and/or psychotherapy and two have had experience as a counsellor or therapist. All have relocated from their place of birth. This general and preliminary information is presented to provide the reader with a context for the following section on the collection of data through intensive interviews.

INTERVIEW PROCEDURES

With the completion of the literature review and clarification of the author's own personal presuppositions and biases, the next step in the research design is the interview of the co-researchers. Its purpose is to reveal the experiences of the individual, over a long period of meditation.

Each of the co-researchers was contacted by letter and then by phone and arrangements were made for an initial meeting. The location of the meeting was determined by mutual consent. Generally, it was in the home of either the researcher or co-researcher, wherever the latter felt most comfortable.

Following a review of the conditions of research, including confidentiality, and signing the agreement to participate, each co-researcher was given a set of biographical questions to provide baseline information about the co-researcher's life These questions (see appendix) included the co-researcher's age, place of birth, number and age of siblings, marital status, religion of parents, years of schooling, length of involvement with meditation, intensity and current frequency of meditation practice, and involvement with counselling or psychotherapy (including type and duration).

After the co-researcher had completed this document, the author briefly explained his interest and motivations in studying the subject. I attempted to establish a climate of trust and openness which would persist throughout the interview. Since the aim of the interview is to discover

how the respondent sees the world, it is essential that the relationship provide a climate of trust and openness.

Describing how the literature had thus far stressed short-term, experimental approaches to meditation, I explained that I was enlisting the assistance of the co-researcher in furthering an understanding of long-term meditation practice. I also told the co-researchers that I hoped this study would be of benefit to both meditators and to counsellors and therapists interested in using meditation as an adjunct to their practice.

The co-researchers were told that the interview had no set questions but would proceed rather as a focused conversation and that there were certain areas of interest, including motivation for practice, impact on relationship with others, the benefits experienced through meditation, the occurence and impact of any "transpersonal" experiences, and the role of therapy in their lives and its relationship to meditation. Only if these areas had not previously been covered spontaneously would they be raised by the author in the latter stages of the interview.

However, it was explained that the primary intent of the interview was to assist in an understanding of the co-researcher's experience of meditation, beginning with his or her first contact with it and continuing to the present.

The interview generally began at that point with the question, "could you tell me how you first became involved with meditation?"

This question usually brought forth a long story, often beginning at a very early point in the person's life as they attempted to set a context for their involvement with meditation. I attempted to elicit further information in as unobtrusive, nondirective manner as possible (Brenner, 1985; McCracken, 1988). A trusting and equal relationship is critical in determining both the quality and quantity of responses.

Once the co-researcher had embarked upon the story, I encouraged the elaboration of the story, using a combination of active listening, minimal prompts, questions of clarification and open-ended questions to enable the co-researcher to expand upon some topic they had raised. Leading questions were avoided in an effort to minimize the interference of the author's own biases.

The intent of these interactions was to permit the respondent to tell their story in their own words, in their own way, with minimum interference or direction. Therefore the interviews were largely unstructured, with questions asked to clarify of general themes or areas of interest.

Generally, the co-researchers told straight forward stories of their experiences with meditation, followed by reflection on some of the changes they had experienced in their own lives and the meaning that their practice of meditation currently holds for them.

CONSTRUCTION OF ACCOUNTS

> "Story, not fact, defines human psychological life, and in this sense psychological experience as story is to be distinguished from a factual account of experience...a story is primarily a way of seeing, a guide, something which shows the way. It is the manner, guise, or appearance of things, the way in which things and human events appear. It is the form and shape of things and human events, their *eidos* or what is essential to them."
>
> - Romanyshyn, 1982, 86

Each interview was recorded on audiotape and then transcribed verbatim by the author using a dictaphone. This was done on a word processor, so that both a file and hard copy were available to work with. Once the transcription was complete the author constructed a narrative account of the coresearcher's story of his or her involvement with the long-term practice of meditation.

The first step in constructing a narrative account involved the development of a chronology. During the interview, co-researchers often described events out of sequence or switched back and forth between events to clarify significance. The task, then, is to re-order the material of a transcript into a time sequence. In this task, events were relatively easy to place in a chronology. However,

thematic meanings which pervaded an account were more difficult. Themes of meaning developed and it was difficult to locate them as precisely, in part because later understandings might colour retrospective descriptions. Whether these themes of meaning are precisely accurate or not in their place in the chronology is, in one sense, secondary to their classification. How a person shapes an acoount reveals that person's orientation to events (e.g., Kvale, 1987), how they are to be understood from that person's perspective.

Once the transcript material was ordered and dwelled on sufficiently to have a detailed grasp of the whole, the second step involved the actual writing of a narrative account. Since a major aim of straightening the transcript story is to maintain the perspective of the individual, to reveal his or her life-world, a large part of the writing is a relatively straight-forward matter of using the person's own words. The co-researcher's descriptions were edited to eliminate redundancy, clarify meaning, and make explicit connections that were implicitly taken for granted. During this process, continued reference was made to the original transcript to avoid distortions and neglects.

In working with a narrative, or storied approach, we have two complementary purposes. One is descriptive, accurately rendering the accounts already held by the informants to

describe the narratives already held by individuals or groups. The second is explanatory, explaining through narrative why something happened.

Recounting the person's story leads to an expanded and deepened understanding of human experience in the area in question. This construction of each account "produces a document describing the narratives held in or below awareness that make up the interpretive schemes a people or community uses to establish the significance of past events and to anticipate the outcomes of possible future actions." (Polkinghorne, 1988, 162)

The key point of this for research purposes is that the story of the co-researcher is revealing and comprehensive and is presented with coherence and consistency. Once the stories have been developed, they are referred back to the participants for verification.

CONSTRUCTION OF A COMMON ACCOUNT

In this stage the individual stories were examined and compared to each other to determine relationships of similarity and difference among the narratives. This stage involves the development of a general story from the particular stories not only in relationship to each other, but also in relationship to the analytic and cultural categories developed in the literature review and self-questioning.

Thus, the strategy involves relying on the "naive" descriptions of the participants and on the theoretical assumptions (Yin, 1989) that have been developed and explicated by the researcher. The author searches for common themes. As patterns and themes emerge from the individual stories, there is an increasingly clear sense of the structures of the overall pattern of the phenomenon.

To accomplish this, the stories were read a number of times for a sense of the important elements. Then, the author returned to the verbatim transcripts and using a word processor, recorded the key statements and phrases from each transcript. These statements were coded by theme and co-researcher. When all the statements from each co-researcher

was so recorded, they were then grouped according to theme. The clusters of themes became the organizing structure for the common account, which was constructed like the individual accounts as a narrative, with a beginning, middle, and end.

Yin (1989) refers to this process as one of three dominant modes of analysis: pattern-matching. Specific structures (e.g., common or similar events, common or similar meanings) among the individual stories are presented as elements of certain key themes or patterns. Again, the product of this stage is a narrative in which both common and idiosyncratic elements of the various individual stories are explicated. McCracken (1988), describes this as: "A process of transformation (that) takes place in which the cultural categories that have been unearthed in the interview become analytic categories. By this time, one is no longer talking about the particulars of individual lives but about the general properties of thought and action within the community or group under study (46)". Having developed this general story, the next stage is again concerned with verification and validity.

VALIDATION OF ACCOUNTS

There were two steps to the validation process: one for the individual stories and one for the common account. As a final stage, the draft findings (in the form of both composite story and any other formal analysis) were reviewed by both research participants and peers. Once the researcher felt that the story of each co-researcher accurately and exhaustively reflected his or her experience, it was then presented to the co-researcher for verification, correction or clarification in a subsequent interview. This interview was recorded in turn and transcribed to provide the convenience and accuracy of a written record.

Each co-researcher was asked if the story accurately reflected his or her experience and if there were any additions, deletions or changes which they wished to make. As with the initial interviews, these interactions took the form of an unstructured dialogue, led by the interests and concerns of the co-researchers.

Any changes were rewoven into the story, maintaining as precise a fidelity as possible to the richness of the co-researcher's experience and expression. The few corrections or clarifications made by the participants enhanced the accuracy of the study, increasing its construct validity.

Agreement at this stage concerning the accuracy and exhaustiveness of the stories constituted the completion of this aspect of the research.

After each story had been validated as described, the general account was constructed and this story was then read by each co-researcher as well as by an independent expert. Co-researchers were asked if the general account still accurately reflected their experience. Any discrepancies or disagreements were noted. They were invited to compare their responses to the general story with their reactions to their own individual story.

Finally, the general story was presented to an independent and expert witness for his comments. The person involved in this capacity was Ken McLeod, a westerner who has himself been involved with the practice of Tibetan Buddhism for over twenty years, who underwent the traditional three year retreat twice, and who is one of the few Westerners fully authorized by the Tibetan masters to teach these traditional systems to others. Mr. McLeod is currently the teacher in residence at the Kagyu Centre in Los Angeles and also works as a counsellor. In both roles, he is concerned with the integration of the insights of Western psychology and psychotherapy and the Buddhist system of meditation. He has had a wealth of experience with numerous Western students.

The author faxed Mr. McLeod a copy of the general account and had a series of conversations with him by phone. Mr. McLeod was asked to comment on whether the general account as presented was similar or different to what he has seen in other Western students of Buddhist meditation. As well, he was asked to comment upon the content of the general account in relation to his understanding of the philosophical view and practice of Vajrayana Buddhism.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS

The findings of the research are displayed in this chapter. The narrative of each of the co-researchers is presented, followed by the general story, a condensation of each of these stories into one coherent account of the experience of long-time meditation. Prior to this presentation is the validation of these accounts by the co-researchers themselves as well as that of the independent experts. Following the stories is an analysis of their common phases and a commentary on their significance.

While the validation interviews resulted in a number of small changes to the following stories, each of the co-researchers confirmed the overall validity of their respective accounts. Dylan likened the experience of reading his story to overhearing someone talking about him in a line-up outside a movie theatre. He could identify that he was the object of discussion but felt curiously estranged. In addition, he expressed surprise at how coherent a story had been developed from what he thought was a rather rambling account of his experience. He clarified his experience with Trogawa Rinpoche which in its original

form had not sufficiently stated the context of studying for his Board exams.

Changes were made in other accounts to correct factual errors, such as the number of brothers in a family and the change of the location of a significant event. On occasion there were changes made in emphasis as well. For example, in the final account of Augusta's story, she emphasized that her grandmother had been an important model and source of support in her early life, while this fact had been neglected in the original account. Another significant adjustment in her story concerned a sense of disappointment in a teacher. In the validation interview she emphasized that she had never particularly regarded this man as a teacher and hence did not experience the disappointment originally depicted.

The final version of each of these stories was validated as written as accurately representing the experience of the co-researchers. Some of their confirmations were particularly touching. Jane, for example, told me that she wanted to send a copy of her story to her son, now attending college in the Eastern U.S., so that he would understand more clearly her earlier experience and, in consequence, his own. As well, she expressed particular pleasure in the ability of account to capture the rythmns and movement of her speech.

Sid was similarly very pleased to see his story presented. He felt it accurately portrayed his life and commented upon the powerful impact it had upon him to see it objectified in that way. After reading the general account he made the interesting comment that while his own story affirmed him for who he was, the general account was perhaps even more affirming because it enabled him to see the commonalities he shared with the other co-researchers. This, he said, was the greatest validation and a source of real empowerment. Reading the common account, he said, strengthened his desire to do more meditation. Hamish and Jane, along with the others, felt that the common account was an accurate expression of their experience and in addition felt that it would likely be helpful to both practicing and potential meditators.

Following the validation of the individual and general accounts by the co-researchers, the general account was presented to the independent expert, Mr. Ken McLeod. His assessment was that the account was generally very full and rich, and that it was expressed clearly. He expressed a concern that the development of the stages through which a practitioner passed was not developed more explicitly in the story. Subsequent to that comment, the headings of the various themes were included in the text, which may have met this concern to some extent.

After expressing his agreement with the overall thrust of the general account as well as several specific points which he suggested have been inadequately addressed in the past (such as the culturally oppositional nature of meditation and the role of projection vis a vis the teacher), Mr. McLeod raised several significant theoretical points. Since the account as presented to him had previously been validated by the co-researchers as accurately reflecting their experience, it would have been inappropriate to alter the account to accomodate a different understanding. Consequently, the issues raised will be addressed in the concluding chapter. They deal primarily with the nature of the student-teacher relationship, the relationship bewteen meditation as such and spiritual path, and the experience of "emptiness" or "groundlessness" as the fruition of the path.

Dylan's Story

Dylan grew up in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and he recalls the long and inclement weathers which he believes may have contributed to his personal style of being an "observer" through much of his life. "I found myself being able to sit at a window and look out at the world for the longest time, which for a child, some would call it daydreaming but it was

just totally absorbed in watching what was in front of me without any sense of anything else I had to do."

While sometimes experiencing this sense of being a watcher in negative terms, feeling like a outsider, cut off from others, he also sees a positive side. Since childhood, he has had an ability to experience "that state of restful mind that arises from being in that watchful state" all his life and speculates that it may have been inculcated through spending the first seven weeks of his life in an incubator.

This natural stance of observer was instrumental to what he now feels were glimpses of spirituality during his late adolescence and early twenties in 1960s and 1970s, when he experimented with various psychedelic drugs, including marijuana, hashish, peyote and LSD. It seemed to him at that time that he had possessed more than the five senses of the body, "that there was the possibility of the experience with other senses. And I could trust those other senses and even enter into that world, move through that other world that no one else seemed to be a part of, but that seemed as rich and as tactile to me as the common reality that most of seemed to share."

These experiences often took place in natural settings with few other people around. During these times, Dylan worked with creative issues, seeking to enter into fuller

appreciation of what was happening around him. Because they had such "a mind-jolting and altering effect", these experiences led him to some exploration of the ideas of meditation, religion and religious absorptive states. For a while, in an effort to extend the qualities of those experience and understand more fully what they meant, he experimented with "ecstatic schools of meditation, like Jewish Hassidism, music oriented things and dance." They "seemed to draw out a part of me that I didn't understand but at least brought out a state of joy."

However, it was not until 1978, when Dylan was 27 and had just started his career in natural healing, that he met someone who spoke to him about meditation as a contemplative sitting practice. As he says, Dylan wasn't drawn to meditation threw any particular interest in philosophy or tradition particularly, but it was this meeting that got him interested. A friend invited him to an initiation on Compassion that was to be given by a Western teacher named Namgyal Rinpoche who was working in the Vajrayana Buddhist tradition of Tibet.

The idea of the initiation intrigued him with its promise of the arcane and different and, more out of "dilettantishness than any deep desire (he) consciously felt", Dylan attended the ritual which was actually in initiation into the meditation of Chenrezig, the Bodhisattva of Compassion.

Not only did he sort of "fall under the spell of the ceremony" but he also found himself drawn to the teacher. "I was definitely drawn into the magnetism of this person. He had a sense of authority about him that was not heavy handed but which was certainly clear thinking. He had the impression of someone who you could admire or respect."

Dylan at this point had no idea of what Buddhism was about and none of the answers to his questions from other students really "spoke" to him. So he started reading as much as he could, seeking out the few available books on Tibetan Buddhism in print at that time, trying to reach some intellectual understanding of what he had experienced in the ceremony.

He began also to study with Namgyal Rinpoche and to start to meditating following his instructions on sitting meditation, watching the breath and doing vippasana. He notes that this meditation had a calming effect on him but he didn't experience much of a difference in his day to day life. What was more noticeable was a shift in attention. The more time he spent studying with Namgyal Rinpoche, the more he began to develop an interest in consciousness and as he did so, he became more and more curious about himself and his place in the world.

Thus, he developed an orientation to meditation which focused not so much on what happened when he was sitting, but more in developing a style of daily life which made more sense to him. He noticed that he could bring a sense of meditation to both his work as a chiropractor and his avocation of writing poetry.

Some time after meeting Namgyal Rinpoche, Dylan met another teacher of Tibetan Buddhism, this time a "living master" of the tradition named Kalu Rinpoche. Kalu Rinpoche was in Canada to induct a number of Western students into a traditional three-year retreat and Dylan participated in a six-week series of initiations and practices that the retreatants were to utilize over the retreat period. Participation in these initiations was a profound experience.

He sensed that the teacher was able to pass on his spiritual knowledge and experience directly to himself and the other students. The initiations consisted of elaborate imaginal descriptions of numerous deities, both peaceful and wrathful. Sometimes they would be in front of you, or on your head, or within you. Sometimes you would imagine that you and the deity were one. The initiations would also include moments of powerful imageless awareness. It was as if the deities were "being given over by the teacher, as if they take that image, put it in their hand and stamp it on

your forehead and all of a sudden, it's there in its full glory within you and you can use that at any time."

Arising from these initiations at this time, and of critical importance to Dylan's further development was a deeper sense of what he has come to call his "spiritual body". He'd had glimpses of this spiritual body in his earlier days with drugs and even earlier experiences of timelessness as a child, looking out the window in Winnipeg. This was the first time he'd felt that in terms of a meditative experience. It arose from his intensive participation in the daily cycles of initiation with Kalu Rinpoche, of "everyday being involved in the receiving of a spiritual blueprint that you could take into your energetic memory and be able to then call upon it at any time because it had been entered into your memory and a gate had been opened up and you had been given permission to walk into this set of clothes and try these clothes on. You'd been introduced to it and to have such a wide array of internal allies at one's disposal was quite empowering."

Beginning from this period, Dylan found that his perspective toward the world shifted. He describes this as a discovery that "I probably had more patience for the world around me." During the retreat and for several months following, there was a sense of "blessing", experienced both psychologically and physiologically. His body felt calmer and digestive

tract problems spontaneously cleared up. Relationships with other people seemed easier. His mind "wasn't as rampant in its running around looking for things to involve itself with".

Over the years, Dylan continued to meet and study with a variety of teachers from the Tibetan tradition, learning and practicing the various meditations which he learned from them. He has practiced vipassana, which he first learned from Namgyal, the contemplation of the Four Thoughts That Turn the Mind, the four foundational practices, the Guru Yoga of Padmasambhava, and a variety of deity yoga practices, including Vajrakilaya, Chenrezig, and Tara, among others. Each of these, in their turn, has provided a focus of practice. While not always aware of any direct spiritual impact, he trusts that their influence will one day ripen. Meanwhile, he is readily aware of the power which they have to affect him physiologically, relaxing him and slowing him down, permitting the mind rest more evenly on what he was doing.

As important for him as the actual practices have been, Dylan refers often to the importance of his relationship with the various teachers themselves. The sense of blessing that occurred following the initiation retreat with Kalu Rinpoche was repeated following meetings with other teachers. This sense of well-being and clarity would remain

with him for extended lengths of time, depending on various factors, including the qualities and the feeling of connection with the particular teacher and the length of the visit. The connection with these teachers over the past fifteen years has been like a slingshot, "where they can take you upon their back; give you the experience and shoot you on to another dimension."

Two years ago, in 1989, while studying for his Naturopathic Board exams, Dylan had an powerful experience which illustrates the impact of these relationships with his teachers. Having taken three weeks off work to prepare for the rigorous Board exams, he was immersed in studies which were so intense that it was like a meditative concentration. In the midst of this, he went to an initiation into the Medicine Buddha being given by another Tibetan lama, Trogawa Rinpoche. "It wasn't just one unconscious part of me that was appreciating it, but it was full conscious parts of me that were appreciating it. I could <u>feel</u> that connection with Trogawa Rinpoche where in fact he obviously noted it too, because he stopped in front of me and he would look at me in a different way than he was looking before and make this connection and at that point, I thought, 'yes, I can do this. I can gain from this experience and I do have the capability of doing it'." His state of mind was perceived and acknowledged by the teacher. His confirmation and

validation acted as an important marker of Dylan's development.

At other times, it would be a particular teaching that struck home, rather than the connection per se. For example, recently Chagdud Rinpoche led him through a contemplation and meditation concerned with developing compassion for others: "seeing yourself as a source of pain for another person and to make the decision to remove yourself from that place so that you relieve the other person's pain was for me a profound way of seeing relationships...it just resounded through my core. Now, it's become part of my moral ethos and I have to examine that in all situations that I'm in."

Having established the connection with these various teachers and having practiced the meditation teachings and applied them to everyday life, Dylan has also found a source of inspiration in the natural world. Among his most memorable meditation experiences, he recalls certain vivid moments of vipassana meditation in natural settings, "which let me experience the growth and regenerative nature of the planet itself and that's very nourishing: to actually experience temporal time as a rock experiences temporal time...to take on the qualities of a rock and be part of the world as a rock". He becomes aware of the feeling of the pulse of the earth in his own body. This sense of feeling

of connection with the earth has provided him with a moral context for understanding and responding to the global ecological crisis.

Over the last fifteen years, trips to Greece, the Lake District of England and, most recently Tibet, have impressed him with the sense of power places which have been able to enhance his practice and deepen his sense of spiritual connection. In Tibet, he found that his connection with the spiritual tradition and teachers of that country contributed dramatically to his visit. While he was there, his meditation practiced focused the on invocation of Guru Rinpoche, or Padmasambhava, renowned for bringing Buddhism to that land. Everywhere one travels, there are cultural and geographical reminders of this teacher's presence.

Once again he had the feeling of participating in the slingshot effect of the teacher and his tradition, of rapid spiritual development due to the power of the teacher's practice. "In that landscape, whatever practice was being performed, you would have a more profound, deeper absorptive, more readily experiential" quality to it. "People I encountered, teachers, who I encountered, everything had a stronger impact and I learnt from each one of those things; I could feel the effects reverberate through my core."

While Dylan hopes that one day he may have the opportunity to do some intensive practice with particular meditation techniques, such as the Six Yogas of Naropa, on the whole, he finds what works best for him is a potpourri of meditations that he has gathered over the years. These meditations on one hand clarify and support the cognitive teachings he has had from various teachers over the years, and from a different perspective, enable him to understand and orient himself to his ongoing flow of experience.

As he reflects on his development over the years, he notes a profound shift in relationships, creativity and spiritual awareness. Some of this understanding has enhanced by his involvement in psychotherapy. Noting that his experiences with psychotherapy over the past four years has been very complementary with his meditative practice, he has developed his own typology to make sense of his experiences. Essential to this is the sense that he has three bodies - physical, emotional and spiritual.

Each of these bodies has its own time scale: "my physical body has a certain time, or temporal relationship with the world, like I could eat something and within twenty minutes, I might get a reaction to the food that i've eaten...then there's also an emotional spatial time, where I might be in a situation which might provoke a strong emotional reaction taking place, for instance anger, and I might not feel that

anger for several hours later...but when something happens in the spiritual body, the change is very profound. It's almost as if there's a large piece of a gear in a machine and it finally chunks into its place where it has to fit and it's a resounding chunk that goes through every cell of my being and I can feel that something has happened and there's no way that it's going to go back."

Dylan first became aware of the spiritual body during his experiments with psychedelic drugs but in retrospect suspects seeing it at play in the contemplative child in Winnipeg. Contact with Namgyal and Kalu Rinpoche refined his sense of it. Changes on the spiritual body occur perhaps over years and are initiated, catalyzed, and crystallized by a variety of experiences. The trip to Tibet brought about such a shift as do the meetings with teachers: "whenever I would actually encounter a teacher or someone who would actually embody those principles, that all of these things became marshalled or crystallized within me and diverted onto another level."

Other events corroborate and confirm his sense of spiritual development: At an exhibit of Buddhist art in London, he saw a granite statue of meditating monk. "It seemed to me in looking at this sculpture that a typhoon, a whirlwind, an earthquake, everything could be going around this being who was meditating and nothing could change the way this being

was...those are sorts of things that seem to embellish one's spiritual body and give one faith to deal with one's emotional body."

Meditation practice maintains a continuity for this development and harmonizes the connection between the three bodies. Dylan's "spiritual body" has remained a reference point for him through his years of practice. The health, growth and development of this spiritual body in some sense is the goal and aim of his meditation. It is meditation in its various forms, both formal and informal, that assist in bringing Dylan back to the spiritual body. At the same time, psychotherapy has been instrumental in activating the "emotional body". The relationship between his physical, emotional, and spiritual bodies is central to his sense of both psychological and spiritual development.

Interestingly, while he maintains the importance of working with the emotional realm, it was his spiritual quest and his initial connection which Namgyal Rinpoche which alerted Dylan to the needs of his emotional body. When he was first spending time studying with Namgyal Rinpoche, he had an experience which moved him profoundly, raising new questions about his motivation. Dylan, last in line for an interview with the teacher, had been patiently waiting his turn. "He came out and said, 'right then, who's next?' 'Me, sir'. And he came and put his arm around me and led me into the room

and as soon as he touched me it was as if I wanted to just fall into him, to be taken over by him, by the parent." He'd never experienced anything like it before and knew that he had to understand what this overpowering feeling was about.

Following this, Dylan underwent a variety of experiences with natural healing treatments and more recently, starting in 1987, psychotherapy. The issue of "father" continued to surface. Until the experience with Namgyal Rinpoche, his meditation teacher, spurred him on to learn about his father. Until then, "through resistance or anger or whatever", he had avoided the whole area. Now, he began to see his father in a new light, "with a whole lot more compassion from the point of view of how he was acting out of only what he thought his role was, that of being a provider, but also his inability to relate to his son as his father was probably unable to relate to him." In retrospect, it began to become apparent that in his initial attraction to Namgyal Rinpoche, Dylan had been seeking an absent father, "longing to be taught by a father".

Thus Dylan worked with what he calls the emotional body in therapy, healing the pain that is carried there and coming to terms with earlier experiences with and feeling towards his father. But he notes that that work has had reverberations in his spiritual body as well. Now, he is

discovering that there is a father element to his spiritual body which is connected to his ability to learn from others and also to his desire, in turn, to teach and nourish younger men as he gets older, to be in turn a mentor.

At this point, finding that his active involvement with his healing vocation limits the time he has for formal meditation, he relies upon this "spiritual body" to guide him in the course of daily life. He is able to set aside only several hours several times a month to engage in a formal meditative practice, at which times the meditation brings him back immediately to that spiritual body: "It brings me back to opening my awareness of anything that could happen from it. It's as if I have a whole new sense of awareness...in the kind of work I do , I find that I work best when I let that spiritual body become the vehicle for that exploration."

When this happens it's as if his sense of himself falls away and he experiences himself, through an alteration of focus, as "just the landscape that exists between us where someone is, where I am, more of an energetic appreciation of the world between us rather than the physical body".

Of course, he is not always able to stay with that experience and sometimes his emotional body takes over and directs his interaction with others. Then, he has to make a

conscious decision to differentiate his own feelings, "to watch what is arising within and not project it on the people I am working with, to keep them from being the recipient of my angst." His experience in therapy has shown him the personal and historical sources of these patterns of his own pain and anguish.

Re-experiencing the rages he was thrown in as an infant by not getting what he wanted, has revealed to him how those early experiences have been stored in his "body-memory, energetic-memory and neurological-memory". "Whenever anything happens throughout your life, which seems to provoke any part of that , it's like the whole map coming out, time and again...the lineage of that emotion as it echoes back through your lifetime."

Recalling a recent instance of being thrown off balance, he describes being interrupted while working with a patient and reacting with intense anger, "both inappropriate and disrespectful" that was all his: "it had nothing to do with anything else that was going on...I knew that daggers and swords had passed my lips and created irreparable damage and that the most immediate thing that I had to do on the planet was to resolve that issue and to restore that bridge."

The tension between living from the flow of the spiritual body and the lineage of emotions within the emotional body,

Dylan describes as "living on the razor's edge." Meditation becomes a key to this process. Firstly, it helps develop an awareness of the "lineage of emotional experience". In the example given above, while his outburst threw him off in his interactions both with his immediate patient and for a greater part of the day, still Dylan credits his experience with meditation with his ability to notice, on the spot, the inappropriateness of his action. Even as he reacts from his "emotional body", he recollects Chagdud Rinpoche's teachings on compassion. Over the years, he has noticed that he is increasingly able to actually experience emotions on the spot and not be thrown off balance by them.

Secondly, Dylan has worked with meditations specific to certain emotional states, such as Vajrakilaya, a very fierce, wrathful deity who embodies an enlightened transformation of anger. If unable to deal creatively with anger on the spot, Dylan has found that he can take it home, as it were, to the meditation cushion, "and actually watch what it does to me first, on the physical body, what it gnarls up, where the armouring is, and then to feel what it does emotionally, and then to feel what it does spiritually...and the net effect seems to be a transforming of that anger into an understanding of that anger."

In this way, as well, meditation supports the therapeutic process as it is "very helpful for being able to develop an

awareness of that lineage of emotional experience. In understanding (the echo effect of emotion), you realize the steamroller effect, or the boulder rolling down a mountain that that emotion is, and not that the emotion is anything to be negated and cut off but it's something that's a reminder of where you've been...so that you can deal with what's happening in front of you now, as opposed to having all the excess baggage being thrown in on top of it."

The interaction of psychotherapy and meditation has been a potent source of growth for Dylan. Not only has the process uncovered his issues with his father and contributed to a major change in their relationship, but their have been other benefits as well. "How I relate to people in the world has altered...I feel I engage myself more with people than I did before. That watcher role that I talked about has been altered so that I can involve myself with other beings, as opposed to keeping myself separate." He is much more comfortable with his father and interested in "learning who he was from where he is now." As such, he finds that he gets much more from the relationship than he ever did as a child.

To some extent, these changes can be understood in terms of the development of compassion and morality previously expressed. In turn, these forces have been enhanced by the "courage to look into death" which is such an integral part

of Dylan's meditative tradition: "In the contemplations (on impermanence, death, and dying, I began to notice particular aspects of the whole process and then to be able to see that on a day-to-day basis, how we go through little deaths and what that dissolution involves...I've done my naturopathic/chiropractic work with that point of view always in my mind." This awareness of death and impermanence becomes more and more stable as he practices: "I start seeing the world from that point of view as opposed to slipping back to another aspect of it."

His creativity has also benefited from the practice of meditation, not only with his patients but also in his writing and daily life: "I feel I'm much more of a creative person now than I was before I began this process, because I can hear inner voices that need expressing now, whereas before I had no sense of those things and that has greatly enriched my life."

Over the past fifteen years, meditation has assisted Dylan on a path of ever increasing engagement with the world. The watcher has been transformed into a spiritual body which provides room for a body of emotions. "Probably the biggest thing I have to learn, which again bounces back between psychotherapy and spiritual practice, is how do I reconcile what I, my ego needs, with what I spiritually need and have a relationship with somebody in the process?...Where I am

right now is in another cycle of dealing with issues that first come up perhaps in therapy and then bounce back to my spiritual practice as a context in which to see it and then back to therapy as a means of resolving it as a tool."

For Dylan, meditation functions like a tuning instrument, constantly bringing him back to his "spiritual body". Acting from that base, he finds that his "perspective of the world has irreconcilably altered...when I actually think about how meditation has changed my life, it seems like in all aspects of it."

Augusta's Story

Augusta, eleven years old, is sitting silently on a hill in Saskatchewan with her friend. As she gazes up at the sky and the stars appearing in the gathering darkness, she is struck by the magic and the immensity of it. Somehow, the teachings about the meaning of life that surround her, even at this age, do not seem to answer the questions that she is beginning to pose.

The mother's side of the family is Catholic, her father's protestant and there is friction between them. Augusta is only eleven when her mother dies. Her maternal grandfather buries her in the Catholic cemetery and has the father's name removed from the headstone.

The Church and the influence of her maternal Grandmother had been strong. There was a sense of mystery in the rituals of communion and the ideas of insubstantiality of the Body of Christ. She was told that life was about being a good person, going to Church and being rewarded at death with Heaven.

Following the death of her mother, and the family tensions which surrounded her then, Augusta's sense of the inadequacy of the Church and the hypocrisy of the priest and parishioners started to grow. Her father worked for the Local Improvement District and as such was involved with the co-operative spirit of the Prairies. Not only did he assist farmers with road building and farm improvement, but Kathy remembers him befriending Native people when they were still excluded from restaurants and bars. With her father she discussed ethics, morality and disdain for hypocrisy. Materialism and the pursuit of wealth seem ignoble. There must be a greater purpose to life.

Through her early adolescence, she started to question the role of the Church in people's lives, coming to view it more and more as an instrument of social control, part of the pursuit for power. Her disdain for exclusion and privilege developed through this time and her break with the Church culminated when the priest refused to allow her younger brother to accompany the other altar boys on a trip to Disneyland because he had made fun of the priest.

The hypocrisy and small mindedness had become too much for her. It seemed there were few wise persons with whom to consult, to provide meaning and orientation in life. The one exception to this was her paternal grandmother, "who acted as a touchstone for many people in my world." Her

grandmother provided an important model of somehow who had consciously worked on refining her awareness and compassion and was thereby able to share a gift of wisdom.

She went to university at 17, in the mid-sixties, where her effort to understand her experience brought her to philosophy and other humanities courses and ultimately to psychedelics. By the early seventies, she had moved to Vancouver where one day, her boyfriend noticed a poster announcing a talk with a Western meditation teacher at the new coffee house on 4th Avenue, the "Naam". This teacher suggested Augusta go and see Kalu Rinpoche, a Tibetan Buddhist teacher, who was at that time about to visit Vancouver on his first trip to the West.

Augusta went to a talk with Kalu Rinpoche, knowing nothing about meditation and had "some kind of very supernormal experience" when she saw him: "the energy loosened up somehow...there was a sense of intense power ancd colour and richness." Feeling strong connections now, she continued to attend his talks. When he left she started studying at the Centre which he had begun near 14th and Heather, continuing to study with the Lama who had remained as a resident teacher.

At last, it seemed like there was someone, some group of people, who could respond to the questions which Augusta had

been carrying with her for so long. Previously, no one had seemed to have any concern for understanding, and as she puts it, "when I actually saw someone who talked about Mind, the nature of Mind, I felt like I'd come home." It was "like water to a parched person bred in the desert of Western culture her whole life time."

Instead of being told to be a good person so she could go to Heaven, finally, someone could speak to her about her experience in language that made sense. She had what she felt was a good heart, a sense of caring about people. She had been "staring into her own being for the meaning with psychedelics and sociology and psychology for some time, but nobody'd ever had so much wisdom, wisdom that was not just intellectual." The teachings made sense to her in a "real way". "When Kalu Rinpoche would speak about mind as empty, clear and unimpeded, it seemed absolutely clear, that was the way it is. at least to me, that's how it is."

"Nobody else had ever been that gentle and that aware." It was his gentleness, she believes that made the connection. She felt that in his presence always and heard it also in his concern for those who suffer, in marked contrast to her earlier experience with the Saskatchewan Catholics whose attitude was, "too bad for them, but we'll feel real good in heaven."

Kalu Rinpoche's gentleness was instrumental as well in Augusta's first experiences with meditation. Kalu Rinpoche initially taught Chenrezig, meditation on the Bodhisattva of Compassion. Attending group meditations with Kalu Rinpoche gave her her first glimpse into what has become, over the years, the essence of meditation: letting the mind rest. Following Rinpoche's instructions, she found that she could readily use the visualization as a "very beautiful support you could build up and rest with". Her favourite part of the meditation was letting the mind rest following the dissolution of that visualization.

She threw herself into the meditation practice and soon was doing ngun-dro, or the Foundation Practices, as well as Chenrezig. Soon, she and her boyfriend took over the operation of the Centre from the western couple who had brought Kalu Rinpoche to Canada. They took care of the Lama, cooked, and orchestrated the schedule of the Centre. She did her 100,000 prostrations quickly, reveling in the energy and clarity which they brought her.

However, her joy at finding a source of meaning and the commitment to pursue it had a shadow. She became a "Tibetophile". "I thought all Tibetans were like angels, and the way to enlightenment was to become a Tibetan, to adopt that cultural heritage." After the magical connection with Rinpoche, she had plunged into becoming a "good

disciple", doing Tibetan meditations, wearing Tibetan clothes and learning the Tibetan language.

During this period, she felt like she was engaged in something very special and since she was special she had to be a very good student. In retrospect, it now seems like a "sort of abnegation of your personal worth and taking on this whole mass or body of information as if it's going to save you from your ignorance".

Slowly, the situation became uncomfortable. It might have been in part seeing their own behaviour mirrored by other Westerners who were also surrendering their own identity, but Augusta and her boyfriend found themselves trying to distance themselves from what increasingly appeared to be an unhealthy situation. "We were just getting sick of the slavishness of the Westerners abnegating their personal worth and bowing down before the Tibetans." While attending a visiting lama, they found themselves spiking their orange juice with apricot brandy. They started to realize they would have to leave.

At about this time, as well, Augusta had progressed to the next stage of Ngun-dro, Dorje-Sempa, a purification practice. While doing this practice while she was in retreat with another student up the coast, she had a very powerful experience which was to further distance herself

from the Centre. She experienced a continuing waking fantasy of standing up, getting a knife from the kitchen and going to stab the other woman. Alarmed and bewildered by this thought, she determined that she would rather stab herself. Fearful that she might be overcome by these impulses, she returned to Vancouver for advice from the resident teacher, but all he could say was, "oh, very bad".

This was her first major disappointment with someone from the Tibetan tradition, a missed opportunity to explore "something very potent that could have been very illuminating." The Lama failed to help her to understand her experience and her own mind at this critical juncture. Nevertheless, she made a clear separation between this particular teacher and the body of teachings that was the Tibetan tradition.

Augusta's development of a more critical attitude at this point was catalyzed to some extent by her boyfriend, Oliver. His meditation practice had begun to diminish as the result of powerful and sometimes overwhelming experiences, with which he too recieved minimal assistance. While Augusta continued to persist with her meditation, both Chenrezig and Ngun-dro, she and Henry moved out of the Dharma Centre and separated.

She moved in with two other women students and began preparations to enter the traditional three year retreat, studying Tibetan and continuing the meditation practices of Ngun-dro, specifically mandala practice. Her on-again off-again relationship with Oliver was resolved when she became pregnant. Putting aside her desire to do the retreat, she continued with Guru Yoga practice throughout her pregnancy until the birth of her daughter. "Everyone else went into retreat and that's when I had the big break with the Ngun-dro practice." It was years before she completed the Guru Yoga practice.

This was a confusing time for Augusta. She "wrestled" with her practice as doubt and faith conflicted. She had moved again, into a house with two male friends who were involved in the study of Sufism and were very critical of Buddhism. For a while, she stopped meditating altogether and ceased her involvement with Buddhism. Her relationship with Oliver was up and down. "It got really strange and I remember I thought I was loosing my grip on reality...I was feeling very confused and feeling very alienated." She reached out again to Oliver and when she started doing Chenrezig practice again, she started to calm down.

In 1977, Augusta and Oliver married and moved to Saltspring Island with their daughter Isadora. While she wanted to continue meditating and studing Buddhism, Augusta had

undergone a fundamental change following her period of questioning. "After that, I was never interested in the cultural baggage of Buddhism. I only wanted to understand what was important and anything that would make me feel self-important was questionable."

On Saltspring, Augusta and Oliver were in an automobile accident. Isadora was thrown from the car and suffered severe head injury. In Augusta's desparation, she turned to her Chenrezig practice to pull her through, and contrary to what she understood intellectually about the practice, appealed to the deity almost as an external source of comfort, solace and assistance, "like a liferaft". This crisis "really reconnected" her to her meditation practice.

The family returned to Vancouver and Augusta set up a shrine and started to develop a regular practice for the first time in several years. She had her own room, where she drew, painted and meditated. At this time, a lot of her practice was "just letting the mind rest. I was really interested in Mahamudra." After a while she also returned to the Guru Yoga practice which had been interrupted several years before, finishing this just before Kalu Rinpoche returned on one of his last visits to North America.

At this time, an interview with Kalu Rinpoche marked a significant turning in Augusta's development. She had found

herself struggling to take care of her daughter who had become mildly handicapped as a result of the accident, to work through a problematic relationship, and trying to make sense of a powerful attraction to another man. Being aware that Rinpoche, due to his advancing years, would not be accessible forever, Augusta determined to relate directly with him. "I didn't want to just ask him about Ngun-dro, or about yidam practice. I wanted to ask him about my personal experience, even if it was stupid. I didn't care. I just wanted to know. How to deal with it."

Augusta refers to the content of that interview as being crucial to her development in several ways. She becomes tearful as she reflects on its impact, reminded again by the gentleness and clarity of the teacher, the sense of really being listened to, and how his presence seemed to respond to all the alienation and aridity of our own culture.

In that interview, when Augusta talked about her attraction to her friend, Rinpoche advised her to look directly into the essence of the feelings as they arose. Working with this, both on the spot and in her meditation, she recalls that "I started to see the qualities that I was personally attracted to and so I could start to recognize humour, wit, warmth, brilliance of mind, and I started to realize what it was that I found so appealing and see them in my own mind. So it wasn't so important to go seeking them out in someone

else." As, well, the concept of emptiness was much more real for her. Instead of being something or someone solid, it was suddenly clear that there was only a collection of qualities, and so her attachment "began to fall away".

In Vancouver, while Isadora continued to recover, the long-standing legal wrangling over the settlement was still being resolved. Augusta and Oliver found themselves stretched to the breaking point with the medical, educational and social needs of Isadora. "Oliver would froth at the mouth at the end. It was dreadful. Life was a mess." Augusta, in particular, was feeling desperate. She had to get away from the hectic pace of the city. The family decided to return to Saltspring but first needed to convince the public trust that that was the best plan. In retrospect, it seems like the desire to return to Saltspring "had to do with resolving what had happened there."

They were succesful in their claim and they moved back to Saltspring in 1985. Augusta began meditating regularly, four times a day. "I wanted it to be like I was brushing my teeth. No big deal. That's how I wanted meditation to be and so I did, that came about, that attitude where it became reasonably relaxed. Instead of being something I had to do, yet another duty, yet another thing I had to do to be a good person, it was an act of pleasure: to sit on my cushion and take a little break."

The five years on Saltspring, from 1985 to 1990 resulted in a real ripening of Augusta's practice. "The experience of meditating regularly gave me a real spacious feeling in my mind and I felt less pushed and pulled by events and a sense of clarity and I wasn't run out by my experience."

At this point, she continues to practice regularly, working with several different meditations, including Green Tara, prostrations, Mahamudra, Vajrakilaya, and confession. To each of them however, she brings attempts to bring the same view ("just whatever arises look at the essence") and the same attitude ("gentleness"). Her approach to meditation today, she says, is much more "experimental" than when she began. At that point, she adhered rather exclusively to the Chenrezig and Ngun-dro practices, performing them with diligence. Now, "I'm not so attached to a form...my practice is more related to whatever arises at the moment."

As a result, she finds her relationship with others altered. The Buddhist concept of compassion has become integrated into her experience. She gives the example of waking up in the morning to find Oliver's dirty ashtrays and finds that she no longer gets so annoyed and involved in a cycle of anger, incrimination and self-reference. "To me, compassion is the ability to relate to the specific moment, without

wanting to screw him into the ground, because you have that open spacious quality where you can do that." This is in marked contrast with how she remembers herself when she was young, a quality she observed in her father and a state to which she still occasionally returns and makes her feel miserable: "the feeling that something was always wrong, that it was supposed to be a different way, that's the insecurity of a fixed point of view."

Over the years, Augusta's meditation has helped her develop and refine the sense of spaciousness that she first glimpsed back in 1972, doing group Chenrezig practice with Kalu Rinpche. Of meditation now, she reports, "I just have this feeling of open spaciousness. I don't feel constricted . I'm sitting here and there's all this open space around me and that to me is very important." This spaciousness is related to letting the mind rest naturally and the resulting experience of gentleness.

As a result of this spaciousness and gentleness, she feels able to counteract the sense of self-importance that has been so inimical to her since adolescence. Accordingly, it enhances her openness to others. "If you approach your practice with an attitude of gentleness with yourself, that seems to include to me that you're not doing anything special. That it's no big deal...if you can just relax and be gentle with yourself, then you're not going to want to go

around being harsh on others because you're not being harsh on yourself."

This element of attitude and motivation is critical to Augusta's meditation. When Oliver has challenged her over the years with suggestions that she is indeed either trying to secure herself or escape from pain, either her own or the world's, she has taken the challenges to heart. She has purposely stopped meditating on such occasions. As a result of such experimentation, she has experienced a marked difference in her feeling state and has become aware of how important meditation is in terms of emotional comfort: "I'd start feeling paranoid; I'd start to feel depressed; I'd start to feel that things weren't going right...a sense of danger...that your life is going nowhere and you're not really able to benefit others because what are you doing with life, not much."

This experience is in marked contrast to the dominant tone upon resumption of practice: "whereas if I meditated, whatever arose...if I was meditating regularly I would just do them and it would be fine". "If Oliver and I were having a quarrel, if a quarrel was developing I found that if was meditating regularly, I wouldn't be so swept away by it. I'd be able to discuss it without becoming swept away by the anger. I could still feel the anger but I wouldn't become bitter and resentful. There seemed to be a little more room

to relate to him without wanting him to be a certain way and be annoyed with him if he wasn't. It was just more simple, I guess."

Worried about using meditation as a crutch, she has discovered that while it makes her life workable, it doesn't really obliterate the pain. "It hasn't gone away. It doesn't go away. I feel it. It's not any less; it's just that I'm not unable to get out of bed in the morning." Indeed, meditation is what enables her to fulfill her goal of being a helpful person and the essence of that, she discovers in communication. "I find that when I meditate I am more able to relate to people: when I go to the store, I talk to the person...I really connect with people...and to me to be able to connect with someone, really and truly with them and not be offended or afraid and all the things that separate you, that make us feel we can't be there with that person, to me that's meaningful. People seem to respond, you know, when you respond with some kind of open honesty. There seems to be a real rapport with the other person."

Starting with the stressful period in Vancouver after Isadora's accident and over the years, as well as meditating, Augusta has had some psychotherapy. While valuing both processes, she makes clear distinctions between the focus and value of each.

"Both the practice of meditation and therapy enable you to become a more functional human being, so you can be more aware of what you're doing and to be more alive." For Augusta, they are complementary processes. When Rinpoche and other lamas were around, and meditation practice was going smoothly, life would unfold without much problem. But at times, this was not the case. Even though meditation was useful, she needed "something more personal...The teachers didn't really understand the particular neuroses of the highly sophisticated Western mind." Western counsellors and therapists could utilize an understanding of the culture specific patterns involved in alcoholic families, for example. Therapy, for Augusta, released "a lot of very powerful emotions and the meditative practice made me able to accomodate them in the sense of having enough room to experience them."

"Therapy helps me see the way I feel the way I do. I understand it better. To me, what oppresses me is when I'm confused and I don't understand why I'm responding or reacting in a certain way." While therapy then, provides both emotional release and insight into patterns, meditation "allows you to develop a certain amount of spaciousness so that you can notice what you are doing." She refers again to the arousal of various degrees of fear, paranoia, and depression. After reaching a new understanding of these patterns in therapy, she finds she can return to her

meditation cushion and develop greater clarity there. As well, meditation gives rise to "a certain amount of energy...when I meditate regularly, I have a lot more energy. I sleep less."

The processes of meditation and therapy seem to reinforce each other. While therapy provides insights that are very specific to the individual. the experiences of meditation reveal and support philosophical understandings which give meaning to life. For example, Augusta's meditations have included contemplations on a set of perspectives on reality that are central to Buddhism and are known variously as the Four Thoughts That Turn the Mind (actually the initial phase of the Ngun-dro practice) and the Four Noble Truths.

"'Life is suffering'. Nobody told me <u>that</u> before I ran into a Buddhist. I thought you were supposed to be happy. I thought there was something wrong with you if you felt suffering." Similarly, contemplations on interdependence, karma, impermanence which become experiential through meditation each "make the experience of life more understandable". There has been something profoundly therapeutic in Augusta's meditative involvement with these concepts.

Of impermanence, she remarks, "I haven't noticed anything permanent. I love it. I think that's why I start to cry

and stuff, because I looked and looked with such longing for so long for somebody who just spoke the truth, you know, just said look at our experience. This is how it is. And here it is. It's true and it's such a relief, God, I mean, because there's so much conscious perpetration of ignorance in the world, that to come across people that are actually engaged in revealing the truth to me..."

This broader perspective balances as well the way Augusta relates to her emotions. She recalled that even as a child, she was aware of the power of emotions and the clarity and energy within anger. For a long time, she knew she needed to work with and to understand her emotions. She discovered that therapy released a lot of emotions and comments on the overwhelming quality of some of them. When Kalu Rinpoche gave her the instruction about looking into the essence of emotions, he had also told her that the mind and emotions are like waves and with the development of meditation, the more powerful the emotions, the less problem they will present: "and as I practice more, I have more ability to accomodate the emotions and experience them and learn from them rather than be swept away, not that I'm pushing them down or anything. I'm more able for them to arise and be experienced."

Through meditation, Augusta has become increasingly aware of the relation between her body and her feelings. Now, when

meditating on Green Tara, she may become aware of "a light coming through your body and I'm aware of structures in the body. I notice that when the light comes through, I'm conscious of wanting it to go a certain place and not be stuck... A lot of emotions are stuck in my throat. Like in that prayer, the Mahamudra prayer, when you pray for deep sorrow. I already feel such deep sorrow."

For a while now, she has returned to painting. She has been working with imagery of the body, particularly of the heart, several images of which express wounding or binding. There is a sense of coping on the one hand with the deep sorrow occassioned by life's sufferings including both her own personal pain and the "deep wrong" of the imposition of "our petty minded materialism on the land and the (native) people here", and on the other hand of the tears of devotion which she feels for Kalu Rinpoche and her other meditation teachers.

As she ponders the impact that meditation has had on her life over the years, along with the development of a more "active critical intelligence", she notes also feeling much more "ease": "I feel more at ease, more often, with myself...before I used to be very, I used to really check out and try to adapt to situations, try to do the thing that was acceptable within the limits of the situations. Now I'm more at ease with myself. That's a <u>very</u> big difference."

She no longer relies on external validation, doesn't need recognition from others. As she meditates, Augusta no longer struggles with old feelings of inferiority: "I remember when I was quite young, I used to have this feeling that somebody else had it figured out and I didn't and I was always either walking a fence, not wanting to take sides and not knowing what to do or being on the wrong side and I don't have that anymore."

The resulting sense of relaxation and freedom is profound, freeing her to connect with the world, answering both her early quest for meaning and her desire for solidarity and inclusion with others. Interestingly, the bliss which she once expected from meditation she now tends to find with others in the world, under, "extremely ordinary conditions, like being with a particular person at the bookstore...and we'd be talking and I'd just have this intense feeling of bliss all through my whole body".

Paradoxically, the questions stimulated by the awe and mystery gazing into the Saskatchewan sky is now answered in the mundane experience of talking with a shop clerk in a book store. The endless space beyond has opened into the space within the moment and the gentleness within that opening has melted the harshness of self-importance and exclusions of her youth. Meditation has assisted in this

revolution of view captured in a quotation from the Mahamudra tradition to which Augusta frequently refers:

> If you look for it, you won't find it;
> But if you look not wandering, you'll see.
> If you hold it, you won't hold it,
> If you relax, it stays.
> If you try to stop it, you won't stop it;
> Whatever arises look at the essence.
> Remember, this is heart news,
> Remember it and keep it in your mind.

Hamish's Story

In his childhood in 1950s Southern Ontario, Hamish met some Buddhists from Thailand. He recalls being curious about them and this thing called "Buddhism". Aside from that event, he doesn't remember anything specific from his early years that would have inclined him towards his involvement of meditation later on. However, in his adolescence he began to be aware of shortcomings in the Western spiritual tradition of Christianity and began reading about other kinds of spiritual practice. Often, those writings, such those by Allan Watts, would mention meditation.

However, it wasn't until the early 1970s, as a graduate student at a university in Pittsburgh, that Hamish started looking again at the possibility of a personal relevance for meditation. He found himself caught up in the great "explosion" of interest in spirituality and alternative life styles of the time. Interwoven with the current cultural fascination with psychedelic drugs, meditation seemed to offer an alternative to the otherwise limited and limiting spiritual and social options that Hamish saw about him.

Experimentation with psychedelics led to some "powerful experiences...that suggested there was some other realm,

that was richer and fuller and more relaxed and open. It existed and it would be a better way to live." In particular, Hamish had become painfully aware of his own self-consciousness, "of being uncertain about oneself, not feeling confident. Just a constant effort to present yourself in a way that would feel good and also gain other people's approval."

Providing a glimpse into "other realms and other spaces", the use of psychedelics provided a temporary relief from the constraints of such self-consciousness, while at the same time highlighting an irritation with the constriction, or narrower view of everyday life and consciousness. He experienced this abrasive quality in his experience as an irritation that could be momentarily relieved but not eliminated. As well, Hamish was still struggling with the question of what lay ahead, beyond his graduate degree in Psychology. He knew he didn't want to follow the traditional way, but didn't see any workable options. Which way should he go?

Reflecting on this time now, he feels that to some extent, not knowing how to be an adult, he just didn't want to grow up. These were the heady days of music, of trips both internal and external and life could be rich, powerful and sweet. In the midst of this cultural ferment he chanced upon Ram Dass's Be Here Now. Suddenly, meditation had been

presented as an adjunct to the appealing alternative life styles. "One friend and I started some sort of meditation. It was rather undisciplined, using the mantra in the book and infused with the wildly enthusiastic ideas of the time, we started doing something."

In retrospect, it seems to Hamish that there were two sides to his desire for a more imaginative way to live. But at the time, the cultural forms that existed seemed very limiting. Spirituality and meditation were to be a way out of that. They would provide access into a different reality, a gateway into more fulfilling realms.

Upon graduation from graduate school, Hamish headed west, travelling across America to what seemed to be a Mecca - California, the source from which the mingled currents of the counter culture flowed. There, meditation and spiritual reflection of several varieties were counterpoint to rock concerts and hanging out. Meditation tended to be a sporadic affair,- "somethimng that might happen on a beautiful afternoon when three or four people might decide to sit outside in a field" - but still an element to the quest for some meaningful alternative to mundane reality.

In California, Hamish had glimpses of the wider view which he sought, but they seemed fleeting, ephemeral. Sufi dancing, hearing Ram Dass speak, discovery of natural power

spots, peak moments of community dancing to the Grateful Dead, all provided "some real joyous experiences... a different state of mind, or altered states of mind"; experiences "beyond what could be explained in terms of one's earlier frame of reference". But while the time was exciting and positive, each glimmer of a more spacious view or enriching experience would be followed by a the pain of watching it disappear, as mundane reality reasserted itself. The problems of "the rent...didn't seem to be washed away by these somewhat exotic practices."

Hamish returned to Canada in 197-, travelling up the West Coast and ending up at a commune on Galiano Island in Georgia Straight. On Galiano, Hamish continued to read a wide spectrum of books and to practice a few esoteric practices picked up in Californai - Tarot, the I ching. More significantly, here he began to practice meditation in a more disciplined way. Complementing the old mantra from the Ram Dass book with a variety of methods newly discovered in his readings, he would hike each day to a favourite tree near Active Pass, sit and practice meditation.

This time brought both communal living and a sort of back to nature approach into his ongoing search. Experimenting with lucid dreaming techniques found in the Don Juan writings of Carlos Castaneda, Hamish had a series of powerful and vivid dreams. His friend in California reported seeing his

Double. "That had a sort of thunderous kind of impact on me. I started to wonder, wow, I really am stepping outside."

But even as such experiences seemed to fulfill his quest for the extraordinary, Hamish found himself questioning the approach he was taking. Reading Chogyam Trungpa's "Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism" at this time, opened up a new and not altogether flattering perspective on his path. The desctription of mind presented by Trungpa, a Tibetan lama teaching in North America, seemed both familiar and "tremendously accurate". Suddenly, the neurotic side of the spiritual quest was presented, and as Hamish looked at himself and those he was living with, he was disturbed by what he saw.

"I was living with people who were Gnostics and were on their way to bneing Fruitarians and I could see that there was something desparate about the search. I could see it reflected in them and I could taste it in myself." He saw how much he had been involved "in wanting to be someone special and unique and noticed and approved through this great effort and also the idea of sort of manufacturing states of mind."

Reading Trungpa at this point, brought Hamish to the realization that if he was going to progress spiritually, he

would need a teacher and a genuine spiritual discipline. He returned to Vancouver and began to check out the spiritual teachers who seemed to be "rolling in in droves". He heard of one particular teacher, a Tibetan lama named Kalu Rinpoche, and had already decided that he would seek this man out when he met a young couple who reinforced that decision. "Oh, he's a real one", they'd said. So, he went to a teaching being given by Kalu Rinpoche, where he "just had some experience of certainty that he was an authentic teacher."

While not a "particularly big deal" he was impressed with the teacher's clarity and took Refuge with him. During a subsequent interview with the teacher, he found what he was looking for. With the lama, he had an "experience of total groundlessness, but not in a terrifying kind of way. Groundless in the sense of free of all constrictions and preconceptions. It was like being fully in the moment and at the same time it was infused with kindness, a really strong sense of warmth." He had found his teacher.

When he got up to leave the interview, the two lamas in attendance brought Hamish forward for a blessing. "He put his hand on my head. He just ran a whole lot of current right through it...It was very, very physical, a tremendously physical experience of a blessing and then just light everywhere and I remember being guided out of the

room." Powerful dreams followed the experience, seeming to confirm the connection. He began to follow the teacher's instructions to recite the Refuge prayer on a daily basis as well as to continue reciting the mantra, Om Mani Padme Hum, which he had learned from Be Here Now years earlier. Thus began Hamish's formal practice of Buddhist meditation.

He attended group meditations or pujas a few times, but felt completely lost with the Tibetan and unfamiliar with the ritual structure. Nevertheless, reciting the prayer seven times a day kept a sense of connection with the teacher and doing the mantra continued to give him a sense of direction. "Repeating mantras kind of jams your internal dialogue for a while and sort of gives you a certain kind of relief and a certain degree of openness, tunes you like a string to more refined levels of experience."

These were Hamish's two meditation practices as he packed up and went back to Toronto, where his daughter was born in 197 . As there were no Tibetan Centres associated with Kaul Rinpoche there at the time, his search for a place to study and practice meditation led him to a Korean monk. It was with this practice of Korean Zen that Hamish first felt that he was learning meditation as such, developing a sense of the importance of posture and mindfulness.

It was at this centre as well that he met a great Korean Zen master, Sen Chen. In an interview with Sen Chen, Hamish experienced the stopping of his mind: "We have such a heavy set of conceptions that all link together and can account for about everything and the Zen teachers can just get you right where all that stays and it all just collapses for a moment, when you are really present, without a lot of baggage." As with his earlier interview with Kalu Rinpoche, this one provided both inspiration and momentum as well as a confirmation of the direction he was travelling. On departing, this teacher gave a tea ceremony on Hamish's honour, providing him not only a great blessing, but also indicating how meditation could be conjoined with "action in very simple ways like making tea and living ordinary life."

On a visit to a bookstore one day, Hamish noticed a note on the bulletin board announcing that Kalu Rinpoche's students in Vancouver had bought some land on Saltspring Island. They were inviting people to come to the land and to help build a Three Year Retreat Centre. "I just knew that that was the thing I had to do". So, he packed his family into a camperized pickup truck and headed West again, stopping in Boulder, Colorado on the way.

In Boulder, he reconnected with his old friend from Pittsburgh, with whom he'd first started reading Ram Dass' book and had since become a student of Trungpa Rinpoche.

The Boulder experience provided Hamish with more confirmation in his spiritual path. Not only did he meet numerous fellow Buddhists, but here were the legacy of the Beat poets, including Allen Ginsberg and Anne Waldman, who had also moved to Boulder to study with the Tibetan Lama.

Then, back to Vancouver, alternating mantra and Grey Cup game on the truck radio: the mantra "clarifying his mind" and working like a "talisman, it's like rubbing a stone; it puts me in touch with something...I'm aware that the teacher told me to keep doing that and there's some sense of connection and some sense of rightness. That's where I started in the first place, with Be Here Now, it was that mantra which stood out."

After arriving in Vancouver, he throws himself into Kalu Rinpoche's community of students. The teacher himself is in the city again on another trip to the West. There are teachings, initiations and pujas. At first, the pujas, or group meditations are as bewildering as before and he struggles, along with many others, to piece them together. Nobody tells him exactly how to do that, but gradually, he gets the sense of what's going on so he can do it. By now, at least the mantra is familiar and the rest of the ritual he structures around that. Over the years, it is this, the practice of Chenrezig or the Bodhisattva of Compassion, to which he returns.

As intended, he spends time on the land now, assisting with the building of the Retreat. It is there as well that he does his first intensive retreat as he begins his practice of Ngun-Dro, the Foundations for Mahamudra, with prostrations.

Prostrations, an intensely demanding physical practice brought up for Hamish a struggle with devotion. Rather than immediately providing a relief from suffering, the prostrations make clear that spirituality is nothing so light. The rigours of the practice brought up a range of experiences: a rage at being trapped, furious that he had to climb the hill again; a clear intuition that there were indeed two realities and he could choose between them; feelings of compassion and a suffusion with a blissful warmth; three days of purging sickness; the vision of a nighttime rainbow over Duncan. Overall, the feeling that the path of meditation "is tough, it's demanding, and really does require a kind of warrior-like quality...without that, it isn't true."

After six weeks of doing prostrations with a small group of retreatants, Hamish was powerfully affected: "By the time I came down, I was in another world...My mind was very much clearer than I was accustomed to it being until then, and it is now." The discursive process of mind had slowed.

Perceptions were sharp and experience vivid. "It had some of the same qualities as an acid trip but without the flourishing quality of LSD and this was much more solid."

As well, for the first time, the teachings of the relationship between form and emptiness, so integral to the Mahayana Buddhist philosophy and experience, became clear, were no longer intellectual: "It was all very clear to me just by looking at people what their story was: every line in their face, every movement spoke of their story. I understood what the teaching was about of form and emptiness and how everything is just as it is and how there is nothing behind it all and there's no need to look for anything behind it...everything becomes so perfectly obvious. The whole process of trying to construct reality behind the present becomes clearly superfluous."

Attempts to continue prostration practice once he was back at work proved frustrating. For a while, he worked on the second of the foundations, Dorje-Sempa, (including a three day at a Christian center in the Okanogan when he worked in Penticton for a couple of years in the mid-1980s) but that too, was frustrating. Finding ngun-dro difficult to continue practicing in the context of everyday life, Hamish still waits for an opportunity to continue in a stricter retreat situation.

In the years since Kalu Rinpoche's visit and the prostration retreat in 1978, Hamish recieved more teachings from him on other visits, studied with other lamas, made several trips to Boulder and studied Buddhist and Western approaches to contemplation there, notably Maitri training. But over the years, it is the Chenrezig and shamatha practices that have provided him with most continuity.

All of these meditations have been supported over the years with the more cognitive and intellectual contemplations which typify the Tibetan Mahamudra approach. For example, prior to both the prostration and Dorje-Sempa Ngun-dro practices, Hamish engaged in the daily and systematic reading and contemplation of the Four Thoughts That Turn the Mind: precious human birth, impermanence, suffering and karma. "Those thoughts have informed have informed not only my practice but my way of living, the way my life has gone...(they) undermine a certain kind of spuriousness which is very helpful".

For example, in his work with the concept of the pervasiveness of suffering, Hamish feels he has transformed his experience of pain. "You know, I understand that I'm not going to avoid pain. The experience of pain and suffering then become an intrinsic part of life and an invitation to practice at the same time...There isn't sort of that sense that pain is wrong and a certain kind of guilt

arises from it, where you think you must have done something wrong...There isn't the idea that I should be able to find some way to shut it off."

He feels that working with the concept of impermanence has profoundly influenced his approach to his career: "I have a lot less attachment to what I create in the context of my work than most of my colleagues...I don't need to defend territory as much because I have a sense of how things can come into being and go out of being and that's fine."

Similarly, working contemplatively with the Heart Sutra over the years has informed not only his meditation practice but also his life-style and the therapeutic practice which he applies to his occupation as family therapist. Study, contemplation (including dialogue with numerous Buddhist teachers on this subject) and meditation, are interwoven to affect both his view of what is occuring and his accompanying behaviour.

"With meditation practice and the understanding of the Heart Sutra, discursive thoughts become just that. The identification with the thinking process is loosened; that kind of compulsive attachment to the thinking process is loosened." While this experience has been cultivated through his meditation over the years, Hamish refers to the impact of one of Kalu Rinpoche's teachings on Mahamudra

around 1980. "He had us visualizing Toronto and New York at the same time. It felt like he was taking all of our minds into his mind and just taking us all through this thing step by step and eventually it was just 'pow'."

Hamish's meditation practice has developed an sufficient awareness in his mental processes that he can move "in and out of absorption in thought" and also "to sort of drop things...in order to take a fuller stock of a situation or to percieve a situation more fully." He applies this to a moment in his therapeutic practice, arguing that it has changed the way that he has shifted his attention from a bedwetting child to "the pattern that forms the context for the bedwetting", and emphasizing the affinity between these insights and systemic thinking.

When he reflects upon the impact that meditation has had upon his relationship with others, Hamish points to a similar shift in understanding and behaviour. When his wife confronts him with being late for the third night in a row, he is able to regard that as "feedback about being late, not about myself...I feel a lot more flexibility. I don't feel an expansion of meaning in those kind of situations. I'm much more capable of seeing them as they are through practice." His interchanges are "cleaner, not always, but the probability is in that direction." "You're much more aware of your part in the situation rather than looking at

the other person as the source of the exchange or the problem."

He attributes this shift in behaviour to a greater feeling of trust and confidence in himself, on one hand, and on other, to a related ability to cut projections, to read less into a situation. "The meaning of things is actually quite present; it's not concealed, to be deduced, to be found anywhere else but in what's happening in the immediate moment...You become more trusting that you're not into a game yourself, that you don't have ulterior motives, that you begin to be able to trust the goodness of mind...You don't have to manufacture anything else, make some other presentation. Things become much more as they are, simplified."

It is a big shift from where he started, at graduate school in Pittsburgh. From a desire for other spaces, other realms, Hamish has discovered meaning in the simplicity of the situation in front of him. As well, his "self-consciousness just kind of vanished". The feeling that "I've got to make up something quick, on the spot here or people will see through me" has given way to feeling comfortable: "you kind of lose the ability to take credit or blame for anything. I don't mean responsibility. I feel <u>more</u> responsible actually. But the whole business of what

builds me up and makes me look better, really, whatever that is just starts to thin out."

And from an initial "romantic" motivation for meditation which sought for such validation, more recently it has been more centrally involved in working with the pain and suffering in his life. Within the past two years, he has been involved in a painful separation and divorce, during which time "there was nothing else to do except to practice...(It) doesn't take the pain away but it makes it less solid, so that you begin to expand around the pain, so there's space around the pain, so that you can go on, move on, make it through the night."

The magic and mystery originally sought so ardently comes now, when it does, unheralded as a blessing and no longer as validation of himself. It has come unsought as a "powerful, vivid, awesome" moment in the midst of therapy with unattached children: "On one occassion when I was doing that work I had a very clear experience of Chenrezig...sometimes when I'm working, I get a feeling, a vision, on top of my head of (Kalu Rinpoche's) presence that just spontaneously arises." And it has come also in synchronous events which have linked Green Tara (another of Hamish's meditation deities) with the birth of his son and with meeting and marrying his new wife. "However that worked, whatever that

is, there's definitely some kind of mystery to all of that that relates to meditation practice."

No other realm behind this one, "the meaning is actually quite present." His work as a therapist seems now to be an expression of the original search for "how to be an adult". Summing up the benefits of meditation for him, Hamish is blunt: "It's made me a lot better human being. It's made me more compassionate towards other people. It's given me a lot more confidence in myself and I think it's made my mind more flexible and powerful."

Jane's Story

Jane grew up in North Carolina, being prepared and preparing for her destined life as a Southern woman, "a very comfortable and beautiful life." Her father was English, her family Episcopal and the society was rigid and conservative. Whites and blacks knew their respective places and the world was orderly.

In that society, with its climate of fundmentalist Christianity, Jane's early spirituality was a given: "I had always had an interest in spiritual life." However, questions about the nature of that spiritual life arose quite early. From twelve to seventeen, Jane spent her summers studying piano at a Quaker music camp in the mountains of North Carolina. It became apparent that here was another way of looking at the world. From the Quakers, Jane got a glimpse of a life without prejudice, heard about non-violence.

These possibilities of alternative ways of being were nourished as well through this period by the world of books, as Jane was a voracious reader. She graduated from High School and followed the path of the debutante to University at Chapel Hill, where she did a Master's degree in the School of Education. While at University, a number of

events took place which now seem to her as milestones on a very long road.

During her Master's program, she had a choice between taking a statistics course or encounter group. Her choice of the latter, was "very penetrating": "That was the first sort of experience I had of people moving in on my psychic space in a direct way." If this was one harbinger for what was to come, her involvement in a second major social movement of the time was to be even more significant.

It was the 1960s and the Civil Rights movement was shaking the foundations of the South. "The Civil Rights Movement was important to my spiritual path because I was an upper middle class Southern debutante. I got swept into the civil rights movement literally. I literally walked out of a restaurant one night and a huge sea of black people who were demonstrating came sweeping down and I got swept into it and it kind of went from there."

Breaking from the expected path was not without its consequences. She had had it made "as far as a woman was concerned in that society." She married a Doctor and was fitting into the Junior League milieu as a Southern Belle. Her activity in the movement changed that and she was ostracized by former friends. "Being pushed out of what had been a comfortable position for me was part of my path, I

believe to coming to (meditation) practice and taking a stand for the relief of people in pain." As soon as she could she and her husband left for Colorado, where she had worked briefly as a waitress during her University days. Though she had some familiarity with Colorado, she found it hard to settle in. It was a long way from the protected environment of her youth and the "credentials" of a Southern Belle. She felt like an outsider, but in an odd way. She was President of the Medical Wives, but "not really connected to how to work and how to live in that world." Externally, performing her duties, inside she felt alienated and inauthentic.

For several years she struggled with her confusion, trying to fit into to this new society. She wrote and published poetry and that helped her maintain a sense of who she was, but she still didn't really feel connected. In 1972, she gave birth to her first child after having tried unsuccesfully for several years to become pregnant. She and her husband had resorted to the use of a "fertility pill" and while they had been succesful in the pregnancy, there was an unforseen side effect which did not show itself for many months.

In 1973, she began to have blackouts and fainting periods. As well, she started having pains in her lower abdomen. A visit to her gynecologist resulted in the discovery of a

grapefruit sized tumour on her left ovary. She needed surgery immediately. After calling her husband, she and the doctor rushed to the hospital. There, the attending physician warned her that she could die on the operating table. She had not even had time to see her son.

"I was given a whole pile of tranks and stuff and I thought, 'I'm dying, I'm fucking dying here' and I was 30 and so I went into the operating room and I did wake up....Has that covering burst, I would have been dead pretty quickly. So I was very lucky. I was incredibly lucky...and I'll never forget the first thought I had when I woke up, 'you've wasted your life', and the second thought I had was, 'you have to find a teacher' ".

An injection of morphine to help her cope with her pain compounded this break with the flow of her life. It brought on vivid hallucinations and though she's forgotten the context of her visions, they introduced her to different states of mind. After the operation, she was "incredibly, incredibly glad to be alive. The world was vibrant and beautiful and it was a very very powerful experience."

Up until this point, she's "a middle class Southern doctor's wife." She recalls, "I don't know from Jack about any of this. I was interested spiritually; I had tried to go to church, to the Episcopal Church, and none of that. I even

tried other brands of Christianity, but that didn't cut it. That wasn't it; that wasn't my way." Now, these thoughts ring in her mind: her life has been wasted and she has to find a teacher. The need for this teacher becomes a central concern and she started "praying to whatever powers that be" that she would find one.

After the operations, Jane and her husband moved from Denver to Boulder where she joined the Creative Writing Department at the University as a grad student and teaching assistant. In Boulder, she continued her search for a teacher, sampling from the variety of offerings available. She recalls with some humour dragging her "doctor husband" to EST and while she didn't find her teacher there, she did learn something about meditation. She began to read and study more about it.

At this time, she discovered that the neighbours with whom she and her son had struck up a relationship were Buddhists. Eager to learn more about meditation, she approached them for some teachings. They suggested she wait a couple of weeks and then ask again. "I waited fourteen days to the letter, actually watching my watch, the second hand going around and I went back at the end of two weeks and I said I waited two weeks and I know I want more meditation practice." They gave her some instruction and she began to meditate on a regular basis.

By this time, she had become aware that Boulder was the home of their teacher who was a Tibetan Lama and of Naropa Institute, the school he had established there. In fact, she had already run into this teacher by chance, one day in a Chinese restaurant. The friend she was having lunch with, a Hindu writer, was quite excited to find the lama eating there. Jane couldn't quite understand the fuss but was aware that "it was extremely hard to stay in (her) seat." "I very much wanted to go over and talk to him, but what was I going to say?" One day, her neighbours invited her to hear this man, their teacher, give a talk at Naropa.

He was talking about a concept central to Buddhist philosophy: emptiness. "I couldn't understand a single word he said...I could understand his accent and everything, but I could not understand the concept or the non-concept of emptiness and so, it just balled me up, wrapped me right around the axle." After all, she was a bright, intellectual Southern writer and not being able to understand what he was saying seemed very unusual. As well, the teacher seemed a bit dangerous to her. She was wary about getting to close to him. In fact, she felt that the meditation she was learning and practicing from his students was pretty good and she could do that, but she wasn't about to get involved with "this lama guy", Trungpa Rinpoche.

While she started practicing meditation more regularly, beginning to sit for day long meditations at Karma Dzong (the Buddhist centre), her marriage started to come apart and during this period, "it fell to pieces." "I go on teaching at Colorado University and going to classes and so on, have a now two year old child and am getting a divorce and basically going crazy." During this period, while she continued to meditate, her curiosity about Trungpa Rinpoche started to overcome her trepidation about him.

In the following spring, wanting to understand what the attraction is to this man ("basically, I wanted to get closer to him and watch and see what he was doing"), she went to his house to volunteer for some service. "I said what could I do and they told me I could jolly well clean the toilets. So this for the Southern Belle who had black servants and was this debutante and everything started back cleaning the toilets."

During this while in Boulder, as she moved ever closer towards full involvement in the Buddhist community, Jane continued to experience a series of such reversals. Not only did she have to work her way up in the hierarchy at the house, over the course of a year, from being "allowed to vacuum the basement" to getting "to watch him eat", she experiences the reverse prejudice of being a Southerner in the North.

While loving the energy and intellectual stimulation of being in a community with "very, very bright" people from cities and universities across the country, including the Beat poets, she struggled to overcome the feeling that she didn't belong there. City-wise students from New York and Chicago would tell her that she was being too damn friendly and phoney. Others would respond to her accent and steretype her as a dumb Southern cracker. It's at once a "very very exciting time" and a shocking, devastating time. As with her encounter group experience at Chapel Hill many years before, her psychic space is being entered, invaded, and the way she has put her life together until now continues to be dismantled.

Despite the struggle and the confusion and the ongoing snese of being an outsider, she started connecting with other people in the Buddhist community, or sangha. She remarried, this time to a Buddhist. She met and made a personal connection with her teacher, Trungpa Rinpoche who challenged her concerning her vestiges of prejudice. "Being a servant was very powerful for me. He (Trungpa) worked very powerfully with my mind, on the spot, in a physical way, in getting me to behave in a physical way ...and I ghot connected powerfully." The positive aspects of her life made it possible to cope with the dismantling that was taking place simultaneously.

For example, as a servant in her teache's house, Jane had to take lessons from the English major domo: "He was in charge of service at Rinpoche's house and here I was and I was a debutante. I knew, I mean I had given parties for hundreds of people and I knew how to do it and he'd be instructing me, 'now, we want you to put the fork here" and I would know that it didn't go there and I would have to do what they said even though I knew it was wrong. And all that was just terribly, terribly mind-blowing and I just felt like I was being dismantled, like I was just being shredded out. And in some way, I was."

In retrospect, she feels that she entered into the Buddhist community with a certain degree of arrogance. Of that time, she says, "on the one hand, I didn't have much confidence and on the other hand, I was pretty arrogant at the same time. I didn't know that particularly. I was also unaware. But I couldn't figure out how my relationships didn't work very well." She recalls that at first, she didn't really know how to meditate, that she was "pretending". It was confusing. Rather than providing her with any sense of comfort or tranquility, her meditation seemed to shake her foundations as much as her external life. Nevertheless, she persevered.

"Somehow I had enough faith to keep going, that confidence...I didn't even really know what I was habving faith in particularly. I trusted somehow that if I kept practicing that something would happen or cease to happen and I didn't really quite know what." After working for several years with the basic sitting meditation practice of shamatha, Jane began the Ngun-dro, or foundational practices.

She recalls, "when I did the prostrations, I just came apart like a hand-grenade. I was Ramboed". She worked with the Ngun-dro practice for the next two years. During DorjeSembha pracice, the second of the four practices, for the first time, she had a strong experience of clarity and serenity.

A Tibetan woman teacher had come to Boulder and was staying at a Buddhist guest house which had a shrine room where Jane was doing the DorjeSembha practice. "And she was practicing there and she cleared my mind, or practicing with her did. I don't mean that she did it but practicing there with her in her presence did...I experienced a tremendous amount of bliss and that was a revelation. I didn't know until that point that that was available." Thus, it was several years before her faith in meditation actually gave her some sense of fruition.

It felt that life was starting to become meaningful. Jane no longer felt the sense of wasting her life away which had arisen so powerfully on the hospital bed. She was starting to feel at home. Even so, it continued to be a struggle. The two years of ngun-dro practice were "the two most agonizing years I think I can think of."

Contributing to the agony was a marriage that looked more and more like a mistake. Jane's new husband was becoming progressively physically abusive. Upon finishing ngun-dro, Jane began a new meditation practice that was to prove instrumental in finally moving her through this period of confusion leading a breakthrough and dramatic change in outlook.

When she first practiced the sadhana after recieving the empowerment for the Vajrayogini practice, Jane was somewhat discouraged as she would fall asleep. But perseverance finally brought about "a real connection and that's when I actually experienced some serenity, some settling down, and that was great...after several thousand Vajrayogini mantra, I remember the experience of a lot of joy."

By this time, seven years ago, Jane had been practicing meditation for almost eight years and had developed to the degreethat she was now teaching it to new students. It had dismantled her sense of who she was including many patterns

of thinking and behaviour that had been learned growing up in the South, some of which, she feels sure, set her up for involvement in an abusive relationship. "It'd been a big process for me of taking apart some pretty destructive old programs and then there's sort of a wasteland period, where you float around with no identity for a while."

Her marriage had "turned out to be a really hideous situation. It was a violent marriage and he beat me up and I really had to sort of hit bottom. I'd been sort of addicted to relationship...I couldn't believe it was happening to me." Her practice at that time, plus the support of the sangha, was instrumental in maintaining her awareness of what was happening to her: "the practice makes you so intensely aware of what's going down." Once she decided to leave, that was it, there was no going back. "When I split, I split."

This was bottom, "my facade totally fell to pieces." At the same time, she was deeply involved in the Vajrayogini practice. Vajrayogini is a red semi-wrathful female deity who dances on one toe. She has a hook knife and a skull-cup full of blood. As with other Vajrayana yidam practices, one visualizes the deity both in front of one and then as oneself, prior to dissolving the whole display into emptiness and letting the mind rest. The practice seemed to

mirror precisely Jane's world. "I really get personally the significance of her for what happened to me.

As well, she experienced in this practice a sense of "presence". She was aware of starting "to feel decent, like a really decent person". She began to teach in the Shambhala training program. Then, as assistant director and later director of the training program, this sense of decency continued to expand and deepen and increasingly she became aware of her own personal power.

The gradual ripening of her meditation over the years as well as her feelings of success in being able to teach meditation to others gave to her new confidence; that she "might not be a total failure....even though I was a single woman, had failed twice at relationships and so on, I could still have a decent home and a kid and decent work ...I began to know I worked well with people, I could be a success in my interactions with people and I wasn't all alone."

Following the very clear pattern of practice laid down by her teacher, Trungpa Rinpoche, has brought Jane a long way. This path of meditation has proceeded systematically from the shamatha-vipassana breath meditation, through the foundational practices of Ngun-dro and Mahayana practices such as tong-len to the yidam practice of Vajrayogini. A

common and important effect of these meditations has been to "change the patterns, to break the habitual thought patterns."

Jane summarizes clearly the impact of this restructuring: "just sitting and allowing the emotional stuff to run freely or whatever and getting detachment from the tapes that are going on in your mind and understanding that's not who you are and you're not the emotional rushes and you're not the thought either. You're something more, or less...I began to have a sense of myself as a person...apart from convention or what my mother might want, or what my husband might want, or anybody might want: there is being here who has her own ideas and needs and wants...more than ideas, her own being, that I am in the world; I'm not nothing, a sense of self and it was different from ego which for me is a defense structure and the sense I am talking about is undefended, pretty vulnerable as a matter of fact."

As well as occuring as a result of sitting on the cushion and working directly with the flow of thoughts and emotions, study has also contributed to the changes that Jane has experienced. "Trungpa Rinpoche used to talk a lot about not being a stupid meditator and I studied a lot. I studied and prcaticed the slogans at Seminary and everything and you begin to mix your life around the teachings and the

meditation practice." It is the mix and the perseverence with it that ultimately brings about the changes.

Recently, Jane returned for a visit to North Carolina and realized "how fortunate" she is. While the Civil Rights Movement was instrumental in leaving the South, meditation was instrumental in leaving her life as a Doctor's wife. "I'm sort of grateful for the discomfort leading me to practice and I'm grateful for the practice leading me to totally dismantling the false, pseudo approach...it put me in touch more with who I genuinely am, rather than who I'm supposed to be." Had she not walked this path, Jane is convinced "that I would have been alcoholic and/or on tranquilizers or dead or institutionalized".

She has changed from a person she describes as cynical, negative, not very trusting, arrogant and controlling. "I've come a long way. It was intense and it was difficult and I really have a very good life at this point. I really am a happy person. I've really got what I want. I have a loving husband and a beautiful life, and an opportunity to do something, to practice...I belong. I belong here and that's very confidence giving, makes me feel I have a right here."

And, having a right to be here, not "having to push your weight around when you don't have to prove anything or be

anything: you are, you just are" and "then", she says, "you can start having fun."

Sid's Story

Sid's is a story of struggle, of polarity and conflict. His meditative path has involved a duration and intensity that few other Westerners have experienced since it includes, as well as long-term daily practice, an immersion in the traditional three-year retreat of Tibetan, or Vajrayana Buddhism.

Sid has struggled, contended, wrestled with the angel of a different world, an alien culture, the practices of which seem variously frozen, absurd, and meaningless. A struggle as well with laziness, distraction, anger and lust. A journal entry from the third month of his long retreat typifies this: "Painful day. I am becoming sensitive to my internal chatter, the desires, the despair, rising, falling, hope & fear. So fucking painful."

A search for meaning in the face of meaninglessness. Peace and calm in the midst of a heightened sense of chaos, speed and confusion. One culture, steeped in faith, rubs up against the other steeped in praise of ingenuity and spontaneity, sandpaper on a chalkboard. Doubt and faith: "depression caused from energy drain due previous mental and body worry" (Dec. 1986)

Sid's story, as chronology, begins around 1966. He's watching television in Toronto and there's a human interest story which grabs his attention. Years later, he remembers vividly the images of black clad figures gazing into space. This news spot, seen when he is "something like" eight years old, is the earliest memory Sid has of anything to do with meditation. He is the oldest three brothers. They grow up in numerous small towns and cities of Northern Ontario. His family are working class, truck-drivers, mine workers, moving from job to job.

When he is ten or eleven years old, in Elliot Lake, North Ontario, a uranium mining town, he climbs the hill behind his elementary school at recess. He sits down, alone, with a pebble in his hands on which he has written the word, "love". He holds the word in his mind as well, saying it to himself, over and over, thinking "love, love" and when the bell rings, calling him back to school, he is already forming in his mind an intention. "I knew I didn't know how to meditate but I wanted to meditate and I'd have to wait until I would know how to meditate".

He recalls a time in Grade Nine, the second time in Grade Nine, when his teacher asked him to write a story. The character in the story is a young guy with a striped t-shirt who becomes a "65 year old man in his rocking chair

saying what the fuck was all this for?" Against the backdrop of Sudbury's giant smokestack and the surrounding wasteland, sharing his generation's concern about the possibilities of nuclear war, he felt like he would soon see the collapse of Western Civilization. His family life was hell. There were no paths around that made sense.

At thirteen, Sid left home. By the time he was fifteen, he was "basically living on the street, was on drugs, living in men's rooming houses, on my own, just a wild young guy on the street". Nevertheless, he was impelled with a longing for meaning, "a very deep interest growing in me in some kind of spirituality". And against this background of longing, as at many times later in his life, sparked meetings and events of meaning and purpose, moments of intuition, vibrant with certainty.

At fifteen, he's "on his own, just a wild young guy on the streets", living in men's rooming houses, doing drugs. During this time, he meets a guy on the street, the first person he has ever met who talks seriously about spirituality. He feels an immediate familiarity. He walks into a "weird little bookstore", finds a copy of the 60s classic "Be Here Now" by Ram Das, "and as soon as I opened it, it was like 'click'. I read the words, looked at the pictures and knew, this was where I was going".

About the same time, after having been busted for drugs, he went up to Ottawa to get away from Sudbury. Someone at the Youth Hostel takes him to see Sri Chinmoy, the Hindu guru. While the scene is "too trippy", nevertheless, the holy man impresses Sid with a sense of wisdom, "a real keen insight into what was going on and somehow not caught in it. Though he hadn't had any particular religious background in his family and his only real exposure to Christianity was through the Jesus freaks he met on the street, he had a feeling that there was an answer.

Someone at this time gave him a copy of Carlos Castaneda's first book and the idea of the "man of knowledge" became a symbol for Sid's path. His journey, both spiritually and physically, had begun. He reflects that at that time, there

was "this very deep interest growing in me in some kind of spirituality and about meditation."

For the next few years, Sid feeds this interest with readings of Castaneda and other books of the time, but he is becoming increasingly depressed with the lack of direction and meaning in his life. On the surface, there's magic in the air when he and his friends are out at night, hanging out in weird restaurants. But underneath it all, "there was this part of me questing in side, looking for some kind of truth, a strong intuitive feeling that the whole thing was bullshit." There's a decision point, an "edge, a certain point when it becomes serious business...you see where you're headed". He feels finished with this stage of his life, the street life.

But at the same time, when he looks around at the adults in his life, "guys who'd go work in the mine for thirty years, doing some job, marry the little lady, having a bunch of kids, by the time they're sixty-five, what are they?...there was no joy in their eyes and they just plug into the big company or whatever it was and just live out this very small mundane life." While he had a sense of some elusive meaning, "a very deep sense that life is something very precious and meaningful". It scared him to think he might become like the older men he saw in Sudbury.

So at eighteen, with this sense of closure with all that had gone before, in a moment of deep despair, he sits down behind the Value-Mart in downtown Sudbury, and for the first time in his life, he prays. He prays not to God as such, but to some sense of something eternally good, prays for some kind of help. And as he sits and prays a young man cycles past him and then back to him, and relates to him the Biblical parable of the three seeds and Sid is inspired there and then to leave Sudbury and head West.

He ends up for a while in Edmonton, where he works his first real job at a New Age restaurant, meeting others involved in alternative life styles. He briefly visits with a group of meditators, "aura balancers, into channeling and things" who did some kind of meditation using imagery of white light. But Sid wasn't comfortable with this, "too trippy". After a year he moves on, to Whitehorse.

In Whitehorse, he hears about a guy who's building a cabin out in the bush, needing some help. When Sid joins him, he discovers that the man is a Buddhist. He's one of many "really eccentric" people that Sid will meet up north, many of whom have been to university, yet choose to live simply, often in squatters huts, some living just hand to mouth.

It is in Whitehorse that Sid meets his first Buddhist teachers. One is a traditional Tibetan Lama, Kalu Rimpoche.

This is 1976 and Kalu Rimpoche is "this little old shaky man" who's doing some ceremony, a Medicine Buddha empowerment. Sid is not impressed. The cultural trappings are an immediate turn off for him. But at the same time, he is attracted by the style of the Buddhist students. "They didn't push. They were just into meditation. They were together in who and what they were".

And into this environment came Namgyal Rimpoche, a Western Buddhist teacher, who really impresses Sid, "a very powerful charismatic man", and is introduced by him to the practice of Chenrezig yidam meditation, in English. "Soon as I started doing it, it just clicked like that...I really liked the aspect of compassion and love, that was all the way through it." Now, for the first time, he's no longer doing guesswork when he meditates. He is now in a formal situation, with teachers.

Suddenly, there's a focus for the restless, probing, intense questioning of the past years. "Sometimes, there were people I couldn't talk to and a lot of times when I would talk, I'd feel like all my words were fake issue, they were empty, they were just empty words." He has been grappling with questions of meaning, purpose and direction since leaving Sudbury and now, there is some sense of community, some sense of direction.

Sid's about twenty now and he's starting to wonder what he's going to do with the rest of his life. He contemplates healing, herbology, construction, carpentry. He's not sure which way to go. He meets "this little guy with a big laugh", an old time Dharma student who's been around for years. "I ask him all my questions and he just laughs most of the time and he says, "well, why don't you go to India?"

And again, deep inside him, there's a response. "And it was that very deep intuitive feeling inside that made me leave Sudbury, that brought me to Whitehorse, said 'go to India'." And just before he leaves for India, Sid has a dream. "It's like a commercial. This dream flashes up and it's Rolling Stone magazine. The cover of the magazine, and on it, it says 'KALU RIMPOCHE IS COMING'. A picture on it, feature picture, Kalu Rimpoche with a big fancy hat on and little monks around him. And it just flashed up and disappeared, five second spot, it was nothing!" And via Europe, through India, he finds himself at last, "really freaked out", in Darjeeling, up in the mountains, booked into the youth hostel.

Without knowing it, he finds himself a hour's jeep trip from Kalu Rimpoche's monastery in Sonada. At a bakery, talking to some Western dharma students, he realizes how close he is and the next day, hops in a jeep, and arrives at the monastery. He will spend the next nine months there.

At first, it's hard. He has the same discomfort with the teacher that he had the first time, in Whitehorse. He's "not impressed". But, more than that, he finds himself fiercely resisting the focus of impermanence, suffering, the frustrating and unsatisfactory elements of life. Every four or five days, he'd go listen to Rimpoche give some teachings, bombard him with questions, and then return to his room to practice the meditation instructions he'd been given. All through this period of questioning, there's an undercurrent of intuitive encouragement. "At a very gut level, a deep level, something was going on. I don't know what, I didn't understand it, but very deep down there was this sense that 'this is the most important thing you can do, being in Sonada, doing what I was doing". This despite the fact that he doesn't like the practices that he is doing, ngung-dro, the foundations. And despite the fact that he is doing his meditations now in Tibetan, a language which is mumbo-jumbo to him, frustrated and hating it.

Fortunately he meets a woman who acts as a bridge into this strange new world and she helps, along with the other Westerners who are there. He enjoys his ongoing practice of Chenrezig, but the foundations, particularly prostrations, are really hard, a struggle. "Sometimes, it would be like getting hit with a sledge hammer - BANG, that's what it was like, it was horrible. I hated it." He struggles with doubt

and is torn by conflicting forces. The teacher's style repels while at the same time, the depth of his experience touches him.

He rages against the formality of the practices, the strangeness and unfamiliarity and the pessimism of the teachings, but still he hangs in. A sense of inner emptiness propels him, "a sense of not feeling good about who and what I was. All the role examples I ever had, parents, family, teachers, friends, none of them I ever wanted to be, none of them satisfied me." This is experienced as an anguish, a hurting and sadness that is bound up with a yearning for relief, release.

He maintains a hope that this path will help to fill that emptiness. When he meditates, the ache recedes. While the "thoughts and emotions are still there, there's something being touched on much more fundamental and deeper inside. Something content. It's just present and so the thoughts and emotions aren't everything...There's much more spaciousness for them to move. I don't have to associate myself with them. There's a place in the meditation I can just rest, hang out, just be. And it's not static, ...it's a calm depth, it's very fulfilling, very enriching. Like coming home, like coming back home."

As well, he has a strong, gut sense of appropriateness and the teachings on love and compassion continue to reverberate and satisfy him on a moral and intellectual level. He finally even surrenders somewhat to the language, hearkening to Rimpoche when the teacher says that to really understand the Dharma, this will be necessary.

Slowly, imperceptibly, he starts to feel a connection with this "shaky old man", Kalu Rimpoche. That persona, he starts to feel, is just a front. "At some profound level, it's connecting with him. Part of me says it's coming from him, but that's not quite right. There's something there that includes him, I don't understand it. It's intuitive, it's a felt sense, it's not logical, it's just in the guts". And it's the teacher's presence too, that slowly works on Sid and wins him over.

One time in particular, Sid arrives at the teachings and bombards the Lama with question after question. "I went through my whole spew of questions, put it to him and he answered them back and he gave me that whole time and I appreciated that and just wore out the questions I had. Sit down and think about what he had to say. I respected him." So the man's patience, his compassion and respect and quality of listening won Sid over and also, his "unpretentiousness" - "he was sort of the centre of attention and he sort of shifted over, and I was back and I

was watching Rimpoche, and he was wearing these long sleeves and he'd gotten one dirty and he went over and wiped it off on some grass. He turned around and looked at me because I'd been watching and he just smiled, like this little mischievous boy who'd been caught doing something, you know. It was sort of like 'here, they've made me out to be some sort of great venerable old man, I don't care, I'm just me.' A whole natural unpretentiousness."

Over all, the teacher gave Sid the feeling that he was respected. He felt encouraged and in that environment of encouragement and respect, he was able to ask Rimpoche the burning question of the Vajrayana practitioner. Was Kalu Rimpoche his guru, his root lama? Rimpoche's answer - that every situation, every person, every thing, was his root lama, his teacher - struck Sid resonated within and broke through layers of idealization, vastly expanding his understanding of teacher and teachings.

Near the end of Sid's stay in Sonada, Kalu Rimpoche was about to put in a three year retreat, and when he put on his hat and began the ceremony with his monks, Sid recollected that he had already dreamt the moment. "And at that point in my life, I knew I was gong to do the three-year retreat". The next stage of his life is being prepared. "The program was plugged in".

He returns to Canada from India in late 1978. He returns, impressed by the poverty of India, with the spirituality, the strength and patience of the people there. He has been moved by their faith and these elements stand in sharp contrast to the lifeways of the North Americans to whom he has returned. His re-entry, to take up residence in a Buddhist community in Burnaby, is a shock to him. He experiences people within the Buddhist community as lonely, hurt, and isolated people, many of them "socially incompetent".

He decided to break from that environment following a party. He suddenly realized that he was unable to relate to non-Buddhists, understood that he too had fallen into an insular existence, felt "weird and isolated". "I wasn't connecting. I didn't feel like I could share." If this was the result of involvement in a Dharma Centre, Sid was not interested. He didn't attribute this to any way to his meditation practice, but he determined to leave that environment.

In 1980, he moved to Saltspring Island. His meditation practices at the time included Chenrezig, ngundro and shamatha. He started helping to build the three year retreat centre, met Ann and started living with her. He became more and more disillusioned with the Dharma "scene" through this period. When Kalu Rimpoche visited in 1982 to

put the first retreat in, he told Sid basically to be patient and though he was virtually ready to leave, he stayed on, patiently waiting until the second retreat could go in. That was scheduled to take place in 1986.

From 1982 to 1985, Sid worked, at construction, as a treeplanter, saving money. The first retreat came out in 1985 and Sid was planning on moving up onto the land where he could study Tibetan, meditate and prepare for retreat. He's twenty eight years old. He and Ann break up in the summer of 1985. And that summer, "I met an incredible woman, fell madly in love with her, blew me away, never had such an intense experience, sexual experience, love, with anybody." As this relationship progressed over the next six months and reached it's end, and as the time for entry into retreat approached, Sid's life started coming unglued.

"She touched something in my heart. And I felt this rip open in my heart that I never felt before...I felt my confidence, my sense of who and what I was, the ground just collapsed from under me. I felt frantic, I felt spaced out, I felt disassociated, I just felt right out of it, emotional, depressed, up tight, all kinds of anguish, groundless." In the context of this groundlessness, this opening of emptiness, when Sid was engaged in meditation on the deity Mahakala, the familiar intuitive voice came to him and said "go to India." In three weeks, he was back in India. As if

he were expecting him, Kalu Rimpoche was waiting at the foot of the monastery steps on his return.

Over the next two months, Sid slowly healed the anguish of the loss of this love. He does lots of meditation: Dorje Sempa, Mandala offerings, Chenrezig and shamatha, and Guru Yoga. Yet despite the nature of the meditation, the sessions, at first, were extremely painful. It is impossible to practice shamatha or mindfulness meditation. Images of the woman who has left him, deep soul searching, lots of hurt, lots of anguish.

The practice of Dorje Sempa through this time, provided him with "the support of this clarity, pureness, this whiteness of Dorje Sempa, kind of a groundedness." This practice seemed to fit most closely with Sid's experience now: "the white light coming in and all the black shit going out...and also the empowerment part of that. Dorje Sempa saying, 'yeah, you're pure now. You're a good guy. You're okay.' Smiling and chuckling, giving me a wink."

As well, hearing something powerful in a statement of Rimpoche's - "It's all Mind, it's all only Mind" - he started working with visualizations of his friend, carrying on a form of active imagination, connecting with her, dialoguing, and then, as in Vajrayana practice, dissolving the emptiness of this form into the emptiness of himself.

And as the wound of his loss was healing, another question loomed larger and larger. As the time for the retreat became more imminent, Sid, from his depths, began to question his purpose. Seemingly, there was no answer which could justify such an act. "It was like a fist holding my guts inside, squeezing, saying, 'Just do it. Any reasons you have for doing it's totally wrong. Any reasons for not doing it's totally wrong'."

At this time, as Sid underwent a total life review, he is overwhelmed with feelings of disappointment, "disappointment with the whole fucking thing. I felt I'd been used, I felt I'd been wronged, I felt an incredible amount of disrespect had been given to me." This sense of disappointment may have been exacerbated by practices like Mandala, which unlike Dorje Sempa, Sid experienced as meaningless, mechanical. The practices are experienced as mumbo-jumbo. Yet in the midst of this, the pain and the meaninglessness, the highly regarded teacher Jamgon Kongtrul Rimpoche tells Sid to carry on, that the obstacles will pass. And sure enough, on completion of the requisite number of mandala offerings, the "fixation" on his friend, the feeling of having been ripped away from the midst of a feast, fell away and she was no longer an issue for him.

And slowly too, he reaches a resolution on the retreat and on the disappointments and betrayals he has felt from his teachers. He recognizes that he has been projecting too many hopes and expectation sonto them, feels a little embarrassed. He sees these teachers now as mortals, like himself, and while wishing that they had been more honest with him about their limitations, forgives them as well, and thus prepares his return and his imminent entrance to the retreat.

Upon returning, he makes a quick trip to visit his mother and brother, good-byes before leaving the world for a while. "I see a cold hurting pain in the eyes of my family. There is an ache of loneliness in each of their hearts. We are all trapped in who we are, our past history, the pain held, and the ignorance of not knowing any difference...the air is so thick with moving changing mists and swirling fogs of emotional veils that cover everything and distort any light trying to come through." And then, by early September, he has entered retreat, listening to "monks chanting, crickets chirping, autumn song, fills summer night". The regimen has begun.

Sid begins discussion of this period with a cautionary note. He's not sure how much he will be able to reveal about his practice in retreat since much of this material is generally held in private between teacher and student. The nature of

Vajrayana and the intimacy of the relationship between meditator and yidam preclude certain areas for discussion. "It's very private, very personal, and there's a flavour of blessing that comes with the practices. Nevertheless, he's willing to try. He begins by comparing the relationship with the yidams with people. Your response to them will vary. Sometimes, "it's like being with a person 10 hours a day. After a while, you get sick of them or maybe overwhelmed by them because they really have a powerful presence and they hit a lot of buttons."

The retreat itself consists of working with many yidams, with yogic practices. Most of the practice is done individually, in your room, by yourself, but there are also group practices. As the practices went on, day after day, month after month, one practice following another, Sid began to discern a pattern. In many ways, there's no choice in the situation: "so, I'd get a lot of resistance to some things and I'd go through my resistance and I'd get angry and pissed off and frustrated and really upset but then over a period of time I'd start to acclimatize and finding aspects that did work for me and emphasize those aspects and then some things could really open up for me."

The first practice he enjoyed but many others he did not. Prostrations, for example: "they bring out negative stuff inside of you. Just by the very nature of throwing yourself

down on the ground and worshipping these imaginary deities who you have no idea who and what they are." In particular, he found that way of manifesting humility difficult. He stopped 30,000 short of his requisite 100,000 prostrations and didn't start again.

In the course of the first weeks, doing the prostrations, becoming aware of unpleasant group interactions, the doubts that he had struggled with in India once again surged into awareness. Questions of authenticity arose again, what was he doing, was this really him? A disillusionment came on that persisted for the next three months. It was a really tough struggle, just to hang in. Unless he could find a way to personally connect with these practices, he knew he would have to quit. So then, he kept himself going with promises, going one yidam at a time, as he had heard that's where the "pay-off" lay.

Also as time went on, more interpersonal conflict arose. Sid became frustrated in his interactions with the other retreatants, dissatisfaction with the teacher and the overall learning environment. He was finding that when he went to his room to meditate, to practice the particular visualizations they were working on, thoughts and images of unresolved, negative interpersonal interactions would arise.

He started to see that "you get very sensitive to what you're normally not conscious of, underlying moods and drives; fear ,insecurity, anger, all kinds of stuff...the very hidden undercurrents of what is going on." This reflection brings Sid directly to the two complementary sets of learning that he derived from the retreat: an appreciation for the power of the Vajrayana, and a new found awareness and understanding of his own psychological processes. [I'm] "much more conscious of what is going on with me now. And not so embarrassed about it, not so ashamed of when I feel afraid, insecure, jealous, angry. Now, I can just see that and accept it and say that's part of me...you become more and more in touch with what you are." This experience stands in stark contrast to a widespread and dominant notion about meditation as leading to some sort of enlightenment or being a "spiritual superman" who is beyond all negativity.

It seemed to Sid as if the other retreatants were going through a similar process. He experienced the group enmeshed in "very heavy game playing", a lot of nastiness, bickering. On one occasion, Sid sat immersed in his anger and resentment towards another retreatant for several days. This was only resolved after first recognizing the repetitiveness of the pattern, acknowledging that his discursive mind was not changing the situation or relieving

his suffering and then posing, at a deep level, a bodily level, the question: "What is the essence of this pattern?"

The question led to a focus on body sensations which revealed a knot of tension in the pit of his stomach. "And what arose when I did that was this deep sense of fear and insecurity and it was the first time I actually caught that. And saw that I felt very insecure and intimidated by this person in that retreat. I felt very powerless. I felt like a victim...and that was a very deep-rooted sense in me...and once it came up it was like the demon came up and was dancing in front of me. And I had the fucker. Because I recognized that quality of feeling had been in my life a lot before. And I hadn't recognized it. And now I finally got the bastard, I knew who and what it was." This was a big shift for Sid that influenced the course of the retreat from that point as he now had a handle on a previously unconscious pattern and having identified it felt he had a way of working with it.

Indeed, this experience profoundly influenced Sid's approach to meditation. Instead of counselling in the traditional manner the labeling and letting go of thought/emotion, he has come to believe that one should contact this feeling directly, feel it and accept it. He would not stop with this "acceptance" but continue to question the source of such experiences. Working with this process, Sid discovered that

family images began to surface. "Mother, father, and then a whole lot of sense of who and what I was and I started to come to the realization that I didn't want to do it the way I was raised. Alcoholic father, co-dependent mother, really messed up family background and I started to see, more and more, how much that affected me and shaped a lot of my personality and drives in me and a real kind of compassionate aspiration that I can do something with it. It's not a dead end."

Accepting and working with these emotions that arose in the course of his retreat meditations, Sid began to feel more and more integrated. With an understanding and acceptance of such feelings as victimization, intimidation, they would lose their power over him. He stayed with this process over many weeks, hours on end, aware of his body relaxing, shifting, as memories and images formed. Images of mother and father and his childhood with the feelings of childhood shame, of not-rightness, something poisonous. The variety of yidams would draw forth different images and feelings.

For two years, he waded through a series of "wretched deep depression, ...some suicidal kinds of thoughts, self-hatred and loathing and blackness. Just a deep feeling of wretchedness a lot of the time." But slowly, the feelings lifted and it seemed as though a process of purification was taking place. And by following this process of acceptance

he was amazed, over time to see in others, the same fears and vulnerabilities, and he found his heart going out to them in a spontaneous compassion. It was this process that, in retrospect, made the retreat worthwhile, gave it its true meaning.

By the third year, the technical elements of the retreat - the pujas, the details of the complex meditations - had been mastered and much of the group conflicts had been resolved. People knew each others boundaries and limits and there seemed to be a mutual respect for these. "And I wasn't worried about becoming enlightened or attaining anything. The shit got kicked out of that and more and more it was just trying to be an ordinary human being. That was enough. Just trying to do that, that's enough. So I was feeling much stronger and happier with myself."

The meditation practice of that period has left Sid feeling much more content and whole. A previous desperation in his seeking (for meaningful activity, for purpose and fulfillment) has been replaced with a sense that he has something to bring to the world, something to bring to whatever activity he engages in. The meditation "tools" "helped turn me inward, become much more conscious of what was going on inside and somehow that meaningfulness, that divine quality of life was a little more accessible."

Reflecting on his path, Sid suggests that the Vajrayana tradition of Buddhism with which he has been working is in essence "just a set-up to give you access to that meaningfulness in life, that divine quality." The techniques of meditation "somehow" connect one with the force of enlightenment represented by or embodied in the teacher (in this case Kalu Rimpoche). This connection with the teacher ("one of the most graceful, beautiful men I've ever met") acts as compass and touchstone. "I just have to think of him and there's just this heartfelt, literally a heartfelt sense inside of a very deep profound connection...that gives me access to something effective". And it is this that gives him the strength "to be Sid Whyte as he is". He honours this connection deeply.

So there seem to be at least two strong streams running through and ultimately converging in Sid's experience of practice: the personal and what we would call psychological process and the spiritual. Blending these streams into a cognitive understanding is difficult. Clarity is elusive, and Sid once again is left to refer to a "very deep intuitive sense" which in this context suggests that "by doing the practices and trying to live in an appropriate manner that's conducive to that awareness, that divine nature or whatever has a possibility of sparking through."

It has been fourteen years since Sid left Sudbury, sick at heart with the limited and spirit-less options around him. He recalls his family there with regret, contemplating the degree to which alcohol become a substitute for meaning, a surrogate for openness and goodness. Sid seems to have discovered through his own struggle, via a path of meditation, the answer to the question posed many years before: "there's got to be something more than this".

Since coming out of retreat a little over a year before this interview, Sid has met a woman and fallen in love, is again seeking his way in the world, making vocational decisions. Reflecting on his path, he sees a new direction opening. In some ways, Sid seems to have been "doing it backwards from when I was very young." It's only now that he's really started engaging in "psychological work" - " trying to take that Western ego that's developed and make sure it will grow." To do this, he's started undergoing therapy in men's groups to continue exploring the issues which surfaced for him in retreat. Individual therapy, reading Gestalt, Mindell, Gendlin and others, living in a family the way he could never have done before, are all part of this exploration, and they are all "coming from this training, from these ten years of my Buddhist practice".

It's is as though he is maintaining two types of ego. His Western ego and his Buddhist ego, which slowly came to birth

through his years of practice. His Tibetan ego, he refers to as "the foundation. That's when I come into this (meditation) room and sit down to practice. Being by myself, that's when I have the sense of being who and what I am is really strong." He maintains this self with regular practice but comments that he sometimes misses the intensity and depth of the meditation afforded by retreat.

It seems that this practice sustains Sid while he ventures out into the newer and curently riskier struggle of developing his "Western ego", while he examines "these fears of rejection, all the symptoms of ACOA" with which he now struggles. Meditating now is "like drinking from the well". While the world continues to draw forth negative feelings of not being loved, fears of rejection, anxieties and insecurities, meditation continues to put such feelings into perspective.

His practice allows him "to loosen up a bit and laugh at [himself]. We're here. Right now, in this moment, we're alive right now. Really alive now. Couple of days from now, we could be dead. Sure you're fucked up and neurotic and you had a horrible family life, the world's going all to hell, have a drink of wine, enjoy the sunset, enjoy each other, because if you don't, if you can't do it now, you might never do it."

GENERAL STORY

In this section, I will present a general account derived from the five individual stories. While the preceding tales stayed very close to the language, voice and understanding of the participants, this narrative, responding to the task of greater distance and interpretation, will broaden our perspective so as to permit a new range of understanding, which at the same time always remains recognizable by the participants as their story. The general account will be organized according to the themes which emerged.

Questioning

The story begins with a question, or perhaps more precisely with a questioning. For each of the participants, this questioning occurs at different points in their lives, but regardless of its moment of occurrence, it marks the beginning. For Augusta, it is occasioned by the vast open space of the Prairie sky. For Sid, the question is embedded in a word, "love", written on a rock. Jane's question shakes her back to life on a hospital bed at 30. For each, the question is similar. It is the question expressed somewhat tritely in the phrase, "what does it all mean?"

Given that the question arises at all and marks the beginning, it is important to acknowledge that it does not arise in a vacuum. In each of the preceding stories, it arises in a specific cultural, social and family context. And in each, as well, inasmuch as each of these contexts is historically conditioned, it transcends them and addresses the fundamental and existential questions of Being: firstly, what is it to be, and secondly, how shall I live or respond to this fact of being. And while this question marks the beginning of the story, we do not leave it behind at that point, because it continues to motivate and impel the ongoing path of each of the participants.

Dislocation and loss

Let us take up these several contexts, for an understanding of them is critical for our story. The question arises from a need that is at once personal and cultural. This is clear in Sid's story as he reflects on the fact that so many people in his family and early milieu were alcoholic. "They're competent and proud of their workmanship, but they have no vision in their life. They have no sense of what they're here for. This is just work, eat, drink and fuck. Is that all there is to their life?" Looking around for adult role models in Sudbury, Sid saw reflected back to him only the desperation and dead end of such a life.

Hamish, similarly, looked around himself in graduate school and there were no models of what it was to be an adult. In each of the stories we find an initial lack of meaningful structures. This lack in each case is in sharp contrast to an early sense of hopefulness. Jane expressed an interest in spirituality in childhood. Augusta, as well, from an early age, wanted to understand her experience and with her friend "wondered what it all meant", but "nobody seemed to have very much wisdom in the culture in which I grew up."

The structures of meaning which could sustain the development of these young people seem to be lacking. Augusta is perhaps most explicit. She sees at an early age the hypocrisy and corruption of principles in the Church. Like her father and paternal grandmother, she is disinterested in materialism and finds the pursuit of wealth ignoble. Hamish noted a dissatisfaction with Christianity and recalls arguing with his classmates in high school about the existence of God. Sid is vehement about Christianity. It "broke the back of any kind of authentic spirituality, crushed it down and used it to keep people down. It sickens me to think of what they did." He compares the achievement of goals in our culture to eating whipped cream, devoid of substance.

Dylan focused most explicitly on the impact of the absent father. It is to the father that he looked for boundaries,

for direction and for support. The father was to carry and define the projects of life for the son. But he was not present. For Augusta as well, the father represented a loss, a lack, an absence: "he was really unhappy because he couldn't relate to who I was because he had a fixed point of view about who he wanted."

Searching

There is a seeking then, which does not seem to be reciprocated by the culture, in either its formal institutions or the family. Indeed these structures are sometimes seen as obstructing the agency of the persons involved. This obstruction is raised explicitly in Jane's story. When she participates in the civil right's struggle, she is ostracized by her immediate social circle of friends who attempt to restrict her activity to the socially and politically approved role of the Southern Belle. Later, it is an abusive and violent husband who acts to constrain and control her. Her efforts in each case to assert herself are highlighted through reference to the broader situation of a racist and sexist culture.

While responding to the historical specifics of their time, the participants develop their own understanding of their individual suffering and discontent. Hamish speaks of his awareness of "inherent suffering" in adolescence and young

adulthood. For him, life feels constricted, is abrasive. He is concerned with people seeing through him, "an edge of something was wrong with me." There is a lack of trust in himself. Augusta had the feeling of always walking the fence or else being on the wrong side. Years later, in meditation, Sid reconnects with some of his early feelings, "kind of like a feeling of shame, kind of feeling not right, poisonous." For Jane, who was thirty years old and had already established herself on a coherent life path at the time, the awakening after her operation to the meaninglessness of life is a profound shock. Through such images and feelings, dissatisfaction and pain are experienced as intensely personal, bound up with one's own being, however much they may be mediated by the culture. They speak to something beyond time.

However, though they are thrown into this world and while struggling with its constraints, they experience glimpses of other possibilities. Jane's sojourn with the Quakers creates a lifelong impression as does Augusta's connection with her father's mother. Dylan finds a strength within himself, to withdraw to a restfulness within. Hamish and Sid recall images of monks from far away. For each person, there are markers on the horizon that speak of possibility. Some, if they are able, turn to academic studies of the arts or humanities in college or university.

Frequently, books present alternative worlds in which a greater degree of meaning, a sense of freedom might be found. Books speaking of the wisdom and traditions of other cultures play an increasingly important part in the quest. Certain books in particular are cited with great regularity: Carlos Casteneda, Ram Dass, and Chogyam Trungpa. Seemingly unsupported or thwarted in their own culture, other traditions appear as the repository of the possible.

Besides a search in books, there is as well a turn to ecstatic experience. All five of the participants experienced altered states through the use of drugs; four of them intentionally, the fifth accidently. These give rise to experiences of other states of mind, the feeling of a multitude of senses, a perception of other realms which were richer, fuller, more relaxed and open. Sid, for example, recalls his "acid-trucking" days: "we'd go out to these weird restaurants and there was a real magic in the air." These experiences solidified an intuition that there was more to reality than that which had been presented by "mainstream" institutional culture. As well, by participating in socially-disapproved and illegal activity, the participants often set themselves against parents and other authority figures, using such opposition as further confirmation of themselves as outsiders.

The experiences themselves would sometimes be taken for something real and concrete in themselves and Hamish for example, "had some idea that spiritual practice could act as a gateway into these other realms." The compelling power of these ecstatic experiences seemed sufficient to justify them. Various ways to capture or maintain these states are attempted: art, dance, writing, music, trance states, the search for power sites. But while tantalizing, there is still some dissatisfaction, some level of awareness that this approach is limited. For Sid, on the streets, this came quite quickly as he saw his friends burn out, become ill or die or end up in prison. For Hamish, the let-down after highs was an irritant. Dylan wanted a solidification of the experience that dissolved, an understanding.

By now, one has usually heard or read of meditation and there is an idea that this may bring the desired state of mind or understanding that is sought. There might be some effort to practice meditation but one is not sure of exactly how to proceed. For others, there is a search for someone to act as a guide.

Meeting with the teacher

Augusta's boyfriend sees a poster on the street. Friends of Sid and Dylan take them to see a lama. Hamish embarks on a

search, checking the credentials of many spiritual teachers who are passing through town. Jane goes to hear the teacher with the neighbours who have been teaching her meditation. They go with a mixture of curiosity and hope, and sometimes fear as well. The meeting with the teacher is a momentous event. While a person might see a number of teachers while on the quest, often one will stand out as the teacher.

The first meetings can be profoundly dramatic. Sometimes, the very first contact can be pivotal. Augusta experienced something extraordinary the first time she saw Kalu Rinpoche. For the others, the critical meeting took place later. There seems often to be a linguistic and cultural gap to be bridged prior to the connection: Jane doesn't understand a word and Sid's "not impressed" with the teacher who looks totally out of place in his Tibetan garb in Whitehorse. For them the connection is later.

Dylan is immediately "drawn into the magnetism" of the teacher and is impressed with his authority and clarity, but the ritual, with its sense of the exotic, was also instrumental in engaging him with the subsequent path of meditation. For Hamish, it was not so much the initial ceremony as the following interview that clinched his feeling that this was "really it." In that meeting, he experienced a "total groundlessness...infused with kindness" in which all constrictions and preconceptions fell away.

Acceptance by the teacher

The impact of the teacher is in marked contrast to the lack of direction and structure provided by the culture. The teacher is experienced as someone credible, worthy of respect. Augusta was sometimes surprised at the depth of emotion she experienced in his presence, or even now, just thinking of him. She recalls his kindness, the warmth which she is accepted, but even more profoundly she is moved by his wisdom. "That's why I start to cry...because I looked and looked with such longing for so long for someone who just spoke the truth."

While Sid first sees just a shaky little old man, seemingly out of place, he is later impressed by the teacher's unpretentiousness and his confidence. He felt respected. But again, most of all, "it's his depth of experience, his mind, his enlightenment touches me in a very deep way...I feel like a thirsty man coming to water." The teacher answers a sense of incompleteness inside that no-one else has been able to satisfy. Sometimes he would go for an interview with all sorts of questions, "and it would be just one look from him, he'd just look right through me to the bone, deeper than I'd ever seen my self." The relationship ultimately involves "a literally heartfelt sense inside of a very deep, very profound connection."

For Dylan, the warmth that spontaneously arises when his teacher puts his arm around him is overwhelming. He is taken by surprise by the depth of his emotion. He knows he needs to understand this experience. It is years later, in therapy, that he comes to understand this as a longing for the father. Sid, as well, speaks of this longing: "the need for mentors and not having them, the lack of the fathers, drunk or just unavailable. How much of that is the Second World War? They're really lost."

It is the parent that embodies the past, a past which contains the patterns which can guide and shape us in our lives. It is this pattern and the structures which would hold it which is absent from the lives of the participants. Jane's second thought on coming to is, "I need a teacher." It is the teacher/parent who embodies the meaning and possibility of its transmission. The subsequent path of meditation needs to be seen in the context of this broader field. And what is unique here is that the embodiment of meaningful tradition is from, or represents, a cultural tradition other than the student's. The desire for freedom and meaning, of expansion and personal development is answered initially by the depth and fullness of a foreign path.

Struggle with the teachings

At first, this path can be quite bewildering. Elements of the teaching may seem so foreign, even inimical to aspects of one's previous assumptions, that one might never even begin. Sid constantly struggled with the emphasis on suffering and argued the point with his teacher. There are conceptual problems, lack of information, linguistic difficulties. To the beginning student of meditation it often seems as though there is no-one who is either willing or able to explain how to do the meditation. Difficulties in meditation are often attributed to one's own shortcomings: laziness, lack of discipline, lack of understanding. The demands of balancing one's time for meditation with other needs and interests are an ongoing problem that persist for many beyond the initial stages of practice.

At different stages, but often in the early days of intense practice, powerful negative emotions and images arise. During prostrations, Hamish experienced intense rage. Augusta wrestled with the violent and frightful imagery of stabbing her friend. Sid suspects that he was becoming "very sensitive to what you're normally not conscious of: underlying moods and drives, fear, insecurity, anger, all kinds of stuff, jealousy; you just really start to get the sense of these very hidden undercurrents that are going on."

As well as difficulties with meditation itself, the social context of the practice can also be problematic. There can be disagreements, even disillusionments, with one's teacher and fellow students. Such feelings of disappointment and betrayal can inhibit one's practice or even drive one away from it.

For some, it can seem as though one's identity is being unraveled. Jane describes starting "to feel busted from day one." She found other students within her meditation community "very brutal" in confronting her: "It was very shocking to me: people from the streets of New York and Chicago telling me to get off my trip. I was just too damn friendly and they suspected that...I would just be devastated." While Jane found her former style to be attacked, others find different struggles with negotiating an identity. Augusta and her boyfriend for a while willingly surrendered theirs. They appropriated the style of the Tibetans, dressing, eating and meditating like them, beginning to learn the language.

At some point, there may be a realization that the essence of the practice is being missed. Augusta and Oliver saw their own behaviour mirrored in the slavishness of other students and decided to leave the centre. After living for a while at the Dharma Centre following his return from

India, Sid came to a similar awakening: talking to some non-Buddhists at a party, he became aware that "I found myself getting blocked in talking to them. I found I didn't feel comfortable, alienated and on the outside. I felt, 'this isn't right. There's something wrong here.'" He too realized that he needed to pull back in some way and find a balance between engaging in practice and maintaining contact with his own culture.

Thus, as well as learning the mechanics and techniques of meditation, the student must negotiate a number of social tasks. These related challenges may take years to overcome. Initial experiences with the meditation practice itself, the teacher(s), and the community of fellow practitioners determine whether one will persist with the journey. Each of the participants in this study have been thus far successful in negotiating the challenges.

Experiences of success with meditation

At first, there might be a sense as with Jane, that one is "just pretending" to practice, even with a meditation that seems simple, such as following the breath. For her, it took two years before she experienced directly some sense of calm and tranquility in her practice. She kept going out of some kind of faith or confidence alone, "somehow that if I

keep practicing that something would happen or cease to happen and I didn't really quite know what."

Others, while similarly struggling with the technique, experience glimpses of states of mind which indicate something worthwhile happening. Dylan experienced a calming effect with vipassana though it didn't seem to make much difference from day to day. Hamish found that repetition of the mantra "jammed his internal dialogue" and seemed to enable him to contact "more refined levels of mind". Augusta loved the energy and clarity of mind that arose in prostrations. Such experiences act as confirmations of one's practice and keep one going, but in themselves they may not be sufficient. Other students can help one through these times of confusion. One can feel a sense of very strong connection with them, a sense of engagement together in a meaningful project.

Integration into the meaningfulness of practice

We shall return to the process, meaning and impact of meditation itself, but first, the story will illuminate another element of the meditation's context, one which both supports and impels an ongoing practice.

As they listen to teachings and practice meditation, the meditators start to experience a shift in their motivation. Motivation for practice is a central concern of Mahayana Buddhism, the tradition with which these people found themselves involved. From the very first contact with the teacher, motivation for involvement is not only implied by the various concerns mentioned above, but it is also made explicit by the teachers speaking from a tradition centrally involved with the alleviation of suffering. They are reminded by the teachers that what they are doing is an act of compassion for others. Before they meditate they remind themselves that while one's own needs for relief and fulfillment are being met, there is an invocation to expand that desire, through an act of empathy, to all beings.

The participants find in this motivation a mirroring of their own deeply felt concern and need for others. Jane's involvement with the Quakers' vigils during the civil rights movement and, as a result, "being pushed out of what had

been a comfortable position was part of my path of...taking a stand for the relief of people in pain." Recalling that Sid's path begins with a stone on which the word "love" is written, it comes as little surprise that "if anything sold me on Buddhism, it was the amount of compassion and love - for all sentient beings you do this work, and trying to become enlightened so you can help all people."

Similarly, among the initial attractions to the teacher and his teachings, particularly the meditation on Chenrezig as the embodiment of compassion, was the sense of contrast Augusta felt here between the concern for all beings and that for our own which she felt permeated her Church background. The spontaneous manifestations of sorrow during her meditations now and which finds expression in her painted depictions of the wounded heart bear witness to the same concern. The teacher and tradition reflect and clarify a compassion which may have been previously enfolded. This embodiment of compassion provides powerful motivation and connection not only at the beginning but along the length of this particular meditative path.

It also becomes an antidote to an elitist position that might otherwise develop. This concern is seen, for example, in Augusta. As well as maintaining an abhorrence for exclusion, she is also at pains to minimize the use of meditation for self-aggrandizement. She wants meditation to

be as simple and natural as brushing her teeth. By grounding her practice in an understanding that its frame of reference is all beings, and not herself alone, she is assisted in guarding against isolating herself from a common world.

This aspect of the process - a motivation which is directed beyond oneself - is particularly important in the initial stages of the practice. In the context of the prevalent trends of our modern or post-modern, generally secular humanist era, to embark upon a "spiritual path" of any nature is to engage in an oppositional act. To assume a path from outside of the "Western" tradition seems doubly so. Since it is congruent with not only the Judeo-Christian tradition but also the secularist ideal of progress, the emphasis on compassion provides the practitioner with an important continuity. Indeed, when Sid was struggling with doubts in India, it was the emphasis on compassion which kept him engaged. Similarly, when Augusta returned to the meditation on Chenrezig following her period of greatest doubting, she experienced calmness and renewed resolve.

Confirmation

The resolution of doubt and concomitant commitment to persisting in meditation practice is supported by the combination of clarified motivation, faith in and connection

with the teacher and fellow practitioners and signs of success with the practice itself. These signs of success with meditation vary and include both external and internal aspects. Often, the teacher will provide some confirmation of the student's progress, as when the Korean teacher gave a tea ceremony in Hamish's honour, or when Trogawa Rinpoche recognized and thus confirmed the heightened awareness that Dylan had achieved through concentrative study.

However, at various times in the course of one's practice, there will be failures of support and confirmation. Mirroring the original factors which have brought the student to the practice in the first place - the fact of or perception of a break with a grounding and informing tradition - these times can present profound challenges to one's engagement. In fact the seeds can be discerned right at the beginning, in the problems the participants had in getting guidance and advice for their meditation. After that initial difficulty has been surmounted, the challenge continues. Augusta experienced a degree of this when, in a state of desperation, she turned to the resident teacher to assist her with the recurrent images of stabbing her friend. The advice she received was useless. Fortunately, in terms of proceeding with her practice, she had never come to see this man as a particular embodiment of the teachings.

Sid has struggled with this element of disappointment and betrayal frequently in his path. He acknowledges in retrospect that he was looking for a father or mentor and "having a whole lot of illusions crumble". The teachers and older students "could not handle it. They did not know how to do it...I didn't understand that at that time, I just knew what I expected from these teachers and what I did get was bullshit."

Dylan reflects on a recent situation in which a Tibetan teacher seems to be assuming a very authoritarian position: "there's a place in me that reacts with anger and indignant nature. It would probably be a reaction to the oppression of paternal authority rather than a larger point of view, rather than a spiritual father...centered around the betrayal of how a teacher is with his students, or how a father is with sons, or a parent with children." He struggles to reconcile these events in his "emotional" body with their resonances with personal history and his "spiritual body" which is oriented more towards the openness and depth of Being.

Connection with self and others

The resolution of such conflicts is essential for the continuation of practice. As we are seeing, engagement with

the practice of meditation involves far more than mastery of certain techniques for relaxation or "strategies for self-regulation". At one level, the practice is profoundly social, and while mediated, symbolized, and enacted within a seemingly solitary and contemplative activity, it nevertheless involves the negotiation of relationships with significant others. The relationship with the teacher (or even the principle of the teacher which may be discovered at times with one's peers) is critical in this process.

While this is the case, the confirmations which maintain one's motivation are more often experienced as internal and of a self-referential or self-reflective nature. The participants variously report physiological relaxation, shifts in body awareness, calmness and reduction in stress. These factors though, seem largely secondary in the accounts of the participants. More significant are such experiences as greater insight into the nature of mind, clarification and transformation of problematic emotional states and the contact with deeper and richer sources of meaning and being.

By looking now at the experiences of several of the participants, we may be able to begin to understand the process through which these shifts occur. Let us look at several accounts of this. Dylan's conception (which is at the same time an experience) of his "spiritual body" provides us with our initial approach.

Problem solving

He suggests that meditation in its various forms serves to nourish his spiritual body which has been awakened and shaped by contact with both spiritual teachers and spiritual places. He experiences this spiritual body in terms of shifts of perspective. It is that which permits the transformation of otherwise negative and destructive emotional states. As he describes working with anger, for example, in a meditative context, we can begin to get a sense of what is operative: "to actually sit with it and actually watch what it does to me first, on the physical body, what it gnarls up, where the armouring is, and then to feel what it does emotionally, and then to feel what it does spiritually...and having gone through an awareness of all three of those levels, the net effect seems to be a transforming of that anger into an understanding of that anger."

Before we move to an understanding of this "understanding", let us look at two other instances of this type of shift. In retreat, Sid is struggling with an ongoing emotional knot: "I was just getting more frantic and up tight. So what I did was I just dropped all thinking as much as I could, just focused on what was happening in my body...and what arose

when I did that was this deep sense of fear and insecurity and it was the first time I actually caught that...and once that came up it was like the demon came up and was dancing in front of me and I had the fucker!...And I found when I could accept it, when I found fear, intimidation and I feel that kind of ashamed that I feel this fear and intimidation, but there's part of me that arises and says, 'You have to treat that with compassion now'. And I have a real strong mental image of putting my arms around that emotion and pulling it in and saying, 'okay, this is okay...this I love, this I will give my warmth to, I will care for this'."

When Jane is at the nadir of her second relationship, hit bottom, her facade fallen to pieces, she was deeply involved with Vajrayogini practice: "and that deity is on one toe and she has a hook knife and a skull cup of blood and you identify with that being and I really get personally the significance for her of what happened to me. And so I can value everything now."

What these three instances share is an experience of the body in a particular context. This context is shaped by the culture of a particular (alien) tradition with a particular ritual form from that culture. At the same time, the individual is bringing his or her unique life-path into contact with this tradition. The bodily experience of this juncture permits a shift which is a resolution or

accommodation of a problem or tension and is also an opening to a broader dimension.

While we have looked very briefly at three particular instances, a similar pattern can be discerned in other situations. There is a recurring theme of openness, of space, of groundlessness. Sometimes this phenomena is accompanied with experiences of warmth or kindness. It is often experienced in contact with the teacher. It can happen during either personal interview or in the more formal settings of teachings and initiations. Both Hamish and Jane give examples of contact with teachers that "stop their mind". Sid describes the impact of receiving initiations from Kalu Rinpoche as "a gate that's been opened up."

These experiences can then act as reference points for the wide range of specific meditation practices in the Vajrayana/Mahamudra tradition. They are all the more powerful in that they tend to transcend previous categories and are more than simply either cognitive events or emotional experiences, though they encompass all of these. Hamish describes the impact of one such meeting that actually involved physical contact with the teacher: "He put his hand on my head . He just ran a whole lot of current right through it. It was just extremely powerful. It was very very physical, a tremendously physical experience, of a

blessing, and then, just light everywhere and I can remember being guided out of the room."

It is the physicality of the event that is particularly compelling. And it is the physicality of each meditation (ranging from the contemplations of the Four Thoughts, through shamatha-vipassana and ngundro, to the yidam practices) which provides the ground for the changes which occur.

The practitioners have strong reactions (both "physical" and "emotional") to the meditations with which they are engaged. Jane, for example, "hated" tong-len. The first few times, she "got sick. I didn't let it just ventilate through me; I just took it on and I got blockbustered." Sid "hated" prostrations, was bored by mandala offerings, but liked Dorje Sempa. Each practice summons a response from the whole person, at a bodily level. Each practice consists of a particular set of gestures, physical or imaginal, that reveal or bring to awareness formerly hidden or cloudy elements of being and open new dimensions of experience.

Participants refer, for example to the impact of the meditations on death which are involved with the Four Thoughts. Dylan recalls how, in these contemplations, he would "start to notice particular aspects of (the denying process) and then be able to see that on a day to day basis,

how we go through little deaths, and what that dissolution involves." It is, he says, a "visceral" experience.

The practice of prostrations is most actively involved with the physical activity of the body. Sid highlights the impact of some aspects of this meditation. As mentioned previously, he "hated" these: "sometimes it would be like getting hit in the head with a sledge hammer - bang!" His problem was, it "takes a great deal of humility, to throw yourself down on the ground...that doesn't come easy for me, that kind of humility."

Many of these meditations involve visualization. In these, the body is imagined as transfigured, and at the same time, vivid, clear but devoid of literal substance, "like a dream". As Sid describes this, "different yidam practices hit different nerves...like with Vajrayogini, you've got this hot red woman in flames, big knife and fangs: that's going to hit certain nerve endings in you and it's going to draw out certain feelings in you."

And whatever the practice, there is a dissolution of the mental construction or imagery, and a resting of the mind, a return to the fundamental experience of groundlessness. This experience in its fruition, variously described within the tradition, is the goal of the entire path. However it is conceptualized and however subtly it is experienced the

experience seems to be the primary touchstone for the meditator. It is the essence of Dylan's "spiritual body". For Augusta, that was always the favourite part of yidam practice, "just letting the mind rest."

This groundless experience paradoxically becomes the ground which permits real changes in the practitioner's way of being in the world, both with him- or herself and with others. As Sid puts it, "there's something being touched on much more fundamental and deeper inside, something content. It's just present and so the thoughts and emotions that arise aren't everything. They're not the whole life. They're just part of what I am and so there's much more spaciousness for them to move. I don't have to associate myself with them. There's a place in the meditation I can just rest, hang out, just be. And it's not static, it's not like static stillness, either: it's a calm depth, it's very fulfilling, very enriching, like coming home, like coming back home."

This is the dimension which, while contacted during the unfolding of a personal story, opens into a vertical dimension, in which time is no longer relevant. It is not an event which happens once and for all, at a certain moment in time or point in space. Instead, it is, as the Buddhist texts have it, ground, path and fruition all at once.

It is both the central element in these stories, to which all others refer and it is their horizon, the boundary which contains them. While the spiritual traditions of the West formerly provided access to this domain, it has been discovered by the participants in this research within the Buddhist tradition of the South and Central Asia.

But as well as this vertical dimension, there is a horizontal dimension which is equally important which needs to be highlighted here. Whatever form the meditation takes it has a profound social component as well. For the practice itself embodies a communication not only with the teacher (and through him the succession of previous teachers of the lineage and the whole weight of the tradition) but also by projection with the objects of the practice, namely all sentient beings throughout limitless space. It is through reference to these two dimensions that the quality referred to as "spiritual" takes on meaning.

Re-engagement with the world

Interestingly though, the story does not end there. Each of the five participants has been actively engaged in one or more forms of western psychotherapy as well as continuing with their meditation. Rather than experiencing any conflict between the two approaches, they unanimously suggest a supportive complementarity. Dylan, involved with

one therapist now for four years, talks about uncovering the history of his emotional body. His experiences as a child and infant have profoundly shaped his emotional life and therapy for him is an "archeology dig". Again, it is his spiritual body that provides a context for understanding his emotions as well as being the basis of moral and ethical decisions. Were he to act exclusively out of his emotional responses to the world, he would be acting irresponsibly and unconsciously.

Similarly, Hamish has experienced the release of "some patterns that had been entrenched in the body, long enough for different energy to arise, different experience to arise." The main difference between the therapeutic and spiritual approaches for him is that the former works on "a kind of more relative level."

For Sid, therapy is centrally connected with the construction of a "Western ego". "What I was starting to really crave and seek it out was I wanted my Western ego to grow. I wanted Sid Waters, the guy from Sudbury, I wanted him to grow. I wanted the man of this Canadian twentieth century society to grow." Augusta found that she really needed a therapist when her life became particularly confusing, that a Western therapist could understand the patterns of experience that are unique to our culture, such as formative experiences in an alcoholic family. Like Dylan

and Hamish, she finds that insights in therapy can deepen the meditation practice. As well, therapy for her "released a lot of very powerful emotions and the meditative practice made me able to accommodate them in the sense of having enough room to experience them."

For each, it is as though meditation provides a background for the therapeutic restructuring of their personal story, allowing them to receive the insights of therapy. It provides a space in which more coherent or meaningful forms can arise.

The impact of these many years of involvement with the practice and path of meditation on the individual research participants is described in some detail in their personal stories. Several common elements stand out. There is a general sense of being more open to others, of being freer from the tendency to project blame onto others and instead to take responsibility for their own perceptions and actions. Participants are able to contrast a former mode of being with their current one citing, for example, a shift from uncomfortable to comfortable, from cynical to trusting, and from self-absorbed to concern for and involvement with others.

Overall, there is a sense of agency or empowerment which is gentle rather than aggressive. As Sid puts it, "the sort of

paradox about Dharma that I find is it doesn't make you more special, it makes you more ordinary." Jane describes the same experience when she talks about her feeling of belonging: "I belong. I belong here and that's very confidence giving, makes me feel like I have a right here...you don't have to push your weight around."

While specific points of change may be hard to locate, there is a sense of substantial movement over the years. Each person initially reacted to the lack of a living body of tradition by decisive exploration of a range of possibilities. This search led them to such a tradition, the meditation path of Vajrayana Buddhism. In pursuing that path, they have at once broken with their own cultural background and at the same time developed and enriched it.

Relating to the Buddhist tradition through its exemplars, world view and ritual embodiments and meeting the challenges of such an interchange, they have discovered an openness towards experience which affirms their sense of who they are. A stance originally oppositional to Western culture (which could otherwise lead into deeper cynicism, nihilism and narcissism) has been transformed into an opportunity for growth and wholeness that, while never a finished process, is experienced as profoundly healing.

COMMENTARY

I set out to discover the pattern of experience involved in long-term meditation from the perspective of Western practitioners who have been engaged in such practice for an extended period of time. This pattern of experience has been described in the form of a narrative with a distinct beginning, middle and end. Certain themes emerged within this story that provide structure, direction and coherence. In this section, I shall summarize the issues that seem most relevant to a psychotherapeutic understanding of the process of meditation.

The story as constructed was validated by each of the participants as well as by the independent observer. This validation, while not equivalent to a proof within the empirical science tradition, constitutes an agreement that the story corresponds with the experience of the participants. The validation of the story is possible because the specific themes or organizing structures of the narrative have been recognized by the participants as reflecting their lived experience.

In many ways, the story follows the pattern of the hero's journey (Campbell, 1968). The story begins with a question, a dislocation, a summons of sorts, proceeds through a series of trials, and culminates in a triumphant return with a boon to the community. The story moves from disorder to order, which is the pattern of the comic form, as opposed to the tragic, in which a flaw of character leads to ultimate disaster and loss.

In addition to these metaphors, "path" is another central organizing concept. As there are numerous references in what follows to the meditative (or more specifically, the Buddhist) "path", a few words regarding this concept are in order here. As well as having a metaphoric function, "Path" in this context has a technical aspect, being the linking factor between the "Ground" (or basis of enlightenment: reality-as-such) and the "Fruition" (realization of reality as it is) aspects of self-actualization. As one commentator puts it, the "path" "is the ongoing process of life and growth, the expansion and extension of our being. Actually, the "path" only indicates one aspect of being and it is only a figurative way of dividing life into a ground or starting point, a path, and a goal" (Guenther, 1975, 7).

Regarding the pathways described in the preceding stories, it could be argued that from an "objective" standpoint the co-researchers might have little to be happy about. In

their lives, they have experienced many blows and many losses. Each of them lives some distance from their family of origin. Their stories include elements of estrangement from family and society, breakdown of relationships, personal or family drug and alcohol use, illness, brushes with death and injury to loved ones: a series of disappointments. Each of these events could be a seed for guilt, for despair, for cynicism.

Yet their stories are confirmed as positive. How is this to be understood? Are the stories indicative of self-deception and denial? Or, on the other hand, can they be read as exemplary, as providing valuable information and insight into the use of meditation as a transformative tool which has contributed substantially to a personal healing?

It is significant that the five co-researchers, chosen on the basis of their long-term engagement with meditation, were still involved in this practice. For each of these five, it is likely that there are many others who began to practice at the same time as they, only to drop the practice during the course of their life. These are people who have persisted and the stories which they tell are stories of persistence. The stories, in a sense, justify, maintain and support their continued involvement with meditation.

While the general story can be analyzed in many ways, certain themes seem to stand out. The following themes, while not appearing in a linear and disjunctive fashion, can nevertheless be identified to varying degrees in both the individual and general stories. Each story contains elements of a) dislocation and loss; b) questioning; c) searching; d) meeting the teacher; e) acceptance by the teacher; f) struggle with the teachings; g) experiences of success with meditation; h) integration into the meaningfulness of practice; i) confirmation; j) connectedness with self and other; k) problem solving; and, m) (re)engagement with the world.

Thus the story begins with loss and ends with discovery; begins with rupture and ends with connection. It seems significant that each co-researcher stresses, in their own way, the complementarity of meditation/spiritual path and counselling/therapy/personal growth. Meditation seems to provide a context for the discoveries which take place within therapy, as well as, perhaps, strengthening the identity of the meditator and thus enabling the therapeutic process. In any case, the affirmation that is depicted at the end of the story is not so much a completion, an enlightenment or state of unending happiness or even calm. Each person continues to struggle with the vagaries of life.

The end of the story and the fruition of the spiritual practice of meditation has been the construction of an encompassing and meaningful world view which is supported and maintained by a variety of forces. Among these forces are other meditators, one or more teachers held to be significant by the meditator, the predisposition and ability to recall to mind elements of the teachings which are of immediate relevance to either practice or daily life, and an on-going meditation practice of satisfying frequency and quality.

The stories permit an understanding of the practice of meditation within a broad context. People meditate for a variety of reasons. There seem to be both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations and rewards. The meditators involved in this study would seem to be concerned primarily with intrinsic factors of meaningfulness, though arguments could no doubt be made in favour of external factors such as positive reinforcement from the environment.

Reflecting further upon the contributions of the meditative path to the well-being reported by the participants, certain factors stand out. Chief among these are the importance of the guru or teacher; an enhanced awareness (with both cognitive, affective and behavioural components) of personal and interpersonal processes; an enhanced sense of personal power resulting from increased control over stress and

tension; the validation of feelings of love and caring for others as a confirmation of the experience of compassion (a critical component of the Buddhist path); and the overall sense of self-validation vis a vis "belonging", which results from the combination of these factors.

The various parallels between these factors and those of the psychotherapeutic enterprise will be taken up in the following chapter. For now, I wish to elaborate on each of them in turn, remaining within the context of the meditators' experience.

The teacher acts initially as a model for an ideal or exemplary human being. The discovery of the existence of this person is at once a tremendous relief, a revelation, and a goad to action. In response to this personification of the ideal, the meditator is inspired to follow his (or her) example, the example of meditation in its various forms, supported by study and contemplation. As the meditator continues to practice, the totalism of this idealization is threatened and must be negotiated. The super-human aspects of one's first (or root) teacher are replaced (or complemented) with a more "realistic" appraisal. Paradoxically, in the course of this process, not only is the relationship further developed and enhanced but also the student comes to see that the ideal originally sensed in the teacher is perhaps accessible to his/her own

experience. Finally, it is the teacher who continues in a variety of ways to confirm the progress (and to some extent the identity) of the student.

Through following the instructions of the teacher, the student becomes aware of how he or she constructs reality. This process can begin with the first attempts at meditation and continues throughout the path. The stories illustrate many of the experiences of enhanced, altered or uncovered awareness arising with the practice of meditation. This begins while attempting to keep one's attention upon the recommended object of awareness. One realizes the strength and compulsion of the spontaneous flux of one's thoughts and feelings and the difficulty of attending systematically to this changing stream of mental events. As the meditator continues to practice, patterns of mental functioning are recognized and this self-awareness begins to spill over into interpersonal relationships resulting in a greater sense of personal freedom and control.

Similarly, as well as becoming increasingly aware of habitual patterns of experience, the meditator begins to experience moments of clarity and calmness within or behind these normal and compulsive patterns. As he or she persists, these experiences appear to become more frequent and sustained. The experience of stability and clarity becomes coupled with the self-awareness mentioned previously

to further enhance a sense of identity and personal efficacy.

In the ongoing involvement with the teacher and teachings, this experience is understood in part as the arousal of compassion, not only as the desire that other beings be free from suffering, but also that others be treated with equanimity and experience happiness. The element of compassion is a critical component of the meditator's experience, at least within the approach followed and examined in this study.

The teachers explain that compassion and wisdom must be developed together, as the two wings of a bird, in order for liberation or ultimate realization to be had. Compassion is stressed over and again. The awakening of compassion marks a shift from the ego-centric preoccupation with one's own confusion and suffering to a mindful concern with the plight of the others with whom we share a world. The experience of compassion is regarded as an indication of spiritual development as is spontaneous devotion to one's teacher.

While this continual reference to altruistic motivation might imaginably give rise to feelings of personal imperfection and shame, the contrary seems to be the case. As compassion develops from a concept to an experience

through study and meditation, feelings of isolation from others and the sense of life's absurdity or meaninglessness dissipates, along with one's personal feelings of worthlessness.

As well, to the degree that one authentically puts the happiness of others before one, the more grounded and affirmed one feels. The underlying pattern of psychological poverty with its concomitant shame and worthlessness seems to be undermined, to be replaced by a movement towards a feeling of belonging and the courage to be and act "oneself". That this belonging and courage are expressed in part in every story as a willingness to enter into therapy or counselling indicates at least two things.

The first is that meditation alone (as they have practiced it) has not answered all of the questions put by life to the co-researchers. Day to day concerns of interpersonal and social life still clamour for resolution. Questions remain as to whether meditation in forms developed, practiced within, and translated from specific cultures is capable of responding fully to the needs of a receiving culture. It is possible that given a certain duration and intensity of meditation practice that it alone could be a sufficient "therapy". In this case, the lack of opportunity to practice, given the structures of our day to day and year to year life is a real constraint. It is often in response to

such an idea that the co-researchers in this study entered therapy.

The second implication is that meditation does not become or remain the solipsistic or "navel-gazing" enterprise which some detractors have called it. The co-researchers in this study, rather than retreating into a totalistic or fundamentalist approach to the world in which meditation and "spirituality" are the answer to all questions, remain open and questioning.

This chapter has provided a general account of the process of long-term engagement with meditation as abstracted from the case stories of five individuals. The general story has revealed a set of common themes and has suggested a number of important factors, including the importance of the role of the teacher, and the development of interrelated enhancement of belonging, personal power, efficacy and compassion. In the following chapter, I will examine these findings in light of Western theories of counselling and psychotherapy.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION

The experience of long-term naturally-occurring meditation has been described and examined in the preceding chapter. The meditation experience of five people was presented in the form of phenomenological narratives. These stories were then condensed into a general story which answers the question posed at the outset of this study, namely, what is the pattern of experience involved in the practice of meditation from the perspective of long-term meditators.

In this chapter, we will examine the answer to this question in the context of psychological theory. Following a summary of the results, the strengths and limitations of the study will be considered. The theoretical and practical implications of the results will then be presented, followed by suggestions for further research.

Summary of findings

The general story has revealed a variety of themes common to the unique stories of the co-researchers. Each of them came

to meditation as the result of a dissatisfaction with life as it had been experienced to that point.

Meditation seemed to offer some hope for the relief of the mental, emotional, or spiritual suffering experienced by the co-researchers. Meditation provided a radical alternative to the normal lifeways offered by their own family and cultural backgrounds which seemed lacking the compelling sense of direction and purpose which they sought.

For each of the co-researchers, the teacher was of great significance, providing emotional support and validation. He represented an ideal human being to which one could aspire. He was a person who had discovered the truth about life and embodied it in his own existence. Contact with him provided motivation for following the meditative path.

As they continued the relationship, followed this path and deepened their practice of meditation, the co-researchers gained a heightened awareness of the pattern of their experience and a greater sense of control over it. Slowly, the teachings imparted by their teacher took on greater meaning as they continued their study and practice. Concepts such as emptiness and compassion became more fully

integrated with their daily lives, in their interaction with friends, family and others.

However this integration was in no case accomplished without conflict. Each co-researcher struggled in their own way with doubts and fears. For some the teacher was the focus of these conflicts, while for others, their fellow practitioners became the focus of doubt and questioning. These questions were organized around such concerns as honesty, authenticity, integrity, and devotion versus blind faith.

Over time, each co-researcher was able in their own way to resolve these questions. This negotiation led to a heightened sense of self-esteem which was in marked contrast to the initial state of estrangement and loss which brought them to meditation. The stories reveal that the co-researchers have developed an enhanced sense of personal identity. They experience a sense of belonging to a particular community, path, or cultural phenomenon which gives them a sense of direction and purpose.

In contrast to their recollection of their state of being when they began meditating, the co-researchers experience themselves as more capable, more socially oriented, and with a greater openness to experience. Each of the five experienced a willingness and desire to enter into

counselling/therapy and saw this experience as complementary to meditation.

The movement revealed in the general story from initial estrangement, disorientation and meaninglessness to their opposites can be seen to require the accomplishment of three tasks: 1) the development and resolution of the student-teacher relationship and the related issue of idealism and spiritual materialism (Trungpa, 1973); 2) the mastery of the meditation techniques; and 3) the successful learning of a new set of constructs and values and their subsequent integration into everyday experience, including relationships with others.

Limitations of study

Due to the nature of the paradigm and methodology being used, the study does not lend itself to the "traditional" project of prediction and control. In this approach, no attempt is made to generalize to a particular population. These stories of five people who have maintained a practice of meditation over many years simply illuminate the target experience.

The primary limitations of the study result from the practical and logistical difficulties of the interview process. More subjects may have contributed additional detail while greater length of interviews may have done the same. The process as followed is very time consuming.

The data are limited, as are all self-reports, to what the co-researchers can relate or explicate. The co-researchers' level of awareness is necessarily limited, for example, by lapses of memory and selective attention, which affects the breadth, depth and precision of information available. The use of projective tests or other measurements, while useful in providing normative data, are not applicable in this type of study with its focus upon narrative self-understanding.

Another limitation of the study is the fact that each of the participants have been involved in one or other forms of psychotherapy for various lengths of time. While the participants were unanimous in their insistence on the complementarity of the two processes, it is not possible to make causal statements about the relative impact on their development of meditation compared with psychotherapy.

Theoretical implications

Before proceeding, a few words of introduction are in order. This research has largely overcome the problems of decontextualization and time limitations which limit experimental approaches. Rather than viewing meditation as a solitary and asocial activity which is primarily an intrapsychic phenomenon, it has provided a different perspective.

While meditation, among other contemplative practices, generally displays little actual physical movement or motion, nevertheless it is an instance of human action. To paraphrase Watzlawick, "one cannot not act". Paradoxically, the intention "to not act" is the essence of certain types of meditation. This stance is perhaps most familiar to us in the translations of the Zen Buddhist literatures of China and Japan (cf., Suzuki, 1969). It is also a central element in the Mahamudra and Maha Ati literatures of Tibet which provides the philosophical underpinning for the meditation practices studied here.

Meditation has often been interpreted by Western writers (e.g., Alexander) as a non-communicative act, asocial, if not anti-social in nature. At first glance, this aspect

appears to clearly distinguish meditation practices from our Western traditions of change - the modernist inventions of psychotherapy as well as the praxis of revolutionary social change. An alternative view is that meditation, as an intentional human act, is a communicative act and a profoundly social act, the nature and benefits of which will thereby be more adequately understood. Elements of such an alternative perspective will be discerned in the following discussion.

Temporality

The stories, both individual and general, highlight the need to look at meditation as a long term process. This study suggests that consolidation of the benefits of meditation occurs along with the fulfillment of three interrelated tasks. It is unlikely that this can be accomplished within the limited duration of practice implied by the majority of studies published thus far. The complexity of these tasks as revealed in the stories helps to explain earlier findings (e.g., Brown and Engler, 1986) which showed minimal progress in personality growth after even three months of intensive daily practice.

Motivation and results of meditation

Unlike research subjects or patients who are instructed to meditate to alleviate specific physical or psychological complaints (e.g., phobias, addictions, anxiety), the co-researchers in this study were motivated by a more global sense of dissatisfaction or suffering. While the stories provide anecdotal support for the benefits identified by the behavioural researchers, they were impelled by a holistic crisis of meaning and value rather than by a hope for relief from specific symptoms.

The initial motivation is an experience of lack, loss, or absence. Initially, the participants hope for and expect a resolution of this absence. For example, the participants imagine they will "become enlightened" or they will achieve "states of mind" which will bring satisfaction. Initially, the co-researchers imagine that meditation will bring an end to the anxiety which marks their lives. Ideally, the path will culminate in an ongoing state of happiness or bliss, a state of perfection which may be psychological, emotional, spiritual or a combination thereof.

As they persist in their practice through the years, disappointments with the process force a re-examination of

motivation. There is often an initial, profound disappointment when the meditator is not magically going to be "enlightened" through either mechanical repetition of meditation techniques or his/her relationship with the teacher. If these disappointments are successfully negotiated, the participants refer increasingly to the satisfaction of being engaged in the process of life itself.

This process finds an explicit parallelism in Frankl's (1984) sense of "tragic optimism" which "allows for: (1) turning suffering into a human achievement and accomplishment; (2) deriving from guilt the opportunity to change oneself for the better; and (3) deriving from life's transitoriness an incentive to take responsible action" (162). Frankl determined that a sense of meaning of life was available through work, love or suffering. Love, suffering, guilt, and impermanence are each at various points objects of meditations for the people in this study. To a large extent, these themes are linked through the concept of bodhicitta: one meditates for the benefit of all sentient beings. As the meditators become more explicitly engaged with this motivating factor their motivation undergoes a transformation and there is a movement away from a selfish or strictly egoistic orientation.

As well as providing the impetus and energy for continued meditation, the motivation of relating directly to and

making meaning from suffering now connects the meditator with both the teachers (and lineage) and with "all beings" as the reference point. At the same time, the experience provides its own reward in the form of enhanced physical and psychological well-being, both during the meditation session itself, and in post-meditation periods.

This shift from a focus upon one's own (narcissistic) gratification to a more objective stance toward reality is reminiscent of the movement in Adlerian psychology from mistaken life goal to Gemeinschaftsgefuhl, or social interest. The mechanics of this movement are significant and involve the mastery of each of the three tasks identified in the stories: relationship with teacher, technical mastery, and cognitive restructuring.

Teacher-student relationship

One of the key elements of the impact of long-term meditation revealed by this study was the role of the teacher, guru, or lama. This importance bears many parallels with the relationship with a therapist as well as some differences.

In his transcultural study of psychotherapy, Fuller Torrey (1986) suggests that the personal qualities of the psychotherapist (whether known as a witchdoctor or psychiatrist) is one of the basic components of psychotherapy: "not only the actual personality characteristics of the therapist but those projected onto the therapist by the client" (1986, 35). Torrey stresses that everywhere the relationship is a personal one.

When applying his study to the practical question of seeking a helper (psychotherapist) to help you with problems of living, Torrey suggests that you seek a helper who 1) shares your world view; 2) makes you feel comfortable and seems genuinely interested in you; and 3) is trustworthy. On the latter point, he cites Strupp, et al (1977, 137): "Avoid therapists who fail to show common courtesy in human interactions, who are overly zealous, who make extravagant

claims, and who in general lack human qualities of warmth, concern, respect, understanding and kindness. Beware of pompousness, hostility, harshness, lack of seriousness, seductiveness, inappropriate familiarity, and 'phoniness' of all kinds. Above all, make sure the therapist impresses you as a decent human being who you can trust."

Within the Buddhist (and other meditative) tradition, the characteristics of the teacher are similarly very important and explicit. According to Gampopa (Guenther, 1971, 34), the teacher should be endowed with eight qualities: "(i) to possess a Bodhisattva's discipline in ethics and manners, (ii) to be well versed in the Bodhisattvapitaka, (iii) fully to comprehend the ultimately real, (iv) to be full of compassion and love, (v) to possess the intrepidities, (vi) to have patience, (vii) to have an indefatigable mind, and (viii) to use right words."

Similarly, the qualities of the student are important and clearly articulated. "The process of receiving teaching depends upon the student giving something in return; some kind of psychological surrender is necessary, a gift of some sort...It is essential to surrender, to open yourself, to present what you are to the guru, rather than trying to present yourself as a worthwhile student" (Trungpa, 1973, 39).

The Tibetan teacher, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche (1973, 1976), described in some detail the stages through which a student can expect to pass in relating with the teacher. It is only with some degree of difficulty and pain that the relationship finally ripens into one of "genuine friendship" which permits the proper transmission of the teachings and the "direct and total communication which is the 'meeting of the two minds'". "At first devotion is inspired by a sense of inadequacy... from a sense of poverty" (Trungpa, 1976, 127). The relationship evolves from surrender, through games, to a state of complete openness, as a result of which "you begin to see the guru quality in every life-situation, that all situations in life offer you the opportunity to be as open as you are with guru, and so all things can become the guru" (Trungpa, 1973, 45).

The narrative approach of this study has revealed something of the complexity and richness of this topic. From a classical Freudian psychodynamic perspective, the various stages of the relationship with the teacher (as with the analyst) would generally be seen in terms of resistance, particularly as instances of transference, the unconscious reenactment of forgotten childhood memories and repressed unconscious fantasies, and its subsequent working through and resolution. In the psychodynamic view, "resistance is a general term that refers to all of the forces in the patient that oppose the painful work of therapy...this last

resistance is often seen in an erotic or hate-filled transference" (Ursano, et al, 1991, 31-32). From this perspective, the cure of the patient is said to be complete when the patient's neurotic attachment to the analyst is resolved.

Ken McLeod, in reviewing the general story, commented that "psychological projection" was involved in perhaps 95 out of 100 cases of students who maintained an insistence on only one unique teacher as "their guru". Speculatively, it may be that what Trungpa referred to as "games" in the teacher-student relationship parallels the transference phenomena in the psychoanalytic approach. ("We begin to play a game, a game of wanting to open, wanting to be involved in a love affair with our guru, and then wanting to run away from him. If we get too close to our spiritual friend, then we begin to feel overpowered by him" (Trungpa, 1973, 43).

The five stories can be read with an eye to the student-teacher relationship. Dylan is quite explicit about his understanding of his "transference" to Namgyal Rinpoche and its role in impelling him to understand his relationship with his own father and reconnect with him. Western psychotherapy has assisted him in this process. Augusta, after being captivated by Kalu Rinpoche's "gentleness" subsequently become absorbed with the task of working through the sense of doing something very special, having to

"be very good". Her quest to be "ordinary" and subsequent development of personal humility and openness seems to indicate a sort of working through of childhood fantasy. Sid is quite explicit about many types of varieties of resentment and resistance which he encountered during his practice.

In the psychodynamic tradition, resistances are resolved through interpretation, "so that the patient can re-experience consciously the old forbidden impulses and memories, and the fears, disappointments, and painful affects associated with them" (Ursano, et al, 1991, 36). In the meditation process studied here, rather than interpretation, the teacher relies on the strength of his own example as a motivator and continues to direct the meditator to reflect on the goal of the process - enlightenment for the sake of all beings. In that context, his instructions are almost invariably simply to continue meditating, or sometimes to decrease the intensity of one's practice. The practice itself is regarded as sufficient to impel one towards the ultimate goal. The effort and diligence exerted in following the teacher's injunction to practice combines with other factors (see below) to resolve personal issues underlying the meditator's difficulties. For example, through his persistence, Sid reached a point where he "wasn't worried about becoming enlightened or attaining anything. The shit got kicked out of that and

more and more it was just trying to be an ordinary human being...So (he) was feeling much stronger and happier with (him)self."

A primary difference between the teacher in this meditative tradition and therapist in the psychotherapeutic is the end relationship. In the psychoanalytic world, the patient has experienced substantial relief from the suffering resulting from unconscious conflicts. For the Buddhist practitioner, one's motivation for meditation has ideally undergone a profound shift and while he or she may have experienced a release from personal suffering, this becomes only the first phase in one's career of alleviating the suffering of all beings. In the psychodynamic tradition, the patient is grateful to the doctor for effecting the cure but has ideally developed the capacity for self-inquiry initially carried by the therapist. This includes the ability to understand and analyze any remanifestation of transference enabling the former patient to regard him/her as a psychological equal with whom further relationship is not currently needed.

By contrast, in the meditative tradition, the teacher is continually respected and served, shown devoted interest and reverence, and pleased through "establishing the validity of his instruction and acquir(ing) a primary understanding of it" (Guenther, 1971, 35). Ideally, the teacher is regarded

as the Buddha himself, as is indicated in this verse from a Kagyupa prayer, Intensifying Devotion In One's Heart: Crying to the Guru's From Afar (McLeod, undated), "Essence of the buddhas of the three times,/Source of the holy dharma of scripture and experience,/Master of the sangha, the noble assembly,/Root guru, think of me." Even after the student has attained a high degree of realization, he maintains this intensity of devotion for the teacher (see e.g., Chang, 1962; Nalanda, 1980). The transference, if one can use that terminology at all in this context, is not resolved through interpretation but is rather redirected toward the guru as symbolic of one's own realization.

Brownstein (1991) draws upon Kohut's self-psychology to understand these differences. He suggests that the guru within the spiritual tradition, as a realized being, is optimally able to provide both an idealizing and mirroring function for the disciple-student. He contrasts the therapeutic situation in which the client/patient is slowly and gently dis-illusioned from the illusory ideal of the therapist and thereby becomes accepting, flexible and realistic with the spiritual. In the latter relationship, "the Guru sees the essence, or the inner being, of the disciple as pure and always reflects this purity back to the disciple, reminding him again and again that this is his true nature" (4). While the therapist mirrors the ego or

personality structure of the patient, the Guru mirrors the Self, the underlying reality behind all forms.

The relationship with the Guru connects or reawakens the disciple's insight into his oneness with this fundamental reality which in turn overcomes the suffering inherent in one's alienation from the source of being (or, in Buddhist terms, the fundamental ignorance (avidya = not knowing) which posits an independently existing self). Hamish's description of his experience with Kalu Rinpoche is illustrative: "groundless in the sense of free of all constrictions and preconceptions. It was like being fully in the moment and at the same time it was infused with kindness, a really strong sense of warmth."

The maintenance of a relationship with the teacher is thus a prerequisite for the psychospiritual development described in this study. However, it is not sufficient unto itself but provides an impetus and context in which the two other tasks - technical mastery and cognitive restructuring - are achieved.

Technical mastery

Just as psychotherapists of whatever persuasion rely upon the ability of the client/patient to master a certain set of skills (e.g., free association, focusing, attentional awareness) without which therapy is fruitless or even contraindicated, so too does the meditator need to master a certain set of skills. These skills, which have been systematically described in centuries of meditation literature, are primarily skills of attention and analysis. Mastery of these skills is what permits and gives rise to the range of transformative phenomena described by the meditators.

While the phenomenological nature of this study provides access to experience, it precludes proof of such hypothetical constructs as hemispheric lateralization (Pegano & Frumkin, 1977) or physiological factors like reduced metabolism and arousal (Delmonte, 1979, 1985) or brain wave resonance and coherence (Haymes, 1977). However, the co-researchers described a range of related experiences.

These include the narrowly physiological effects and benefits and the related effects of stress-reduction which have cognitive and affective as well as physiological

aspects. Participants refer variously to a relaxation response, a calming or "stilling" effect, and a slowing of bodily processes. On the other hand, participants also experienced increased energy and heightened clarity resulting in less need for sleep.

Among longer term effects, the participants mentioned a renewed sense of meaning: a sense that one was no longer wasting one's life. Some reported that the maintenance of practice countered feelings of ennui, depression and paranoia which would otherwise arise in day to day experience. Development of authenticity and a reduction of feelings of phoniness, shame, unworthiness, were common to the participants at various stages of their journey. These experiences are reflective of psychological health and well-being as described by such existentially oriented psychologists as Rogers (1961), Maslow (1954), and Yalom (1980), and Fromm (1976).

Also common to the accounts were reports of enhanced ability to relate directly with others, minimizing experiences of defensiveness. Quarrels or disagreements with others assumed less importance. Some interpreted their own behaviour in this regard as being less involved with projection. Whatever the interpretation, the phenomenon was experienced in terms of "spaciousness" and "openness". The

use of these and related terms appears with great conformity and consistency throughout the accounts.

One way of accounting for this phenomena is suggested by the communication axioms of Watzlawick, et al (1967). As well as highlighting the impossibility of not communicating, the authors draw attention to the simultaneous digital and analogue elements of communication, the former being embodied in language and the latter in bodily, non-verbal presence to another. Problematic communication results in part from the misperception or misreading of either or both the digital or analogic component of a message.

Meditation, through its attentional strategies, tends to relativize not only the digital element of communication which manifests as self-talk but also the non-verbal analogic aspects of body, including feeling and proprioception. This relativization is traditionally expressed as impermanence and is further conceptualized and elaborated as selflessness and emptiness. As these aspects of one's experience are brought into awareness during and after meditation, it becomes more unlikely that communication with others becomes locked into the fixed and pathological patterns, e.g. "schismogenesis" (Bateson, 1958).

There is a corresponding likelihood of greater flexibility and openness of communication as is made explicit in several of the stories, notably that of Hamish and Augusta. A naive statement of this idea may be found in Augusta's comment, "if you can just relax and be gentle with yourself, then you're not going to want to go around being harsh on others because you're not being harsh on yourself."

What is the relationship between the mastery of meditation techniques and these short and long term effects? The divergent views of transpersonal theory in the debate between Washburn (1988, 1990) and Wilber (1980) were briefly examined in the literature review. The interpretation of the narratives presented here is more supportive of the position of Washburn. The co-researchers frequently allude to a resurgence of emotions and imagery from earlier periods of life which is congruent with Washburn's contention that transcendence involves reversal and regression before ascent.

At the very least the participants do not themselves conceptualize their development from a stage perspective as found in Wilbur's typology. While not exactly refuting Wilber's developmental perspective, the general account presented here, with its focus on the body as the locus for transformation, seems to be more faithful to the co-researchers' lived experience.

When the participants describe the impact and results of meditation, their language frequently refers to bodily sensations and processes: for example, the effects "reverberate through my core" (Dylan); "an act of pleasure: sitting on my cushion", "aware of structures in my body...a lot of emotions stuck in my throat" (Augusta); "like getting hit with a sledge hammer", "like drinking from the well" (Sid); and, "came apart like a hand-grenade" (Jane). These metaphors suggest that the ground of the transformation that is experienced in meditation is the body.

The specific meditation practices which compose the overall path of the participants give rise to experiences which both clarify and go beyond old patterns of feeling and perception. This is apparent, for example, in Sid's statement, "I can see that and accept it and say that's part of me...you become more and more in touch with what you are." The frequent reference to an enhanced sense of spaciousness is similarly related to physical awareness. The language of the Buddhist meditative tradition refers to impermanence, emptiness (not in the sense of a vacuum, but rather as the absence of any limiting characteristic) and egolessness.

These factors are experienced with and as the body, via the ritualized action of meditation. They are transpersonal, rather than prepersonal, because the states are "in awareness" and are intentional, and while they are "beyond" the personal they provide direction, guidance and motive force for the personal self. The concepts of change advanced by E.T. Gendlin (1962, 1986) seem accurate analogues for this set of processes. Conversely, aspects of the meditation described by the co-researchers seem to open additional and complementary pathways to Gendlin's technique of "focusing" (1981).

Similarly, the writings of the bioenergeticists and bodyworkers, particularly Lowen (1975) and Keleman (1979, 1981) provide alternate ways of understanding some of the meditation phenomena. Keleman's (1979) description of the "Middle Ground" is particularly evocative of the experience of intensive meditation: "the middle ground is like an ocean welling up with images, sensations, feelings and needs, each taking its turn on the stage, asking, clamoring for attention, trying itself out in the field of consciousness so we can then use it in the social world" (77).

In the general story, the practice of meditation is located within a context of community and altruism. Similarly, for Keleman, "it is essential to reorganize our connections to our community as we reorganize ourselves somatically...the

private world of middle ground generates the capacity for cooperation and community" (1979, 99). For Frankl (1984), "the true meaning of life is to be discovered in the world rather than within man or his own psyche, as though it were a closed system" (133). Augusta expresses this directly, speaking about how meditation has enhanced her ability to relate with others, "to be able to connect with someone, really and truly with <u>them</u> and not be offended or afraid and all the things that separate you, that make us feel we can't be there with that person, to me that's meaningful."

In terms of actual technical mastery of the meditative process, the meditator must be able firstly to achieve "calm abiding" (or a relaxed but focused engagement) with the object of meditation, be it a thought, an object, a visual image, breath, or a mantra. The achievement of such stabilization depends on the ability to overcome a set of five obstacles (laziness, forgetfulness, numbness of mind, restlessness, and excessive forcefulness) which are to be overcome through the application of the antidotes of exertion, aspiration, presence of mind, and equanimity (Tarthang Tulku, 1973). Traditionally, the content of any thoughts which impede the achievement of a calm abiding with the object of meditation is unimportant.

Interestingly, for several of the co-researchers, the specific content arising to awareness during meditation was

felt to be significant. During the three year retreat, Sid found that a specific focus upon the images arising during meditation (an example of agitation or restlessness in the tradition) was psychologically healing for him. Augusta, on the other hand, was overcome at one point by negative and violent imagery which she was unable to dispel.

While she now suspects that access to a more skilled teacher could have facilitated both increased self-understanding and technical mastery, her experience (and those of the other co-researchers) supports the findings of Brown and Engler (1980) in the comparison of Western with Asian meditators. Westerners generally took longer to achieve profound meditative absorption, at least in part due to fascination with the content of their thoughts.

This issue of the irruption of unconscious material into awareness is the crux of much of the current literature in the field of transpersonal psychology (e.g., Engler, 1984; Epstein, 1990). In their attempt to explain a wide range of "complications of meditation practice", Epstein and Lieff (1981) suggest that meditation may follow a developmental process which includes both regression and progressive tendencies. Sid's re-experiencing of family conflicts and Augusta's recurring imagery of violence are supportive of a view of meditation as an opportunity to "reexperience and reexamine unresolved conflicts and drives embodied in

material which unfolds through the practice of meditation" (Epstein and Lieff, 1981).

According to Russell's topology, personal development may occur through either "bringing more unconscious material into consciousness" as in psychotherapy, or in "experiencing increasingly higher states of consciousness" (Russell, 1986, 68). The experience of the co-researchers indicates that meditation may be useful in the facilitation of both of these tasks. Not only do the meditators report imagery of a primitive and problematic nature, but also experience imagery comprised of such transformative symbols as the yidams (e.g., Chenrezig, Tara, Vajrasattva, the lamas) and the Four Immeasurables (love, joy, compassion, equanimity), charged as they are with the capacity to generate meaning.

It is interesting that each of the five participants have been in therapy and/or counselling. The co-researchers each affirm the complementarity of therapy and meditation and their stories may be read with an eye to the dual openings to the unconscious on one hand and the "spirit" on the other. This phenomenon has interesting implications for further development of a combination of meditative and psychotherapy, as suggested by Katz and Rolde (1981).

The co-researchers in this study seem to have resorted to counselling or psychotherapy for two reasons: to resolve immediate crises, often of an interpersonal nature; and to examine and/or transform restrictive or painful personal patterns (narratives). In both cases, they are concerned with elements of their uniquely personal, idiosyncratic life stories. They express a common feeling that Western therapies are more understanding of the particular problems of living which they face.

Meditation, and the tradition which is the context for its practice, on the other hand, is concerned with the compelling general and invariant elements of the human condition which are addressed by the existential-humanistic tradition generally (cf., Frankl, 1984; Fromm, 1976; May, 1983): suffering, purpose and meaning. Meditation seems to answer questions and concerns that counselling and therapy do not. The participants concur that one without the other would be insufficient.

Cognitive restructuring

Closely related to elements discussed under the heading of technical mastery, this topic is central to the changes experienced by the participants. The relationship between the two topics is clearly suggested within the Buddhist tradition itself which organizes one's development into the three tasks of hearing, contemplating and meditating. Thus, following an initial presentation of a concept, there is a progressive deepening of understanding culminating in an incorporation and embodying of the object so that it is truly part of oneself.

As Guenther (1975) puts it, "teachers and friends can do little more than rouse us by their example from our passivity and lethargy (90)". Following this initial awakening, the student must exert himself in the process of transformation which is sustained and guided by specific ideas that result in a new perception of the world. The approach to change articulated by cognitive psychologists such as Beck (1980) and Mahoney (1980, 1985), and by constructivists such as White (White and Epston, 1990) and Watzlawick (Watzlawick, et al, 1967) provide an analogous understanding.

Indeed, the Buddhist meditational path has much in common with the cognitivist perspective. Cognitive therapies are generally based on the assumption that life problems result from faulty ideas. "A basic premise of the cognitive behavioural modification approach is that one cannot change behaviour without having individuals increase their awareness, raise their consciousness, or notice a behavioural pattern (how they think, feel, and behave and the impact they have on others. There is a need to have clients interrupt the automaticity of their acts or the scripted nature of their behaviour" (Meichenbaum, 1986, 348).

Such heightened awareness is the pre-requisite for change. Bedrosian and Beck (1980) summarize the approach of cognitive therapy succinctly as, "a set of treatment techniques that aim to relieve symptoms of psychological distress through the direct modification of the dysfunctional ideation that accompanies them" (128). As Meichenbaum (1986, 374) suggests, "the treatment approach can intervene at various points, namely, at the point of cognitive structures (beliefs, meaning systems), cognitive processes (automatic thoughts and images, problem solving skills), behavioural acts, and environmental consequences. The CBM approach can also intervene by influencing the content of the client's thoughts and the client's style of thinking."

Similarly, the techniques of meditation give rise to a heightened awareness of current cognitive functioning (with attention traditionally directed to body, feelings, consciousness, and mental objects (Trungpa, 1976)) within a context of an alternative world view provided by the teacher and fellow practitioners. Representative of this shift is Sid's statement, "thoughts and emotions are still there, there's something being touched on much more fundamental and deeper inside." Through meditation, Augusta discovered that the qualities she actively sought outside herself (humour, wit warmth) were actually qualities that she herself possessed.

The Buddhist view contends that all suffering arises and is maintained through ignorance or false views regarding the true nature of reality. Buddhist meditation is, in effect, the treatment which progressively modifies these false views. While the ultimate wrong view is the belief in an inherently existing self, there are other false views which are systemically confronted and overcome along the meditational path. Among the initial meditations undertaken by the co-researchers are those known as "the four thoughts that turn the mind". These are "the precious human birth", "the law of cause and effect", "the pervasiveness of suffering", and "the inevitability of impermanence and death".

As with other topics, these contemplations are first heard, thought about, and then finally meditated upon, where meditation is "a familiarization of the mind with an object of meditation" (Dalai Lama, 1984, 183). Repeated meditation upon such thoughts, for example, the inevitability of death (cf., Becker, 1970) seems to result in a profound re-orientation to experience. Hamish, for example, noted the profound effect of this concept on his approach to his career.

Other objects of meditation discussed at various points by the co-researchers include the devotion to the lineage and humble kinship with all beings embodied in Prostrations; one's inherent purity as embodied in the Vajrasattva and other yidam practices; one's inherent richness and capacity for generosity as embodied in mandala offering; and the blessing from and connection with one's teacher in Guru Yoga practice; compassion as embodied in Chenrezig and tong-len practice; and, as both co-extensive with these as well a topic in its own right, the inherent selflessness of all phenomena, the fulfillment of which is liberation.

Mahoney (1980) and Guidano and Liotti (1985), among others, seek to understand such "personal revolutions" and "deep change processes" in the context of cognitivism. Guidano and Liotti, for example, conceptualize "deep change

processes" as resulting from "the reconstruction of sets of deeper rules emerging from tacit self-knowledge...(leading to)...a restructuring of the attitude toward reality through which the world can be seen and dealt with in a different manner" (122). They suggest that such shifts are accompanied by intense emotions. Jane's sense of being "blockbustered...Ramboed" is indicative of this. The ability of the meditator to experience the more profound insights of the Buddhist tradition is dependent upon their technical mastery of the meditative process.

The culmination of these insights is the progressive realization of the "view realizing emptiness" which is "the common cause of the enlightenment of all three vehicles" (Dalai Lama, 1984, 154). An analogous understanding is provided in Watzlawick's (1967) notion of psychotherapeutic change:

> But to change one's third-order premises, to become aware of the patterning of sequences of one's own behaviour and of that of the environment, is only possible from the vantage point of the next higher, the fourth level. Only from this level can it be seen that reality is not something objective, unalterable, "out there", with a benign or sinister meaning for our survival, but that for all intents and purposes our subjective experience of existence

> is reality - reality is our patterning of something that most probably is totally beyond objective human verification. (267)

All of the various types of meditation and the creation of the context in which they are practised can be understood from this perspective: the revelation of the paradox that life's meaning arises from its inherent lack of meaning and its simultaneous resolution via a compassionate commitment to all beings who suffer as a result of the non-realization of this truth.

Life-path research

In terms of this study, meditation seems to facilitate mental health and well-being to the extent that it facilitates the development of a coherent narrative or life-story (White and Epston, 1990) which provides one with meaning and purpose. As Watzlawick (1967) notes, "the loss or absence of a meaning in life is perhaps the most common denominator of all forms of emotional distress...pain, disease, loss, failure, despair, disappointment, the fear of death, or merely boredom - all lead to the feeling that life is meaningless" (266).

As one pursues the practice of meditation and elements of conflict arise, the experience of meaningfulness and subsequent well being is threatened. The latter occurs, for example, as "negative" affect and imagery arises during the practice of meditation; or as confusion about new sets of roles and meanings arise. However, the negotiation of these imbalances gives rise to subsequent experiences of openness and meaning. Indeed, the central therapeutic factor within the meditation practice may be the simultaneously avowed and experienced goal of awareness of impermanence, suffering, and emptiness. The awareness of these three inter-related

factors in turn gives rise to compassion for both oneself and others.

The five studies presented above can be understood as narratives representative in varying degrees of the progressive realization of the paradoxical meaningfulness of life. The paradox lies in the fact that, as Watzlawick (1967) elegantly suggests, "the solution, then, is not the finding of an answer to the riddle of existence, but the realization there is no riddle" (271).

Practical implications

There are three areas of particular practical significance for counsellors and therapists. It has implications for the use of meditation as a complement to conventional forms of psychotherapy; for doing therapy with individuals who are involved in any spiritual path, whether or not it involves a meditative or contemplative component; and finally, it may have relevance for the personal and professional growth of the counsellor. I shall address each of these in turn.

1. As an adjunct to therapy

As we have seen, the participants in this study have all been involved in counselling and/or therapy as well as a disciplined long-term meditation practice. They have each clearly stated the belief that there is a beneficial interaction between these approaches. Increased awareness of the value and impact of particular types of meditation (and upon the contexts in which they are practiced) on the part of therapists would likely be of assistance to a great many clients. For example, such explicit contemplations on suffering, impermanence and death, the four immeasurables, the laws of cause and effect could all readily be applied by

a counsellor to the needs of a particular client. The training of awareness implicit in meditation would be a valuable support to many forms of therapy, not only those which rely explicitly upon one's ability to attend to immediate experiencing, but also to cognitive and psychodynamic approaches which similarly rely on one's ability to attend to cognitive and emotional structures.

Generally, mental health practitioners neither regard themselves as, nor do they present themselves as, spiritual teachers. However, not only are there aspects of meditation practice which they can teach to clients who are interested and who may benefit, but also, they can and may fulfill a spiritual role to the extent that they symbolize to the client an optimal degree of wholeness, integrity and caring. The importance of the spiritual teacher in the transformative path of meditation revealed in this study is to some extent exemplary for therapists.

At the very least, bearing in mind Bergin's (1990) findings regarding the spirituality of clients, it may be appropriate for counsellors to refer clients to bona fide spiritual teachers. For this purpose, as in any process of referral, the counsellor must have a clear idea about, and faith in, the teacher involved. At the very least, there needs to be the sort of understanding of the search which has been addressed above. Ultimately, we might hope for some sort of

dialogue or consultation between mental health practitioners and spiritual teachers.

With these issues in mind, we can look at several factors which arise from this study which bear upon the use of meditation as an adjunct to counselling/therapy. One of the common elements of meditation practice (in one or more of the forms discussed) revealed in the narratives is the experience of heightened awareness of negatively toned states of mind. These can arise in affect, imagery and/or thought. (Previous research supports this finding which has been conceptualized in psychodynamic terms either as a derepression of repressed material or regression to more primary modes of thought.) Meditation(s) of this sort would be clearly countraindicated in certain clients, e.g., those who are in crisis situations, or those who are overcome or flooded with emotion. On the other hand, the therapeutic process with clients who are "out of touch" with memories, feelings, images may be assisted by such meditation.

The research suggests that certain meditations and contemplations may be helpful in acting as aids or antidotes for particular concerns or again, merely raising underlying concerns into awareness where they may be dealt with through other interventions. For example, we have seen that the practice of prostrations surfaced issues about humility/

arrogance. Mandala practice (another one of the foundations) raises the issue of generosity/stinginess. The Four Thoughts (which function as highly focused cognitive contemplations) work powerfully to stimulate concerns with existential questions. There are several meditations which work specifically with a shift of awareness away from a preoccupation with one's personal suffering and toward the development of compassion and involvement with others. Clearly, there are many possibilities for exploration which at this point are merely suggestive, including the impact of meditation on the interpersonal or communicative competence of the meditator.

Finally, the participants refer with regularity to the power of meditation to provide a context or space in which they could more readily process the material arising in their counselling and therapy. Meditation as spiritual practice seemed to provide a context in which their personal/ historical issues could be relativized and/or understood from a broader perspective. The relaxation component of meditation seemed to provide a balance to the psycho-physiological arousal entailed in therapeutic exploration and the strong emotional states entailed could be increasingly tolerated.

2. With practitioners

The interpretation of the process and context(s) of meditation presented here will provide mental health workers with a better understanding of the experience of people involved with meditation as a spiritual path. As Bergin's (1990) research has discovered, the general population (of potential clients) tends to be more open-minded regarding spiritual realities and pursuits. This study validates the practice of meditation (and spirituality, more generally) by rendering it more comprehensible to the mental health practitioner. In particular, it highlights and provides perspective on the roles of the teacher, technical mastery and cognitive restructuring. Meditation can now be understood in its role as a facilitator of meaning and as a vehicle for movement away from self-absorption with one's own narrative of victimization to a compassionate concern with others.

There are a variety of moments within the process which require careful negotiation and may lead to experiences of confusion and conflict, including issues of trust and betrayal, collapse and replacement of habitual world views, and irruption of powerful negative imagery. There is the potential that individuals working within a meditative tradition may have powerful experiences which exceed their understanding. The phenomenon of spiritual emergency (Grof,

1990), which takes many forms, may be triggered by certain meditative practices. Counsellors need not only to be able to honour the validity and reality of these practices but also need to be familiar with the various contexts of the path of meditation.

There is an additional range of concerns which may be presented to a counsellor by a meditator. While not explicitly an issue for any of the co-researchers in this study, problems of sexual abuse by individuals in positions of spiritual authority are becoming more widely reported. This type of sexual abuse is an extreme instance of betrayal and, inasmuch as it involves the individual concerned in a crisis of faith, it has great import. The therapist must take into consideration the spiritual values of the client, care for, and protect these values at the same time as surfacing the fears, guilt and rage of the victim. Without understanding the narrative of the client's path and the profound importance that meditation can play in his or her construction of meaning, purpose and value, this will be very difficult to accomplish. I believe the findings of this research will greatly assist the helper on her/his task. (This is equally true for other types of disappointment and betrayal experienced during the course of the journey.)

3. Counsellor growth

There are clear implications for the use of meditation by counsellors as part of their own process of growth and development. Given the nature of the profession, counsellors can deal with a high degree of personal stress, frustration and burnout. The findings support other research which suggests that meditation practice is a useful stress-reduction technology (e.g., Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Shapiro, 1980). However, this study implies that meditation as a spiritual practice may have values surpassing the psychophysiological reduction of stress, whatever mediating factors are involved. The role of motivation, values, and the underlying story of what life is about are all seen as central elements in the on-going practice of meditation.

This study suggests that meditation can lead to a new and deeper understanding of death and impermanence, the establishment of bodily experienced personal boundaries that are at the same time flexible, the development of compassion that is at the same time firm and confident, and an openness to dimensions of being beyond the personal from which life draws meaning and purpose. The stories examined here also provide support for the argument (Lesh, 1970; Welwood, 1983) that meditation is useful in the development and training of

empathy. These are all qualities and capacities that I, for one, would hope for in a therapist.

The practice of meditation seems to enable a reconciliation with of the practitioner with that which has been estranged. For example, the interpretation suggests that meditation can be part of a process through which one's parents, as the embodiment of, or symbol for, a guiding cultural tradition, may be re-embraced. This type of healing may be at least as relevant for counsellors as it is for clients.

Further research

Having developed an argument for the importance of studying meditation practice within its naturally occurring contexts, other concerns become apparent. Specific areas of this research could be deepened through further phenomenological enquiry. For example, the structure, impact, and meaning of specific meditation practices (e.g., the contemplation of death, the contemplation of precious human birth, prostrations) within the tradition could greatly extend the openings that this study has created.

Similar research could profitably be carried out with practitioners of other spiritual/religious systems: not only converts to the wisdom traditions of Asia, such as other schools of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism, but also with those who have kept faith with their Western traditions and those exploring such alternate pathways as shamanism, gnosticism, and Kabbalah. The findings of this study are so suggestive of psychotherapeutic benefits of long-term meditational practice that such research would be well advised.

As well, we are dealing with the experiences of a small range of individuals who are roughly in the same age cohort and all began to meditate in the same decade (between 1970

and 1978). They share a number of other significant characteristics: experiences with drugs is an important factor in their story; none of them live in their place of birth; they have all been involved in psychotherapy. It would be instructive to compare their stories with those who began to practice later or who share different profiles on one or other of the dimensions cited.

While the phenomenological-hermeneutic approach employed here might well be taken into other areas, questions remain that may best be tackled from within the positivist-experimental paradigm. The findings of this study should provide future researchers working within that tradition a way of clarifying their questions. In particular, as mentioned above, it is not possible with the methodology used to ascertain the relative impact of meditation and psychotherapy. Further research to determine the proper and/or possible domains of each as well as the interaction between the two is clearly called for. For example, what role might traditional meditational disciplines play in facilitating specific shifts in ideas, perspectives, world views, cognitive structures and processes? What specific processes are involved in the apparent increase in self-esteem seen in the stories presented here? What is the impact of meditation of various types on locus of control?

These and other questions are suggested by this study. But what is ultimately called for is a response to the overarching question of how the disciplined interventions of psychotherapy and the meditation techniques of spiritual traditions complement each other to contribute to human, and by extension, planetary well-being?

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APPENDIX ONE:

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

CODE NAME _____

AGE_____

BIRTHPLACE_____

RELIGION OF PARENTS_____

OCCUPATION_____

YEARS OF EDUCATION_____

MARITAL STATUS_____

NUMBER AND AGE OF SIBLINGS_____

YEAR OF STARTING MEDITATION_____

AVERAGE NUMBER OF HOURS/WEEK OF MEDITATION_____

PREVIOUS INVOLVEMENT WITH PSYCHOTHERAPY_____

TYPE_____

DURATION_____

APPENDIX TWO

Interview Concerns

This project requires an in-depth unstructured interview format in order to follow the particularities of each informant and to provide adequate detail and richness. An unstructured interview, while not consisting of a standardized set of questions, nevertheless provided firm structure and focus for the exploration of the topic under investigation.

In this case, there are certain questions of a demographic nature which were asked to provide a context for understanding the story of each informant. These questions included the following: **informant's age, educational background, size and composition of nuclear family, occupation and occupational history.** (See appendix one.)

Beyond these particular details, the interviews have the quality and appearance of a natural conversation, striking perhaps in its enquiring and mutually-reflective tone. The literature review and related personal reflection determined a set of themes and topics to be explored during the course of the interview, yet the progress by which these areas were covered and the emphasis that each informant placed upon them varied. This approach permitted new questions and lines of enquiry to develop naturally and spontaneously. The work with each succeeding informant could be altered as new possibilities came to light. The series of validation interviews permited a return to themes previously underdeveloped to ensure completeness and fidelity.

With this particular project, a chronological approach was followed, with most of the important topics rising in context of the narrative produced. These topics or questions included **motivation and first experience of meditation, obstacles to practice, teachers and other sources of support and facilitation in the maintenance of practice, critical or pivotal experiences in the practice of meditation, and reflection on the personal benefits of practice.**