

LOVE OR FEAR?

We might think that meditation is one thing. But not so. There are many styles of meditation and their particulars largely depend on the metaphysical and cultural contexts out of which they arise. For this reason, meditation methods are often ways of cultivating our characters and our subjective lives in order to bring them into conformity with some culturally sanctioned ideal which is in turn justified by some metaphysical presupposition.

In almost every tradition, however, we find a minority of practitioners who grasp this state of affairs and find it “all too human” for both their taste and their intellectual conscience. I might mention here, the Yoga sage Patanjali, the mythical Padmasambhava who is supposed to have originated “the higher Tantra” of Vajrayana Buddhism, numerous early Zen masters, the 13th century Dominican Meister Eckhart, the contemplative Taoists Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu, and such modern pundits as J. Krishnamurti. This latter trend tends to emphasise the fact that our attempts to “improve” ourselves by systematically eroding our egos are themselves about as egotistical, egoist and egoic as it’s possible to be.

How do these two tendencies pan out in practice? On the one hand, there is a project of producing some conformity to an ideal, (Buddhist, Christian, Shaivite, New Age, post-modern or whatever), through some practice or set of practices which will of necessity have an ascetic character. Attaining the goal of the practices is conceived of as being like winning the lottery: one supposedly becomes self-sufficient, peaceful, magically able to fulfil one’s wishes – and here’s the golden egg: one no longer suffers. The goal is also usually conceived of as being very distant and hard to achieve. Let’s call this “ascetic spirituality”.

On the other hand, there is meditation without a goal. This is then of necessity a “letting-be”, a radical openness to “what actually is”, a deep acceptance of who, what and where we are. And since there is no goal, there is no question of either ease or difficulty and no consideration of time-spans. We should also add, there is no question of method. Let’s call this “openness”.

Here I should tell you that my approach is the latter one, not least because the metaphysical underpinnings of ascetic spirituality are of necessity incoherent, but because asceticism has invariably morbid results. On the positive side, the exquisite sublimity and beauty that resides in the most ordinary moment makes the intoxication produce by asceticism seem completely without the significance often attributed to it.

So we don’t have methods, and scarcely anything to teach. All we have is a pointing towards what you already have. What seem like methods are really only tricks. One of the tricks we *do* use is to indicate how you might comport yourself within your meditation. This doesn’t ask you to do this or that, imagine this or that, repeat this or that. It asks you to exercise your choice and *be* a certain way as you find yourself alive and conscious within a life which is unfolding, as it will and as it must, moment to moment.

At first it seems like there are a lot of choices, but really there is only one. We can be orientated

towards our own existence with a fearful attitude or an attitude of openness. The latter attitude is one in which love and the intelligence of love automatically arises in one's heart.

This choice actually mirrors the two approaches to spiritual life outlined above. If one is fearful, perhaps because an over-active super-ego is incessantly shouting that we are not good enough, then one will attempt to apply "methods" to achieve the goal of moral perfection, and through that, some peace of conscience. Or our attitude might be fearful because we rightly recognise life's great capacity to make us suffer and then seek some escape. We may then entertain the fantasy of bed-of-nails Yoga, whereby supposedly we will learn to become impervious to pain. But that which arises from fear will always smell of fear.

If one chooses openness in the sense of radical openness to what is, one has also chosen to love oneself, life itself and others. One has also given up on fear as an orientation to life.

Fear seems, at first glance, to be primordial given humankind's ability to register their essential vulnerability and to project their consciousness into the future. But a meditation of letting-be with awareness, of settling down into the stream of life, demonstrates very clearly that our primordial life-energy is love and that fear is a kind of crystallisation or fixation of that primordial energy. How wonderful that our most basic gift is love!!!

Pete Yates 24/2/2007