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Self Awareness
A Short Guide

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The moral right of the author has been asserted

This work is dedicated to all who wake up
one morning to find themselves
on the path of self-awareness



Foreword

As a conventionally trained physician and scientist, I find it exceedingly difficult to come to terms with a concept of bodily energy which is not quantifiable in physical units. It was with some trepidation, therefore, that I accepted an invitation to join a group on a visit to Egypt, organised by Second Aid. I had met Judy Fraser socially and we had discussed, *inter alia*, a project which she had in mind, and which I believed to be of major importance. Hence, although I was a trifle apprehensive about the sort of people I thought might be immersed in the exercise of developing 'self-awareness', I was reassured to know that Judy and I had more than a little in common.

In the event, our trip proved to be a rich and unforgettable experience, in many different ways. The group was made up of people from widely different backgrounds, interests and ages who were, without exception, delightful and stimulating travelling companions, and as we visited the temples and tombs of the successive dynasties we all became aware of the spiritual influence that still lingers in these ancient holy places, and with which, to some extent, I think all of us could identify.

Not surprisingly, many members of the group looked to Judy for surcease of various problems, both physical and psychological, which had directed their footsteps towards Second Aid in the first place, and her unique skills were in almost constant demand. But on the physical level, which can never be wholly dissociated from the psychological, I as an experienced physician, was privileged to sometimes be able to help.

What I have learned from Second Aid, and from all that is encompassed by this small yet huge book, is that there is a great deal of mental, emotional and physical discomfort which can be relieved by the processes involved in the development of self awareness – and that in some circumstances this can operate synergistically with the practice of 'conventional' medicine in a truly holistic sense.

In dealing with our respective 'patients', Judy and I approach from radically different points of departure, but our objectives are the same, and our concepts of good health and a sense of well-being are identical. I have also learned something of the deep understanding that has contributed to the concept of Second Aid, and which found expression in the ancient civilisations, and is rooted in the subconscious databank of mankind.

There is no conflict between the practice of conventional medicine and the practice of Second Aid. On the contrary, aptly named Second Aid can relieve our surgeries of a proportion of people whose emotional needs are the basis of psychological physical symptoms which will inevitably fail to respond to routine medical and psychological treatment.

Surgeon Vice-Admiral Sir John Rawlins
KBE, FRCP, FFCM, MFOM, FRAeS

Honorary Research Fellow – *University of Lancaster*
Honorary Director of Technology – *Robert Gordon's University*
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Note to Students

Please use an exercise book or diary to record your thoughts and reactions. Comparison of how you are now to how you used to be will help stabilise you in the present. Eventually past pain will fade, future ideas will become more realistic and you will be relaxed within life as it is now.

*I would not interfere with any creed of yours,
nor want to appear that I have all the cures.
There is so much to know.
So many things are true,
the way my feet must go may not be best for you.
And so I give this spark of what is light to me,
to guide you through the dark,
but not to tell you what to see.*



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Accepting Yourself

Accepting yourself . . . what does that actually mean and what can you do to achieve that state? Self-acceptance means giving yourself permission to feel – whatever it is that you are feeling. That does not give you license to think that you are perfectly entitled to think or act in any way. It doesn't mean that what you are feeling suddenly becomes "good" just by virtue of the fact that you are feeling it. Feelings such as anger, jealousy or envy do not end up making you or the person involved feel "good". But they can help you know and understand yourself better.

We have all been told many times to "relax and take life easy" but no-one has yet given us an easy prescription to follow which would make this seemingly straightforward ideal possible! One does not suddenly "become deeply relaxed" in one instantaneous leap – from the confused, uptight state to a blissful, peaceful one. Relaxation is a process, a basic framework which allows us to healthily and hopefully pass through life's many transitions.

But what do we mean by relaxation? How do we learn to deal with the steps and stages we must pass through to become adults, and how do we deal with life once we have become so-called adults? Upon reaching adulthood many of us (feeling we have acquired enough freedom and wisdom to guide us over life's hurdles) heave a sigh of relief, thinking that the goal has been reached and now we can really start to live the way we want to. When events conspire to show us we have not yet reached the pinnacle, we are faced with an apparent contradiction. Sometimes the resulting dis-ease and dis-comfort seem unbearable and life is a jungle of confusion. It is then that we start feeling the need for a state of restfulness, relaxation and ease.

We often do not realise that this state of affairs is as it should be. For as our outer body grows and matures from child to adolescent to adult, so too does our inner vehicle. It is simpler to see it on the outside level and once we are grown up we think the difficulty is over. But the inner being is much more complex, and just like the physical body, subject to growing pains. Our experience of life and our experiences of ourselves often seem isolated and fragmented, with no connecting thread running through them. Acceptance of this – acceptance of oneself as a human, growing, changing being – eliminates the confusion and allows, whatever

the circumstances, a state of rhythm and harmony to ensue. One can achieve a relaxation of substance, a relaxation of the otherwise perpetual state of conflict.

While pursuing that evasive state of relaxation, it is totally unrealistic to expect that you will be able, as popular yoga, anti-stress and meditation courses would have us believe, to flop onto a comfortable chair and within fifteen minutes release all your tension. If you can even find the time to practise this you will see it is not so simple to enter into a state of blissful contentment and peace. And if you do manage to achieve that envied state for fifteen minutes, what happens when you get up from your chair and resume your responsibilities? Can you keep it up?

Often it is not easy to find the time to enter into deep relaxation, as we are faced with the demands of children, bosses, spouses, partners, commitments and so on. We are too busy to relax! Therefore, part of the process is to make the time a priority.

We can ask those around us to accommodate us for a while, to cover or fill in for us, while we take a bit of time off from our duties to enter into a set period of relaxation. It is a question of short-term loss (in terms of time taken from other activities) in favour of long-term gain (the result of relaxation is more stamina, endurance, tolerance and a positive attitude towards life).

The following pages offer what we have found to be a flexible plan, approach or attitude, as well as guidance, support and encouragement. Relaxation may simply be one goal or objective in an overall state of being. In any case, we must learn to keep on keeping on, not in an altruistic way, or as a martyr, not merely for the children or because our boss or spouse needs us, but for ourselves. Ultimately, the path of self-acceptance and self-expansion is the only viable alternative to perpetual confusion and chaos.

Relaxation Technique

1. Sit in a comfortable chair, or on the floor if you prefer, but make sure that you are in a relaxed position. If you are on a chair, place your feet flat on the floor, straighten your spine, neck and head, and close your eyes. If you are on the floor, you may cross your legs (Indian style) or stretch them out before you, providing your knees are bent and your feet flat on the floor. Try not to slouch, but don't become stiff either.



2. If you are feeling tense, worried or distracted, you can use this simple process to help you relax. Take in three deep breaths, and as you exhale slowly, say to yourself the word “relax”. Consciously concentrate on the muscles in your body, starting from your feet, calves and thighs, moving up to your stomach, chest, arms, neck, head and face. Tense each set of muscles first, then release the tension consciously and slowly, feeling the gentle warmth, comfort and relaxation each time you release. Become aware of your body as a pleasant part of the natural surroundings.

3. Create a clear picture in your mind of the situation about which you feel worried, angry or resentful. Be aware that you are feeling uncomfortable. Then again say the word “relax” to yourself three times and become conscious of your breathing. Try to breath in and out deeply and slowly. Do this several times.

4. Picture good things happening within the situation, a happy ending, a reconciliation, a change for the better, a rest. See the situation – yourself and all those involved – surrounded by love or whatever you think would be a good antidote to the problem. Picture the positive side.

5. Be aware of your reactions. It is natural to have difficulty seeing a loving picture. The feelings of tension, anger, frustration and all the other emotions are also natural. Dissolving them into relaxation will become easier with practice.

6. Think about the role you may have played in creating the stressful scene, and try to re-interpret the event, your own and other people’s behaviour. Imagine how the situation might look from another person’s point of view.

7. Be gentle with yourself and your thoughts. Try simply to watch rather than judge them, no matter how negative they may be. Become aware of how much less frustration, anger and resentment you feel. Tell yourself that you carry this new understanding with you.

Before you resume your normal activities, imagine yourself to be safe, healthy and protected. Mentally draw a white cloak around you and imagine that it gives you gentle comfort, safety, warmth and love. Move your head, hands and feet slowly. Open your eyes, look around; know that all is well with you and that you are in harmony with all that is.

These are the sort of impressions we carry with us, consciously or unconsciously, which at some point we must look at, review and revise. Without doing so, it is difficult to allow our own subsequent levels of growth

to emerge fully and freely. And, since personal growth and expansion is the goal of Second Aid, it is never too early or too late to reflect on our beginnings, on the past that has led us to this point, and thereby free ourselves from history.

*Learn to be silent.
Let your quiet mind listen and absorb.*

– Pythagoras –

Back to Beginnings – Overcoming the Shock

When you really think about it, the innocent bliss of childhood is not all that it is said to be. Though precious and unique, never is a person so vulnerable as when a baby. We are helpless and dependant on others for the fulfilment of our every need. We are also in the state of recovery, as it were, from the traumatic experience of the birth and no-one can alleviate the confusion and disorientation we experience. Thus, what is often thought of as the most comfortable and agreeable time of our lives is actually a highly stressful period, a time when we need constant attention, care, skill and much nurturing – to recover from birth and little by little, relax into life.

As we mature into adulthood, many of us decide that we do not wish to rely on others for our sustenance; we want to be independent. What we have forgotten is that without the initial period of reliance we would not have reached our present state. No one can ignore the goodwill and assistance given to us by others, even if it was only in our childhood. In some way, we are independent, in others interdependent, for no one person is an island unto themselves. We observe interdependence existing at all levels of life. It is a reminder of some greater force at work in this creation we call the world, and when we honour the fact that all beings are interdependent, we begin to see things in a new way.

As our inner being matures through adulthood, we come to periods where we recognise the need to let go of what was relevant in the past because we can see it is no longer important to us in the present. We might especially feel this way when reflecting on our childhood. Childhood is a time of experimentation for both our parents (or whoever takes care of us) and ourselves, a time of “learning by doing” as it were. Parents



do their best to have the endless patience, endurance and tolerance a child needs. Nonetheless, while we receive their loving care and good intentions, we also experience the “rubbing off” effect of their negative vibrations. Perhaps we can now better understand, as adults, and some of us as parents ourselves that our stewards may well have laboured, as we are now, under their own pressures and stress and may not have been able to give us as much care and attention as we wanted.

Where we may, perhaps, have harboured resentment towards our parents, we can now transform that into sympathy, understanding and love. We can work with the fact that though we benefited from their love and care, we also absorbed much of their tension, stress and negativity.

The temptation here is to blame our parents for our present problems, to resent their inadequacies rather than look at ourselves and see how we might improve our lot. Blaming means living in the past; it is not a positive action of the present and certainly creates no promise for the future. As children we had the wisdom of innocence; as adults and/or parents, we are still children, in that we are still learning and growing, still open, still changing. There is really no superior or inferior role; it is just a question of watching the changing of the seasons, and dealing with what life brings in each one.

Some people advocate putting your childhood behind you; we think it more helpful to return to the childhood, not to be childish, but to be as open, loving and trusting as you can – of course without making yourself too vulnerable! And if we have children, we would do well to meet them at the point where they are now and where we once were.

By approaching our lives in relation to the family with the thought that we are learning from them, we can reflect on what they teach us rather than resent them for intruding on our space. We can monitor, assess, evaluate and become free from negativity, instead of remaining crystallised in negative emotions or memories.

Fear

It is often said that fear is a built-in defence mechanism, deliberately designed by the Creator. If we had no fear of crossing the road, for instance, we might misjudge

the speed or distance of an oncoming car and get badly hurt. Despite the fact that fear can sometimes be helpful, we are trained to think of it as a negative emotion. As young children we are constantly told: “There is nothing to be afraid of” while being expected to embrace fearlessly every new experience or concept immediately. Fear, we soon come to realise, is not something to be readily admitted, rather it should be denied or hidden. Little boys are taught to puff out their chests and boast about not being afraid of anything. Girls perhaps have a little more leeway, they at least are allowed to cry! As adults, if we can view fear as an often helpful and natural control mechanism, we might learn how to work with it and perhaps even be grateful to it as a signal which warns us against over-extending ourselves.

Most of us become nervous, fearful or anxious when we are endeavouring to learn a new skill and similarly notice that as we become more adept and familiar, fear subsides. When this happens, as it almost constantly does when we are young and everything is new, adults will unwittingly try to divert or suppress our fear. This is another example of a case where we absorb negative vibrations. Though the adult is trying to be helpful this negative reaction to a child’s fear can be very counter-productive. It does not actually work with the fear, bring it out into the open or help the child accept it, let alone overcome it.

This is what we are left to work with, as adults, both in ourselves and with our children. We must first acknowledge and accept that we (or they) are experiencing fear before we can overcome it. If our own childhood fears have been suppressed, or if we have not been in an atmosphere where it was safe to express fear, we need to re-learn our creative expression and communication. Upon acceptance, fear becomes an aid to our progress and expansion, rather than a paralysing, anxiety-producing nuisance.

As we learn more about our inner working, we open to new levels of confidence and understanding. When we know more about what to expect we reduce the incidence of the unexpected having the power to bowl us over and we are more prepared to deal with unpleasant occurrences when they do arise. Ironically, when we consciously engage in self-discovery fears may seem more real, vivid and BIGGER than ever, so enormous and so plentiful that we think they can’t possibly be diluted, let alone dissolved never to return.

It seems a vicious circle. We often think it better to



ignore or suppress our fears (as our parents taught us), out of the fear (there it is again) that we might inadvertently be feeding fear by acknowledging it at all. Where to begin?

What we must understand is that the same energy which fed rather than dispelled our fears can be used now to disperse them and rectify the imbalance. First, accept rather than deny that your fears exist. Talk about them. If you actively seek counselling, information and guidance, there will be so many of your own resources for you to process and examine, so much for you to synthesise and think about that you will notice your fears diminish as they become transformed into food for further expansion.

Denial: Facing Change

From the time we are small we are told about the world, told who we are, what we should be, what is or isn't good for us. Especially when we are youngsters, we actively express a willingness to experience – sometimes in an open challenge, or rebellion against what has been told to us by others. We are not afraid of change; we are afraid not to change. When we are discouraged by our elders from experiencing things for ourselves, we often respond to their advice with the challenge “Who is to say that what is correct for you will be the same for me? I am not afraid to learn for myself!” It is only later, perhaps as a result of negative experiences, that we become afraid of and resistant to change.

All our lives, we question the rules and regulations imposed upon us. Many of us recognise that rules – since they were supposedly designed to aid us – should be flexible. They should, ideally, be adaptable to change, as we must be, to survive the variable and complex stages of life.

There is a time to question and a time to accept. When, for example, a loved person or way of life outlives its usefulness or becomes destructive to us, we need to know how to deal with the situation and that we can help ourselves to create the space to move on.

When we forget that we are in the cradle of Mother Nature our reaction is one of denial. We can't accept the change becoming apparent in our lives, yet we can't deny it either. An internal conflict can arise, where we feel we must move on and expand, yet we are afraid of change, fearful of hurting someone (or

being hurt ourselves), afraid of letting go, unsure of what may follow. We might even feel that life has suddenly lost all meaning. Shadows of the past emerge; we are uncertain and a great chasm of loneliness, perhaps inertia, overwhelms us.

When we have finished a chapter in our lives we can learn to be willing to leave it. We can give ourselves permission to remove ourselves from the experience or place or person that has, in effect, died. Some of us are now reaching that stage in our awareness where we realise that many of the rules by which we have allowed ourselves (or not) to be moulded and guided have become crystallised and outdated. We see that we must establish new guidelines, perhaps even belief systems, which will further and nurture personal – and collective – growth.

Looking at it from another point of view, it is much harder to see that we also impose our beliefs and projections on others. Good intentions exist on both “sides” but it is just as intolerable to impose our conditions on others as it is to have theirs imposed upon us! Again, adaptability, flexibility and open-mindedness are essential.

There is no real security in the cloak of concepts and projections that many of us wear. Whether it is of our creation or others, the protection that such a cloak affords is of the flimsiest kind. Eventually we must all become free of that outer layer of conditioning, and move on and into deeper aspects of the self.

Anger and Frustration

Anger and frustration are inextricably mixed. Without both of these signals letting us know that there is some imbalance that needs adjusting, there would be no release – rather a suppression of – negative emotions. We would remain unaware of our feelings and that would be self-destructive.

Let us examine anger as one of our reactions to other people's viewpoints – especially in the case where we unwillingly or unwittingly play a negative part in their scenario. We are all familiar with the syndrome of the human volcano where we try to pretend our annoyance doesn't exist or isn't really important and do everything to keep that wooden smile doggedly on our faces. Our anger (whether justifiable or not) nonetheless builds and builds and one day, when the build-up is too great, the human volcano erupts.



Instead of being upset or feeling guilty about this, we should feel grateful. It is, as we know nowadays, healthier to release our inner anger rather than suppress it. If we keep suppressing and finally the volcano erupts, we stand to lose more, in terms of loss of time due to extreme upset and in the disturbance caused to those around us. It is far easier to deal with, accept and work with our emotions and perhaps eliminate the need to explode altogether.

Frustration is similar if less intense. If we are interested in learning about our reactions and growth patterns, we will see that the frustration often prompts us to seek further, to question ourselves and others, to examine our behaviour more closely. This sort of activity in itself may not necessarily be positive (in some people it becomes obsessive) or even helpful. But through this attitude we learn to channel our frustration creatively and to look at events, feelings and our interactions with people in a way that we may not have been able to before. In this way, we can actively make our growth a more pleasurable, more rewarding and less threatening experience. Intuition and insight, which means taking the time to assess our feelings, circumstances and the situations that we "find ourselves in", provide the key.

As we become more familiar with our own inner signals, we do not have to wait until it becomes necessary to scream, shout and upset ourselves and others. Instead we can affably ask ourselves: "What is this situation trying to show me? How can I work with it?"

If we can't creatively summon our own self-awareness in times of stress, anger and frustration, we allow ourselves to sink in situations we ourselves have created, to become like a rock, crystallised. We cannot, and therefore should not, try to prevent motion, the very energy of life that moves through us. We are like the sea – and we must learn to work with the ebb and flow of our own tide.

Harnessing our anger as we would a team of wild horses (a daunting task) and putting the energy to work for us can be one of the ways we most help ourselves; and allowing others, good-naturedly and peaceably to hold their own beliefs, completes our inner balance. Contrary to what many people may think, there is plenty of room on this planet for differences of opinions. We do not necessarily create unity and harmony with others simply by agreeing with them.

All the different kinds of flowers, with their many colours, shapes and sizes, live in the garden without

quarrelling or shoving each other out of the way. Why can't (we) humans? Adopting this attitude and practising it as often as we can, we create a new level of self-discipline which is infinitely valuable – and much needed in today's world.

Suppression of anger and frustration merely causes static and creates a time delay factor, sometimes of many years. In the end, it all comes out in the wash; it must all be dealt with and resolved. We are often, in sudden, unexplained outbursts of anger, reacting to "unfinished business". One of the best ways to channel this energy creatively and let off steam is to pursue some sport or physical activity such as swimming, football, walking or dancing. Reading is helpful as a creative release and therapy. If you must, kick a pile of cushions instead of someone's shins; shout at the wind instead of at your boss; punch your mattress rather than the side of your car. Whatever the trouble, don't just sit around and stew in it! Move about. Talk to people. Help others by joining a group with a good cause. Above all, remember to accept yourself – and so carry on.

In learning to take responsibility for our actions and reactions, we are making the commitment to improve ourselves and our relationships. Learning to cope with our emotions, especially anger, is a major step in the process of self-awareness.

Projections of Guilt

Making a commitment to inner growth means recognising the need to experience; not to look around or wander about, but to actually go through it. Unless we try to "get ourselves right" – or as right as we can – we are a liability to those around us, as well as to ourselves. We have all noticed that if we are pleasant, our behaviour will have a positive effect on associates, friends, family – on all whom we encounter throughout the day. A smile from us can not only elicit a smile back, but create one for the next person down the line. In the same way, if we run amok, though we try to patch things up on the surface for the sake of appearances, the tone of the day will be negative. It is a chain reaction, and instead of blaming others, we should look to ourselves to set the trend we want to achieve.

We are always dealing with the projections of others, and one of the main ones is guilt. We may be made to feel guilty for neglecting someone, putting off our duties, showing anger or annoyance, forgetting to send



Mum a birthday card. But guilt, like most emotions, can be a long term investment towards deeper self-awareness. When we give permission for all our emotions to surface, though we may feel guilty about exposing them, we are in fact being more positive and life-supporting. If we catch ourselves feeling guilty it is a good time to engage in a little more self-searching. We can, for example, adopt the attitude that by improving ourselves, the interests and well-being of everyone will be improved. Perhaps we feel guilty if we have a bad day and take it out on others. We can look inside more deeply and try to pinpoint why we are having a bad day, why we are irritable or withdrawn. Guilt is merely a warning signal that something deeper inside is going on which is making us feel inferior or inadequate – according to our expectations of ourselves or the expectations others have of us.

We can then say: “Forgive me for being irritable. It is nothing you have done, it is something I have to work out myself. Please try to allow me some space to work it out and perhaps we can talk about it later”. This way, the needs of everyone can be considered and we can learn to co-operate even in times of stress or emotional discomfort or uneasiness. If we are given the opportunity to express what we feel without being made to feel guilty, more stability and a deeper understanding between the parties involved will be the result.

By the same token, we must become aware of when we make others feel guilty because their actions haven't met our expectations. If our objective is inner peace and stability, we need not be overly-concerned with how others treat us. It is far more beneficial to occupy ourselves with what we do unto others, for it is ourselves that we are trying to improve, and by doing so the world in which we live automatically reflects this in the fullness of time.

Bargaining and Freedom

Negotiation or bargaining often follows frustration, anger and guilt. We accept that if we are buying a house we must work with certain limitations, such as how much money is available, how many people are to be housed, the size, specifications and so on. If we change jobs we negotiate salary, hours of work, holidays and our duties and responsibilities. We don't think twice about negotiating in these sort of situations. But if we feel uneasy, or unsafe mentally or emotionally, we find

it much more difficult to enter into discussion to try to improve our situation.

Often it seems as if circumstances and rules are imposed upon us and we have few rights or choices. But if we look back over our lives until now, we can see that a force propelled us, as if of its own volition and despite our resistance, right up to this very moment. We recognise that in fact most of our needs have been met, even if we now feel it necessary to reject the processes which have propelled us into our present situation.

You might ask, then: “What about choice – am I not entitled to choose? What about my sense of freedom? Am I merely a puppet on everybody else's string?” For freedom is an elusive thing; you need to start with some in order to gain more. Is freedom inside or outside – or both? Where do you start?

We are all trying to create situations in our lives where choice is a possibility. This in itself is a gradual process. Any athlete will tell you that to build strength, endurance and resistance, you gradually increase your ability to extend a little further – every day, every week, every month. Soon you have achieved more than what you thought would be possible; through training you achieved your goal.

Similarly, if only we are able to observe ourselves, we may come to see that what we have come through is not so far removed from the daily episodes of a television soap opera. The events are apparently almost complete in themselves, yet there is also a thread which, often tenuously, links us to the next episode. It is only when we get an overview of our lives, when we step back for a moment and look at the forest instead of the trees, that we appreciate how each situation relates to our overall growth. While we are emotionally involved it is practically impossible to observe the complete production. The famous line of Shakespeare is appropriate in this respect – “All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players”.

So far we have assumed that we are in some position to negotiate, but as we all know, this is not always the case. Sometimes we find ourselves on the receiving end of somebody else's negotiating and we feel impotent, manipulated and resentful. No doubt these are the most difficult situations in which to try to apply cool, calm thinking, and it is ironic that these are the times when we need it most. Emotional reactions usually don't help. At those times what does help is to review our ideas of freedom. When we are feeling



imprisoned, this is realistically all we can do. We may not always be able to choose our circumstances but we can always choose to use our circumstances for growth, to use them (whether they are past or present) to move through and beyond the very circumstances which appear to limit us now.

So we can bargain for freedom – with ourselves. At least that is a choice open to us. We have seen many times that by not choosing this alternative, things usually become more difficult for us and others. So, at that point, it is crucial to call upon our previous experience and energy, resources and all our training to get over the hurdle. It is a time for review and reflection, however momentary, which in turn frees us from the initial emotional reaction which limits or colours a more meaningful response. Put even more pragmatically, the issue at hand simply becomes a choice between short-term and often superficial gratification or long-term gain.

To maintain stability in any situation, it is necessary to reflect and in so doing, consider our real needs as well as the immediate demands placed on us by a person or situation. Especially in restrictive circumstances we must try to be creative and inventive. Use your imagination if there is no other alternative to your present situation. Write a poem – or a book! Take a course. Offer your support to others whose circumstances may be even more restricted than yours.

It seems appropriate to relate an experience which illustrates the power that lies within each of us. One of us had occasion to visit a prisoner who had been incarcerated for over twelve years for an act, now regretted, so became dedicated to freedom and service. He was a man who had experienced himself to great depths and he seemed more a monk than a prisoner. At the time of meeting, he was preparing to return to the mainstream of life knowing that suspicion and opposition would greet him every step of the way, every day. Others who had not yet reached his level of conviction would challenge and react with prejudice – their judgement the result of social conditioning – and he would have to react with a stoicism born of deep inner strength and self-knowledge. The few hours that this author had the honour to spend with him marked a turning-point where a profound truth was recognised. When one reaches the limits of one's capacity, there is no need for pretence. When you have nothing left to lose, you are free . . . when you are free, you know you have nothing to lose or gain.

Confusion and Potential for Change

Confusion, a state we all know well, is a sense of fragmentation, when many different options and/or points of view place the weight of a decision upon us. Whether the confusion is real or imagined (and who is to say which is which?) we feel that a great onus is on us. "What path should I follow? Last time I made a terrible mistake. Should I or shouldn't I? Can I or can't I?"

To allow for more than one possibility means you are ready to accept the responsibility of commitment. We often jump in our views from one extreme to another, and (here is another of life's little ironies) lose sight of the original idea or ideal altogether. This can be extremely depressing, yet if we can view the depression dispassionately, we can allow ourselves to be taught by the experience.

Appreciation of the potential of a situation allows us to experience more fully. Compromise is one aspect; the freedom to say "I don't want to" is another. Whatever the case, we must give of ourselves unconditionally, which means that we take responsibility for our actions and the subsequent reactions created thereby. Because we know that no situation is hopeless, we can relocate hope; we can "dare to care". We can deal with whatever comes.

Confusion actually helps us sort out the wheat from the chaff, and allows us, if we try, to see the essence which lies behind it. If we use confusion in this way, as we mentioned earlier, using fear, anger and frustration, we begin to be able to work with what it is, to experience clarity amidst confusion, to separate essence from imagination. As we train ourselves to strip our states of mind into component parts, we can condense and retain that which is useful and unburden that which is superfluous. This is hardly easy! We are dealing with states of mind not only in ourselves (and that alone is a monumental task) but also in relation to others. To do this requires that we release what we thought of as our own so-called "authority", and bow humbly before a greater authority, the universal consciousness.

In spite of the fact that we sometimes do not appear to know what we are doing, we can remember that there is precise order and rhythm within the cycles of nature – and knowing that is perhaps the greatest freedom of all. So we can embrace our smaller sense of self and try to harmonise with something greater – even though we may not know or understand exactly



what is going on! This may sound fatalistic but often there is no other choice except to keep on going.

Thus the real meaning behind confusion is an appreciation of the potential, usually of something we are as yet unable to understand. In speaking this way, we are not making light of the uneasiness confusion creates; what we are saying from our experience is that there is sense within the apparent nonsense. As the end of winter drags on and on it seems that spring will never come, but it is the very end of winter which signifies the coming of spring!

The element of time confuses in its own right, for when we are at a low ebb, time acquires the characteristic of seeming endless, and when things are going well it teasingly passes in an instant. Passing through confusion increases our ability to grow and expand.

Though times of confusion may create great difficulty and static for ourselves, our family, friends and colleagues, it is a prelude to a more balanced state of being.

Burnout and Balance

How can we know light without darkness? How can we experience balance without having experienced imbalance? Often it seems that experiencing the negative side or polar opposite of our goal helps us measure our progress. We can't cop out of life and so must accept that we will experience the extremes in many situations until we come to a point of integration and reconciliation. Balance is not an outside thing; it comes from inside and means that you can face all of life with the sense of inner balance. You become a sort of mental juggler or acrobat; you see how well you can do without falling. And if you fall or lose your balance, you pick yourself up and try again . . . after all, you've only fallen onto the trampoline, and so you can bounce back.

The ironic thing about inner growth is that it seems to create imbalance. When you're out there living life, making yourself vulnerable, perhaps, by taking chances, expressing, communicating, trying out new ideas and activities, you are more likely to be subject to radical swings. It is another one of those "snake-eating-its-tail" symbols. By seeking growth and not hiding in the superficial comfort of your routine or habits, you open yourself up to situations where swings, shifts and sometimes catastrophes will occur. But at least you're giving life a chance and living it fully.

In our enthusiasm we must also beware of becoming slaves to our ideals. There is no need to exhaust ourselves while trying to glimpse both ends of a given spectrum. We needn't run to both ends to get an informed overview. But we do require the overview to make aware choices. A broader understanding allows us to perceive the invisible behind the seen, the sound behind the words, the shape and shadow behind touch, the thought behind the description.

We must also be aware of burnout, a modern-day syndrome where, with so much to do and learn in this age of specialisation, it is easy to be open to everything until we suffer from overload. We may recognise the merit of many activities or ways of living but that does not necessarily mean that we have to try them all. We must achieve a sense of balance in all respects, achieving what we set out to do day by day, week by week, month by month. We must also seek to create the balance in helping others as well as taking care of ourselves, learning to fulfil our obligations as well as taking on new tasks and interests. Both are necessary, and both are rewarding. It is simply a question of refinement and attunement, until we get the blend right. And we know when that is so, because we are rewarded with additional energy and inspiration when we thought we had exhausted it.

Finally, we see we are now at a point in our growth where we can make use of experience rather than be the hapless victim of it . . . and we can begin to think of using our experience to help others.

The time cycles are there to guide us and they do even before we realise; we know when to finish breathing in and thus reverse the flow and breathe out. We know when to stop looking outwards within our growth and so start to look in. Then we have a gap to facilitate going into reverse so to speak. So we get a period when the light of new learning unites with its shadow side and is looked at from various different angles. We see this reflected and duplicated by nature in the sun, moon, tides, etc. Once both are united we release the need for fight and flight and achieve an embracing of both. That which was the ceiling then becomes the floor of the next phase and the foundation of the next building is laid.

*However many holy words you read,
however many you speak, what good will they do you
if you do not act upon them?*

– The Dhammapada –



Expansion: Up the Spiral Staircase

Expansion and education are, unfortunately, not always in keeping with the thinking of school authorities. For many of us, formal education was often more of an endurance test than a process of expansion and training in real self-awareness. When we remember our salad days, we think of a (mild?) form of dictatorship; we were forced to study subjects in which we did not have the slightest interest and to apply theories and principles which seemed to have nothing to do with real life. Only a small part of our education, it seems, truly helped us “grow up”.

This attitude held by educators denies natural laws. Obviously, children need encouragement, advice and guidance but they must also be allowed and encouraged to follow their natural inclinations. It seems that even modern schooling has a long way to go in this regard. As adults, we are often freer to pursue interests we were not encouraged to follow as children. We can choose to harmonise our interests and skills, our work and our play, with our evolution as human beings. In other words, we are free, in many regards, to exercise a little more of our free will, simply because we realise we are free to choose. Where hope was lost, it may be rekindled. A new talent or interest can be discovered; a lost one can be revived. We recognise the importance for our overall health and well-being to integrate rather than separate the various aspects of our lives. We are never too old or too rigid in our outlook to drink the elixir of eternal youth.

Before, we fought and rebelled against the force and limitations imposed on us by authorities; now we are prepared to actively participate, to work with and implement the efforts others have made on our behalf. We can once again – now! – enjoy the promise of freshness and anticipation because each moment is new. Thoughts, ideas and events do change because life, as energy, continually moves forward. But we can learn to look forward even to the uncertainty of what tomorrow may bring, rather than fear it.

When we see our lives as a reflection of universal law, when we pursue and persevere with the attitude of self-awareness, we find that we gain rather than lose control. This approach to life, which many people call fatalistic, actually allows us to act from a standpoint of calmness and freedom which no amount of striving or emotional actions and reactions can. Suddenly life,

which seemed to be an endless series of disappointments, frustrations and compromises, a never-ending endurance test – a struggle – seems manageable! The tide has turned.

At this point, we recognise that all of us are part of a greater pattern or cycle. This is demonstrated at every level of nature, and at every stage of our evolution, if we can perceive it. As the years pass, we keep ascending the spiral staircase, passing through familiar (and these can be loved or despised) spaces and places – but always on the way up. It is important to recognise that we are moving forward! If we don't acknowledge that we are progressing, we may expect present situations to conform to old patterns and to have the same negative results or cause the same old difficulties.

This shows the strength and power of our minds to create either negative or positive thinking. If we project negativity, the self-fulfilling prophecy is bound to occur, and we will ourselves have created the negative situation. Or, perhaps we withdraw from the situation because we think it will be too difficult to cope with. Then we have wasted a precious opportunity for growth.

Why limit ourselves? If we are able to release the past and recognise the freshness and unique opportunity which the present has to offer, we can make the most of each moment of our lives. That does not mean to say that we should naively run headlong into trouble, or that the risks are over and we can expect no difficulties; it is just that we are better equipped to deal with difficulties when they arise.

At this stage, it becomes useful to seek others, to share experiences, to communicate with like minds. Having experienced something of that unique, mind-boggling and often confusing glimpse of something deeper, many people become avid readers to further their explorations. It becomes a further exercise in awareness to listen intelligently, sensitively, perceptively. We find, perhaps, that we are drawn to people and places which before held no interest. And because we are more open-minded, we receive more encouragement and direction, often in unexpected places and from unexpected sources. It is as if we are being invisibly guided. We cannot rest complacently; we must keep going forward, even while sometimes looking over our shoulders. And because we discover that there are others on the same path, we can help as well as be helped along the way.

For most of us, this is one of, if not the greatest,



transition periods we have experienced, for now we must trust ourselves as well as others, and it is neither smooth nor easy. Sometimes we wonder if we are in control of ourselves; it may seem that we are being mysteriously guided by an unknown force! Again, we must remember that we always have the choice of how to look at things. If we have rejected parts of our past, the present and certainly the future will be an improvement. If we choose self-awareness, education, open-mindedness, we are choosing expansion. If we choose not to make efforts, we have chosen to fragment rather than unite, to punish rather than help ourselves.

We are all familiar (perhaps from personal experience) with the child whose inner light has faded because he/she was unable to receive helpful information, encouragement and guidance when it was needed. We are, perhaps, those children who ran amok. And we value those very special elders whose light still burns brightly, like a child's, whose interest in and energy for life seems insatiable. The lesson is that those who would be helped must also help themselves. A sense of inner harmony is the result of trust and surrender, and acting in trust and surrender means acting for our evolution.

To do this effectively, it helps to have support and encouragement from others who experience life in a similar way. Sometimes we think we have to be too independent. Why not help ourselves by actively seeking and accepting the guidance others can offer? Every step of the way can be consolidated and experienced in fullness. Every pressure, every exertion, is necessary and helpful, for it creates strength and increases our capacity to live happily.

Discernment: Fine Tuning

As we begin to accept the need for new information and a new system of rules, we are still in a state of doubt. "How do we navigate ourselves through the perils and the unknown? How do we know that this new approach will make us happier? Perhaps things will get worse!" We need to bolster our courage at this point and have a little faith in our own good judgement.

It helps if we share the company of a friend or counsellor who can be objective, who can, like a mirror, act as a reflection of ourselves. An objective well-wisher can be very constructive in aiding us to select that which we should retain and that which it would be

best to discard or modify. In clearing away some of the clutter our minds become sharper and more able to work with and further refine those ideas which we retain or newly adopt. We discover that our powers of discrimination and discernment are more astute, and we waste less time and energy over things and thoughts which are unproductive or not positive for growth.

Our goal is to refine, appraise and monitor our progress. A helpful visualisation is to imagine that you are your own management team and that you have granted yourself the time and resources to study a proposed plan. You proceed with caution, monitor the stages and review your progress. In reporting back, you hold a board meeting with yourself, as it were, and fix as your goal a "win-win compromise", whereby all members of the team, which means all with whom you come into contact, can feel as if they've benefited by being in your presence.

When you organise your strength, you will see just how much you have not only to gain, but to offer. Within this cycle of growth, you will notice a new chain reaction occurring. You, the pupil, can in an instant become someone else's teacher; though you are in the process of learning you can simultaneously help someone else. And you recognise also that everyone is your teacher! You begin to see that we are all linked, obliged to help one another, that we are inter-dependent, each of us a unique part of the whole.

Wisdom

Some may be blessed by being born with wisdom and these fortunate people are thus innately wise, but for most of us wisdom is learned and acquired and life is the only teacher. To become wise you must commit yourself to growth and that means turning away from your own crystallised state in order to create a new approach to yourself, to others and to life itself. We must constantly examine our inner structure which is made incredibly complicated by the fact that much of what we think of as "us" is the conglomeration of our having learned and adopted the concepts of our parents, friends, schools, society, etc. Our very thoughts and belief systems, the principles upon which we base our lives, are built largely on the foundation which we have imbibed from others. No doubt we have interpreted and assimilated much and have our own per-



sonal views and opinions. We are not simply carbon copies of the prevailing status quo! However, there remain no areas in our present selves which do not require review, which do not need to be understood and verified. We must face our own areas of sluggishness, stagnation and strength, see who we are, what we wish to become and where it all fits together.

Thus, the accumulation of knowledge, facts and worldly experience alone is not wisdom. So far, our wisdom is mostly the composite of all our experiences, insights, perceptions and beliefs. While "becoming wise", we are not in a state of inertia. Attaining wisdom is an active, dynamic process which begins before we are born and does not end with our last breath. Wisdom is a state of being or beingness. It is a process of updating, incorporating a larger scope, adding more tolerance, more understanding, more depth. Compassion is born out of the experience of wisdom.

Some of us might be inclined to expend so much effort in this direction that we exhaust ourselves. Here again, we should remember the element of deep relaxation. Over-extending ourselves can be very healthy and is one of the ways through which we stretch and expand. But, like our lungs which suspend movement between the ingoing and outgoing breath, we must use that built-in pause – which is natural to all our bodily functions – for reflection. Reflection is one of the most valuable activities we can engage in. Ask any inventor, artist, writer or problem solver and he or she will tell you that times of reflection have often been the birthplace of wisdom and intuition.

As wisdom arises from reflection, so it is also a mirror reflection of our experience to date. When we can comfortably amble along and there is no great contradiction between our internal body of knowledge and our day-to-day experience, we feel reasonably secure and content and think of ourselves as being sufficiently wise. When we encounter discrepancies, blockages, questions, we become stressed. If you visualise the two extremes of mental ease and stress on a continuum you will see that between the two are anger and frustration. When we reconcile these emotions, we have entered (until the next upheaval anyway) into the wisdom sphere.

These processes are the basis of our forward impetus. Clearing the past helps us to continue the journey. When we stop and rest in contemplation and reflection we can look with compassion upon our experience and, though we may feel vulnerable, we can move with self-assurance to greet the next of life's challenges.

Illuminations

We are seeking a rhythmic and harmonious approach to life. Still, we too often treat new ideas with instant rejection: "Too difficult," "Too strange and unconventional;" "Too boring." The problem lies not necessarily in the idea, it is more our impatience which leads us to a continual search for perfection rather than a willingness to work with what is available.

Many of us are at a stage in our lives, perhaps not for the first time, where we are questioning fundamentals. We may have fought and rebelled, kicked and screamed. We may have undergone (and are probably still undergoing) personal traumas. Now we are willing to ask ourselves what lessons there are to be learned, and which laws should govern us.

Much of what has gone before is neutralised and we are now aware that through positive growth, all duality can become unity. The inner and outer being can now merge and adopt the same goal. That is the only way we will be able to make sense of it all – when "my" goals are not different from "your" goals, when my "inner" being is in harmony with my "outer" being and vice versa. Then perhaps we can learn life's lessons while being guided by a set of principles that enable us to expand in harmony with both our inner and outer environment.

Any stress we are feeling functions as a motivating factor, prompting us to find an acceptable level of ease and comfort within our expanded capacity. It is understood that we are all subject to greater patterns and disciplines that come from minds greater than ours, whether it is the collective mind of our city, country, the planet, or the mind which created all these. However we picture the greater picture to be, we are nonetheless concerned with one particular part – us – within the whole. Though each cell in our body is unique and complete, it still functions as part of our physical body. If we extend that concept we will see that as individual entities we are also part of that universal law of correspondence. This being so, we are able to plan our own path within the greater pattern. According to the law of cause and effect we, as beings of free will, are able to choose the path of illumination or the path of delusion, the path of greatness or that of smallness. At every moment, in every situation, this is the choice we face.

Previous experience (especially if it was negative) makes it tempting to sit on the sidelines and try to post-



pone action, but the nature of cosmic law does not allow this. Total involvement is required to work beyond the effect and so increase our understanding of the nature of cause. Another of life's lessons involves motivation and intentions. Without motivation, a person cannot move. No matter what the activity, if the motivation is negative, the activity and its results become negative. By the same token, when the motivation is positive, the activity and its results become positive. Even if the results appear unsatisfactory to us, natural law demands that the donor of positive motivation and intentions should receive in abundance what he or she has given.

Life as we know it progresses in chronological order in stages from birth to death. Providing we exercise the will and desire to know, we can rest assured that the knowledge we need at any given time will be made available to us. The law of transmutation enables us neither to reject nor helplessly accept what we don't like, but rather change it positively into a foundation for future growth.

The law of generosity encourages us to share our knowledge and link harmoniously with the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms, as well as with energies and realms in higher dimensions. In learning to link we evoke the law of love, recognising that as our knowledge increases so does our responsibility to care for the creatures of this earth. We can imagine that in each encounter with another being we are spreading light and that those who absorb light from us will in turn spread and radiate it to others. As human beings aspiring to real growth, we practise and cultivate love, compassion and tolerance, the qualities cherished by all great beings.

*A tree that can fill the span of a man's arms;
grows from a downy tip.
A terrace nine storeys high;
rises from hodfulls of earth.
A journey of a thousand miles
starts from beneath one's feet.*

– Lao-Tzu –

Responsibility and Harmony

We have mentioned the "win-win compromise" in which the parties in question work out a solution whereby each is recognised as winning or gaining, rather than losing in a given situation. This method of

reconciliation is now gaining recognition in economic and political arenas as well as in inter-personal relationships. It is an attitude that wins respect and transforms negative energies.

When we think in a manner that embraces all possibilities we become positive, life-supporting people. That is, we are not exclusive, we do not exclude or alienate others or their way of thinking. We are expansive enough to welcome others (in spite of the temporary inconvenience that may be caused) and entertain their points of view. This is another case where short-term discomfort achieves a long-term gain. Once again it is a question of balance and working creatively with circumstances and situations to create ease and well-being, thereby extending the parameters of personal growth.

An exercise to help create this state of mind is to imagine ourselves as part of an orchestra. Each player is a master of his instrument and each must also adjust his volume and style to accommodate the others. The level of commitment is such that each musician puts aside his own personal desire to be the soloist and works toward a balance which will create harmony. Each accepts that his individual part creates a shared whole which, because it is the culmination of the individual effort and skill of all the members of the team, is more enjoyable and satisfying to listen to.

Carrying this analogy a little further, one could say that playing a solo would be more satisfying and less restrictive than playing an indistinct part. That may well be so. The point to be recognised, however, is that you are free to choose. If you want to strike out on your own, fine. If you would like to be part of a collective endeavour you have to abide by certain rules otherwise chaos results. There is certainly a time for each and much satisfaction can be derived from both kinds of activity and focus. But remember that life is a collective endeavour, that it helps to help each other and work together to achieve common goals.

We have now reached a crucial stage in our lives where we must acknowledge and identify with greater rhythms. In so doing we give credit to the skill of the conductor of the orchestra, who manages to keep the music flowing from all of us and we are as gracious in our acceptance of his/her skill and wisdom as we can be, recognising that there is always room for our own improvement!

Developing harmony is a kind of discipline, a self-imposed limitation which we are committed to work



through. To create harmony we should adopt the attitude of "How can I make a positive contribution to this endeavour?" rather than think only about what we are going to get out of it. To achieve harmony within one's own being and with others is, perhaps, one of the most pleasurable experiences a human being can know. It means that we make the commitment to take responsibility for ourselves rather than expect others to carry us along through life. We can acknowledge the unique opportunity that so-called limitations afford us to further our understanding, and in so doing we celebrate a new aspect of communication with others.

Communication

We have been talking about thoughts and feelings but it is communication of these that usually creates the problems. The first step is to find out what we think and then link this to our environment. As if this were not already quite a task, we then have to try and bridge the gap in relation to other people's realities. Sometimes, as we mentioned earlier, we are trained to withhold what we think because it does not suit or fit the status quo and in that way society often reinforces suppression of our communication.

It is sometimes difficult for us to remember that others are viewing situations from a different place, influenced by a different set of conditions and beliefs. Therefore the only person who can make sense of the message of the moment is you and, of course, those who guide you from higher dimensions. So in many instances we would, perhaps, do better to keep quiet until we have got a real perspective of the situation!

If we learn and practice observation and assessment we are more likely to become effective in our understanding and communication. The senses, their various functions and their infinite number of messages illustrate this clearly. Who can say what the prime sense is? For each person a different sense will be the most important. Your ears can tell you one story while your eyes tell you another. Each sense gives us a different perspective of the jigsaw. Communication is a vast subject and there are so many languages with which to communicate. Body language, verbal exchange, the written work, visual media and telepathy are only some of the means. It is no wonder we find communicating with people exhausting! And listening or perceiving are not any easier, for to be really tuned in all your senses

must be well co-ordinated. To be co-ordinated you need to have gained a measure of control and perception, not to mention balance. You must know when to talk or transmit and when to listen or receive.

Communication is a skill we possess innately, at birth, and one which we keep expanding upon throughout our lives. Development of any skills needs information and practice. On the path of self-expansion we must make a concerted effort to communicate and allow others to do the same. The first place to begin is with yourself. When you become aware of your own inner workings you will be much more perceptive about the world around you and much better at living and communicating truth.

Trust

Faith is having trust that, in spite of appearances to the contrary, our lives and our efforts to make this world a better place are worthwhile. Faith is a basic principle that needs constant renewal.

We do complete cycles in our upward spiral of self-awareness. It is not necessarily that there is a complete resolving of problems or fears or that nagging memories of confusion disappear overnight. Situations may and often do recur which trigger areas we thought we had come to terms with long ago. We learn to reconcile that what we need may not always be what we want! Though we may not like everything we are going through, we recognise that it may be a necessary part of our spiritual growth – even though we may only be able to recognise this in hindsight.

We have to stand firm and trust when we find ourselves thrown back into areas of darkness. It may at times seem that we have taken one step forward and two steps back and we feel that we have lost our footing and have slipped back into the shadow realms of the inner, secret, dark side of our self, into isolation fear and confusion.

Stand firm and trust. Remember the infinite possibilities, the infinite magnitude and infinite precision of the creative consciousness – that the stars do not fall out of the sky and that even the tiniest insect has its place in the universe.

It is much easier sometimes to throw a temper tantrum and inform the Almighty how undeserving you are of all the trouble He/She has inflicted upon you, how unjust life is and how you would have created the



world more fairly. Time for the Creator to improve things with a little high-tech perhaps?

Eventually we recognise the wisdom of avoiding such extremes, of taking the middle path and maintaining a sense of detachment. We can resolve from now on to acknowledge all sides, but we needn't get emotionally involved in all of them.

There is so much we do not know. If we could release our resistance we could be shown. We may not always be enthusiastic about the situation but we can give some of the responsibility for it to the universal consciousness by offering our trust. For it is generally the case that we are untrusting creatures, reserving contingency clauses and options in case the "in case" should happen. The simple truth is that if we release ourselves, and trust, we are shown and guided. Sometimes those around us prove to be an even greater obstacle to this, but in spite of their reactions of doubt or negative projections, we can choose to respond to life in this fashion. In the end, it is your own strength and faith that sees you through difficult situations, so why succumb to the scepticism of others?

If we are able to detach and look objectively at our situation, we can observe that it was precisely this set of circumstances – however unwanted – that brought us to where we are now – to the threshold of a new understanding. Winding our way up the spiral, we can recognise the confusion and see the alternatives, appreciate that there is a higher power at work, change our plans, adopt a new strategy. We can release the past, retain the essence of all that has been and train ourselves to be flexible – so that we can adapt to and accommodate whatever is to come.

This is a process which cannot be hurried. There may be times of apparent depression and confusion and the lack of sympathy and understanding of others may not help. To be climbing out of the pit, as it were, reminds us of having fallen into it. The image is of watching ourselves in the very same place as before; only this time we are travelling forward, up out of the mire!

Seeing

We have referred to seeing, not merely with our eyes but with a deeper sense of vision. We are trying to develop the ability to see beyond where we now stand in life. The flow of life itself is moving so quickly, all

around us and within us, that we sometimes feel dislocated, unsure of our place and role in the tapestry. At the same time we are aware, however vaguely, of that elated feeling that comes when we "see" with clarity. Click, click, everything suddenly fits into place, and the universe is right once more. We see where and who we are, and that each of us is a perfect and whole part of the puzzle.

Externally, life can be perceived as endless motion. We (that is, our thoughts) also seem to change so quickly; everything around us is changing at an incredible speed. Yet we are also aware that there is a point of stillness and quiet deep inside. How can we learn to see and work with that stillness in motion? We need to be able to adapt to change, to perceive with a clear-sightedness that sees the past as a complement to, not in conflict with the present, and the present as a creative opportunity for further expansion. If our vision is broad enough we can include the needs of others. If we are not wearing mental blinkers we can see clearly in retrospect, work positively with the past, and use the past positively not only in anticipation of the future but in the eternal now. The more we see and perceive the more we are challenged to make sense out of apparent nonsense . . . and we can continue to expand the panorama of our vision!

It is all too easy while struggling through life's everyday helter-skelter to lose sight of these goals, to lose patience with those whose vision may not be as expanded as ours. It is easy to blame others for our own failings, forgetting how hard we are working to acquire understanding, and that in turn our understanding must be used to help and encourage others achieve the same. To see is to recognise not only our own needs, but those of the groups within which we live and work. There is a bonding that takes place with others, all the more powerful when you are able to perceive what they, perhaps, cannot. To maintain that foresight and vision is an act of great courage and requires a great deal of hard work that is often less than pleasant, especially when others think we've gone a bit daft!

A valuable exercise for our growth is to work in situations or groups with others and learn how to handle them without losing our own, ever expanding perspective, to remain undaunted even by criticism and lack of support. In this regard, it is often helpful to get in touch with nature, the earth, by doing some indoor or outdoor gardening, touching the flowers and trees, or



walking barefoot on the ground. Learning to see not only with our eyes, but with every part of ourselves, creates a rich, harmonious and rewarding way of living in the world.

Hearing Beyond Sound

Unlike animals, humans do not depend solely on their physical senses for survival. The sixth sense, which is the meeting point and message centre for the five physical senses, is the storehouse and nerve centre which processes incoming information absorbed by the senses. Our minds then interpret these messages through thought, feelings and action.

Though the senses are important for our basic survival, they are also used as a form of measurement to judge our response to a given situation. This is illustrated by the expression "cloth ears", where you screen out (consciously or unconsciously) what you do not wish to hear. If someone is lecturing us, for instance, and we don't really want to listen to what they're saying, we can literally block them out. On the other hand, we are not so technically endowed as to set up an optional receiving station so that many vibrations and sounds penetrate our consciousness which we sometimes wish hadn't.

The extension of our hearing beyond the normal scope of our ears is known as clairaudience, and as the name implies, we become the audience of many types of sounds. When we absorb so much information – that is, vibrations as well as auditory sounds – we must ensure that we are selective and can screen out what is redundant. We must be able to say "No!" to too much. When you've reached the saturation point and can't listen to another word, it is a good idea to leave everything alone and read a book, go for a solitary walk in the woods or in the nearest park, even go to sleep. A change, which is as good as a rest, can also be a good balancing agent. Be realistic, be selective, and don't waste your precious energy. Don't listen to rubbish! Practise economy of speech as well as economy of listening and most of all, if you really want to hear what's going on, listen to the voice which speaks inside you.

Earth represents the tangible evidence whilst water links the flow of the ever-moving scene. Air represents the invisible realities of our life and fire is the essence generator. These are communicated via our sensory mechanisms of touch, taste, smell, sound and sight and

the sixth sense collector which is conveyed by intuition to a feeling which we learn to recognise and trust. And so we begin to test or detach ourselves and to discern how our feeling is actually the love of the finest, lightest quality gained through understanding the best available data. We can then select the thought transmissions and telepathically transmit that which we clairvoyantly know to be the best and trust that what we are able to do will be added unto by many others and that all efforts will be united and harmonised within a greater effort.

Instincts: Smelling, Tasting and Touching

Smelling and tasting are (probably) two of our secondary senses. While animals depend almost entirely on these two instincts to stay alive, we have to a great extent eliminated dependence on these skills. However, like the other senses and their corresponding mental functions, taste and smell are intuitive recording mechanisms and through them we can interpret much about atmospheres, environments and their vibrations.

We can, first of all, revive the conscious use of our senses to assess more closely what attracts and repels us. What are our senses telling us? Do we really want to be here? Can we make adjustments and improvements? Often our senses confirm a feeling or intuition we have inside and would otherwise dismiss as being silly. We can check our intuitions against the messages of our sensory equipment and then decide to accept or dismiss our initial impulses.

A good example which we can all relate to is eating. If we eat food prepared by someone who is sick or unhappy, we are likely to find that the food disagrees with us. It might be our favourite dish but if the chef just separated from his wife we are likely to feel the vibration of his mental state in our stomachs. Knowing that we usually find this dish delectable as well as agreeable to our insides, we can safely assume that the feelings of uneasiness created by the food originated from the chef, not from us.

Our senses act both as receivers and transmitters. We may have noticed that we sometimes enjoy being touched or affectionately touching others, while at other times we shrink from physical contact. This type of observation provides us with valuable opportunities



to assess our mental, physical and emotional reactions and go deeper still to establish their cause. If we lose touch with any of our senses, our perception will be impaired and perhaps we will need to discover the reason for the block.

Our senses also tell us when we have been neglecting the needs of our bodies in pursuit of so-called loftier, more abstract ideals. We must recognise that our minds cannot be healthy unless our bodies, which include the senses, are well looked after. So next time you've overeaten because you were depressed or stayed up all night reading a book under a poor reading light or rolled around on the grass and hit a patch of nettles . . . remember that your senses and body are your most valuable tools and treat them with a little extra tender loving care!

Senses and Emotions

Our senses also work through our emotions. Sensory input gives us the messages and our mental faculties interpret them. One manifestation of this interpretation is emotional response. For instance, certain atmospheres or buildings which have a particular smell, such as hospitals, will arouse memories and emotions related to hospital experiences, death or illness. Before we know it a particular smell has evoked in us an emotional reaction which actually may have nothing to do with the present. Vibrations held in buildings and in other surroundings, especially if these are not regularly cleaned or painted, can amplify and arouse emotional responses we had long forgotten.

These reactions may seem beyond our control and may even become quite troublesome. However, we can train ourselves to regard our emotions as barometers of inner states, as hazard signals or warnings that some part of us needs work, something in our past history needs resolving. Perhaps we have been unconsciously held back in past shadows. If we haven't acknowledged and worked with the situation, we may remain daunted or stunted rather than free to go forward. If we make the effort to re-adjust ourselves, we will find we are healthier and happier for having undergone the experience.

Nature in her benevolence has given us many gifts. When we release through sadness, for example, we are creating space for something more uplifting to take its place. Laughing and crying are totally healthy and inte-

gral. Laughter is the music of the soul. We wash away our disappointments with tears. Releasing anger and frustration in a creative way realigns the body's metabolism and allows built-up pressure to settle and become more stable. Thus we must give ourselves and others permission to release emotions. We can discipline our emotional reactions, certainly, so as not to create chaos or misery, but we should never restrict them.

Admitting that we need help and guidance in certain areas is a very important step towards emotional honesty. And equally important is offering our honesty to others. This does not mean that we indiscriminately blurt out every thought. It simply means that as we become more honest with ourselves and imbued with courage and confidence as a result, we can elicit honesty from others, thereby filling them with our love and understanding.

The Cycle of Birth and Rebirth

Why bring up the subject of birth again? Surely by now we've got over the trauma of finding ourselves in a body, with a mind, emotions and all the rest and we know how to deal with life. We don't want to look back, we want to go forward! Even in confusing and discordant circumstances, we have learned to work with and through alternatives and now we are at the stage where we are ready and willing to enter into the process of active and constructive living. Life has become an acceptable rhythm . . . or has it, fully?

Mythology, religion, art and even the biological sciences talk of a cycle of birth and rebirth. These days we hear a lot about rebirthing and other types of holistic therapies. But we in this book are talking about a much simpler understanding of the recurring process of rebirth, a form of Second Aid for which you don't need any kind of therapist.

Generally the term "rebirthing" refers to the attainment of a higher level of awareness. Most of us know something of that ecstatic experience, where we have glimpsed, if only for a brief moment, the sense of our own wholeness or perfection, meaning or purpose, a sense of something greater than ourselves yet the same as ourselves, something unifying, guiding, loving. It is a moment of total fulfilment, of pure self acceptance.

We can make this a living, total state of being rather



than a momentary experience, a state wherein we become radiant and sensitive, where our awareness is not for ourselves alone, but extends to and includes caring about others. The basis for this state of being is actually quite simple. As human, living, changing beings, we continually process information which is tempered by the many and varied experiences we encounter in life. The balance and integration of incoming information and personal experience transforms us from negative, passive receptors to dynamic, positive transmitters. In fact, both aspects are necessary to complete the process of integration and self-acceptance. One without the other creates an imbalance.

To reach and maintain this level of being requires great courage and fortitude. Sometimes we lose sight of the goal, and our attempts at self-improvement and expansion seem fruitless, often eliciting feelings of despair and failure. But what a sense of celebration and joy our efforts can also bring, as we become more aware of the visible and invisible aspects of our being. The division between our inner and outer self seems to blur and dissolve, we can co-operate with ourselves, as well as with others. Neither the real nor the imagined can harm us and we see that cause and effect are interdependent. Cause becomes effect and effect becomes cause and we are the mediator, the creating entity in between, the link between thought and action. And positive thought does create positive action.

This is the state of being in which the laws that govern the universe no longer remain mysterious, elusive, incomprehensible. We can know and understand life in and through our experience – as we keep expanding our awareness. This understanding is the sister of unconditional love – love without demand, love without fear, love without selfish motive. And there is no greater reward than to offer our love unconditionally in service to the universal consciousness and to accept with gratitude the same gift of love in return. Soon we colour all that we see, do, hear, taste, touch, smell, think and speak with that purity of heart.

Intuition

Training yourself in self-awareness will automatically make you more sensitive to vibrations. It is as if you can hear with your mind rather than with your ears, see with your heart rather than with your eyes. You will be more aware of the signals and messages given to your

brain by your five senses, and you will not be able to ignore the warnings of your body. You may also notice qualities of vibrations in the atmosphere of a place; for example, you may feel fine walking into a room and once inside, suddenly feel strangely depressed or sad as if for no reason. These are all ways of saying that your intuition has become more acute.

It seems that as we become more sensitive we also become more vulnerable to the effects of people, places, pressures and stresses around us because we realise we are part of, not separate from, the whole picture. However, there is no point in offering ourselves for the sacrifice. We must learn when it is healthy to withdraw a bit and filter our experience. It is not that we should become protective of ourselves and our new state of being, paranoid or otherwise inclined towards a mild “spiritual superiority complex”. Rather, as our development and awareness is heightened, we can intelligently and compassionately apply common sense in terms of our own survival. Basically, all we are trying to do is maintain stability in dealing with any situation.

Recognition of this may cause us to withdraw from familiar habits and patterns and our families and friends may become alarmed at our seeming lack of interest in many of the pastimes we used to enjoy. Here is the perfect place to practise compassion with those who show love and concern for us. Though they may not understand us, we can still offer them our love and understanding.

We must learn to become comfortable within the process of our own expansion. We will find ourselves constantly investigating, comparing our past thoughts with our current ones, refining, fine-tuning. We are not changing so much as we are evolving and life can become a beautiful, continuous meditation, a time of monitoring, in which we can perceive so much of what we overlooked before. Our experience of life becomes very rich and we feel as if we are privileged guests invited to watch life reveal her secrets to us in all their many colours.

We are not the directors. We are, along with everybody else, the participants in life's drama. We are merely undertaking to discipline ourselves a little, within this new found state of harmony we are experiencing. We must include and embrace rather than separate. Realising that not everyone has yet discovered the same treasures as we have, we must allow them the right to their point of view.



This may well be the most important time of transition and adjustment we have yet experienced and so we should be patient with ourselves. During this time of metamorphosis and always hereafter, it is a good idea to take the time to sit quietly, to review our experiences and experiments, and see how we can offer ourselves in service to all. In so doing, we may need to withdraw for a while from those whom we wish to help, while we sort ourselves out and gain a sense of our inner ease and comfort, a sense of certainty of the inner, deeper reality. In this stillness, we can, if we so desire, consciously rid ourselves of old patterns to gain a fuller perspective.

Always in a constant state of motion, as part of the universal energy, we are like the river flowing into the sea, leaving behind that which is no longer essential and taking with us – in fact, becoming – the purity of energy itself.

Spiritual Responsibility

If you have developed yourself to the extent that you can see with clarity, it follows that you will have to take responsibility for what you see. This may not be easily reconciled with our ideals and will probably require a compromise (hopefully a win-win one) between our ideal and our reaction to what is actually taking place. Romantic images of the way we would wish things may fall by the wayside. This is not a negative thing! To play the roles is absolutely essential to our growth, whereas to become the role is confusion. We are massaging our brains, as it were, clearing away the tensions and clutter, the crystallisation, and making room for more space within our heads and hearts.

Many of us have reached a stage in our lives where we think about helping others in some way. We do not necessarily have to choose a helping profession to help others. Every day we are given opportunities in which we can extend in love and friendship to our fellow human beings. When we have examined our own motives and our own foibles, we are more compassionate towards those who have little understanding of themselves and whose behaviour belies that lack. We must remember that our commitment to growth is not for ourselves alone, but for the good of everyone.

Many of us shy away from responsibility, but realistically there is no way to avoid it. And why should we want to? It is only when we feel trapped that we want

to run away, but when we approach situations with confidence, believing that we can make them workable, or at least tolerable, then we can face life straight on. Thus we must take responsibility for our own behaviour, working on areas of resistance rather than ignoring or merely thinking about them.

Life is an investment; the more you invest the more interest you earn and the more you have to work with and enlarge upon. If we choose to relate – to people, to experiences – it becomes vital that we communicate to others. We must be able to tell our story in a way that is not threatening but interesting and inspiring. Acting with others in mind we may even find ourselves willing to do things we would never dream of doing for ourselves!

In short, we are now ready to take responsibility for our own destiny and by extension, for the destiny and well-being of our friends, family, institutions, city, country and the world! Hardly a small task – in fact it's a lifetime's work and commitment – but what else is life for?

"Come to the edge" he said.

They said: "We are afraid".

"Come to the edge" he said.

They came.

He pushed them . . . and they flew.

– Guillaume Apollinaire –

The Soul Journey

There are fewer words more misunderstood than the word "soul". Yet to ponder its meaning evokes a mixture of sadness, joy and wonder, for our acknowledgement of the existence of soul is a commendation, a recognition of indivisible eternal consciousness.

For so long it seems we have struggled along, staggered from one crisis to another, woven our way through confusion and doubt. In our more inspired moments, we feel our lives are not without some purpose but more often we have no clear idea of what that purpose might be, particularly as there is so much pain to be endured throughout. The vibrant colours of childhood seem to have faded away and become dull before the picture was completed. When we look back we see the natural harmony and innocence of our childhood buried in our mistakes. Have we sold out, have we compromised too much? Where are we heading now? What have we to show for all our efforts, mis-



guided though they may have been? The efforts may often have appeared misguided but the experiences have always served a purpose.

If we alter our vantage points, just a fraction, we will recognise that our soul has always been there, the force and existence behind all the costumes we have worn and all the roles we have played. Often we become so locked into the drama that we forget the central figure – us – whom we are seeking to rediscover in the first place! We get so involved in performing for others that we forget that we too are meant to derive some joy and satisfaction from all the hard work we have put in. Recognising this, we can smile and tolerate not only our own foibles but also the confusion of those around us, those who may still be inextricably tied to their roles, those who are still seeking, still searching for they know not what.

This experience is akin to feeling the warmth and comfort of the sun after weeks of relentless rain and cloud. We almost forgot that, though we could not see it, the sun still shone above the clouds. To bask in the light of this sun is to know that a greater power is at work. We can easily re-focus our thinking and watch confusion fade, drift away and dissolve, just like the clouds in the heat of the sun. Again, we have actively learned how to transform nonsense into sense.

A word of caution here, so as to avoid the trap of becoming too complacent. It is not that, having reached this stage in our growth, we have attained all there is to achieve on this earth – far from it! What we have learned is how to create space, how to use it (all), how to take responsibility for our own lives. We are continually on the path of return and must never become complacent or patronising because of our new ability and knowledge.

As we feel it is now safe to look back over the events in our lives, we begin to understand the necessity of undergoing some of the experiences that have frightened, disappointed and imprisoned us. If we now experience self-confidence, self-acceptance and self-understanding, we need not censor the past or the truth; rather we are given the strength to unburden ourselves and carry on. We needn't avoid any part of life and we find we have the ability to cope – and to hope. With our sense of reality now deeper and more all-encompassing, we relocate ourselves within a richer, more nurturing environment – the environment that lies within our heads.

We are more confident of our self-worth because

we know our understanding, love and compassion have expanded and are continuing to expand and that we can be of help to others on their path. Although much of the past may have been unpleasant, it is part of a bigger, more comprehensive picture. The lost art of truly seeing has been revived.

And finally, the ability to acknowledge the changes that evolution brings, to recognise new areas of work, new opportunities for growth, to meet new companions (or rediscover old ones), to explore new ideas, new ways of living – enables us to live each moment as the eternal present. And to share with others the sense of wonder and joy, at the increase of awareness, is perhaps the greatest reward of all.

Rhythms of the Spirit

The circles within the spiral carry us ever upwards. The order and organisation of our planet, our galaxy, the universe, is breathtaking to behold. Everything is perfect unto itself, and perfect also as part of the whole creation. Nonetheless, unlike other species on earth, we humans spend a considerable amount of time trying to get the world to respond to us according to our desires and when it does not, we find the discrepancies difficult to reconcile. We imagine that we are forlorn, unworthy uncared for, small, insignificant.

To evolve as a human being – not merely to grow up, but to evolve – means opening ourselves to the flow of life, allowing life to flow around, in and through us. We needn't drown while learning to ride the waves; we learn by experience to maintain harmony with the rhythm and flow of nature. We can make room for subtler guests to enter into our consciousness; we can nurture and cherish them, and be instructed by them.

It follows naturally that we become givers more than takers, as we are able to offer more. Our emotional battle scars and medals of merit prove we have learned to cope with the wars, and now we wish to serve others who are finding the experience of change, movement and the call to real bravery as difficult as we did. We offer our support not as great heroes, but as living demonstrations of survival, a reminder that – yes – we can make it through!

Offering our love and support to others often calls for a “no nonsense” approach which when on the receiving end we know could seem harsh. Now, however, a whole new circle in the spiral is revealed. We



learn to be caring yet firm, to open ourselves to the subtle energies at play within the universe. We may be apprehensive, as if we've started all over again and yet we know that this is what we've been waiting and working for: our own inner awareness, and to help and guide others in that direction too. Everything else pales by comparison; as if we'd been looking in the wrong place all these years, but the wonder and love we now feel at this new lease on life brings great joy – and a real commitment to humanity.

Although we probably would not wish to repeat some of the circumstances of our lives, we realise that if they were necessary for us to reach this point, we would not have missed them. And we can use our life experiences to help motivate others. The more we study and absorb the subtler energies, the more we learn to trust in the cosmic consciousness.

At first, we experiment with caution, but as we find we are truly more loving and giving, we can communicate more effectively from our place of new found freedom. Each interaction, each attempt becomes easier and boosts our confidence further. Our reserves of courage increase and we become more familiar with the invisible workings, the invisible worlds within.

We begin to give love with no expectation of return; we find the courage and energy to do what we think is right in spite of the reactions or disapproval of others. The self-censorship we exercised out of fear of being different or misunderstood is no longer necessary, as our trust in the greater consciousness and in ourselves becomes deeper. We know that to speak only that which others think acceptable limits not only our responses to life, but theirs as well.

We now care enough to tell our truth, for we know that we are an integral part of the vastness of space. The cohesive power is all-loving and as we trust this more and more, there is little room in our lives for doubt, fear or guilt. Cohesion and unity come from love and as we put our trust into this principle, there is less energy that can go into the negative areas and more is available for positive attitudes. We are representatives of that greatness of being and we reflect that will, power and love.

Having renewed and regenerated ourselves by withdrawing somewhat and playing a more outwardly passive role, we are now able to return to a more active state. We may not always be in the position to express ourselves verbally, but we can radiate our knowledge and our state of being and transmit our

underlying strengths to anchor and reinforce the efforts of others.

Teaching ourselves to be better people is a simple philosophy. You don't practise this Second Aid on anyone other than yourself. By working on yourself, you become a pure reflection, an untainted mirror able to reflect the essence and truth of circumstances, situations and life itself – without becoming marred by the reflection.

As this occurs, as it will do with friends, family and associates, we recognise that we have become a walking catalyst. Wherever we are, things seem to happen. This can be quite disturbing, for we do not intentionally wish to stir things up, as it were. If events become too unsettling, we will need the support of someone who has been through this stage of development, someone with whom we can discuss our thoughts and who can guide us to better understand these happenings and how they affect us. In these circumstances, it is particularly helpful to share our experiences with a meditation or spiritual development facilitator. With this support, we will feel less uncertain; the unknown, threatening element becomes neutralised and we can freely embrace the greater perspective rather than be defensive towards it.

Almost without effort or exertion, we can respond lovingly, effectively and in freedom to situations we found distressing, if not downright impossible to deal with before. We can safely and confidently return to the mainstream of life, after our short journey within, with renewed interest and energy. Seeing where we are now, recognising how far we have come, allows us to settle into life knowing that we are guided, guarded and supported, that we are intrinsic, colourful threads in the tapestry of life.

To follow the dictates of your own self is not selfish – if you reflect daily on your actions and ensure that you have acted for the good of others as well as for yourself. In this way, we can take care not to inflict our personal ideas onto others. We reflect and radiate our well-being to them but we do not presume to preach or teach. We merely create an opportunity for them to learn for themselves, just as we have. If they are not ready, we are there as a reference, a guide, a resource, always available if needed.

For you have earned your success and can now hold your head high, knowing you have acquired that inner strength which is born of faith, knowledge and your own efforts. It is not merely that you have come,



through your perseverance and understanding, to the end of a stage of life. Rather, you know that you are on the brink of a new horizon, an infinite, promising, unknown but not unfriendly place; and a heretofore unseen panorama of life lies before you . . . the vastness of which resides, after all, within your own being.

Growing inside can hurt if we are restricting the flow. If you feel you are, please feel free to write to us, we would be pleased to hear from you. You deserve it for **YOU ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT PERSON YOU KNOW, AND THE MORE WORK YOU DO ON YOURSELF THE MORE YOU HAVE TO OFFER TO THOSE YOU LOVE AND THOSE WHO LOVE YOU.**

The Next Step

For help with our physical actions and reactions we turn to First Aid. For help with our emotional/mental actions and reactions we can now turn to Second Aid.

Physical wounds and scars are painful. Emotional/mental wounds and scars can be even worse, because they are not immediately discernable. Second Aid helps you to gently explore, unravel and balance the conditioning, misconceptions and attitudes that are complicating your life. It is a way of reaching your own truth, of finding out what is right for you, within the whole framework of where you are.

If you would like details of other services available, check out the website on www.secondaid.net

Afterword

Every now and then there appear wonderful "little books" written with inspiration for those who see that we are here for a purpose and for a training. In Blake's words:

"We are set on Earth a little space, that we may learn to bear the beams of Love".

Two titles come to mind – 'Light on the Path' and 'The Impersonal Life'. When you find the volume that suits your temperament, use it and treasure its wisdom.

The awakening to self-awareness is vital in our time of confusion and transition. There is nothing more important than learning to control our own reactions.

The deepest truth is that we become what we think. We can therefore transform our lives through positive and courageous affirmation.

Second Aid 'Self Awareness – A Short Guide' should be of real help and encouragement to those who will work with its teachings and suggestions.

George Trevelyan
Sir George Trevelyan

*Rely on the message of the teacher, not on his personality:
Rely on the meaning, not just the words: Rely on the real
meaning, not the provisional one: Rely on your wisdom
mind, not on your ordinary, judgemental mind.*

– Buddha - Four Reliances –

Self Awareness A Short Guide

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