Self-Agency and Beyond
**Techniques for working on the self
Becoming open to self-transcendence
Philosophical Foundation**

David B. Center, PhD

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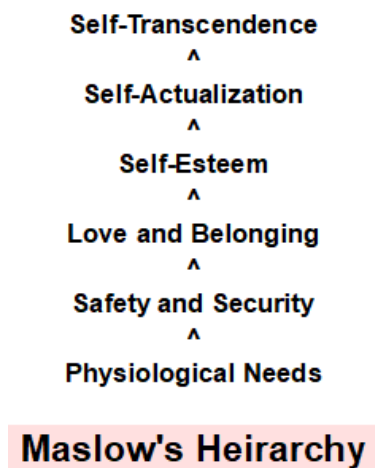# III. Philosophical Foundation

Introduction

As the author of this manuscript, I should briefly introduce myself. Educationally, I began my career as a short-term, high school dropout. My flight from education was not ended by my recognition of the importance of education but by my inability to find a job. I went back to high school and did just enough to squeak by and graduate. In my senior year of high school, I was in a serious automobile accident that led to a transformative experience. I will come back to this experience later. Following this experience, I worked for several years, read widely and began attending night classes to correct some of my academic deficiencies from high school. I subsequently enrolled in college and graduated with honors with a double major from a large state university. I then served two years in the U.S. Navy. Following that, I returned to school and earned a masters degree. I then began work as a developmental therapist with emotionally disturbed children. Later, I earned a doctoral degree in childhood behavior disorders and began a career in academia, preparing teachers to work with challenging children. I taught at three different universities and ended my career as a department chair in a large, urban research university. In short, I've spent most of my adult life thinking about how to bring about change in people.

The title of this book contains several words that are worth clarifying by way of this introduction. The word "self" is used in two ways. The first part of the book focuses on change in the everyday "self" that most of us think of as who we are. This is also the self that is meant in such terms as self-concept, self-image and ego. The second part of the book uses the term "Self" that some of us think of as the higher Self or the spiritual Self. To keep these two uses of the word separate, the spiritual Self will always begin with an uppercase "S," and the everyday self will always begin with a lowercase "s." The only place where case, used to make this

distinction, breaks down is at the beginning of a sentence. In those rare cases, you'll have to rely on context to distinguish between the two meanings.

The second word in the title is "agency." Agency implies two things. First, agency implies that choices exist. Agency can't be exercised over something if there are no choices. Some would call this aspect of agency as "free will," and I'm okay with that as long as free will is defined as the ability to make choices from a range of possibilities of varying probabilities. *Will* for me means the application of active intent to make a choice other than the easy choice or what has been called *the path of least resistance.* Only active intent can increase the likelihood of a lower probability choice taking precedence over a higher probability choice. Second, agency implies an agent acting on something -- that would be you or, if you prefer, the self. Free will is especially important for the realization of the Self , because the ability to make meaningful choices is critical for the evolution of consciousness and self-transcendence.

The third word in the title is "beyond." Beyond means considerations that lie outside the boundaries of self or ego. In the "beyond" portion of the material, I will be talking about topics that transcend the mundane considerations of life in the relative world. In other words, I will talk about transcendence of the self, which is the last phase in Maslow's developmental hierarchy (see figure below).

Self-Transcendence
^
Self-Actualization
^
Self-Esteem
^
Love and Belonging
^
Safety and Security
^
Physiological Needs

Maslow's Heirarchy

In this book the *primacy of Consciousness* (or Awareness) is assumed. There are two dichotomous views on the ultimate nature of reality (see figures below). One is commonly called the Primacy of Matter (a.k.a. materialism) and the other is the Primacy of Consciousness (a.k.a. idealism). Classical physics and everyday experience support the former, and some interpretations of quantum physics and the experience of various mystics support the latter. The two views have significantly different implications. For example, materialists explain consciousness as an epiphenomenon (derivative) of matter, while idealists explain matter as an epiphenomenon of Consciousness. There is considerable contention around which view is correct. The likelihood is that neither conception will ever be conclusively demonstrated to the satisfaction of everyone.

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        Mind                        Mind
         ^                           ^
       Biology                     Biology
         ^                           ^
      Chemistry                   Chemistry
         ^                           ^
  Atoms and Molecules         Atoms and Molecules
         ^                           ^
   Energy and Matter           Energy and Matter
         ^                           ^
    Space and Time              Space and Time
                                     ^

                            Awareness/Consciusness
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Materialism   **Idealism**

Both views are faced with essentially the same conundrum, that is, *initial origination*. If you are of the Primacy of Matter persuasion, you must ask how did matter come about and from what? One hypothesis is the so-called "big bang" event or the near instantaneous expansion of an extremely dense concentration of energy/matter (a.k.a. the primordial atom). Even assuming it is correct, there still remains the question of where did this "primordial atom" come from? A noted physicist, the late Stephen Hawking, suggested *spontaneous creation* or the

creation of something from nothing, which seems like "begging the question" to me. If you are of the Primacy of Consciousness persuasion, you must ask where did Consciousness (hereafter Source) come from? I know of no hypothesis about the origin of Source.

Some Primacy of Matter advocates might argue that matter has always existed and the material universe has cycled through endless regenerations. Likewise, some Primacy of Consciousness advocates might argue that Consciousness has always existed and always will exist. In the end, both camps reach a point where they really have no choice but to say that either matter just is or that Consciousness just is. Regardless of which hypothesis you find the most plausible, you are ultimately faced with a leap of faith.

I make the assumption that Consciousness is primary simply because it provides a model that is broader and deeper than materialism. However, one need not throw off materialism entirely when adopting idealism, because materialism can be subsumed under idealism as a secondary construct. In fact, the two models can be construed to be almost identical except with different root assumptions or starting points. I have framed most of the above using the term "Consciousness" because that is a commonly used term but Awareness is also used.

My personal take is a bit different, and I briefly offer it for anyone interested. I think that what is being dealt with is a multifaceted concept. I think it begins with *being*, which is also sometimes referred to as Source. Being supports *awareness*, which only arises when there is something to be aware of. The dualistic physical dimension is a virtually endless flux of things to be aware of. This flux is a product of the contrasts created by complementary pairs. For example, take the pair hot and cold; once this contrast is established, the experience of temperature arises. Flux in temperature between the two elements of the complementary pair makes it possible to be aware of a wide range of temperature related experiences.

Once there are things to be aware of, attention arises and serves to bring specific things in the field of awareness into focus. Once attention brings something in the field of awareness into focus, the thing is objectified and the observer or attender becomes conscious of the thing as an *object of consciousness*. I will go into this a bit further when I talk about mind.

The second assumption that I will make is that evolutionary biology is a valid and powerful process operative at many levels. This almost doesn't need to be put forward as an assumption since the theory describing the process has pretty well been empirically established. There are, however, some points within the theory that can be argued on scientific grounds, such as the reliance upon random change to the exclusion of any other potential factors. The details of the debate around that issue or others are not necessary to this introduction. Just know that in real science nothing is ever True, only tentatively accepted.

An idea related to the first assumption is that of the indivisible whole. If Source is the origin of All-That-Is, then there is only one Source albeit with many derived beings. Thus, All-is-One becomes an unavoidable philosophical position. The indivisible-whole hypothesis is supported by science within the limits of the "physical" universe. Replicated experiments support the quantum state of entanglement by which two *particles* (see note at end) become connected and share information. If the information is changed in one, it immediately changes in the other even if the second particle is on the other side of the universe. Since the exchange of information in the space/time universe is limited by the speed of light and the speed of light is too slow to account for this near-instantaneous exchange of information, entanglement implies an underlying non-locality that is outside of space/time.

One physicist who has described this entangled universe as an indivisible whole is Menas Kafatos. He further suggests that from our perspective this whole

only seems to consist of parts. The perception of these parts or aspects arise from Niels Bohr's Principle of Complementarity, which was originally proposed to explain the complementary pair of particle and wave but was extended by Bohr to go beyond applications in physics. A complementary pair consists of two aspects of one reality. Thus, hot and cold, male and female, good and bad, wet and dry, life and death, chaos and order and so on are complementary pairs within the relative world. The world that we experience appears to express or manifest itself through such pairs. Thus, the relative world arises from the absolute ground state of Consciousness. In a sense then, only the whole represented by these pairs is "real." Each member of the pair arises from the whole and is grounded or rooted in the whole.

More broadly speaking, the relative world of change arises from the absolute and is the complement of its unchanging ground state. The apparent function of complementary pairs is to create a dynamic that permits change, which is necessary for experience. In this manner, Source evolves. Each living being is, in a manner of speaking, a learning probe extended by Source into a virtual laboratory (physicality) created by Source through something like creative imagination. Metaphorically, you might say that the cosmos and everything in it is a dream in the mind of Source or God; i.e., *panentheism*, a dream that serves as a learning environment. That makes you a dream character, and if you are aware that you are a character in a dream, a lucid dreamer. Acceptance of the above construction of physical reality as a learning environment requires the ability to make apparently meaningful choices or *free will*.

Implicit in the view that living beings are "learning probes," manifested by Consciousness to explore the experience of relativity, is the apparent necessity for multiple manifestations in the world of experience. Multiple manifestations or reincarnations serve the purpose of allowing one the opportunity to grapple with

errors and limitations as well as to explore talents and abilities using the experiences made possible by the relative world. Since the potential for experience is extensive and unlikely to be fulfilled in a single or even several lifetimes, sequential incarnations seem to be the only way to fully exploit the available opportunities. How then might the requirement for free will be construed in a manner that meets the necessary conditions for the exploration of potential experience?

Simple determinism asserts that everything we do is predetermined, and therefore our apparent choices are really an illusion. From that point of view, we have only what appear to be choices. All the outcomes that follow from such imaginary choices are predetermined and beyond our ability to influence. In short, the chain of causality that began in the distant past, perhaps with the origin of the material universe, set in motion a chain of causes and effects that still continues and will continue into the future. That chain of causality passes through us and determines what we think, feel and do. Clearly, there are no real choices that might allow for the operation of free will in such a dismal conception of life.

Further, such a conception renders impossible any meaningful conception of moral responsibility. If one's behavior is wholly determined and outside of one's ability to influence, how can an individual be held accountable for his or her actions and thereby learn from the choices made? Finally, if simple determinism governs everything, then a spiritual vision that entails the evolution of consciousness (or the soul if you prefer) cannot be valid. Interestingly, the principle of causality or simple determinism has, at the quantum level, been experimentally demonstrated to be untenable. This suggests that a root reality almost certainly does not rest upon simple determinism. This does not, however, rule out the appearance of causality in the everyday, macro-expression of physical reality.

Indeterminism (a.k.a. absolute free will) is the opposite of simple

determinism. Absolute free will means one can by choice affect an outcome that is not predictable from its antecedents. In short, one can do things that violate the principle of causality as it is commonly understood (a.k.a. magic). For example, someone walking on water would both violate the principle of causality and demonstrate producing an outcome by choice that is not predictable from its antecedents. The quantum world includes all possible outcomes and even some that might be considered "magic." However, "magical" outcomes, while possible, are extremely improbable. It is clear that no mere mortal is likely to ever observe or experience one of these highly improbable outcomes. Thus, indeterminism is not suitable for our purposes because meaningful choices leading to systematic consequences are not possible and such choices are necessary for learning and evolution.

The libertarian philosopher Richard Taylor proposed an alternative to simple determinism that he calls *complex determinism*, which recognizes that human agency is a primary factor in causation. That is, human agency or, in the case of an individual, *self-agency* can alter a chain of causality and initiate a new branch in an unfolding sequence. This brings us back to free will. In this view, free will is no longer absolute but rather is probabilistic, which is similar to the statistical determinism of quantum physics. Free will then, for me, is equivalent to complex determinism. Complex determinism suggests that in any given situation there are usually multiple possible outcomes, none of which require magic; i.e., they have a basis in antecedent events. Each of these possible outcomes is more or less probable than another. The most common outcome is the one with the highest probability. This is what is sometimes described by the phrase "the path of least resistance."

When one arrives at a meaningful decision point in life, the complex and tangled web of antecedents that have led to the decision point generally allow for

more than one possible consequence or outcome. Suppose that the decision point contains five possible outcomes or choices. Each has a probability of expression. If the path of least resistance is followed, the choice made will be the one most closely associated with one's habitual and conditioned pattern of behavior. This default choice, in fact, is not really a choice so much as it is an acquiescence. Default responses that follow the path of least resistance are very common and give the appearance of following from simple determinism.

Research has provided evidence that suggests decisions are made at a subconscious level before one is consciously aware of them. This it is argued is evidence for simple determinism. An alternative interpretation is that this research is evidence that habitual or high probability responses are virtually automatic. The research also shows that there is a small delay between the subconscious decision, awareness and action. This delay is the window of opportunity that provides room for free will. Self-agency effected through intention and deliberate choice, based on forethought and anticipation of consequences, can influence and change the probability functions of potential outcomes. Thus, the first step is to prevent the default or habitual response from occurring. The second step is to undertake a deliberate effort to make manifest a possible alternate response. In short, if one is willing to be attentive and make the effort, it is possible to exert self-agency and become a causal force in your own chain of causation.

In this conception of complex determinism, there are three principle contributors to human action: biological factors, environmental factors and self-agency. It is important to recognize that all three influences operate through predisposition, not predestination. Consider two identical twins with virtually identical biological inheritance who are predisposed to diabetes. Further, suppose that the twins live in an environment that has varied dietary choices but one that includes an abundance of readily available, tasty, high glycemic foods. This

environment is one that predisposes one to the development of diabetes. The interaction of the biological and environmental predispositions (what's known as an epigenetic factor) makes avoiding diabetes unlikely, especially given the predisposition to follow the path of least resistance. Eventually, one twin develops diabetes and the other does not. Clearly, this would never happen if biological and environmental causation were predestination. We can ask why did these different outcomes occur?

Very likely part of the answer is that the twins created different environments from the choices they made. Suppose that they took a class in nutrition while they were in high school or college in which they learned of the hazards of overeating high glycemic foods. This was not welcome news since both had become accustomed to this common style of eating. Let's assume that one chose to continue eating a diet rich in refined carbohydrates. This twin followed the habitual pattern and took the path of least resistance. The other set an intention to make dietary choices that minimized refined carbohydrates. This choice was clearly available to both but only the second twin exercised self-agency and took the more difficult path of resisting habitual patterns and making healthier choices. Thus, these different choices in lifestyle differentially influenced the possibility of developing diabetes in the twins.

In my view, we do have the ability to make real choices. We can, at least, make choices from among those potential outcomes that are possible given the antecedents. Our choices, reflected in our intentions and actions, influence (but do not control) the probable outcomes available in situations in which we are actors. Self-agency has the potential to carry us to a tipping point that can set in motion a new causal chain. Most of us, most of the time, fail to exercise self-agency and simply follow the path of least resistance and thereby give the impression of being controlled by simple determinism.

Complex determinism construed as a suitable condition for self-agency then appears to meet the need for the meaningful choices necessary for evolving consciousness. Accepting self-agency as essential for evolving consciousness leads to recognition of *personal sovereignty* as a *natural right*. A *sovereign individual* is a *free agent* engaged in *self-determination*. Free agents set their own goals and choose the means to those goals. Further, a community of sovereign individuals represents a diversity of goals and methods for achieving those goals. Evolution of consciousness can only be achieved by freely taken choices. This means that it is incumbent upon anyone who accepts the primacy of Consciousness, implicit in *panentheism*, to avoid interfering with other people's choices to the greatest extent possible. This is important because it is the intent behind choices, not the acts in and of themselves that is important for the evolution of consciousness. Personal sovereignty ends where another's sovereignty begins.

There are several ways in which one individual might attempt to affect the choices of another individual. First, one can use *force* to impose choices on another person. Second, one can use *threat* or intimidation to impose choices on someone else. Third, one can use contrived *incentives* to influence another person's choices. Finally, one can use *persuasion* to influence the choices of another person. Clearly, the first two options are coercive and inconsistent with self-determination. The third method is also coercive but in a more subtle way. The use of contrived incentives to influence someone's choices is an effort to manipulate them and therefore represents a soft form of coercion. The final method may be the only method that is consistent with self-determination and the evolution of consciousness.

Persuasion, properly conducted, appeals to the reason of another person. Successful persuasion convinces a person of the correctness of a particular choice and is thereby most likely to affect intention as well as action. Persuasion is not

coercive but educational and is the only ethically acceptable method of influencing others in a society of sovereign individuals. Thus, sovereign individuals in their exercise of self-agency must accept some limitations on personal behavior. Specifically, they must accept a prohibition on the use of force or coercion directly or indirectly against others in the pursuit of their goals, except when necessary for self-defense or protecting others from harm. Thus, to embrace the goal of personal evolution of consciousness through self-determination leads one to embrace philosophical libertarianism as the most rational way of participating in the relative world. Part One of this manuscript is about improving the role you play in the relative world.

Note:
Particle is a term used in physics that the general public misunderstands. The continued use of the term is a carryover from classical physics, but a particle no longer has the "physical" characteristics it was thought to have in classical physics. In short, a particle is not made of matter as it was understood in the classical sense. Some now describe a particle as a concentration of energy and others as a packet of information.

Part I
Techniques for Working on the Self

Chapter One
Self-Improvement

Note: <u>If you have a serious condition affecting your ability to function normally in your daily life, you are advised to seek professional help from an individual qualified to assist you with your particular issue</u>.

Almost everyone wants to change something about themselves. Some people even imagine having a complete redesign of themselves or even transcending the self. Perhaps you belong somewhere along this continuum. Maybe you have even tried to make changes in your habits, attitudes or even personality. Unless you are one of those rare individuals who has stumbled upon an effective strategy for personal change, you have probably tried and failed more than once to bring about the changes that you'd like to make. In <u>Self-Agency and Beyond</u>, you will learn about effective strategies that you can use to become a self-change agent.

This guide will initially focus on assisting you achieve personal goals related to self-improvement (focus on the self) and later will shift focus to the possibility of arriving at the highest goal in the late Abraham Maslow's famous hierarchy - self-transcendence. It is widely believed that Maslow's hierarchy ended with self-actualization. However, a few years before he died, he revised the model to include a final step to complete the progression. The revision was not widely disseminated and many of those who heard about it just ignored it, but many more still never even heard about it because the earlier model continued to be taught and used.

<u>What is Mind?</u>

Much of this section will deal with what we often think of as functions of the

mind or for some, the *body/mind*. Below, I'll set out my perspective on this ghost in the brain.

There appear to me to be several critical aspects to the human psyche. One of the most fundamental aspects is conscious awareness. There are spiritual traditions that posit two more basic states of awareness - pervasive awareness and primordial awareness - but teach that while humans have both of these, only humans have the third type - conscious awareness. One might think of this as being aware of being aware or being aware of primordial awareness. Mystics often report that there is an even more fundamental ground state underlying awareness and that is *beingness*. I will take awareness as a base assumption for my purposes in this manuscript.

A second aspect is physical in nature and is what we refer to as the brain. Henceforth, the term "brain" will be understood to also subsume other branches of the nervous system. Of the proposed ways that the brain actually functions, I prefer the "receiver" hypothesis. This is the suggestion that there is only one universal awareness, more commonly referred to as Consciousness, and the brain serves as a receiver for a much dampened down "broadcast" of that awareness.

Third, an important function that interacts with awareness and that may be produced by the brain is attention. Attention permits one to focus on and single out a specific stimulus in the field of awareness. This stimulus can be external (e.g., a bird) or internal (e.g., a pain). It can also be, what for lack of a better word, I'll call a thought form (a concept, belief, imaginal construct, cognitive representation of current experience or memory of prior thought forms.). When attention brings a stimulus into focus is in my view when consciousness manifests, because at this point the stimulus focused on becomes an object of consciousness. In other words, consciousness is at root simply the ability to be aware of specific stimuli and know that one is holding them as an object of consciousness.

Fourth, thought forms are organized into hierarchies and assigned strengths based on their perceived importance. The strength of a thought form is usually evident in the strength of the emotional response that it can elicit.

Fifth, this evolving network of cognitive constructs is what, in my opinion, we come to refer to as mind. This network of conceptual constructs (hereafter NetCC) is encoded in the neurological structures of the brain and can typically be retrieved by and used by conscious awareness to model and explain experience.

Sixth, experience is typically the interaction of the body/mind with any external stimulus perceived through the senses or of thought forms arising in conscious awareness from internal sources (e.g., memories or dreams). Experiences are construed through the NetCC, assigned meaning (or are dismissed) and, if construed to be meaningful, are assigned an emotional tag that orders the experience in a hierarchy of importance. In the future, anything that is sufficiently similar to a stored and tagged experience will elicit the associated emotional state, which arises within the body and represents the next aspect.

Seventh, elicited emotional states become important for generating and directing focus of attention as a specialized function of conscious awareness. Objects of consciousness that acquire emotional valence become memories that are stored and ordered by their importance. Recollection of memories can also elicit the associated emotional state thereby representing a virtual experience. It is suggested then that *mind* is processing that takes place in the brain and that some of this processing (a.k.a. thinking) becomes output available in whole or part within conscious awareness.

Eighth, thinking as a function of mind is greatly facilitated by the ability to abstract and generalize, and this leads to the development of symbolic language and thereby a highly symbolic consciousness.

By way of analogy, think of awareness as a large grass field. Think of mind

as a complex set of "climbing bars" erected on this field. Think of yourself as a monkey enchanted by the climbing bars. If one gets lost in the "mind" (climbing bars) then one never sees the world for what it is. One never stands quietly on the grassy field and simply observes the unfolding of the surrounding world.

The output of thinking frequently but not always leads to acting in some manner. Acting can be either an internal action such as a judgment or an external action such as behavior or both. Not all of the mental processing referred to is available to conscious awareness. I'll have more to say on this topic later.

Foundations

Over the years, one conclusion that I have reached is that change agents such as teachers, therapists, coaches or parents seldom succeed in producing lasting change in clients, willing or not. In the latter part of my university career, I became an advocate for what I called *a cooperative alliance* (see note at end) as the approach most likely to enable change agents to effect long-lasting change in their clients. A cooperative alliance simply means that efforts to bring about change should be grounded in a cooperative relationship between the agent and the client. Further, the agent, for ethical reasons, must rely upon *persuasion* as his or her principle technique for effecting change. Ethically speaking, I think this is the only type of relationship that should exist between a change agent and his or her client. However, I have come to the conclusion that persuasion is not an especially powerful tool for change, and too often frustration over lack of progress leads agents to employ more intrusive methods. These methods may include drugs, reward, punishment, coercion and manipulation among others.

I think that the reason why the use of persuasion by change agents is often frustrating is pretty much for the same reason that our attempts to change ourselves is often frustrating. At a deep level, we aren't listening and responding to either a change agent or ourselves. There appears to be a pretty good reason for this

"deafness." A number of names could apply to this "message deafness," but for our purposes let's call it *automatic programming* (AP)*,* by which I mean biological and psychological processes that are outside of our conscious awareness or that we may only be dimly aware of. Below, I will briefly describe several ways of looking at developmental outcomes that bear on automatic programming. All of these perspectives are too complex to be fully detailed here but the essential ideas are provided.

My first recollection of reading about automatic programming was during my early years in graduate school. I was not introduced to this literature by any of my professors but through my own independent reading. I first encountered this idea through the writings of a former psychoanalyst, John C. Lilly, who among other things was known for his research on communication with dolphins. Following this research, he turned to looking for more powerful ways to bring about psychological and behavioral change in himself and others. Lilly wrote a somewhat obtuse but interesting little book that was first self-published and later commercially published. The title of his book was [Programming and Meta-Programming in the Human Bio-Computer](#).

It was Lilly's contention that we all have automatic programs that control most of our lives and that many of these programs, and especially the more general and inclusive programs, have their origins in our childhood. I'll have more to say about this later. Changing these programs that run us like robots is a daunting task. We have very limited access to these programs and thus to the possibility of "rewriting" them. Lilly used a process similar to meditation to determine the components in what he called a *programming loop*. Apparently, this was not powerful enough for him and he tried several other techniques, none of which I recommend to you, including sensory deprivation in water tanks and the use of LSD. His goal was to break through the barriers that shield us off from access to

functions operating outside of our awareness. Once access is gained, it then becomes possible to more directly and effectively work on changing our programming and thereby our lives.

I also learned of the work of George Kelly through a graduate course in personality theory. Kelly, in my thinking, has not received the attention that he deserves. Kelly began to formulate his perspective on behavior through his work delivering itinerant psychological services to small, isolated schools in rural Kansas. Kelly and his students saw many "problem" children who were referred to their mobile clinic (a refurbished school bus) by their teachers. Over time, Kelly realized that in many cases he was asking the wrong question about a referred child. He thought that instead of asking, "What's wrong with this child?" that he should instead be asking, "What is it about the perception of this child's teacher that makes him or her think this child has a problem?"

Changing his root question led Kelly to develop a complex theory of personality that was published in a two-volume work titled [The Psychology of Personal Constructs](). Kelly proposed that our thinking and behavior are controlled by a hierarchy of cognitive constructs, where each construct is similar to a bipolar scale. Each construct is anchored at its poles by positive and negative examples gained from experience. Kelly proposed that our construct system begins, structurally speaking, with a *core construct* placed at the apex of a pyramid. Below the core construct are *superordinate* and *subordinate constructs* that look something like a military chain of command or an organizational chart for the leadership of a large corporation.

We *construe* the world through our construct system, or some might say we filter and interpret the world through our constructs. Kelly thought that constructs were not necessarily inaccessible but rather their accessibility depended upon their *permeability,* which varied among individuals. Nevertheless, the more basic the

construct the more difficult it would be to access and change. Depending on the permeability of a construct system, access to and change in the constructs would be of variable difficulty. Unfortunately, in Kelly's view, those individuals whose construct system is most problematic and in need of change will be the ones whose construct system is least permeable. Two techniques that grew out of attempts to introduce change into construct systems include *scripting*, which we'll return to later, and *role repertory therapy*.

A few years out of graduate school, I encountered another perspective in [A Guide to Rational Living](#) that resonated with me. This book introduced me to the Rational-Emotive Therapy of Albert Ellis. Ellis frames his perspective in terms of *beliefs* (see note at end). Ellis proposes that our responses, both emotional and behavioral, are *consequences* of our beliefs. He offers a sequential analysis of behavior that in its basic form is represented by A-B-C, where the notations represent *antecedent, belief* and *consequence*. A consequence can be either an emotional response **or** an emotional response **and** a behavioral response. Thus, the emotional response can serve as the motivation for behavior but doesn't have to lead to an overt behavioral response in every instance.

Ellis talks about *root beliefs* and *immediate beliefs*. These are similar to the superordinate and subordinate constructs referred to in the discussion of Kelly's perspective. Ellis thinks that most of our beliefs are acquired during childhood through socialization within the family as well as through community groups, for example, churches, schools, social and political organizations, peer groups and popular media. We process the external world and our experience in it through the beliefs we have acquired. Dysfunctional beliefs either prevent us from developing our full potential, or worse, cause us to behave in counterproductive ways. The first purpose of intervention then is to *challenge* and *dispute* dysfunctional beliefs and then to replace those beliefs with more functional ones. Typically, much of this

work is done through *dialog* and through *cognitive rehearsal* of alternative beliefs, followed by *homework* assignments where alternative beliefs are applied in role play scenarios and then in a real situation.

The final perspective on behavior that gained traction with me did not arise until I was well into my university career. I came across this approach largely because of a son who, while in an engineering program, took an elective in cognitive psychology. In the psychology class, he was assigned to develop his own personal model for behavior. He chose to make use of *control theory* from engineering as the foundation for his model. Control theory in engineering is the basis for automatic systems like the thermostat in your home and the cruise control in your car. In the course of researching this assignment, he learned that an engineer, William Powers, had already developed such a model, which was described in his book [Behavior: The Control of Perception](). My son's paper on this topic stimulated me to explore Powers' model.

Powers' *perceptual control theory* (PCT) posits that we all have an organization of *goals* (a.k.a. values), *standards* (for those goals), *programs* (a repertory of responses for achieving those goals and meeting their standards), and *perceptual variables* (things self-monitored to determine if our programs are achieving our goals and meeting their standards). Problems can arise from any of these components in our perceptual control hierarchy. The top three levels of this hierarchy – goals, standards and programs – provide another way of talking about learned ways of interpreting and interacting with the world that is acquired during development.

The work on client change that I'm familiar with using PCT has taken place in schools. The approach taken in schools consists of attempting to get errant students to voluntarily align their goals, standards and programs with those of the school. Until such time as the alignment occurs, a student is not permitted to

participate as a member of the general school population.

In summary, we have a diverse collection of perspectives on behavior that have arisen at somewhat different times, from people of various backgrounds who all seem to be coming to a similar conclusion, albeit using somewhat different language. What they all seem to have in common are the following:

1.   Most of our daily functioning is governed by automatic programs,

2.   Automatic programs largely run in a stealth mode in the background,

3.   Most but not all automatic programs are acquired during development,

4.   Automatic programs are difficult to access,

5.   Attempts to change these programs from the level of conscious awareness using persuasion (counseling/ therapy) are not particularly effective.

Automatic Programs

When a newborn child enters the world it has a lot to learn before it can function as a self-sustaining adult in a human community. There are many things that need to be acquired, not the least of which are motor skills, context knowledge and language. These lay a foundation upon which most other learning takes place. We can capture most of these other areas under the umbrella term of *culture.* Culture includes the knowledge and beliefs of our family and our family's community. These can include everything from demonstrable facts to pure flights of fantasy and everything in between.

Leaving aside the hard factual material, which for most of us comprises a small portion of our learned content, what's left might be loosely classified under the term beliefs. A prominent professor of psychology, Michael Gazzaniga, has defined humans as "...a belief creating species." He thinks the evidence shows that humans are predisposed to see associations and in particular positive associations between phenomena and generate *explanations* for these associations. Because of our bias to engage in this type of creative cognition, we frequently create erroneous

explanations or beliefs. Generally speaking, as long as the balance between functional beliefs and dysfunctional beliefs is favorable, we manage to muddle through and even thrive in some instances. The point is that our learning environment, especially our early learning environment, conveys a lot of dysfunctional beliefs to most of us. The reason that the early learning environment is so important is that we are most vulnerable to irrational and dysfunctional beliefs during this period. We are vulnerable because we have little in the way of critical thinking skills, whose acquisition is developmentally delayed to facilitate rapid learning.

During most of our developmental period, our brains function in a mode that allows rapid, uncritical absorption of all our environment has to teach us. Patterns of electrical activity determine the mode in which our brain functions. Each pattern is somewhat like a different sensory modality. From birth to around age two the dominant activity is *delta* wave activity. This period is followed by dominance of *theta* wave activity from around age two to around age six. From around age six to around age 12 the *alpha* pattern is dominant. After age 12 the adult pattern of dominant *beta* wave activity is typical.

Looking backward through this developmental sequence of brain activity, the patterns could be thought of as a sequence of decreasing criticality. During the first twelve years of life, we uncritically ingest a plethora of information and beliefs in preparation for becoming self-sustaining adults. Evolutionarily speaking, humans are considered adult when they achieve reproductive capability, which is about the same time that the beta pattern in brain activity becomes dominant. During this critical period for core learning, children learn much more informally than formally through what is described as *vicarious* or *social learning* by psychologist Albert Bandura in his book Social Learning Theory.

Learning

      The following is an abbreviated summary of three basic types of learning. The first type is called respondent conditioning or associational learning and usually brings to mind Ivan Pavlov. It is symbolically represented as S -- R. The S represents and eliciting stimulus that produces a response (R). Responses are usually reflexive and frequently have an emotional component. A simple example is a startle response to a loud noise. A new stimulus can be paired with an existing stimulus and the response elicited. The existing stimulus can then be faded away and the new stimulus will elicit the response by itself. This is the basis for most learned antecedents for emotional responses. This includes both positive and negative emotional responses. Emotional APs are usually established through this process.

      The second type is called operant conditioning or instrumental learning and usually brings to mind B. F. Skinner. It is symbolically represented as S -- R -- S. The first S represents an antecedent stimulus that functions to cue emission of a particular response (R). The second S is a consequent stimulus that serves to reinforce or punish the response emitted. A simple example is a student driver learning to stop when a traffic light turns red. When a light turns "red", it is a cue to stop and the student driver is instructed to step on the brake. The driving instructor reinforces the response by providing positive verbal feedback. This is the basis for most learned voluntary responses, including both positive and negative behavior. Performance APs are usually established through this process.

      The third type is called vicarious conditioning or observational learning (a.k.a. social learning) and often brings to mind Albert Bandura. This approach is symbolically represented by S -- O -- R -- S. The first S represents an antecedent stimulus, which in this case is usually some type of social behavior performed in a social context. The O represents observation of the antecedent S or cue, which goes

well beyond simple perception and includes encoding what was observed either linguistically, imaginally or both and then storing it in memory. The most common response (R) is an imitative response where the cognitively encoded performance observation is used as a guide to reproducing the modeled behavior observed. The second S is the consequent stimulus that reinforces or punishes the imitated behavior. A simple example would be observing someone downloading a computer file from a server to a desktop computer and then imitating what was observed to download a file oneself. In cases like this, the reinforcing stimulus might simply be the positive feedback resulting from success. We all acquire much, if not most, of our social behavior through observational learning. This is probably the primary method by which, as children, we established many of our APs, especially those related to social behaviors.

Entire books have been written about each of these learning models. The above descriptions are intended to give you an idea about different ways behavior related to APs might be acquired. A significant amount of detail about each model has been omitted. Further, there are specific, structured application techniques that have been devised for employing each of the models.

In recent times adulthood has been pushed out to the late teens or even early twenties. Upon reaching adulthood, we have a large set of automatic programs that have been established through learning and function like an autopilot. It has been estimated that outside of conscious awareness as much as four billion bits of information per second are processed. This information arises from both the internal environment of the body as well as from the external environment. All of this information is processed through parallel programs running simultaneously and may account for as much as 99.99% of all processing. These programs produce output and send signals to maintain a wide variety of functions and responses. This is in many ways a very efficient system because a lot of routine requirements are

handled automatically and don't require any attention.

Psychological research has shown that we are capable of making emotional associations, initiate thoughts and make decisions without being aware that we are doing so. These automatic responses are then, with a slight delay, transmitted to the body and in some cases into conscious awareness. The built-in delay is the closest thing we have to a fail-safe system. The conscious mind has a small window of opportunity to interrupt, delay, stop or alter the response originating outside of conscious awareness. Most of the time the conscious mind is not even aware of the output from these automatic programs *(APs)* and, even when aware of the output, we usually just look on like bystanders. This is what some call following *the path of least resistance*.

Gazzaniga's work implies that our great capacity for generating explanations allows us to create *post hoc* rationalizations to explain what we do even when it can be demonstrated that we are consciously clueless about why we have reacted in a particular way in a given situation. In short, we usually function like zombies who, under the control of *APs,* create narrative fictions to explain why we think, feel, say and do things. These narrative fictions or stories that we spin about our *fictive-selves* represent our ego identity or self-identity. It is important to recognize that ego is a fiction and not to become overly identified with it. It is a tool to help us negotiate the but it is just a tool.

The web of the world is a phrase that I use to describe the elaborate civilization that humans have created on this planet over the millennia. All of the belief systems, customs, theories, literature, histories, philosophy, science, technology and so on represents strands in this web. Indeed, this species' narrative is about itself and the "reality" that it inhabits. One can get a quick fix on what this web is comprised of by imagining a world in which humanity has disappeared. Ask yourself how much of what we think of as "our reality" would continue to persist

in the absence of the narrators. Years ago I read a remark by an Indian shaman who while instructing an apprentice advised the apprentice that if he wanted to be a shaman he had to learn to stop the world and get off. I puzzled over this advice to the apprentice for some time before I grasped its meaning. I realized that the shaman wasn't speaking literally and that what he was talking about was recognizing that one's perceptions and understanding were being produced by the web of the world. In order to exercise any shamanistic powers, one had to disengage one's thinking from this web and approach "reality" from a fresh perspective unencumbered by the consensus reality that the vast majority of humanity lived through.

One has a personal narrative (the fictive self) that creates the "self" (you) as a separate entity and defines that "self's" (your) place in and relationship to the many layered human narrative (web of the world). The message in this is just let go of the narratives and be, as Adyashanti says, emptiness dancing. The essence of being. In the unlikely event that the message describes where you live, there is nothing more for you in this manuscript and you can stop reading or listening now. Let go of the spiritual snipe hunt.

The adult conscious mind seems to have two basic functions. One function is largely oriented toward dealing with circumstances that arise for which there are no APs. The conscious mind is often said to be the source for *executive control functions* that lead to selective attention, problem solving and deliberate actions. The conscious mind can process about two thousand bits of information per second (less than .01% of all processing) and uses serial processing. The conscious mind is like an evolutionary afterthought compared to the processing that occurs outside of conscious awareness. The conscious mind is directed outward and the APs running outside of awareness rarely become objects of consciousness. Further, the conscious mind is usually critical of input that contradicts existing programming.

The other function of the conscious mind and the function that provides the resistance to contradictory input is creation and maintenance of the *ego*, fictive-self or self-identity, which is our interface with the web of the world and represents our sense of who we are within that context. When the conscious mind is not engaged in executive functions, it seems to be busy embellishing, maintaining, rehearsing and reinforcing its self-identity. The "idle" thoughts (e.g., self-talk and memories) you often find yourself occupied with are usually related to this function. This mental chatter is largely under the control of what is known as the default mode network or what I've called the relaxed attention network. We'll come back to this network a bit later.

Notes:

Belief is a personal affirmation about anything that is based upon unconditional acceptance of its validity (a.k.a. taken on faith) in the absence of any actual evidence supporting it. The opposite of factual knowledge grounded in experience. Public knowledge is usually scientifically obtained through experiments or other relatively objective methods. Private knowledge is obtain from personal experience. For example, science might determine that meditation alters the pattern of electrical activity in the brain. Personal experience may confirm for you that meditation enhances your sense of well-being. Both are factual and based on experience, but one is public and the other private, i.e., phenomenological.

Cooperative Alliance is an attempt to influence someone's choices by **persuasion**. Persuasion, properly conducted, appeals to reason. Successful persuasion convinces someone of the correctness of a particular choice. A change agent can best exercise persuasion through a **cooperative alliance**. In such an alliance, a person's participation and cooperation in the change process is essential. The only way that a cooperative alliance can be formed is for an agent to develop a positive, supportive and therefore a personal relationship with the person needing assistance.

Chapter Two
Pathways I and II

Introduction to Meditation

 A tried and proven method that has been with us for millennia is **meditation**. There are many varieties of meditation, but they usually focus on sitting quietly and occupying conscious awareness with the *focus of attention* on a target such as an object (e.g., candle), sound (e.g., "OM") or process (e.g., breathing). Eyes may be open or closed unless you have chosen a visual target. This is not a method for rapid change and requires dedication to the practice over time.

 As one sits quietly and attentively focused on a selected target, thoughts, feelings, sensations and impulses to action will arise and enter your awareness. The practice is to simply note these and refocus attention on the target. There is a tendency, in beginners, to shift the focus of attention to the new cognition that has entered conscious awareness. This typically takes one of two forms. The first is to follow the cognition wherever it mentally takes one. Think of a hound dog following a scent trail. The second is to drill down and reveal the details comprising the cognition. If you are familiar with compressed computer files, think of extracting a compressed file. If not, think of unpacking a suitcase. If you find that you have done either of these, just note the nature of the cognition and shift the focus of attention back to the target.

 Noting the nature of a cognition can be categorical. Label the cognition from a classification scheme such as *planning*, *ego narrative*, *boredom*, *anger*, *impulse, fantasy* and so on. Develop any classification and label system that resonates with you. A very simple system can be pretty inclusive. For example, I have used a two-category classification that employs the labels *chatter* and *imag*e. The point is to

simply acknowledge in some way the cognition that is intruding into awareness and then go back to your original target. This is the first step in a meditation practice. The objective is to simply recognize that *you* are the *observer* of this mental activity (good, bad and ugly) and <u>not the mental activity itself</u>. After all, if you are the mental activity itself; ask yourself, who is observing the mental activity?

The second step is specific to mental activity that seems to be arising from a problematic automatic program (AP). Meditation will make you much more aware of this content, because it will regularly intrude on your effort to maintain a singular attentive focus. Why this occurs will be discussed in more detail later. One way to recognize this type of activity is by a negative emotional reaction (a.k.a. contraction) such as anxiety, anger, fear, guilt, shame, etc., that accompanies the content. A second way is to recognize an avoidance response such as an effort to suppress the mental activity or to quickly generate a mental distraction. By simply sitting with the content believed to be arising from a problematic AP, one can neutralize negative reactions to the content.

This step in meditation works much like a desensitization program in behavior therapy. For example, suppose you have an AP that judges moral worth by the degree to which a person is involved in what you consider productive behavior. This AP is activated when you observe someone being idle for an extended period and an evaluative thought associated with a negative emotion arises. The evaluative thought might be summed up with a label such as "lazy" or "deadbeat." The emotion might be anger or disgust. With such an AP, it would not be surprising that during meditation your unemployed younger brother's name (or whomever) arises in awareness followed by the evaluative thought (lazy) and an emotional response (anger).

Your goal in the second step should be to keep the mind as quiet and calm as

possible while the thought and feeling are simply observed passing through awareness. Don't try to get rid of the thought and feeling but try not to allow yourself to be distracted by and entangled in them. If you simply note them and shift your attention back to your target, the cognition and associated emotional reaction will produce less of an impact on you. You should continue to treat all future occurrences in a similar manner. Repeated occurrences of an AP that is ignored weakens the AP until it ceases to be automatic or simply drops out of your repertoire of programs (a.k.a. extinction).

Another example might be an impulse that drives a habitual behavior such as cigarette smoking. The AP for smoking tobacco includes biological, self-identity, social and behavioral dimensions. This compound AP is not easy to ignore when it activates. The impulses it delivers are usually responded to automatically. However, if you can learn to simply note the impulse and refocus your attention during meditation, the link between the impulse and acting on it will be weakened. Thus, you will begin to strengthen your voluntary control over the AP when it sends you an impulse to act. If you can take the AP off of automatic during meditation, you can begin extending this skill to other situations. In short, by neutralizing the AP, you can learn to be a free agent instead of a zombie.

Meditators often go through a series of stages during the practice of this pathway. The stage labels given below are descriptive and you will probably recognize all of them at some point in a meditation practice:

1.   *Monkey mind* (thoughts zip around like ricochets in an iron pot) *early* Step 1

2.   *Hummingbird mind* (thoughts flit about but with pauses) *late* Step 1

3.   *Teflon mind* (thoughts just drift by like clouds in the sky) Step 2

4.   *Natural mind* (Undisturbed awareness, more on this later) Step 3

It is likely that each of the above descriptive states are associated with a

dominant pattern of brain wave activity. Most non-meditators and beginners probably find themselves largely in the beta state. Novice meditators in whom beta still dominates often complain that meditation makes their "mind" run out of control. In fact, nothing has changed in the functioning of their minds. The perception of change is a product of not being accustomed to paying attention to what is going on in their "mind." Those with a consistent meditation practice will probably regularly enter an alpha state. Experienced meditators will likely enter a theta state with some frequency. Highly accomplished meditators appear to not only enter gamma on a regular basis but spend much of their non-meditative time in gamma as well. This last point has only come to light through recent research.

Brain researchers, Jürgen Fell, Nikolai Axmacher, and Sven Haupt at the University of Bonn, in Germany, report in the journal *Medical Hypotheses* that average meditators' EEG readings show that alpha waves typically dominate and that increases in theta wave activity is also often seen. EEG readings for expert meditators show high-frequency gamma waves, which distinguishes expert meditators from other meditators. In fact, gamma wave activity is higher even when the experts aren't meditating. Advanced meditators apparently experience the world in a fundamentally different way and appear to experience novel states of consciousness.

Further findings indicate that gamma wave states, associated with expert-level meditation, assist in the reshaping of brain structures. Gamma wave activity is thought to be associated with "neuroplasticity" or the ability of the brain to form new connections and build on structures already present. Data show that expert meditators often exhibit increased cortical thickness and more gray matter in specific parts of their brains, indicating physical changes from extended experience of meditation. These brain changes produce effects that are evident even when one isn't meditating.

Richard Davidson at the University of Wisconsin, in cooperation with the Dalai Lama, undertook a study of Buddhist monks in India who had between 10,000 and 50,000 hours of meditation practice. In this study the monks and inexperienced controls were asked to meditate with a focus on "unconditional compassion." The results from this study of monks, published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, reported that the monks exhibited significantly more gamma band activity, and some of the monks produced gamma wave activity more powerfully than any previously recorded in a healthy person. The longer a monk had been meditating the stronger was the gamma activity recorded. The kind of gamma activity seen in these monks has been linked to the networking of separated brain circuits and to heightened awareness. Much of the activity was associated with the left prefrontal cortex, a region previously associated with happiness, positive thoughts and positive emotions. Given that the monks exhibited greater gamma activity than controls even when not meditating suggests to Davidson that meditation probably produces permanent changes in the brain. He said, "What we found is that the trained mind, or brain, is physically different from the untrained one."

In an article in *Scientific American*, Terry Sejnowski and Tobi Delbruck report that Robert Desimone, at MIT, has shown that attention to a specific stimulus increases the number of cortical neurons that fire in synchronized spikes in the gamma band (30 to 80 hertz), which appears to signal that whatever is passing through conscious awareness at the time is important. Further, Pascal Fries of the Ernst Strungmann Institute of Neuroscience in Frankfurt, Germany, has found evidence that the gamma band is involved in signaling between widely separated cortical areas. Synchronized firing of spikes in the gamma band have also been found to strengthen the connection between synapses in the cortex. Research also indicates that gamma band activity seems to be deficient in certain

disorders such as schizophrenia and autism.

Finally, William Bengston, an academic sociologist, conducts research on "energy" healing using both animal and human subjects. He describes one of the techniques that he has developed for training people to do energy healing. He thinks this technique may have its effect by increasing gamma band activity. His hypothesis is based on brain wave data collected on a gifted healer who introduced him to energy healing and described himself as using a technique that Bengston now calls "cycling." Some years ago, the healer's brain wave activity was recorded by the American Society for Psychical Research. They recorded activity that today would be classified as in the gamma band but at the time was attributed to equipment malfunction, because gamma wave activity was not recognized. If he is correct, cycling may be a shortcut to significantly increasing gamma band activity. Bengston says that cycling requires a lot of practice to master. However, it doesn't take the thousands of hours reported in the studies of the Buddhist monks described above.

Bengston's technique is described in his book The Energy Cure and is essentially a visualization technique. He says the purpose of the technique is to completely occupy the ego and get it out of the way. He says one must use a minimum of twenty images, and each image should be of something that the ego wants. He cautions against the use of ideals and says to focus on ego gratification or ego desires. World peace is not suitable but a new sports car is suitable. Each image should be envisioned as already attained, not merely as a wish. Don't imagine the sports car in the showroom window but imagine yourself blazing down the highway driving it. Once you've created and memorized your set of images, he instructs you to practice cycling through them as rapidly as possible until you can go so fast they are a mere blur. You should also reach a point where you can cycle them in mixed order rather than a fixed order. Especially important,

he says, is getting to where you can effectively cycle while in a state of emotional arousal. An experimental test of this hypothesis remains to be done.

<u>Introduction to Contemplation</u>

Pathway two is **contemplation,** in which the focus is on *cognitive associations* guided by an *intention* to elucidate the elements in a problematic AP. This pathway has some similarity to Pathway One. Success is more likely with this method if you've had some experience with meditation, as described above. Your best clue about an AP is a response that you observe in yourself that repeats. The response might be simply a thought that carries an evaluative message about some person or situation, an emotional reaction to a person or situation, a behavior directed at some person or situation or some combination of these responses. The response may be negative or positive in character. For example, you might have an inexplicable negative reaction to a potential client or employer that interferes with you establishing rapport. Or, you might have a positive reaction that is objectively unwarranted to the misfortune of a colleague, friend or family member.

The critical step in employing this approach is to be an attentive and astute enough observer of your own functioning to recognize a problematic AP in operation. Sometimes these APs are so obvious that they are easy to recognize. However, some of the most insidious and damaging APs are subtle and not easily recognized. Thus, an effort to take seriously the old adage "know thyself" has merit. If you are interested in identifying dysfunctional APs, you should try to live in a reflective manner, not a reactive one. Keeping daily notes reflecting on people or events each day that seem noteworthy, for any reason, is a good way to become more reflective. Read back over your notes from time to time and watch for any type of pattern that seems to be present. APs are repetitive and will create recognizable patterns, if you have a record. Sometimes memory is sufficient to identify a pattern but most people shouldn't rely on memory alone.

When you've identified what you have reason to think is a problematic response, you are ready to do an edit. The first step is to employ contemplation. Proceed as if you are going to meditate (review Pathway One, if necessary). Instead of focusing on a target such as an object, sound or process, focus your attention on the problematic response. Keep in mind the idea of a programming loop that was discussed earlier in the section on John Lilly. There are five possible types of elements in a *programming loop*: activating event, belief about the event, emotional response, behavioral response and at the end of many loops an *effect* that feeds backs to you. This may be the only element that you are consciously aware of.

Take as an example a woman (Angie) who repeatedly forms relationships with self-centered men, where she is a giver and they are a taker in the relationship. This "one-way relationship" effect may be the only element of which she is consciously aware. In this example, Angie would begin contemplation using "one-way relationship" as the focus. What Angie should do is allow her mind to free associate on this focus and watch for other potential elements to arise into awareness. Often these elements will reveal themselves in the form of memories. The intent is to find possible candidates for the missing elements of behavioral and emotional consequences, beliefs and antecedents that comprise the loop.

Any time a *generalization* seems to be available for one of the elements, Angie should incorporate it into her contemplative focus. Generalization here refers to some common theme that can be extracted from several memories that appear to be associated with an element in the loop (more on generalization below). She should continue the process until all potential elements in the AP appear to be identified. The next step is to apply this sequence to each previous instance in her experience and see if the elements fit the situation and feel "right" to her. If any element doesn't seem to fit well into the AP loop, Angie should work

some more on that element until she has a good fit.

Suppose that the AP consists of elements like the following: the characteristics in men that capture her attention are some of the same characteristics that she recalls were prominent in her father. Angie's father was a "user" who was very charming and skilled at manipulating people into attaching to him so that he could use them to do his bidding. As a young naive girl, Angie had never understood this about her father. Basking in his "approval," she never realized that she was being manipulated for her father's benefit and adored him. As an adult, when Angie encounters charming manipulative men (activating event) they evoke in her the belief that they are adorable like her father. This belief in turn evokes a very positive emotional response to such men. Being positively motivated, Angie behaves toward these men in such a way that they recognize her as easily used and take advantage of her. Until she employed contemplation and identified the elements in the AP that had repeatedly drawn her into one-way relationships, Angie had little hope of escaping from the effects of this problematic AP.

Now that the AP and its elements have been identified, Angie is in a position to engage it as a free agent. The first step is to find an alternative belief about the meaning of her childhood interactions with her father. She has recognized her father's behavior as manipulative and self-centered. She now understands that her father's intentions were not trustworthy. Thinking through what she has learned about the AP, she recognizes that she should feel apprehensive about men who act like her father. She recognizes that if she had such a feeling of apprehension it would lead to cautious interaction with or even avoiding such men.

Angie is now ready to return to the contemplative method to reprogram the AP by working back through her previous one-way relationships while applying her alternative belief that their style of interaction suggests manipulative intent. As

she contemplates each of her past experiences, she imagines her initial encounter with each man, observes his behavior, feels apprehensive about what she sees and withdraws. After she has successfully imagined avoiding these prior problem relationships, Angie moves on to imagining new encounters.

In these new, imagined encounters with men whose behavior reminds her of her father, she practices ways of cautiously interacting with these hypothetical men in order to reveal the intent behind their behavior. If she has willing friends, she might do some role play activities based on hypothetical encounters as well. The repeated and deliberate working through the AP imaginatively while in a contemplative state of mind and engaging in role plays are reprogramming techniques. Angie wants to turn the problematic AP that had caused her many difficulties in the past into a self-enhancing AP that will positively assist her in the future. Once she feels that her reprogramming efforts have initially established the revised AP, she must begin to deliberately put it into practice in her life. This last step is the key to the AP being finalized and becoming automatic.

Recall that earlier terms such as root belief and immediate belief as well as superordinate and subordinate construct were introduced. You can think of a root belief or superordinate construct as the basis for a *generalized* AP that may have multiple immediate beliefs or subordinate constructs. These *particular* APs are derivative APs originating from a generalized AP. When a generalized AP is identified through contemplation and reprogrammed, there is the potential for a whole host of particular APs being affected by the reprogramming. It is perfectly fine to target a particular belief driving an AP for change, but it is more efficient to target generalized beliefs when possible.

Here is a simple example. An individual has the following particular beliefs: 1) that he or she must be perceived as an outstanding employee; 2) that he or she must be viewed as having an ideal spouse; 3) that he or she must be perceived as

an exemplary parent; and 4) that he or she must be perceived as financially successful. Each AP associated with these beliefs will manifest emotionally and behaviorally in different ways. However, there is a fairly obvious theme in the four beliefs. The theme is simply "I must be perceived as perfect" or some similar generalization. The individual's belief in perfectionism is the root, superordinate or generalized belief that can generate an almost endless sequence of associated immediate, subordinate or particular beliefs. Identifying and reprogramming this root belief has the potential to impact a number of beliefs that are simply particular variations on it. The contemplation method can be used on a generalized belief following the same process used for a particular belief.

Chapter Three
Pathway III

<u>Hypnosis</u>

The third pathway, **hypnosis**, was most popular in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries but continues to attract interest today. The focus in this section will be on *autosuggestion* (a.k.a. self-hypnosis). All hypnosis is self-hypnosis, because it is entered into by choice. Although often referred to as a trance, hypnosis is not a trance but a method of systematically accessing content normally outside of conscious awareness. The purpose of autosuggestion here is as a tool to explore programs and "rewrite" those programs through suggestion. Recognizing that all hypnosis is self-hypnosis, you can effectively dispense with the need for a hypnotist, especially for working on matters related to personal development.

Metaphorically speaking, your mind consists of three portions. The part you are most familiar with is the conscious mind, which is managed by a system within mind that I'll call the *outer ego*. This portion of your mind is small and is a specialized network of functions that include the neocortex or frontal lobe of the brain. Its functions are characterized primarily by beta wave activity, which is the dominant waking electrical pattern in adolescents and adults.

The part of the mind being called the conscious mind can process only about 2000 bits of input per second. Conscious mind, to use a computer analogy, largely employs serial processing. It processes internal signals sent by the body indicating pain, pleasure or needs that require conscious attention. It is also constantly scanning and attending to external aspects of the environment that are likely to require some non-habitual response, such as making a judgment about which of several algorithms would provide the most efficient computational solution for a problem on an exam. The conscious mind employs what psychologists call an executive control system, which controls selective attention and employs goals and priorities to

help it manage input. It can also call on memory for stored information and skills that might be useful.

The conscious mind makes possible the application of logic and analytic thinking to problem solving, decision making, planning, expressive communication through language and deliberate action. Your conscious mind can focus on a problem and process both incoming information and memory to arrive at a solution. For example, the conscious mind would work out the best arrangement for a load of furniture coming into your house or develop a plan to use the material in this manuscript to improve your personal functioning.

Your conscious mind is prone to becoming bored when the input is too routine and turns to fantasy or other mental diversions. The conscious mind is also prone to distraction when an object or event with high emotional valence enters the environment being monitored, such as the appearance of a sexy billboard ad while driving down the highway. Think of a submarine periscope poking just above the water and scanning the environment for a target. The lookout peering through and guiding the periscope is the outer ego that processes what is seen using the conscious mind. A skilled meditator whose brain produces primarily gamma activity has a greater focus of attention, is less prone to boredom and is less likely to be distracted.

The part of the mind that does the heavy lifting is outside of awareness and not easily accessible. I'll refer to this as the *non-conscious mind*, which I like to think of as being managed by the *inner ego*. This part of your mind is very large and includes a wide range of functions. Its functions are characterized primarily by theta and delta wave patterns of activity. It is estimated that it can process 4,000,000,000 bits of input per second. By way of a computer analogy, it employs simultaneous, parallel processing. The non-conscious mind handles 99.99 percent of your mental processing. It receives input from every sensory system that you

have, whether tuned to internal or external data. There is even some evidence suggesting that it reads data from the energy fields that surround everything and especially living things. There are those who suggest that the non-conscious mind even has access to collective aspects of humanity's consciousness (a.k.a. archetypes).

The non-conscious mind operates outside of conscious awareness. This aspect of mind employs what might be called an autopilot control system, which draws on a library of biological programs and learned programs (a.k.a. APs) whose foundations are root or core beliefs (or assumptions). These APs help manage default decisions, habitual behavior, emotional reactions and memories. This aspect of the non-conscious mind makes possible the application of generative processing and uses creative thinking to problem solve, make associations and manage personal expression. It monitors and regulates all of your bodily functions such as heart rate, respiration rate, blood pressure and so on. It also runs automatic programs to produce habitual motor responses such as walking, riding a bicycle or keyboarding.

Some habitual responses include emotional reactions to various stimuli such as disgusting foods or people that remind you of someone with whom you've had negative experiences. This processing power and its output would overwhelm you if all of it were channeled into conscious awareness. In some cases, such as autonomic physiological processes, the path into conscious awareness is turned off but can be opened up through training and practice using certain meditation techniques or through technological methods such as biofeedback. A lot of the output, however, is blocked from conscious awareness by conditioned filters or psychological constructs that censor most of the output but allow certain types of information to pass into conscious awareness. Think of the non-conscious mind as a submarine deep beneath the sea. This submarine is a spy boat that is receiving data being collected and sent to it from many monitors placed over a wide area. Think of the inner ego as the submarine's captain who commands and directs the data being re-

ceived to various crew members (APs) for analysis and interpretation.

Think of the *subconscious mind* as lying between the conscious mind and the non-conscious mind with a small amount of overlap with each. The subconscious mind is just outside of awareness and more easily accessible than the non-conscious mind. This interface is where communication between the outer ego and inner ego systems can develop. The conscious mind has access to the subconscious when its functions are characterized primarily by alpha wave activity. Thus, the conscious mind has access to the subconscious when daydreaming, "spaced" out, engaged in a mindless automatic activity, when prayerful, in meditation or under hypnosis. Autosuggestion is a systematic approach to entering the subconscious with the intent of communication with the inner ego.

Effective autosuggestion has several requirements. First, one must be motivated to change and be ready to embrace change. If, on some level, one truly doesn't want to change, then autosuggestion will not succeed. Second, one must accept suggestions without analyzing what's being said. This requires that you generate an alpha-dominant brain state to suspend critical thinking. The alpha state is most easily attained by a deep state of physical relaxation. Relaxation is greatly aided by the use of *diaphragmatic breathing* (see note at end). You should certainly do this during autosuggestion sessions but it would be better if you made a conscious effort to breathe this way all the time until it becomes a new AP. Third, you must give your undivided attention to the suggestions being sub-vocally spoken to yourself or being delivered by means of an audio recording. A state of relaxed but focused awareness (attentive but not willful) is conducive to implanting new APs or modifying existing APs through suggestion. Meditation practice can improve one's ability to enter into a state of relaxed, focused awareness. It is important to know and understand all the components of a new AP before trying to insert it or of an existing dysfunctional AP before trying to modify it. The belief component in

a dysfunctional AP is often the source of the problem but not always.

There are reasons to assume that there is a direct connection between your mind and your body. For example, if you consistently perceive your environment as threatening and you are defensive, your body will respond as if under attack. This will put you in a chronic state of stress. Chronic stress diminishes the resources available to your immune system as well as many core organ systems. Eventually, this state of affairs will lead to tissue damage and organ dysfunction or succumbing to opportunistic diseases caused by bacteria or viruses that your body can no longer effectively defend against. Meditation focused on attention to diaphragmatic breathing can help to moderate stress. Recent research done in the medical college at the University of South Carolina has found that diaphragmatic breathing also mediates stimulation of the immune system and has positive impacts on health. Further, expectations consistently held tend to become core beliefs or root assumptions and unfold through your life experience. This is what is sometimes referred to as a self-fulfilling prophecy. For example, if you expect to fail and come to believe that you are a failure, you will fail.

Root or core beliefs are employed by the non-conscious as the basis for establishing APs that implement those beliefs. When they are destructive beliefs, things frequently seem to go against you and leave you puzzled about why you just can't succeed. If you're fortunate enough to have constructive beliefs, you may feel like your successes are due to either exceptional ability or good luck. The longer a belief has been operating at the non-conscious level, the more difficult it is to alter. Autosuggestion can help you effectively alter dysfunctional APs and especially to establish functional beliefs that you would like to take the place of dysfunctional beliefs in an AP.

To be truly effective, suggestions must be acted on because there is a natural *feedback loop* between what we think and what we do. No matter how often you

tell yourself something, it will not become operative if you never act on it and give it validity. Acting on new beliefs is not always easy because resistance from older and long established beliefs have the power of habit behind them. Autosuggestion can help you insert new beliefs into the subconscious where they can be taken up by the processing taking place in the non-conscious mind. Acting on these new beliefs will help you to overcome the resistance of habitual thinking and acting. However, you must muster up the will and courage to act on your new beliefs in order for them to become reality.

I have provided, at the end of this chapter, a self-induction narrative you can use "as is" or as a template for constructing your own self-induction narrative for autosuggestion activities. You should add your own suggestions at the end of the induction narrative. You should always state suggestions in positive terms and tie them to the outcome that you wish to achieve. You should always express a suggestion in the present tense so that it implies that the objective of the suggestion has already been accomplished. Write down your suggestions and then analyze them against the above criteria.

Focus on one objective at a time. Use several repetitions of each suggestion and varied ways of wording the suggestion. Work with an objective for a minimum of a week or ten days. If progress is not being made by then, think carefully about your objective and suggestions and whether or not they might be improved upon. Continue to apply the autosuggestion technique. You can either memorize the induction narrative and suggestions to be spoken sub-vocally or you can use an audio recording to present the narrative and suggestions. You can also improve your induction process by playing some binaural music in the background that is designed to entrain the electrical activity in your brain with its alpha frequencies.

Examples of some contrasting target statements:

Don't say, "Cigarettes will damage my health and I must stop smoking."

Say, "It feels great to be free of cigarettes and to enjoy subtle tastes and smells."

Don't say, "I don't have social anxiety and I will be more socially outgoing."

Say, "I am socially confidant and enjoy interacting with people."

Don't say, "I will pray for the world to find peace."

Say, "I treat all living beings with dignity and respect."

Don't say, "I will meditate every day."

Say, "My daily meditation is mentally and spiritually refreshing."

An abbreviation of this approach is the use of *handwriting* to move your suggestions past the critical outer ego. Handwriting is an AP that already resides outside of conscious awareness. You can use this AP as a backdoor into the sub-conscious. Simply sit down at a desk, table or other writing surface with your list of suggestions, a pad and a pencil . Choose a site that is quiet and where you can have a few undisturbed minutes. Take several deep breaths using diaphragmatic breathing and focus on letting your body relax. You might also play binaural music, if you find it useful. With this technique you could use earphones for the music, since it will be the only audio input.

Once relaxed, focus your attention on the writing task before you. Deliberately write out each variation of the target suggestion on your paper, giving the meaning of the suggestion your full attention as you write it. Repeat this several times. Write with the intention of implementing the suggestion in your daily life, and pick one variation of the suggestion to use as a mental focus for the day. Use the suggestion like a silent mantra, during the day when you are not fully occupied. Daily writing can be used to reinforce an audio-based autosuggestion protocol that you may not be able to implement on a daily basis.

You can also piggyback on other motor skills that are established APs. For example, you could use your audio recording of suggestions while jogging or use sub-vocal or vocal recitation of your suggestions said in cadence with your jog-

ging. The critical idea to keep in mind here is that perceptual motor skills are by their nature APs and provide you with an established avenue into the sub-conscious. Once the pathway is open, you can pair the AP with the material that you want to input through the subconscious and let association with the AP work as the carrier. Remember that to anchor your suggestions in the subconscious and transform them into APs, you must act on them. The feedback between cognitive intention and live action is critical to building or revising an AP.

<u>Self-induction</u>

You can use the following induction for Pathway Three (autosuggestion). Feel free to modify it in any manner that makes it more suitable for you. You can either memorize and recite the induction to yourself or record it and listen to it. Some people find their own voice on a recording distracting. If you're such a person, get a spouse or friend to record the induction for you. If you can afford it, a professional reader is another possibility.

Depending on whether you use self-recitation, a self-recording or have someone else prepare a recording, you may need to edit the induction relative to words such as "you" and "I" using whichever form sounds the most natural for the delivery method being employed. This also applies to the instruction on a recording to repeat to yourself suggestions as they are being delivered. Even if the recording uses "you," it may feel more natural when repeating a suggestion to substitute "I" for "you." You might find it more natural to drop out the instruction to repeat, if you're using the recitation method for delivery.

Whether you recite or listen to the induction, do so in a location that is quiet and where you aren't likely to be disturbed. Sit or lie with your arms and legs uncrossed. If you are sleepy or find that you are prone to falling asleep during the induction, you should sit up straight in a chair rather than leaning back or lying

down. Be sure you use diaphragmatic breathing during an induction. There is an example below that you can edit and adapt or use as a model to write your own script.

An Induction Example

Please take several deep relaxing breaths.
Hold your head normally and look up with your eyes.
Find a spot and focus on it.
You may close your eyes whenever you wish, or
Wait for me to instruct you to do so.

Resume breathing at a normal pace, but
Continue to breathe from your diaphragm.
If you need to swallow or adjust your position, do so.
This will only increase your relaxation.
If you haven't closed your eyes yet, close them.

Now relax the muscles in your feet and toes.
Just let the muscles go and feel your feet relax.
As they relax, warm blood flows easily to the muscles, and
The muscles relax even more.

Now relax the muscles in your lower legs and knees,
Relaxation spreading up through your calves and knees.
Just let the muscles go, and
Feel the warmth of relaxation spreading up your legs.
Your feet and lower legs are very limp and relaxed.

Now relax the muscles in your thighs.
Just let the muscles in your thighs go limp.
Feel your legs and feet sag in relaxation.
They are so heavy it would take too much effort to move them.

Now relax the muscles in your buttocks and stomach,
All the muscles just letting go and becoming limp and relaxed.
Just let the muscles go and feel your buttocks and stomach relax.
You are very limp and relaxed.

Now relax the muscles in your chest and back.

Feel relaxation spreading through your chest and back.
Just let the muscles go and feel the warmth of relaxation spreading.
Your chest and back are very limp and relaxed.

Now relax the muscles in your hands and fingers.
Then feel the relaxation spreading up your arms, and
Through your elbows and into your shoulders.
Just let the muscles go and feel your arms and hands relax.

Now relax the muscles in your neck, face and scalp,
All the way up from your neck, over your face and head.
Just let the muscles go limp and relaxed.
Your jaw sags slightly so that your teeth do not touch.

As you breathe, feel a wave of relaxation pulsing through you.
All of the tension in your body just draining away.
You feel very relaxed and at ease.
Your body is quiet and out of mind.

I'm now going to count from one to eight, and
With each number your body will become more relaxed, and
Your attention will become more focused on the sound of my voice.
1.   Calm and relaxed, every muscle completely limp.
2.   Your attention is becoming more and more concentrated.
3.   Your body feels very rested and at ease.
4.   You are fully focused on my voice now, and
5.   Any thoughts or noises seem far away and easily ignored.
6.   Your subconscious mind is now fully open.
7.   Your inner ego has a perfect channel for messages
8.   Into your powerful unconscious mind.

Note: Substitute an alternate scene if the one below doesn't resonate with you.

I want you to imagine yourself as a passenger in a car.
Imagine that you are in the front seat of the car, and
The car is on an isolated two-lane road that is very straight.
It is late at night and very dark.
Imagine that all you can see is the road stretching out ahead of the car.
The car's headlights cut a tunnel into the darkness ahead.
The road disappears into the darkness beyond the light.

The ride is quiet, peaceful and hypnotic.
You are settled down into the comfort of the seat.
Your breathing is natural and easy.
Each time you exhale, your focus on my voice increases.
You are watching the road with no thoughts or concerns.

Imagine that the illuminated section of road
Represents your subconscious mind, and
Your unconscious mind is the darkness into which the road disappears.
You are confident, at ease and enjoying the ride.

Your only care is keeping your eyes focused on the road and
Keeping your ears carefully tuned to my voice.
Your hearing is highly concentrated, and
You attend to no sound other than my voice.

The roadway before you is an open pathway
Into your powerful, unconscious mind,
A place where you can accomplish many things,
Almost magically, simply by sending messages into it.

Now take another nice deep breath all the way in, and
As you exhale, your focus on my voice increases even further.
Know that should anything happen that requires your attention,
You will be immediately alert and fully aware of the situation.

In a moment you will receive some suggestions.
After you hear a suggestion repeat it to yourself once.
Each time you hear and repeat a suggestion to yourself,
You are planting the suggestions deep in your unconscious mind.

(INSERT YOUR SUGGESTIONS HERE)

You can return to this very pleasant state anytime you wish.
Just breathe deeply and slowly several times,
Telling yourself to relax your body and open your mind.
Relax and open with each breath.

Very soon now you will find yourself returning
To a normal state of awareness.
I'm going to count backward from five to one, and
At the count of one, you'll open your eyes.
You will be refreshed, relaxed and alert.

5.   Beginning now,
4.   Conscious mind taking over,
3.   Normal awareness returning.
2.   Take a deep breath and move if you like.
1.   Open your eyes.

Resources:

If you wish to create your own text to voice induction recording, with your suggestions already in place, here is a link to one free site that has a variety of very natural voices that you can use.

If you want some alpha frequency music to use before the induction protocol begins or as background during the induction protocol, you can find a number of examples by running a search on YouTube. You can also find commercially produced recordings at sites like Scientific Sounds and Sacred Acoustics. You can use voice over, in a program like GoldWave, to put voice and music into the same recording.

Click Here to download sample audio file.
Click Here to download sample audio file with theta.

Note:

Diaphragmatic Breathing, a deep breathing technique in which you fill the lungs with air from the bottom of the lung up and empty the lungs of air from the bottom of the lung up. In other words, when you inhale, draw air down and into the lowest part of the lungs first and when you exhale push air out from the bottom of the lungs. This is simply accomplished by expanding the diaphragm when inhaling and contracting the diaphragm when exhaling. This completely fills your lungs with air and increases your oxygen supply, which is relaxing. One indicator that you are properly engaging in this technique is that your stomach rises and falls with your breath instead of your chest. The latter is an indicator that you are engaged in shallow breathing, which reduces your oxygen supply. Shallow breathers obtain half the oxygen obtained by diaphragmatic breathers. You would do well to practice diaphragmatic breathing until it becomes an AP.

Chapter Four
Pathways IV, V & VI

<u>Scripting</u>

Pathway Four is *scripting,* in which the focus is on writing a new *personal narrative* for yourself. This pathway has some similarity to Pathway Three except it is a much broader application. Scripting should be used for a major overhaul of your narrative.

Narrative psychology suggests that one of the ways that we create meaning in our lives is through the personal stories that we weave from our experiences to explain those experiences to ourselves and others. In a poem that can be found Chapter Five, I refer to this function as the *novelist* in your mind. You might also think about the novelist in your mind having an *editor* that hones the work of the novelist. Your personal narrative is a reflection of what you believe about yourself and the world you live in. There is evidence to support an influential role for your beliefs in determining your life experiences and providing the setting conditions for your mental and physical health. If you just can't seem to get anywhere with your career, education or personal life, it is likely that the lack of success is being influenced by your belief system. This belief system is implicit in your personal narrative.

Personal reality can be thought of as a narrative construction, a narrative created by the psychological integration of selected memories, interpretation of those memories and the imaginative elaboration of those memories synthesized into a coherent personal story. A personal narrative might also be thought of as a general description of the foundation for one's meta-programs or core constructs, which were discussed earlier. Your story is a self-definition. Having a rich narrative is both a source of meaning and a guide to living in the world. In some sense, the

question of whether your narrative is true or false is the wrong question since virtually no personal narrative is entirely true in any objective sense. I like to refer to this personal narrative as the *fictive-self*. The proper question about the story that one spins about oneself is, does it serve you well and affirm your life experience? A "yes" answer to that question gives your personal story functional validity, which is all that is necessary. Truth is an elusive and overrated notion when it comes to finding meaning in one's life.

If one's current life story is a constructed narrative, then alternative narratives can be constructed. In the end, what matters is what you believe to be true about yourself. Since you own your beliefs and create your own narrative, you might as well have a story that lifts you up rather than puts you down. Ask yourself, what kind of beliefs about your past do you think you need to get to where you want to go from where you are? Once you answer that question, employ contemplative meditation to review your narrative and identify where it needs to be changed. You can either put a new spin on existing elements in the narrative, or you can find different memories to substitute into the narrative for those elements, or you can imagine possible alternative events and substitute virtual memories for those elements that need to be changed. Keep in mind that memories are dynamic and constantly changing in both subtle and gross ways and use this to your advantage. The key ingredient is imagination.

Think of yourself as an actor playing a role. Your narrative defines the role you're playing. Some actors get type-cast and their careers are restricted by that type-casting, unless they can break the mold and set themselves free. You may have type-cast yourself or allowed others to type-cast you and are stuck in a role that is unsatisfying or dysfunctional. Rewrite your role and move beyond the rut in which you've been stuck.

It is helpful to first get a sense of your current narrative before trying to

modify it. Either imagine that you're writing a short autobiography or use a voice recorder and imagine that you're giving an oral history about yourself to someone. If it helps, imagine that you're relating this information to a psychologist or counselor. Keep your story focused on the major themes and try to avoid anecdotes, unless they are important to understanding a theme. Sometimes you have a single word that serves as the cornerstone or key to your narrative. In a word, you might describe yourself as "spontaneous." If you have such a word, frame your narrative so that it explains how you think you came to be spontaneous and what the pros and cons of that identity element are for you.

Dan McAdams, in his book [The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self](#), has many suggestions to help write and understand one's personal story. The following should be sufficient for most purposes. If you are having difficulty writing or telling your story, complete the following three statements as prompts. You should have at least five variations on each statement.

1.   What I want from other people is....... (for example, respect or fear).

2.   What I want to have in life is...... (for example, creativity or power).

3.   I am...... (for example, spontaneous or shy).

If you are having difficulty generating responses for a statement, apply Pathway Two (contemplation) to the statement. Once you have developed a set of constructs by completing these statements, you will have a core set of characteristics that are probably central to your story in some way. Using these statements as guideposts, attempt a statement of your narrative in the form of a story. If you are having difficulty weaving the constructs into an integrated narrative, you might try using contemplation to help you bring the pieces together.

After you have your narrative, you can begin an analysis of it to get a better understanding of what your story is saying about you. For example, most stories

will have either an optimistic or a pessimistic *perspective*. What perspective characterizes your story?

1.   <u>The two most common optimistic perspectives are</u>**:**

a.   The *dynastic* perspective: a good past has led to a good present (charmed life story).

b.   The *antithetical* perspective: a bad past has led to a good present (rise from the ashes story).

2.   <u>The two most common pessimistic perspectives are</u>**:**

a.   The *compensatory* perspective: a good past has led to a bad present (fall from grace story).

b.   The *self-absolution* perspective: a bad past has led to a bad present (never had a chance story).

Stories also have an *image* or main character. For those familiar with computer gaming, you might think of the image as your avatar. It is not unusual to have more than one image, for example, one image for your private self and another for your public self. I recall reading an account by a speech writer for Richard Nixon when he was President. The speech writer suggested something to President Nixon and after a moment of consideration his reply was "No, Nixon would never say that." Clearly, President Nixon had a public image that he thought of as "Nixon," and anything being proposed for public use had to conform to the image that he had for the Nixon avatar. Most of us do that sort of juggling but usually are not as self-aware of it or as deliberate about it as President Nixon. An image is an idealized conception of self. Images are symbols. They may be either good or bad and are both common and unique. The basic principles governing images follow:

a.   They express our most cherished desires and goals.

b.   They always enter our stories in specific opening scenes.

c.   They personify our traits and recurrent behaviors.

d.   They give voice to individual and cultural values.

e.   They are often built around significant people in our life.

f.   They may personify a fundamental life conflict.

g.   Common images can be classified using the two basic themes of *Agency* and *Communion*. Does your story either explicitly or implicitly use one or more of these images?

1.   Agency Images:

a.   The Warrior (conflict manager)

b.   The Traveler (explorer)

c.   The Sage (synthesizer of knowledge and experience)

d.   The Maker (craftsman)

2.   Communion Images:

a.   The Lover (seeker of intimacy)

b.   The Care Giver (devoted to others)

c.   The Friend (committed to relationship)

d.   The Ritualist (conserves tradition)

3.   Images High in Agency and Communion:

a.   The Healer (one who mends)

b.   The Teacher (a guide)

c.   The Counselor (a mentor)

d.   The Humanist (advocate for human welfare, values and dignity)

e.   The Arbiter (a judge or decision maker)

4.   Images Low in Agency and Communion:

a.   The Escapist (one who avoids reality)

b.   The Survivor (one who simply endures)

Once you have written out your narrative and analyzed it, which aspects of the story seem to be related to the issue or issues you're trying to deal with? When these have been identified, what changes could you make in the story that would provide an alternate and more self-enhancing story for the life you want for yourself? Rewrite those parts of the story that need to be revised to support the changes that you want to make. A positive and mature story or narrative will exhibit most, if not all of the following characteristics:

1.   It has *coherence*. The story is self-consistent and makes sense.

2.   It has *openness*. The story is flexible enough to change and grow.

3.   It has *credibility*. The story must be plausible given your life circumstances.

4.   It has *differentiation*. The story has richness, depth and complexity in the number of factors, issues and conflicts addressed.

5.   It has *reconciliation*. The story brings harmony and resolution to conflicts and contradictions in one's experiences.

6.   It has *generative integration*. The story not only provides personal unity but positively connects one to the lives and myths of others.

While you can edit and rewrite a narrative past that includes neglect, you cannot edit and rewrite a narrative past that includes a physical condition such as congenital blindness. You can, however, edit and rewrite how you've interpreted this condition in a way that shows a positive adaptation to the condition. This is not a delusional process as long as you recognize that you are the author of your life narrative and you can rewrite it however you wish as long as you don't deviate

from what is possible. As long as you confine yourself to "memories" and the psychological effects of memories, you are dealing with cognitively modifiable content. You might as well have memories and/or interpretations of memories that are self-enhancing as to have memories and/or interpretations that are self-defeating. In short, you have permission to be who you need to be. You control your personal script. You are whomever you believe you are. Others might not recognize it yet but they will if you begin to live the new character.

For example, say that your current narrative says that you were neglected by your parents as a child and you've always felt like you were an abandoned and unloved child. As a result of this "mistreatment," you suffer from poor self-esteem and underachievement to this day. These beliefs give you a handy excuse for your problems in life and they draw experiences to you that either are or can be interpreted to validate your beliefs. You don't have to own that past because it is an interpretation that you've imposed or allowed others to impose on your experience. Why not spin this childhood to be one that led you to take responsibility for yourself at an early age and become independent and self-sufficient? Look for early memories that either are or can be spun to become examples of responsibility, independence and self-sufficiency. In short, find things that can be used as examples of those self-enhancing traits. Next, weave those memories and variations on them into your narrative to replace the self-depreciating elements in your current personal narrative. Finally, start acting the part of the character in your reconstructed narrative.

Acting on the character you've created is critical and has significant effects. Recent research on the neurological effects on actors of assuming the role of a fictional character and performing according to that role found that changes were produced in the brain. Furthermore, these changes persisted for a time after the

performance of the character ended. The longer an actor acted as a character the more likely the brain effects were to become semi-permanent. Not only were there significant changes in brain functioning but the performance reduced the prominence of their typical sense of self. In fact, there are reports of actors' sense of self becoming so thoroughly supplanted by the character enacted that they experienced difficulty in regaining their former sense of self (Post-Dramatic Shock Disorder).

It seems likely that all of the self-talk generated by the brain's DMN or RAN is analogous to an actor mentally rehearsing a character that the actor is playing or preparing to play. In short, strengthening the brain patterns associated with that character. Leaving aside actors, your mental "chatter" is rehearsing your ego or "me" story. If one is attempting to change that story, this chatter is an obstacle. One way of reducing the chatter is through a meditation practice (see Chapter Two). Less "me" chatter probably means less competition with the new or modified character or story being rehearsed.

You don't have to suddenly change how you act in big ways. Start with little things and work from there. Think of yourself as playing a new role in life's drama and you have to ad-lib (spontaneously improvise) the character's responses in various situations. Think about the character that you've written for yourself in the new narrative and ask how this character would respond in this situation. Try it out and evaluate the results. If you see ways to improve on responses, incorporate those improvements at the next opportunity. For example, suppose the old character avoided using spare time for self-development by spending every evening watching TV or going out for drinks with people from work. The new character might choose to let go of the TV and take an online independent-study course related to the future envisioned for the new character or enroll in a

continuing education class at a local school instead of going out with colleagues. Step-by-step acting out the role of the character in this new narrative will lead you toward a different future.

You might find it helpful to imaginatively rehearse new responses to situations that have been problematic in the past. If you have people willing to help, you might even find it useful to work out short skits that script your character's responses in various types of situations in which you need to effect changes. Both of these strategies can be useful when your new role makes you feel like a "fake," a bit uncomfortable or disconnected. These will all pass, if you persist in actively taking on your new role.

Emergence

For anyone who would like to go beyond a refurbished narrative, you must first be able to let go of your habitual narrative. I will call this pathway *emergence*. This is probably a pathway that should only be embraced by individuals who are psychologically flexible and comfortable when facing the unknown. If you are one of those people, just let go of your identification with your current narrative and live without the constraints of a fixed narrative and adapt to life as it unfolds. No editing necessary. You must be able to look at everything from a fresh perspective and try to respond to situations as if they were unique events, not another occurrence of a recurring event for which you have an AP response.

I actually stumbled upon this approach when I was seventeen years old following a very bad auto accident that nearly killed me and badly disfigured my face. After recovering from the injuries, I was examining a yearbook photo that had been taken just prior to the accident with a "before" photo that my plastic surgeon had taken. While looking at these two photos, I was overcome with grief and felt tears running down my cheeks. Suddenly, I understood why I was crying. It was because the character in the yearbook picture was for all practical purposes

"dead." I knew he was "dead" because he looked different and because people treated him differently from how he had been treated by these same people. Sometimes he was treated worse and sometimes better but nearly always differently. My narrative explanations for how I had been treated in the past were no longer functional. I realized that who "I" thought I was, was a fiction, and it could be changed merely by a change in appearance.

I felt completely free of the character I had been. I had an opportunity to start over and create a new narrative or *fictive-self* in the full knowledge that it was a fiction. Subsequently, I also came to recognize that, while a fictive-self was useful for dealing with many of the elements encountered in the web-of-the-world, it was just a tool to be used when needed and then put away (see Chapter Five). My new narrative or interface with the everyday world began to evolve from this foundation. I discarded being an underachieving, angry adolescent who was always in some kind of trouble and became someone facing the future with a clean slate – a transformational experience. This base change in perspective only took minutes. However, in those few minutes, I gained a valuable insight. If you can simply let go and "turn left at Thursday," the "door" to a whole new dimension of your life can open to you almost instantly. In my case, a traumatic event (covered in, *A Personal Odyssey*) stimulated the emergence of the necessary insight. Perhaps you can come to the same insight vicariously through my experience.

Once you step through the door, it may take years to populate that dimension and accept an alternate reality for yourself, but life is a process that, in the relative world, unfolds through time. Change doesn't always come when you want it and sometimes it will take a form that wasn't expected or even desired. However, if you set upon the path and remain open, it will come. You simply need to allow a new reality to flow through you and accept what it offers.

Outlaw

The new narrative that began to form from the experience described above subsequently led to another transformational experience. An attempt to capture this experience is a poem I wrote titled *Outlaw* (see below). This subsequent experience arrived like a lightening bolt and delivered an epiphany. First, that one's fictive-self is really only a psychological tool and can be set aside most of the time. To do this one must learn to live from one's true or essential Self when the fictive-self is not being employed. Second, that the larger story that one lives within that is spun by society is also a fiction that is simply a broader and more inclusive story than one's personal story. Finally, that the personal and social narratives are entangled, which creates a web in which one can be ensnared for a lifetime. If you want to free yourself from this narrative web, you must learn to live from the *natural mind* (primordial awareness), which will be discussed in Chapter Five. Below is the poem I wrote in an attempt to capture the epiphany referred to above:

Outlaw

An outlaw is a man

A man made whole.

Born in quiet and solitude

The quiet of aloneness.

Wind, cold and desolate,

Heralds his birth

And being.

Eyes like polished glass

Opening on everything

Nothing.

His flesh shivers, then accepts

The coldness passes.

It was only a fleeting thought

Set aside now

Forgotten.

His life pulses in rhythm

Time is a schedule

Life a continuum.

To the man

All is simple, clear

To live.

The breath of God

Passes over him

Transforming.

Its essence absorbed

Flowing through his veins

Cleansing.

Bursting into his brain

Lifting a thousand shades

Clearing binding webs.

Webs like steel girders

Weighing upon the mind

Suppressing the man.

And the man knew God

And he was made free.

All history and tradition

Culture and words

Rescinded -- Grace.

Freedom from the past

And from the future

An outlaw.

God moved through him

And he was God.

He was neither good nor evil

Nor right or wrong.

And the man moved

With the world and through it

But, was not of it.

For he knew not

The world, nor man

Being both.

And yet, something else.

Part II
Becoming Open to Self-Transcendence

Chapter Five
Self-Transcendence

<u>The Natural Mind</u>

The *natural mind* is called by many names, including among others, the unconditioned mind, original-mind, presence and selflessness. It is, in my view, the *unconditioned, conscious awareness* that you were born into when you entered this world. It is always present but most of us have become so "lost" in the mind that we are no longer in touch with it.

How could you lose your natural mind? The process begins to unfold very early. There are three steps in the process. The first might be called *primary programs* (unconditioned) that are biological in nature. These programs send signals to the body that we are usually not aware of. But some signals come into conscious awareness and are processed through the mind before we react. Virtually all of humanity is dominated by one of three core programs or drives. One of the three is dominant and the other two serve in a supporting role. Thus, the underlying dynamic is a triad. Think of a triangle where the focus or dominant drive is at the apex of the triangle. Each of the core drives can be associated with a function. The first is safety. The second is sex. The third is status.

Safety is the first biological imperative. If one isn't safe then there is little if any hope for success at sexual reproduction or of achieving social status. The drive for safety leads to fear of anything that can be imagined to pose a threat. Most individuals and most cultures are strongly influenced by fear. From fear comes suspi-

cion of others and their motives. This in turn leads to defensiveness, which can be no more than a psychological attitude or can progress to more overt forms. Fear-driven defensiveness leads to prejudgments about people, usually grounded in superficial characteristics such as race, ethnicity, religion or class. The result is an "us" against "them" mentality.

The second core biological drive is sex. Evolution has given humans a strong sex drive that is largely motivated by pleasure, but there are some other factors such as a commonly experienced biological impetus in women for children. The underlying purpose of sex is reproduction, but pleasure is a potent reinforcing motivation for engaging in sex, which frequently results in conception whether intended or not. Even a decline in reproduction will have no impact on pleasure-driven sex as a major motivating drive. While reproduction is the primary evolutionary goal, the method used to achieve it continues to apply with or without reproduction.

The third component in the basic motivational triangle is social status. The drive for status within the social group has obvious ties to the other two programs, that is, safety and sex. Status is one way of enhancing one's importance to the social group and thereby gain better control of resources needed for safety. Status also generally plays a role in determining one's attractiveness as a sexual partner. You can see the importance of status by looking at almost any social organization, whether it is a professional, religious, business, political, military or some other type of social organization. All of these organizations have hierarchies based on the relative prestige of the levels in the hierarchy, usually based on the associated decision-making power, economic power or a combination of both.

Each of these core programs have multiple, conditioned sub-programs that are the basis for most of our life activity. These APs (automatic programs) send signals that regulate our body and send signals that motivate activity. Most of this

drive activity takes place outside of awareness. For example, hunger is the label we give to the signal that rises into awareness from the AP that regulates the body's need for nutrients. This is related to the core drive for safety, since survival depends on adequate nutrition. When you become aware of this signal, you first identify it and then, if possible, begin activity directed at responding to the signal. You engage in activity that ends in you consuming food and the program rewards your activity by eliciting satisfaction.

Secondary programs (conditioned) are built upon primary programs through choices made and repeated. At the earliest stages one has little choice except to reject or accept what is offered by a caretaker. Later, one begins to have a wider range of choices and some independence from caretakers' choices made on your behalf is achieved. Through choices and repetition of those choices, new programs are established.

Once a program is established it becomes automatic. Given a choice of foods, you don't have to consciously think about the choices and, even if you do, the probability favors you making a selection that has a repeated history under similar conditions and in similar circumstances. Your *automatic program* makes the decision for you and when an impulse to act on the decision enters your *conscious awareness*, you mentally say to yourself something like, "I think I'll get a roast beef sandwich. I really like roast beef." This is a conscious rationale for an unconscious decision made by a conditioned AP. When given choices that you have no history with, such as in an ethnic restaurant whose menu is outside your range of experience, you may be conflicted without your "inner guidance" and will have to actually apply conscious decision making to the choices by seeking more information about the items on the menu or, failing availability of sufficient information, resort to a random selection.

Even in such a situation, your APs may come into play as you gain

information and an AP partially matches up with a menu item because of some commonality in an ingredient or ingredients with already established choices. An AP may make a decision based on additional information and send a choice (as an impulse) into awareness and you mentally say to yourself, "Okay, that dish has potatoes in it and I like potatoes, so I'll go with it." Lacking ingredient similarity, an AP may act on similarity in aroma or appearance. An adult with a lot established programs may seldom fall back on a purely random choice.

In addition to secondary programs there are *tertiary programs*. Tertiary programs are programs established through *informal learning* experiences, such as learning an initial language and refining it, religious practices performed in the home, cultural values held by the family, such as patriotic Americans support their country, or beliefs about social roles, such as men should be goal-oriented and women should be empathetic. Other informal learning experiences may have social influences that are outside the family from peer groups, community organizations and the media. You may acquire APs related to all manner of things such as music preferences, clothing preferences, religious beliefs, sexual attitudes, political ideals, occupational preferences and prejudices. Other learning experiences may be more *formal* like those found in educational programs to teach subjects such as reading, writing, mathematics, history and physics.

If you would like a demonstration of the reality of these APs, click here: "[Implicit Attitude](https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/)" (or paste: https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/ in your browser) and take some of the tests available on the site, especially those on social attitudes. Compare what you consciously believe about the topics with what the tests reveal about the workings of your automatic programs. Frequently, you will find that what you say you believe is a smoke screen to hide biases operating at a level outside of awareness.

Many APs will be functional, efficient and of benefit. Other APs may not be

of any particular benefit currently but do no harm. Some, however, may be or may become highly dysfunctional and create a constant source of problems, the origins of which are difficult to identify. One simple example might be a woman who repeatedly makes poor choices in men because of dysfunctional APs that influence what she finds appealing in a man or, conversely, a man who finds problematic women appealing because of dysfunctional APs.

As you develop and acquire more and more APs, you begin to notice a lot of thoughts, feelings and impulses that enter awareness from outside of awareness. The mind creates explanations about the occurrence of these thoughts, feelings and impulses. Over time the explanations are woven into narratives that explain who we are and why we think, feel and act in certain ways. This becomes an evolving self-description or what can be called a *fictive-self*. The fictive-self usually has several narrative variations, which draw on existing APs and new APs that may develop out of particular circumstances. There is usually a variation for each of the long-term roles that we acquire in the course of our lives, such as student, spouse, parent, employee, partner, friend and so on. Some of these variations may be more functional than others and especially dysfunctional when they are contradictory and thus in conflict.

Another important process in the creation and maintenance of our fictive-self is memory and imagination. When our awareness is not externally focused on some attention-requiring task like composing this chapter, it goes into *narration mode* (a.k.a. the default mode network to be discussed later). I sometimes think of this mode of functioning as working somewhat like a novelist, and I wrote a poem describing it:

Love's Body

There's a novelist loose in your mind

Scripting you as the star in its story.

So flattered you are to be a star

You believe the story to be true.

You learn every detail in your role

Certain the character in the script is you.

This fictive-self orchestrates your life.

Hidden from view is your true Self.

You're never Present, never here Now.

The character is played out to the end.

You revisit the stage again and again

Intent, each time, on Being your Self.

Know that your true Self is Love

And you will always be Love's Body.

Remember, your novelist is ever present

Always ready to spin a new story for you.

Memories associated with our narrative arise in awareness. We ruminate on past accomplishments, pleasures, failures or misfortunes as a way of illustrating and reinforcing our story. If a memory doesn't fit our story well, we will modify and tweak the memory to bring it into better alignment with our story. We also project these memories through imagination into hypothetical future scenarios, which is different from drawing on memories of past experiences when considering how we can accomplish a specific goal. The latter type of thinking is called planning and is not just rumination. Narration strengthens and refines our story and our identification with it.

We become strongly identified with the fictive-self we weave. It becomes us and we go through our lives thinking that we are the story that we have created to explain the APs operating outside of conscious awareness that direct our thoughts, feelings and actions. The more strongly we are identified with our fictive-self, the less aware we are of our original self and the less self-agency we exercise. In short,

we have lost our natural mind and, in the process, the ability to see the world more clearly than it appears through the explanatory filters we have created to explain the effects of our APs. Literally, I AM my story and my story is ME, but a story is just that -- a story. Most people never understand this aspect of their psychological functioning, but some are graced with an insight into this process.

This insight about the fictive-self tends to be powerful, transformative and is often viewed as a spiritual event. The moon astronaut Edgar Mitchell described such events as *noetic* events. Because of a noetic event he experienced on a return trip from the moon, Edgar Mitchell created an organization to study such events. This organization is called [The Institute for Noetic Science](#).

Personally, I had such a noetic event when I was seventeen years of age that revealed to me that my concept of self was simply a matrix of beliefs in which I had invested my identity. This was a transformative experience for me, but one that took years to manifest its effects and be more fully understood. A decade later, I had a second noetic event in which I realized that, not only do we have a personal matrix of beliefs that we identify with, but there is a larger more universal matrix in which our personal matrix is embedded and entangled. If you're interested in these two noetic events in my life, they are covered in *[A Personal Odyssey](#)*.

Stories can be changed. The techniques discussed in Part I include methods for working on your APs and the stories you have spun about them. Self-agency is the tool that needs to be developed, if you want to improve your story and change the way you relate to the world. Just knowing that your life is articulated by a story and making that story more functional can make significant improvements in your life.

However, recognizing that you are identified with a story and improving that story will not alone restore your natural mind. Restoring the natural mind requires that you stop identifying with the story that you've woven around your APs and

relax back into the pure awareness of being. Being present with the natural mind will provide a fresh perspective on everything and you can respond to situations as if they were unique happenings, not instances of AP-driven events that make up part of the story that is your fictive-self. Being in the natural mind will let life flow through you unimpeded by efforts to control and direct it to make it conform to your story.

Ending identification with your I, fictive-self, ego, personality or whatever term you want to use for the construct is not generally something that people find easy to do, even though the idea may appeal to them. There are many approaches to ending identification with the story, and most of them involve extended programs of meditation. Meditation will give you greater access to material that has largely been outside of conscious awareness for most of your life. Coming to know and understand your APs will lead you to an intuitive understanding of the fictive nature of your ego or self. It is this direct understanding that begins to free you from identification with your story. It is this state, of being free of your fictive-self, that was referred to earlier in Chapter Two as Step Four in meditation. Of course, the natural mind goes beyond a meditation practice and carries across into your normal daily activities.

Many spiritual teachings speak of losing the self or getting rid of the ego or living totally in the present moment. All of these notions should be considered as metaphorical ways of saying that you should stop identifying with and living through your story. This also means you stop rehearsing, reinforcing and elaborating your story or, in other words, living in your mind. You can't get rid of your fictive-self because it serves useful purposes. But your phone, computer or car serve useful purposes, and mentally healthy people don't invest their identity in them. These and many other useful things in your life are just tools. Likewise, once you stop identifying with your story, your fictive-self simply becomes a cognitive

tool that is used as needed and then put aside until needed again.

To illustrate what this might feel like, consider the following scenario. You were selected ten years ago by your employer to go overseas to work in a subsidiary. Let's say that you went to Germany, but if you're a German pick another country. You lived in Germany for ten years and became fluent in the language and came to understand the culture. Call this your German identity. At the end of ten years, you return home to work in the corporate headquarters.

You now operate in a way consistent with your native culture and speak your native language. One evening you are having dinner in a restaurant and overhear some German tourists having difficulty with the menu and with communicating their orders to the waiter. You get up, go over to their table and in German ask them if you might be of assistance. They readily accept and you help them negotiate the items on the menu and place their orders for them with the waiter. The Germans invite you to join them and you do so and put your German identity to work during the dinner. When this dinner is finished and you leave the restaurant, the German identity is no longer needed and it is put to "bed" so to speak.

Think of your fictive-self as similar to this hypothetical German identity. When you can put it to "bed" and wake it up when circumstances require it, you will bring to an end most if not all of the narration that has previously had a near continuous run in the theater of your mind. You can now live your life largely in the present moment, which is all that really exists. You will have a much fresher and unencumbered view of events and can respond to them on their own terms rather than in terms of the character in a play of your own authorship. Thus, you have recovered your natural mind.

Many spiritual traditions see the recovery of the natural mind as the first step in moving on to a full opening to the Self and identification with what might be

thought of as Source Consciousness. For example, it might have been the natural mind that Jesus was referring to in the following:

"*Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*"

A translation of this into other terminology might read, "Frankly, unless you can regain your natural mind, you will be unable to know Source Consciousness." You can replace Source Consciousness with whatever terminology works best for you. Examples might include Christ Consciousness, Divine Consciousness, God, Unified Field of Consciousness, the Absolute and so on.

It may be that what Jesus was saying in terms of modern psychological understanding was to alter your way of perceiving. Young children typically employ what is known as bottom-up perception, while older children and adults typically use what is known as top-down perception. Bottom-up perception simply means that you perceive the world without a learned system of filters or beliefs. It is a direct perception of events. On the other hand, top-down perception means that you have developed a system of filters or beliefs through which you construe the nature of events. As an example, imagine you are looking at the Statue of Liberty. What sort of thoughts, ideas, history, stories and so forth are arising in your mind? Suppose you have your dog with you and it is also looking at the statue. What sorts of things do you imagine are arising in its mind? You're doing top-down and your dog is doing bottom-up perception. So in these terms, one interpretation of what Jesus was saying is that you need to regain the ability to employ bottom-up perception or as described above, the natural mind.

Regaining the natural mind is significant in itself. However, for those so inclined, it can become a doorway. Passing through that doorway opens possibilities for access to much broader and deeper aspects of Consciousness.

Taken

The above heading, unlike the book by the same title, has nothing to do with alien abductions. It is drawn from something one of my sons used to say when very young. If asked why he did something he would often reply, "It just took me." That observation seems apropos to this section.

Based on reading, listening to a number of people discuss their spiritual transformations and my own noetic experiences, I reached the following conclusions about spiritual awakening, self-transcendence or self-realization:

1.   You can't develop it. There are no steps you can master one at at time. It is not like working through a belt system in karate. There is no black belt to be attained in the end by passing a series of tests.

2.   You can't learn it. The study of theology, philosophy or spiritual teachings will not help. As one Self-realized being remarked, "...many of you are too intelligent for your own good. You have developed ways of interpreting the world that are highly complex. And so in order to address you...I am called upon to help you get past your education back to the simplicity of being, which is that God is Love...."

3.   You can't earn it. Being charitable and doing good works may make you feel good and may be needed and appreciated by the recipients, but such actions do not contribute to some "spiritual score board."

Self-realization is equally available to a serial killer and a pious nun. Going to church and going to a casino are equally efficacious. In short, you have no control over it. It is largely out of your hands. It just takes you.

So, how do you come to be taken? The simple answer is by *Grace* (see note at end). However, there appear to be three things that you can do that might serve as an "invitation" to *Supraliminal Consciousness* (see note at end), Christ Consciousness, Source Consciousness, etc., to reveal its presence. The operative

word here is "might." The first is meditation. The specific practice is not important as long as it makes the fictive-self or ego transparent. This simply means clearing the egoic veil so that there is an opening that makes it easier for Source Consciousness to shine through your mask. A transparent self is essentially the natural mind. Returning to this state of mind has many benefits in and of itself. It is not, however, a condition necessary for Grace. The second is self-inquiry. This is a contemplative method that focuses on the question, "Who is aware of being aware?" Clearly, your story doesn't have awareness so if the character in your story isn't aware, who is? The third is by *Transmission* (see note at end). Transmission is an invitation extended through a person who has directly experienced Source Consciousness. Contact with the power of Source Consciousness emanating from such a person can create an opening in those exposed, if they are receptive. The operative word here is "can." None of these methods or their combinations are necessary and sufficient conditions for Source Consciousness to be revealed or realized. The first two might make your state of awareness more available for realization and are probably personally beneficial things to do while waiting to be taken. In the end, it is entirely dependent upon Grace. "*All you can do is create a space for transformation to happen, for grace and love to enter.*" Eckhart Tolle

Notes:

Grace is a non-contingent, unconditional gift. It is independent of any response you can make to affect it.

Supraliminal, a perception above your typical conscious awareness, where "liminal" refers to a threshold of perception. Think of Consciousness flowing through you like a beam of light. Your conscious awareness is comprised of those frequencies of the light that you can perceive. There are frequencies that are both below (sub) and above (supra) your conscious awareness. Thus, Supraliminal Consciousness is an expansion of awareness that includes those frequencies above what human beings typically perceive.

Transmission, a term in a spiritual context that means transmitting a level of subtle energy that is only present in a fully awakened person that can provide an opening in the perceptual barrier

between conscious awareness and Supraliminal Consciousness. In early Christian practice this was called Initiation or Conveying Blessing and probably has had no real role in Christianity in nearly two thousand years. In Tantrik Yoga, this is called Shaktipat and has been and still is a recognized practice available through a small number of persons.

Chapter Six
**Foundational Practice One**

<u>Meditation</u>

Of the two practices, meditation and self-inquiry, meditation is probably the most widely known. For our purposes let's focus on an important purpose of meditation, the basic instructions for meditation were covered in Part I. An aphorism that arose during one of my meditations seems like a good introduction to the basic purpose of meditation. The aphorism, *Ego is the mask God wears while pretending to be you.* What this aphorism suggests is that your ego or fictive-self is a mask that hides the fact that your local consciousness is merely an aspect of non-local Consciousness. Recall the idea of *Supraliminal Consciousness* as the full "bandwidth" of Consciousness that includes a constricted stream of consciousness that typically leaves one unaware of the higher aspects of the full "bandwidth" potentially available. What constricts Consciousness is the conditioned awareness (a.k.a. mind) that operates through APs and about which your story is spun.

One purpose of meditation is to relax one's psychological guard sufficiently so that you recognize workings of the self that usually reside outside of conscious awareness so you can begin considering their appropriateness. If memories arise with associated thoughts or feelings that cause a contraction in you, that is, they cause some type of negative emotional response, judgment or avoidance reaction, it is likely that these memories are related to negative APs and are embedded in your story. This content needs to be examined and, if appropriate, cleared or neutralized. This processing doesn't necessarily have to be done through meditation as was discussed earlier.

The second purpose of meditation is to quiet the incessant chatter of the

mind so that it becomes easier to recognize that one is essentially the awareness that observes what is taking place within consciousness and not the body/mind, which is a mechanism making physical experiences available to consciousness. Further, awareness is not the explanation or story that one spins to explain these experiences. Teachers that provide practices that facilitate this purpose are Leonard Jacobson, Richard Moss and Rupert Spira, among others. Jacobson puts his emphasis on being present in the moment, which means being fully absorbed in awareness of what is present rather than "lost in the mind," as he often puts it. Richard Moss teaches a process of monitoring where attention is focused, which he says can be in the past, in the future, in one's story, in stories about others (not limited to people) or in the present moment. He suggests that any time you find your attention focused in one of the first four locations (or some combination of them), you simply shift your attention and focus to the present. Spira teaches that true meditation is a state in which attention is fully relaxed. He teaches that when you learn to fully relax attention, you have no where to go except into the source of attention, which is simple awareness of presence. All three teachers have a similar goal for their teaching but employ somewhat different approaches to the goal.

There have been several findings in brain research that I think have some bearing on meditation. Brain imaging studies have recently identified a network of brain areas and their associated functions that have been named the *default mode network*. This network has been labeled default because it seems to be responsible for most brain activity taking place when one's attention is not specifically engaged. It would appear that focused attention draws largely upon other brain areas and those areas represent a separate network, which some refer to as the *task mode network*. For simplicity's sake, let's hereafter just refer to the default mode network as the Relaxed Attention Network (RAN) and the task mode network as the Focused Attention Network (FAN). These networks are illustrated below.
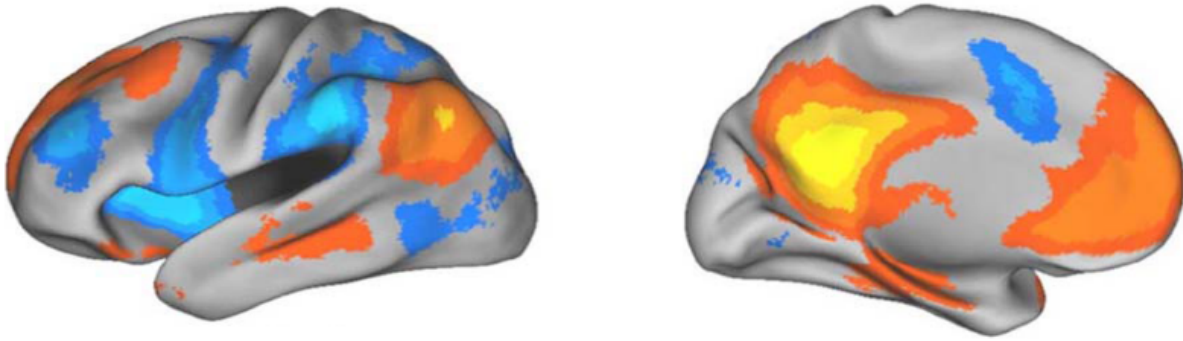
Two views of the brain with the RAN in blue and the FAN in orange and yellow.

We are all familiar with the notion of left brain and right brain functions, but apparently there is another "divide" along the lines of a brain using focused attention and a brain whose attention processes are relaxed. As with the left and right brain concept, the RAN and FAN brain states do not necessarily mean exclusive functions for each network but rather primary functions. The FAN is frequently directed externally but can also be directed internally at specific cognitive tasks or physical states. The FAN appears to be more analytic and rational, while the RAN seems to be more metaphorical and imaginative.

The FAN appears to engage those areas of the brain that govern executive functions such as active attention, decision making, problem solving and planning. It accesses and uses knowledge and skills that an individual has acquired for engaging in tasks of various sorts. It also exercises control over motor functions needed to engage in voluntary actions like drawing or surgery. If you're trying to cognitively inventory the things that you will need to take with you on a trip, to relax a tight muscle in your neck, learn how to solve quadratic equations or teach a child to read, the FAN is engaged. However, when activities requiring focused attention come to an end, RAN is automatically your default state. Clearly, if you're doing nothing but sitting staring out a window, the RAN will engage. However, when you're engaged in routine activities that don't require focused attention, such as running on a treadmill or driving down a stretch of road with

little or no traffic, you usually will default to RAN. Even when focused attention may be needed, boredom can result in inattention and defaulting to RAN.

When RAN is engaged, what you get appears similar to free association or random presentation. In this state, thoughts, memories, images and feelings stream into awareness often with little or no apparent structure. As long as these stimuli stream, you remain in RAN. However, if you focus on one or more of these stimuli and begin to engage with it, FAN comes back into operation. Thus, FAN can be focused on either an external or an internal task. To illustrate the process of going from RAN to an internal version of FAN, think of standing in front of a conveyor belt and watching suitcases streaming by. This is analogous to RAN-generated thoughts and images streaming through awareness. If you grab one of these suitcases off of the conveyor belt and begin unpacking it, this is analogous to focusing on one thought or image and following a chain of associations elicited by your attention to it. You are now back in FAN focused on an internal task. This, however, is usually a less engaged level of FAN than the level, for example, required for solving quadratic equations or teaching someone to read. This suggests that there are degrees of FAN and RAN, meaning that they are not "digital" states that are either on or off.

My introspective observation is that RAN is largely responsible for the creation of a fictive-self, self-narrative or **ego** and especially for maintaining and reinforcing it - more on this in a moment. One way of thinking about the ego is as a psychological construct that functions as the subject or "doer" assigned responsibility for our activities. This fictive-self begins forming early in the developmental period and generally becomes stronger as a child ages into an adult. It seems to me, again from introspective observation, that most of the activity generated by RAN is to bring into awareness thoughts, images and memories associated with our experiences. These become the "bricks" from which we build,

repair and reinforce our fictive-self or ego.

A recent study discussed in the *New Scientist* provides evidence that supports my hypothesis that a major function of RAN is to supply material to build, maintain and strengthen the fictive-self or ego.

"The team gave 20 volunteers infusions on two days, once containing 75 micrograms of LSD, the other [day] a placebo. Then volunteers lay in a scanner and had their brains imaged with three different techniques, which together built up a comprehensive picture of neural activity, both with the drug and without.
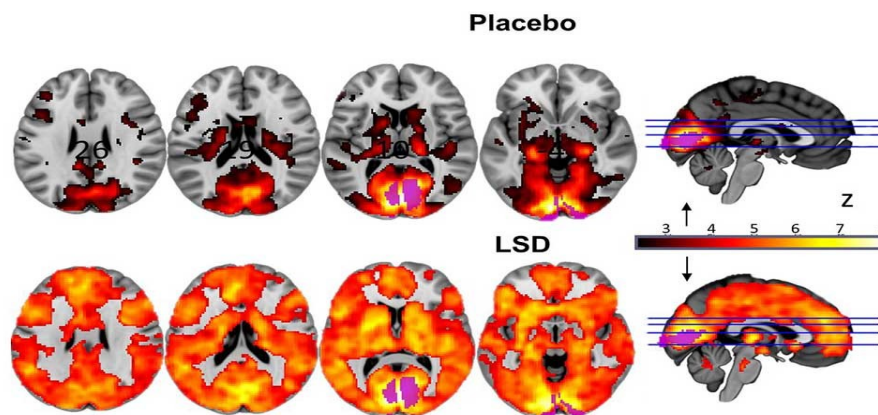
Carhart-Harris et al.

MRI scans showed that LSD caused brain activity to become less coordinated in regions that make up the default mode network. The size of the effect was correlated with participants' ratings of their own ego dissolution, suggesting that this network underlies a stable sense of self [my emphasis]."

Another imaging type, magnetoencephalography (MEG), showed that the rhythm of alpha brain waves weakened under LSD, an effect that was also

correlated with ego dissolution. Alpha rhythms are stronger in humans than other animals, and Carhart-Harris thinks it could be a signature of high-level human consciousness.

Initially, the mind begins a process of organizing material generated by RAN into some sort of kernel story that is rooted in and identified with the body and the development of the notion of boundaries. This becomes the core construct around which our fictive-self or personal narrative evolves. An important function of the fictive-self or ego is providing a sense of coherence and continuity to our life experience. It becomes the basis for the meaning we assign to our lives. As our narrative becomes fairly well established, more and more of what arises from the RAN are thoughts, ideas, images, attitudes, opinions and judgments (among other inputs) that reinforce our fictive-self and ensure our identification with the narrative.

The fictive-self can be recognized through the stream of "self-talk" that dominates awareness when the RAN is engaged and generating content. Much of this "self-talk" can be recognized as rehearsal of one's personal narrative. We become the fiction we have created to explain our self to our self. We are like a hamster trapped in an exercise wheel -- always running but never getting anywhere. If you want to escape, you must first become aware of the structure of your personal narrative by examining the themes in your self-talk and what they imply about the beliefs, opinions and attitudes largely operating beneath your awareness and directing you like a puppet master. Gaining control of the strings linking you to your puppet master is the most essential step required for freedom.

I would suggest that very young children, before the core construct for the fictive-self is established, are not individuated. Therefore, their consciousness is more likely to be resonate with what some describe as Source. It is perhaps worth repeating a comment made earlier concerning what Jesus may have had in mind

when he said, "*Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*" Or, as I discussed earlier, regain your "*natural mind.*" In other words, you cannot access Source or the Absolute ("kingdom of heaven") unless you can first learn to stand aside from the fictive-self ("be converted") and return to a less individuated manifestation of consciousness ("become as little children").

One thought that comes to mind while thinking about RAN and meditation is that during meditation two things are likely to happen. First, the FAN is disengaged and, second, the RAN is engaged. These are operations that most of us fall into with hardly a thought. However, the purpose of meditation cannot be to simply engage the RAN, because if that were true, then there would be no difference between meditation and daydreaming. So, the question arises, what is the relationship between the RAN and meditation?

Many meditation teachers initially advocate the practice of mindfulness meditation. Mindfulness meditation (narrowly defined) is usually described as concentrating on a specific focus such as a rhythmic function like the breath, an auditory stimulus or a visual stimulus. The nature of the auditory or visual stimulus suggested will vary depending upon the tradition from which the suggestion is coming, but there is no evidence that I am aware of indicating any functional difference between the effects of different stimuli from different traditions. For example, if the focus is on a sound such as "Aum" or "Amen," then during mindfulness meditation one simply uses this sound either vocalized or sub-vocalized as a focus, and whenever one recognizes that the focus of attention has drifted, the instruction is to simply mentally note the deviation and return to the focus.

It seems that the basic process in this form of meditation is to learn to use a solitary focus of attention that requires no attention to thoughts. Thoughts as used

here represent pretty much any cognitive content, e.g., words, images, feelings, and so on. Engaging FAN at a low level keeps FAN engaged with a meditative stimulus. This helps avoid becoming entangled in the activity of the RAN. Once some skill at using this technique is developed, one can observe the products of RAN running in the background, so to speak. It has been said that the function of the mind is to generate thoughts, just as the function of the heart is to pump blood. If that is so, it is the RAN that is largely responsible for generating all the thoughts that aren't task oriented. Such thoughts, broadly defined. include almost all mental activity.

What one must learn to avoid is engaging FAN with any of the stimuli thrown up by RAN. Of course, this will happen and happen regularly for beginners. The only solution is to gently withdraw FAN from the RAN product it has engaged and move it back to the meditative or observational mode. As said earlier, the first step is to learn to recognize your self as merely an observer.

By learning to generate FAN at a low but constant level and observing the products of RAN passing through awareness, one begins to get a good sense of what sorts of stimuli are being generated by RAN. Frequently, patterns will emerge among the stimuli passing through awareness. This is how one begins to get a handle on the beliefs, opinions, judgments, expectations and attitudes largely operating beneath your awareness.

Many people may also have emotional reactions to patterns of stimuli that relate to negative events in their lives and may be initially overwhelmed by their emotions. These events have probably made contributions of importance to one's personal narrative. They may also be the source of beliefs and attitudes that affect one's functioning. Becoming aware of these potent cognitive components "pulling the strings" is the first step in gaining control of those strings and letting them fall away. This is the second step in a meditation practice. A non-meditative approach

for dealing with negative APs is described below.

Michael Singer in his book, [The Surrender Experiment](), relates how he began a practice of observing his reaction to choices that arose in his life. If he felt a contraction or resistance to one of the choices open to him, i.e., an urge to reject a choice, he simply said "yes" to that choice. It is important to recognize that the critical component here is being self-aware and recognizing when one has no sound basis for rejecting a choice that is eliciting a negative feeling. This is a pretty good indicator that a negative AP is involved. This wouldn't be applicable, for example, in a situation where you got two bids on a job and one was significantly more costly than the other. It would be reasonable in such a case to reject the more costly proposal, given all other factors being equal. Thus, Singer's practice would not dictate saying "yes" to the less attractive bid simply because you want to reject it. The decision to reject is based on objective factors, not subjective factors. If you stop "feeding" a negative AP by allowing it to make decisions, it will go dormant or extinguish completely. The results from this practice for Singer were truly amazing.

Most spiritual teachings that point one toward Self-Realization consider being able to sustain full presence in the moment (the natural mind) to be a necessary condition. Regaining the natural mind first requires controlling those puppet strings directing your life from outside awareness. By presence what is meant is that the focus of your attention is on what is taking place in the moment. You register these stimuli in your awareness but your mind brings to them no preconceived interpretation and makes no judgment arising from such interpretations. This does not necessarily mean that you will draw no conclusion about what you are aware of but that any such conclusion will be untainted by the content of your narrative. You will discover that in most instances no conclusions are necessary at all. What you observe is simply what is and requires nothing from

you. This is the third step in a meditation practice.

The transition to the third step in one's meditation practice is not a sharp or clear transition. However, at some point the process of noting the activity generated by the RAN and recognizing and dealing with patterns related to your beliefs, opinions, judgments, expectations and attitudes begins to develop into an intuitive understanding of the conditioned nature of that aspect of consciousness we call the self. With this intuitive insight comes an opportunity to begin the process of standing aside or dis-identifying with the fictive-self or ego that is the illusion you refer to as "me." Barbara Brodsky and John Orr (meditation teachers) describe this as:

"*The illusion of [the] "permanent" self dissolving as awareness penetrates and knows the illusion. Moving deeper, beyond the small self, beyond aversion and attachment, beyond ignorance*."

Meditation then becomes a natural abiding in awareness of awareness. One's attention is both relaxed and focused in the present moment. One does not dwell on the imagined future or recollected past. One does not spin "ego stories" about the self nor explanatory stories about other people, groups or organizations. One is able to live through the natural mind. Knowing Source or the Absolute still depends upon grace, but one has done all that is possible to make oneself available to it and ready to expand into it should an opening occur.

Another style of meditation is what [Adyashanti](#) in his teaching refers to as true meditation. My understanding of this practice is that it is a meditation upon awareness itself. The focus of this meditation is on the field of awareness, which is held with a soft focus. That is, one is aware of the field of awareness as a gestalt, which means that attention is withheld from any particular stimulus within the field. In this way there are no objects of consciousness and is probably akin to what Merrell-Wolff refers to as *consciousness without and object*. It is perhaps best to

begin this practice with the eyes shut, which diminishes the attractiveness of many visual stimuli. When one is comfortable with the practice without visual stimuli within the gestalt, one can open the eyes and expand the field of awareness to include visual stimuli. Clearly, the next step in such a meditation is to work with it when moving about and thereby adding a more dynamic dimension to the field.

Contemplation

There is one practice, which I think of as contemplative meditation, that is worth mentioning separately. This is the use, by one school of Zen meditation, of what is known as a koan. A koan is a riddle that is used as the focus of meditative contemplation. For example, the widely quoted koan, "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" Zen is not the only source of such riddles. Here are a couple from non-Zen sources, "The only way out is in" and "There is only one mind." It appears that the purpose of a koan is to shut down the RAN by silencing its near incessant chatter with an intellectual conundrum that has no rational solution. This not only serves as a focus for FAN but exhausts FAN's efforts to bring rational understanding to the conundrum. At the point of exhaustion one might say rationality implodes, leaving what Zen refers to as "no mind" or, according to the Hindu sage Pantanjali, puts one beyond words and concepts. The American mystic Franklin Merrill-Wolf describes this state as consciousness-without-an-object. While not traditional koans, here are some verses of mine for contemplation.

Compulsive thinking is resistance to being Present.

Divine Love is absolute, unconditional acceptance.

Ego is the mask Source wears while pretending to be you.

Attachment to experiences exists to be transcended.

Ego's resistance to Being blocks Self-realization.

The ground of all being is Divine Love.

The mind is a mirror reflecting the endless flux of the relative.

You are Love's body.

Internal dialogue is the programming language of the self.

Source is formless and omnipresent.

Belief in God is the greatest obstacle to knowing God.

Innocence is unconditioned awareness.

Unconditional love dissolves the attachment of ego to judgment.

Your way of being in the world determines the reality you experience.

Seeking enlightenment is a spiritual snipe hunt.

If Source is All-There-Is, what are you?

Is there no doer?

Keep in mind that none of the above practices are necessary and sufficient for Self-realization to take you. They can certainly help prepare you for dealing with the event and advancing it should it occur, but it has taken many people who did nothing. In some cases, they rejected the event because they found it confusing and frightening but not always. If you take up meditation or other practices, take them up for the self-insight and other benefits, such as improved health, they might provide rather than as a path that leads to Self-realization. The end goal is for your daily life to become your meditation and let come what may.

Chapter Seven
Foundational Practice Two

<u>Self-Inquiry</u>

Self-inquiry is not a meditation technique, at least not in the usual sense. The requirement is that you monitor your thoughts all day, every day and use the self-inquiry to put your focus of attention on simple awareness whenever you find yourself getting caught up in ego thoughts or stories. This technique can be combined with meditation and may be helpful in getting the procedure established, but it is not sufficient to do it for one or two short periods each day. In an interview, Eckhart Tolle said if one had a choice between two fifty-minute meditation sessions per day or 100 one-minute meditations, he'd go with the 100 one-minute sessions hands down. He did say both would be better. However, he didn't say what he meant by a one-minute meditation. I think self-inquiry would make for a fruitful one-minute meditation. If you want to progress then you have to work at it all the time, not just in some isolated short-term practice session.

Self-inquiry is frequently associated with the teachings of the great Indian sage of the early twentieth century, Sri Ramana Maharshi. Below is an excerpt from an interview with him by a student that addresses Self-inquiry.

Q-1: Is there any use to reading books for those seeking Self-realization?

A-1 All the texts say that in order to gain release, one should render the mind quiescent; therefore, their conclusive teaching is that the mind should be rendered quiescent. Once this has been understood there is no need for endless reading. In order to quieten the mind one has only to inquire within oneself what one's Self is; how could this search be done in books?

Q-2: What is the path of inquiry for understanding the nature of the mind?

A-2: That which arises in thought as "I" is the mind. By the inquiry, "Who am I?", the thought, "Who am I?" will destroy other thoughts. [Other words may be

used in place of "Who," and some prefer "What."]

Q-3:   How might one consistently hold on to the thought, "Who am I?"

A-3:   When other thoughts arise, one should not pursue them but should inquire, "To whom do they arise?" As each thought arises, one should inquire with diligence, "To whom has this thought arisen?" The answer will be in the form of "To me." To this, one should inquire, "Who am I?" The mind will go back to its source. With regular repetition, the mind will develop the skill of staying in its source.

Q-4:   Are there no other means for making the mind quiescent?

A-4:   Other than inquiry, there are no adequate means. Other techniques such as meditation on the breath can aid the mind in being quiet but will not stop the mind.

Ramana Maharshi's basic process for Self-inquiry is to question every thought that arises that is extraneous to focused attention on a task. For example, one would not question thoughts when one is engaged in necessary tasks such as repairing a door or trying to puzzle out how to improve the gas mileage in one's automobile. One would question thoughts related to how one isn't appreciated for one's effort to repair the door or thoughts about one's spouse's driving habits being a major reason for poor gas mileage in the family car.

In my view, the most critical information in the above exchange is in A3. Primarily, what one is attempting to do is first stop identifying with arising thoughts, which means recognizing that you are the observer of these thoughts. You are not the thoughts. Secondarily, the task is to slow and finally stop the arising of extraneous thoughts. Recall the earlier discussion of a special brain network called the *default mode network* (relaxed attention network) that feeds a steady stream of memories, images and thoughts to ego whenever it isn't actively engaged in the external world. This stream of mental activity is what I mean by

extraneous thoughts.

What Ramana means when he says not to pursue them is that one should not focus on them and begin a process of association and elaboration of the extraneous thoughts. Think of extraneous thoughts as being analogous to compressed data files on a computer and pursuing one of them as analogous to selecting and unzipping (unpacking) the compressed file. Think of the compressed file as having a label that says Chapter Seven and "unpacking" it to decompressing and opening the file, then printing it out and reading all of its pages. What I think Ramana means by "staying in the source" is resting in pristine conscious awareness or what I earlier referred to as the natural mind. Thus, the answer to the question "Who am I?" is not the thought, not the emotion, not the sensation, not the perception that stimulated the question but rather, "I am the Self who observes these stimuli arising in awareness." By implication, I AM CONSCIOUS AWARENESS.

Our true Self is the connection within all of us to our individuated consciousness that is a projection of Source Consciousness, from which all of physical reality arises. The ego is said to be self-referential because, while all operations flow from Source Consciousness, most of us have no experience of Source and so, when the body/mind acts, the question arises as to the source of the action. The fictive-self (ego) is created and maintained in part to answer this question; i.e., I (ego) acted. Thus, a psychological construct (ego, self) is mistaken for essential being or Self.

The three contemporary teachers briefly discussed earlier, Leonard Jacobson, Richard Moss and Rupert Spira are doing variations on Ramana's approach in that all three emphasize a focus on awareness in the present moment and working at establishing such awareness as an ongoing process and not as an isolated practice such as a daily meditation period. Spira has suggested that an alternative way to approach Self-inquiry is to use the question, "Am I aware?" instead of "Who am

I?" He teaches that the only way to answer that question is to go to the source of awareness (being aware of awareness) as opposed to awareness of something. This happens automatically when one seeks an answer to the question. The second step once you're aware of awareness is to keep attention relaxed and not focus attention on anything in particular within awareness. In short, learn to simply be awareness, to be fully present, to be here now. Jacobson teaches that one should monitor one's thoughts, and when one finds oneself getting lost in the mind. become present with whatever is before you in the moment. One technique that I employ to this end is when extraneous thoughts arise into awareness, I say to myself "not that -- this," which is shorthand for "not the thought that has entered conscious awareness but what is literally present right in front of me." Sometimes I'll also incorporate Spira's question, "Am I aware?" as an aid to focusing on being aware of awareness.

Putting It All Together

1.   The starting point is with the identity: *self,* which is the state in which one is fully identified with the body/mind. The "I" that thinks that it is the operative component of the body/mind is generally known as the ego or, as I call it in some of my writing, the fictive-self or personal narrative (the "me" story). This is where most people undertaking a meditation program for the first time are coming from. Ego is the subject and everything else is perceived as a separate object. This is the dualistic perspective.

a.   Initial meditation techniques usually have one sit quietly and erect, breathing deeply and slowly from the diaphragm. Let's just call it "sitting meditation." If the eyes are open, they will be oriented either toward the floor, a blank wall or possibly a mandala. If the eyes are shut, one may be instructed to imagine attention being focused on the area between the eyes, or some imagined object such as a ball of light, or no attention given to the visual at all when the eyes are closed. Some

instructions might suggest use of a mantra or chant, e.g., AUM. The technique used is less important than its "goodness of fit" for you.

b.   This is the point where many meditators experience what is called "monkey mind." The goal during this phase of sitting meditation is to simply learn to relax and observe the activity of the mind without getting seduced by it. As one gains some experience, the frenetic activity experienced by most new meditators will slow down. This more subdued stage might be called the "hummingbird mind." The mind still flits about but not as energetically as in the beginning.

2.   After things have settled down, one will recognize something of a perceptual shift developing that establishes a division. This shift is the *identity-self* morphing into an *observer* and an *ego* (or narrative or story).

a.   During this phase, one should "side" with the observer and allow some distancing from the ego to develop. One should be a somewhat disinterested observer of the activities of the ego. The goal is to begin identifying with the observer rather than with the ego and its body/mind.

b.   As one establishes identification with the observer rather than the ego, it will become apparent that the observer is not to be found in the story that comprises the ego nor can it be found anywhere in the body. Many aspects of "the fictive-self" will come under observation. Some of these may have been buried and outside of conscious awareness. I have discussed these earlier as *automatic programs* or APs. Some of these APs you may recognize as being the basis for dysfunctional beliefs, emotions and behaviors. This is usually a good time to deconstruct such APs. Often just observing these arise and dissipate will lead to their undoing. However, if you think a more direct approach is needed, I have discussed such methods in Part One. Carl Jung said, "Whatever does not emerge as consciousness returns as Destiny." That is, you are likely to keep repeating unconscious patterns until they become conscious, are examined and neutralized.

3.   Let's now think of the observer as the *mindful-self.* At this time, it is useful to begin what I'll call *active* mindfulness as your primary meditation. Mindful meditation can of course be done as part of sitting meditation, but it is most effective when used to carry meditation into one's daily life. Active mindfulness is simply paying attention, which most of us think is easy enough to do until we consciously begin observing our efforts to do so. Your attention will, by default, slip when it isn't held captive by an engaging task. This is the way your brain is "wired" and was discussed earlier as the default mode network or relaxed attention network (RAN).

a.   The objective here is to have the observer closely monitor what the body/mind is doing as it goes about its daily activities. In short, your meditation is literally on what you're doing moment to moment. What you will observe is that many of the body's routines are run by APs, and the default mode will try to kick in and begin to generate unrelated mental content whose purpose is to reinforce the fictive-self. If the mindful-self isn't careful, it will get seduced by this content and lose focus on current activity.

b.   Losing focus during active mindfulness is especially likely when one isn't engaged in doing something. During such times, the best tactic is to become present with anything that is available in the moment. Be present with or mindful of the sound of a breeze blowing through leaves, your dog, a ticking clock, sunlight streaming in through a window, a flower, a ceramic cup, the rise and fall of your abdomen as you breathe or whatever is available. As mentioned earlier *presence* is the focus of [Leonard Jacobson's](#) and [Richard Moss's](#) teachings.

4.   When one becomes well established in active mindfulness and can maintain focus on what one is doing from moment to moment or simply being present with something manifest in the moment, you are ready for the emergence of the *inquiring-self*. The inquiring-self is named for the activity that establishes it, which

is called "self-inquiry." This method was discussed above and is associated with the teachings of the Indian sage Sri Ramana Maharishi.

a.   The purpose of the inquiring self is not focused specifically on what one is doing or something that is present but on being aware of being aware from moment to moment. A psychiatrist, Bessel van der Kolk, identifies the medial prefrontal cortex as the part of the brain responsible for experiencing the present moment. This is located behind the area of the face called the brow. No doubt, this is why Kriya Yoga emphasizes keeping attention gently focused on this area during meditation.

b.   The basic idea is to establish a conscious sense of being a field of awareness. [Rupert Spira](#) teaches a simple and direct method of finding that sense. He suggests that one ask oneself the question, "Am I aware?" To answer the question, one must note that one is aware of being aware. That is where you want to be. Once you are there, you should try to relax into that state of being and remain there. There is an exercise at the end of this discussion that will help you experience a state of pristine awareness.

c.   As the establishment of this state progresses, there will be a perceptual shift. When this happens, you will identify yourself with conscious awareness. You will experience yourself simply as a field of awareness that includes the body/mind. However, you will not identify yourself as being the body/mind.

5.   With the shift described above, you have become an *aware-self* or what I have described as having a natural mind. This is a refined state of duality in which you are clear of most, if not all, dysfunctional APs and are free of making or, at least, taking seriously, judgments, beliefs, opinions and expectations. It is a state that allows one to hold a dispassionate view of the world and its events. It is not, however, what some call *Enlightenment* or *Self-realization*, which is a non-dual state. Arriving at what some refer to as simply I AM, you have done about all you

can do. The rest depends on *Grace* and what I've discussed earlier as being *taken*.

6.　　　According to some teachers, Enlightenment has several progressive states. There appear to be at least three states once the condition referred to as Enlightenment or Self-realization is entered. The first of these is accompanied by experiences of what some call Void Consciousness, a state described as Pure Being. It is suggested that many think this is the end state, and believing this usually constrains any further progress. This may be followed by experiences of what is called God (or Christ) Consciousness, a state described as Divine-Love. Finally, there may be experiences of what is called Unity Consciousness, a state described as Love-Bliss.

The third state is one in which it is said that one comes to the full recognition that one is an integral aspect of an indivisible whole. There is a direct understanding that this whole is Source Consciousness – the ground of all being and unconditional love.

Exercise

This exercise is based on a Buddhist meditation practice called r*igpa* (being aware of awareness).

Find a quiet relaxing spot where your visual awareness can be spacious. Examples of the type of setting that I have in mind might be sitting or standing on a peak gazing out across a beautiful wooded valley, sitting on a dock in the early evening gazing out across the waters of a quiet, undisturbed lake or whatever works for you. The essential feature is the relaxed mood the setting evokes, not the setting itself.

Now, just enjoy the feeling of relaxation that the scene evokes in your body, take in the spacious view before you, listen to the subtle sounds arising from the scene, feel the air move about your face and body, smell any odors carried by the air you breathe. Allow yourself to become fully immersed in the totality of the moment. When you are fully settled into the exercise you will be acutely *aware* but your awareness will be free of thoughts (i.e., words and images) but full of sensations and feelings, — pure *experience*. Fully *present*.

This is you as an *awake* consciousness or in your natural mind. It is always available. It can be brought to any circumstance under any conditions. You merely need to learn to stay in this state of consciousness as your normal or habitual way of *being*. Practice the use of thinking as a tool for accomplishing a specific task and then put it away and become present with your immediate experience.

There is probably no end to the depths of this state of awakened awareness but you first have to learn to live in it before it can flower.

Chapter Eight
Acting in the World

Within relative reality, which is subsumed by Absolute reality, there is a dualistic or complementary conception of behavior that ranges from *ignorant* at one end to *enlightened* at the other end. Of course, as with any complementary pair, one might define a number of intermediate positions between the anchor points at either end of the dimension or spectrum. Everything material is a manifestation of Source, which creates an apparent dualism between matter and consciousness. Life plays an important role in this apparent dualism, which depends on subject /object relationships that require a perceiving organism.

<u>Ignorance</u>

The core defining characteristic of ignorant behavior is perceiving everything external to oneself (subject) as an "object" suitable to be used in any way one sees fit to meet one's needs and especially wants (egocentric). A want in this case is something that one has no objective need for but has acquired a desire to possess or consume in some manner. Objects external to the self can be anything, including inanimate objects, social phenomena, plants, animals and especially other people.

The question naturally arises as to why the material universe and subject/object relations exist. One perspective is that they exist to provide Source with an experiential context. Creation of an experiential context suggests that Source is engaged in self-exploration. The material universe then is an artifact of Source or Consciousness that has rendered a portion of itself ignorant of the rest so that dualistic representations of itself can interact. One might think of the material universe as a canvas created by an artist for the development of his or her creative talents. In short, the dynamic interactions that we think of as life are permutations

of subject/object relations grounded in Source. Ultimately speaking, subject and object are ONE, and the material universe of separate parts is an illusion.

Human beings represent an important component of the material world simply because their capabilities greatly expand the range of experience possible. The key psychological component governing most subject/object interactions involving human beings is ego. Ego is the identity cloaking that portion of source manifesting through human forms. The development of ego draws a veil between self and Source, thereby creating the dualistic illusion of me and not-me. Everything animate and non-animate beyond one's self-awareness is not-me.

Good and evil, therefore, represent a dualistic or complementary pair of constructs that can be applied to intentional actions by ego in the material world. This dichotomy is, like all dichotomies, ultimately an illusion, because Source is beyond dichotomies. It is a spiritual singularity or indivisible whole. However, it is a very "real" dichotomy for individuals lacking direct experience of Source and, therefore, awareness of the illusion. If Source created the material universe in order to impose a counterpoint to itself for the purpose of gaining experience, then the "struggle" between good and evil would appear to be an important and necessary dimension of experience.

In other terms, good and evil can be thought of as the difference between enlightened actions and actions grounded in ignorance. When construed in this way, actions grounded in ignorance blind one to one's true nature, that is, as an aspect of Source or God. Thus, evil arises out of spiritual ignorance that leads one to invest one's sense of being in ego or one's fictive-self. Life then consists of each individual's struggle to overcome ignorance and thereby achieve enlightenment. This dichotomy between enlightenment and ignorance might be thought of as a complementary pair, where one end is anchored by selflessness (loving/kindness) and the other end is anchored by selfishness (egotism). The further one's identity

falls toward the selfishness or egotism end of the scale, the greater one's ignorance and the potential for evil actions.

An interviewer at the Nuremberg trials for Nazi war criminals was asked if he had learned anything from his interviews. He replied that what he had learned was that evil was the total absence of empathy. Empathy can be construed as the ability to expand one's sense of "me" to include others. Carried to its logical conclusion, this inclusive expansion submerges ego and becomes selflessness, which is the antithesis of "me" or ego. True selflessness requires the evolution of consciousness which requires the expansion of empathy that leads to a life grounded in compassion and love.

Evil then in this scheme of reasoning arises from attempts to gratify ego desires. Desire is what one wants as distinct from what one needs. One needs shelter but wants a penthouse apartment on Affluence Avenue. Desires are rooted in status-seeking, righteousness, jealousy, lust, pride, power, honor, envy, fame and fortune, along with many other similar obstacles to the expansion of empathy, spiritual development and enlightenment. When objects are perceived by ego as merely means to satisfy desire, they have no inherent value independent of one's use of them. People, animals, plants, and physical elements are all treated as objects for satisfying one's desires. The desires of ego are an expression of ignorance and the source of evil in the world. Satan, in Christian theology, might be thought of as the personification of ego desire. Thus, to be consumed by the fires of ego desire is, metaphorically speaking, to be in Hell.

Equating self with ego is the initial step leading to treating others as objects. Think of this initial step as ego becoming an *image manager*. We are almost all image managers to some degree. The greater the degree to which we engage in *image management*, the greater the extent of our self-absorption. An image manager desires ego to be viewed by others in a particular persona. Sometimes one

has an intentionally constructed public persona and a private persona that differ from one another. Both will involve some degree of deception. A public persona deceives others while the private persona deceives self. Self-deception perpetuates ignorance, which can only be avoided by not equating self with ego.

The ego, as image manager, makes choices that are believed to maintain or enhance ego's self-image or self-conception. A self-image can embody a positive or negative persona depending upon the purposes that it serves. Ego affects choices about things that include but aren't limited to one's personal narrative, physical appearance, possessions, public behavior, employment, social and intimate relationships. Image management is about "ME" (ego). I'm an important person, I have authority, I'm no good, I'm a victim, I'm beautiful, I'm handsome, I'm entitled, I'm helpless, I'm popular or even I'm spiritual, among many others. Once one has a "ME" narrative, then that narrative begins to rationalize much of what one does. Ego becomes fully self-absorbed, and to be self-absorbed implies that one has a *selfish identity*. A selfish identity means one acts from ignorance, which makes one highly susceptible to engaging in what might be perceived as evil.

Evil is not dependent upon any particular act but rather on the intent of the actor. To do harm to another individual unintentionally is not evil. The same harm resulting from an intentional act committed in the service of ego desire is evil. Graduations of evil or ignorant actions depend upon the degree of damage to "objects" that result from the satisfaction of the ego's desires. The nature of the harm, whether physical, psychological, social or economic, is less important than the degree of damage knowingly caused. Evil of whatever degree is subject to escalation through the power of an egoist to impose his or her desire broadly. Given someone with power willing to cause damage in the service of ego desire, the evil will be multiplied. Acts affecting groups of people are greater evils than comparable solitary acts, simply due to the multiplicative effect of power in the

service of ego desire.

Another consideration is complicity in evil through support for or ignoring the action of others, the outcomes of which serve one's own ego desires. Bystanders are not necessarily innocent but may be passive partners in evil actions and thereby bear part of the burden of such evil. A final consideration is acts that take on the appearance of being motivated by good intentions. Surely, there are selfless acts motivated by good intentions. However, the criterion for evil offered herein pertains to acts motivated by ego desire. A benefit that accrues as a result of actions motivated by ego does not justify the actions or neutralize the evil. The point is simply that there is, in some manner of speaking, a continuum of sorts along which one might arrange acts of evil with varying degrees of precision. While all actions in the service of ego desire are, by definition, evil, there are lesser and greater evils among them.

A question can also be raised about evil and the satisfaction of life-sustaining needs. This poses a fundamental question about natural rights. When a mountain lion kills a deer for food, we would not describe this action as evil. It is the natural right of the lion to acquire sustenance from its environment. In the case of human beings, it might also be argued that they have a natural right to meet their life-sustaining needs. One could argue that a human animal has the same natural rights as a lion, and taking its sustenance by force, when necessary, is no more evil than the taking by the lion. Evil would be avoided, however, only by using no more force than is necessary, taking only the minimum that is needed or a fair apportionment, whichever is less. Even so, an enlightened individual would recognize that the situation is simply one "act" in an evolving human drama intended to provide opportunities to overcome ignorance. Thus, such an enlightened individual might refuse to participate in the drama and accept the consequences. By doing so, the enlightened individual maintains detachment from

the drama of the material world while serving as an example to others and possibly contributing to their spiritual advancement.

Finally, there is the general question of how should one respond to evil action? This will depend upon the development of one's sense of selflessness. Someone operating from the selfish side of the identity scale will respond in-kind and strike back in anger with a desire for revenge and thereby perpetuate ignorance. This is the *morality of retribution*. If a direct response isn't possible or avoided out of fear, the object of the evil action may at least harbor ill will (hatred) toward the perpetrator, which will also serve to perpetuate ignorance. In the case of a response to an unprovoked action engaged in for defensive reasons, even if the defensive actions are in-kind, they are not evil. A purely reflexive defensive action may be grounded in ignorance but it isn't an intentional attempt to satisfy ego desire. It is ignorant because the defender has not learned the negative moral implications of emotionally motivated in-kind, counter-aggression. This is, of course, the way the majority of human beings can be expected to act, which often leads to an escalating cycle of response and counter-response. Ignorance follows the path of least resistance, and ignorance is the soil in which evil takes root.

A person making a moderate response will probably engage in defensive counter-aggression but without emotional content. In other words, an emotionally detached response is more likely to be a constrained response. Someone operating from the selflessness side of the identity scale will recognize the evil nature of the "attack" and the need for a measured response. Such an individual will engage in counter-aggression as a last resort and will then only do so with emotional detachment. Finally, a fully selfless and enlightened person who is the object of evil action might embrace and absorb the action to the point of physical annihilation, knowing that the action cannot do any real injury and recognizing that such a response to evil may serve as an instructional demonstration.

In conclusion, an undeveloped or under-developed sense of empathy is clearly an obstacle to spiritual growth. Thus, being ruled by ego desire and thereby satisfying one's wants through treating everything that is "not me" as an object with no purpose but to serve one's desires blocks the path to spiritual development. To open the path to spiritual development requires a freely made choice to let go of attachments to wants and expand one's sense of empathy through identification and perspective-taking until ignorance and selfishness are crowded out by love and compassion. When the spiritual path is freely embraced, one has taken one giant step in the evolution of consciousness, selflessness and enlightenment.

Enlightenment

The core defining characteristic of enlightenment is *Self-Realization* or recognition that one's consciousness is in fact not a separate phenomenon but is a manifestation of *Source Consciousness*, which becomes more available through enlightenment. Some subject/object functioning remains necessary even for a Self-realized person, due to the necessity of operating in a relativistic context. However, egocentric wants will no longer drive the motivational state of such persons, and thus they will not view objects in the world to be simple means to an end.

Earlier, the natural mind was described as a state of functioning that is virtually ego-free but without full Self-realization, ego-free in the sense that one identifies with conscious awareness rather than the body/mind. Rupert Spira, a teacher of nondual philosophy and practice, has said that this is a half-way point between ignorance and Self-realization. The natural mind is also a state relatively free from conditioned or automatic programs, especially those with a negative cast, that usually play a large part in one's emotional/behavioral functioning. Methods for working on conditioned, automatic programs (APs) is the topic of the earlier part of this book. These APs are acquired largely through our socialization and come to be organized around and understood through a narrative, which may

consist of multiple but related stories constructed from our experiences and our memories of them. My term for this narrative is the *fictive-self*. Neutralizing many of our conditioned ways of interpreting the physical and social environment facilitates becoming free of ego-driven thinking, feeling and acting, i.e., deconstructing and ending our identification with the fictive-self. Once operating from the natural mind, one is available for (i.e., not resisting) a transformation of consciousness through an opening to Source. This is not, however, something that one can "make" happen but must allow to take one as discussed earlier.

As long as one lives in the relative world, there will be choices arising out of the dualistic underpinnings of relative reality. In a book by Jon Marc Hammer, an interesting distinction was drawn. Hammer referred to the *earth* and the *world* as being distinct. The former is Gaia-like, which according to Wikipedia, refers to a hypothesis proposing that "...organisms interact with their inorganic surroundings on Earth to form a self-regulating, complex system that contributes to maintaining the conditions for life on the planet." Hammer would go one step further and say that this complex system is an organism and that all components of it arise out of Consciousness and to varying degrees possess consciousness. The world according to Hammer is a complex of ideas, concepts, beliefs and expectations that govern a drama called "human culture and civilization" performed on a stage called earth. Hammer's drama recalls to mind some lines from the poem titled *Outlaw* that ended Chapter Four. Several pertinent lines from that poem follow:

And the man knew God
And he was made free.
All history and tradition
Culture and words
Rescinded -- Grace.
Freedom from the past
And from the future.
An outlaw.

Eckhart Tolle makes a similar distinction albeit on a smaller scale. He speaks of one's *life-situation* versus one's *life*. Your life-situation is analogous to how you "stand" in relation to the world. Your life is related to your role as one of the biological organisms of which the earth is partially comprised. The world and life-situations are governed by the mind while the earth and life are governed by natural processes.

As discussed earlier, the world can be thought of as a large web spun around the earth. The strands comprising this web can, for example, be thought of, but not limited to: political systems and ideologies, systems of law and concepts of justice, economic and financial systems, occupations, art, music, fashion, religions, philosophies, moral systems, science and technology, social organizations, educational systems, systems of kinship and social classes based on maternity and paternity, "race", ethnicity, wealth, gender and various other characteristics. One's life-situation results from the strands in the web of the world one identifies with and uses to define oneself. If all human life were eliminated from the earth, what would happen to this web comprising the world that most of us think of as *reality*? Most of it would vanish almost instantly, clearly showing that it was not *real* at all but simply a product of the mind. What would happen to the earth and life? They would still be here and would continue on following the natural processes that have always ordered them.

A person acting from a conditioned mind is entangled in the world and cannot see beyond it. When one is functioning from a conditioned mind or ego, choices are ruled by APs, which are conditioned programs, many of which reflect beliefs, opinions and expectations that we have adopted that are related to the world. Such choices are often described as judgments or prejudices. Someone who has regained their natural mind acts through the application of *naive thought* and

intuitive discernment. Thus, the natural mind functions in the world through bottom up perception. Discernment means seeing the "unfiltered" nature of things or seeing through the web. Thus, the natural mind must weave its way through the world distinguishing between essential and superficial characteristics when choices must be made.

Do understand that the web comprising the world is not an illusion and has real consequences that one must take into account. However, the natural mind helps give one a perspective on the web that opens the possibility of navigating it without becoming lost in it. The American mystic Franklin Merrill-Wolff spoke of what he called the "high indifference," by which he seemed to be referring to this ability to rise above the web and gain some perspective on it. This does not mean one is indifferent to the real needs of the living but only that one responds to them independent of egoistic influences. While Merrill-Wolff recognized that it is virtually impossible to completely disengage from the world, he thought that one could function **in** the world without being **of** the world. The natural mind is grounded in life and being, not in the world of the mind or as Leonard Jacobson often says, "...in the world of time."

Some choices involve simple preferences. For example, given a choice between several flavors of creamer for your coffee, personal preferences are adequate for making a choice. However, having found your way back to the natural mind, one no longer has beliefs and opinions (prejudgments) to rely upon in making many choices. One is left with naive thought and intuitive discernment as the basis for making these choices. This means carefully considering the worldly context for a choice and then determining an independent course of action in the present circumstance that is best suited to the true requirements of the situation.

Such choices seem to be close to what the Buddhists mean by *right action*. There are no hard and fast rules for right action. However, if one approaches

decision points without being entangled in and identified with the world, one will usually arrive at the right action. This may simply flow from an unencumbered understanding, or it may be informed by intuitive discernment about what to do. If right action isn't apparent, don't rush, allow the situation to settle into the natural mind and wait for an insight into right action. For those who have freed themselves from the conditioned mind, right action arises from the heart.

Philosophical Foundations
Part III

Chapter Nine
Wholly Spirit

This section represents my personal philosophy and is the foundation for much of what has preceded this section. This is especially true for Part II.

There are two dichotomous views on the ultimate nature of reality. One can be called the P*rimacy of Matter* (a.k.a. materialism) and the other the P*rimacy of Consciousness* (a.k.a. idealism). Classical physics and everyday experience support the former, and the interpretations of some quantum physicists and the experience of various mystics support the latter. The two views have significantly different implications. For example, materialists explain consciousness as an *epiphenomenon* (see note at end) of matter while idealists explain matter as an epiphenomenon of Consciousness. Thus, there is considerable contention around which view is correct on this point as well as others. The likelihood is that neither conception will ever be conclusively demonstrated to the satisfaction of everyone.

Both views are faced with essentially the same conundrum, that is, *initial origination*. If you are of the Primacy of Matter persuasion, you must ask how did matter come about and from what? One hypothesis is the so called "big bang" event or the near instantaneous expansion of an extremely dense concentration of energy/matter (a.k.a. the primordial atom). Even assuming it is correct, there still remains the question of where did this "primordial atom" come from? Stephen Hawking, for example, suggests *spontaneous creation* or the creation of something from nothing. If you are of the Primacy of Consciousness persuasion, you must ask where did the universal field of *Consciousness* (hereafter, Source or just Consciousness) come from? I know of no hypothesis about the origin of Source. Some Primacy of Matter advocates might argue that matter has always existed and

the material universe has cycled through endless regenerations. Likewise, some Primacy of Consciousness advocates might argue that Consciousness has always existed and always will exist. In the end, both camps reach a point where they really have no choice but to say that either matter just is or that Consciousness just is. Regardless of which hypothesis you find the most plausible, you are ultimately faced with a *leap of faith*.

Panentheism is a philosophy that was first articulated in 1828 by the German philosopher Karl Krause. Panentheism in brief means: The whole is in God or, if you prefer, the universe is in Consciousness. This means that the universe and God are not *ontologically* (see note at end) equivalent. Panentheism views God (a.k.a. Source) as the eternal animating force behind the universe, while the universe is nothing more than a manifest part of God. The universe exists within God, who in turn "pervades" or is omnipresent in the cosmos (here taken to subsume the universe). Unlike *pantheism,* that asserts God and the universe are coextensive, pan**en**theism asserts that God is greater than the universe and that the universe is contained within God (or Source or Consciousness, as you will).

More recently, this position has been reflected in the works of writers such as Franklin Merrell-Wolff ([Philosophy of Consciousness-without-an Object](#)), Lynne McTaggart ([The Field](#)), Amit Goswami ([The Self-Aware Universe](#)), Robert Lanza ([Biocentrism](#)) and Menas Kafatos and Robert Nadeau ([The Conscious Universe](#)), Bernardo Kastrup ([The Idea of the World](#)) and Thomas Campbell ([My Big T.O.E.](#) [theory of everything]) among others.

The following analogy illustrates Primacy of Consciousness within a panentheistic conception, which subsumes materialism as a secondary perspective. Think of a vast sea with an infinite amount of water. Suspended within this sea there is a small ball that is hollow but not empty. The surface of the ball defines a boundary that partitions it off from the rest of the sea. Within the ball there is a

self-evolving virtual reality program running. If you're not familiar with the idea of virtual reality, think about a large complex "play" in which the characters have some freedom to ad-lib. The virtual reality program (or play) has to follow certain rules, which impose limits on what can happen but still allow a number of degrees of freedom for its operation. From the sheltered perspective of the virtual reality program running inside the ball, the reality created by the program is all there is, and the vast sea in which it is suspended goes largely undetected. Think of the vast sea as Source. The curved surface of the ball represents space/time. The self-evolving virtual reality program represents the materialist model of macro reality, which offers a few hints that there may be more going on behind the scenes. Finally, the rules that appear to govern the operation of the program, especially at the everyday level of reality, can be thought of as classical physics.

Everything outside the ball can be thought of as an infinite field of possibility, creativity and intelligence, i.e., Consciousness, All That Is, Spirit or, if you prefer, God. Everything inside the ball is a projected aspect of Consciousness or God. Human consciousness is the only projection of Consciousness within the ball capable of recognizing and directly experiencing its true nature, though few achieve this possibility. Thus, with this conception, one has something of a unification of both the materialist and idealist constructs, where materialism is subordinate to idealism. Material reality at the macro level, within the ball, still functions pretty much as classical physics, and common sense tells us it works. However, all of material reality is a product of Source and is manifest as a special subset of Consciousness. Thus, there is an aspect to life and phenomena that is not bound to material reality.

For the most part we, as physical beings, are not directly aware of this aspect of our existence. However, there have been in our midst at various times alleged mystics who claimed direct experience with transcendent reality, e.g., Gautama and

Jesus, among others. From these descriptions of transcendent reality have evolved philosophies and religions that largely agree that man is a manifestation in matter of something eternal, that is, Consciousness, Spirit, Soul or God. The apparent duality of the two conceptions, material reality and transcendent reality, is overcome in the *panentheistic* model because everything material is a manifestation of Source, Spirit or God. Thus, in the final analysis there is total unification or all is W*holly Spirit*.

As indicated above there are several contemporary advocates for what I'm calling the panentheistic model, though they might not all accept the label. A contemporary philosopher, Bernardo Kastrup, who is also an engineer at CERN, is an advocate for monistic idealism. Kastrup's argument in a nutshell is that everything that we think of as the material world exists only in consciousness. If you don't accept this assertion, he would ask for an example of something that exists outside of consciousness. Most people take their consciousness so for granted that they immediately point to any nearby physical object. However, this is not a refutation of the assertion because if you're aware of something, it is within consciousness and if it isn't within consciousness, you aren't aware of it. This argument is much more complex and I suggest you begin with the video on monistic idealism linked above and Kastrup's books and interviews about the books.

Thomas Campbell is a retired physicist who worked with NASA and the Monroe Institute. Campbell learned to do projection of consciousness (a.k.a. out-of-body travel) while doing research at the Monroe Institute. He says that his three-part book My Big T.O.E. is based on what he learned from projections of consciousness into non-material dimensions. His basic premise is that we are living in a virtual reality. Some readers may be familiar with computer-generated virtual realities that are used as the context for a game in which the player's game piece is

called an avatar. If you've seen one of these movies, *The Matrix*, *Inception*, *Ready Player One* or the Holodeck in *Star Trek*, then you may have a basic sense of what a virtual reality is like. Campbell argues that the universe is a virtual reality created by Consciousness and that every living thing serves as an avatar for It.

Several eastern philosophical systems are classified as idealistic philosophies. The physicist Mentas Kafatos (discussed below) says in his book [The Conscious Universe](#) that the eastern philosophy most consistent with his interpretation of quantum physics and the most accessible to westerners is Tantrik Yoga (a.k.a. Kashmir Shaivism). One excellent western proponent of this philosophy is [Christopher Wallis](#), a Sanskrit scholar and yoga practitioner. Wallis provides an extensive introduction to this philosophy in his book [Tantra Illuminated](#). Tantra is essentially what is known as a nondual philosophy. The view taken in this philosophy is that the world of subjects (you) and everything else (objects), which includes people, is an illusion. This illusion is created by individuated, partial projections of Consciousness that function as if they are separate entities (subjects) interacting with the material world (objects). At root all is one and that one is Consciousness. Here is a [guided meditation](#), by [Fred Davis](#), designed to give you a hint at what the experience of nonduality is like.

Primacy of Consciousness seems to be the better choice, because it subsumes the materialism of the Primacy of Matter conception, and therefore one can employ either view as appropriate. Materialism leaves one with a much more limited set of conceptual options. Furthermore, the materialist view deprives life of any meaning outside of living for the sake of living. Under that conception, life arose by happenstance. There was no reason for its emergence and it has no purpose. The meaning of life is contextual, temporal and without substance.

The question of initial origination may be an artifact of the human mind and may not be an answerable question. By accepting that consciousness is primary, the

contention between the two conceptions of reality is resolved. The resolution of the conflict between the two views is one of the advantages of assuming the monistic idealism explanation in a panentheistic form. Why choose between the two when you can have both? The origination question may never be answered for either conception. It is likely that the human mind is not capable of understanding ultimate origination even if it occurred.

Under materialism, meaning may be tied to one's circumstances and possessions. It may depend upon the body, emotions, intellect, skills, talents or some combination thereof. It may be rooted in social institutions such as churches, political parties, scientific bodies or the military. Meaning in any of these contexts is individually pursued, individually acquired and lost with the decline and death of the body. Pursuit of contextual meaning is often self-centered, selfish and occasionally brutal. Regardless of how one lives, what one does or doesn't do in the long run makes no difference. Human life is doomed to end the same way it emerged -- at the whim of random events or happenstance. Panentheism opens up the potential for understanding life from a spiritual perspective, which suggests that life did not emerge by happenstance, which doesn't rule out a role for random events in processes such as evolution. Life from the panentheistic perspective is purposeful and inherently meaningful. This should become clearer in what follows.

Consciousness then is the *ground-of-all-being,* and matter exists only as a possibility within Consciousness. There is nothing but Consciousness or, as some might say, God is All That Is or everything is Wholly Spirit. You and I are material manifestations of Source, as are every living and non-living manifestation in the universe. Thus, all things are potentially interconnected (entangled) and always have in common their origins in Source. Physicist David Bohm offers a model in which Consciousness ranges from creative potential through actualization to manifestation; i.e., the process of dynamic creation (see Figure below).

Figure
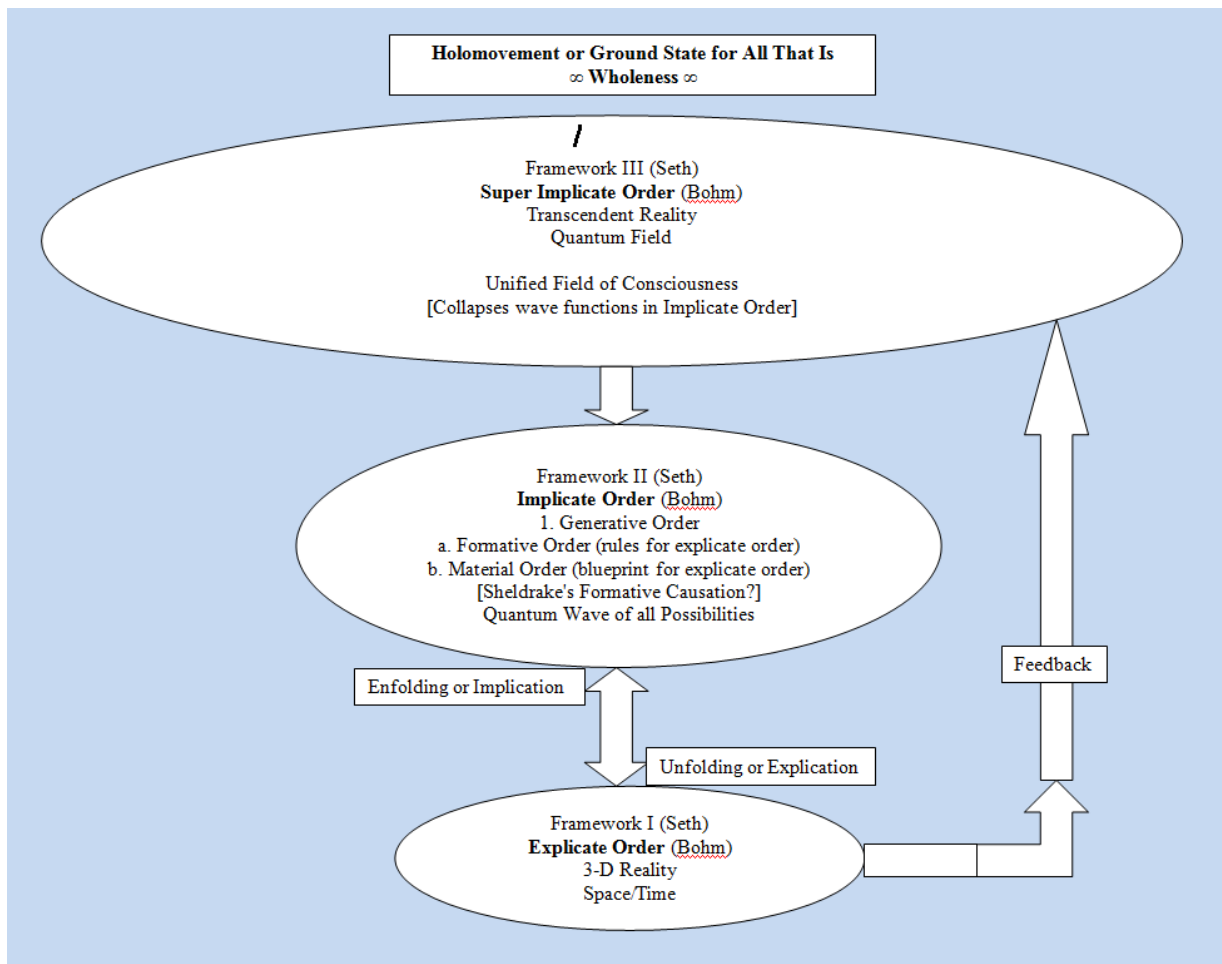
Above, based on my understanding, is a figure that attempts to illustrate Bohm's reformulation of quantum physics. It is shown with parallel Seth material (Jane Roberts) pointers, spiritual pointers, physics pointers and labels from Bohm's reformulation. While not shown in the figure, two concepts from Indian philosophy could be added. Those would include Shiva (infinite potential) at the Super Implicate Order (SIO) level and Shakti (actualized potential) at the Implicate Order (IO) level, resulting in manifest potential at the Explicate Order (EO) level (material level). The figure shows that the SIO is the level that directs which possibilities in possibility waves generated in the IO collapse. The particularized possibility from the collapsed wave of possibilities is then *unfolded* from the IO into the Explicit Order (EO) or physical reality. There is a feedback function between the EO and the IO (called *enfolding)* and between the IO and SIO that in turn affects the probabilities associated with possibilities arising in the IO and directed by the SIO. You can read a more detailed presentation of Bohm's reformulation at this link.

Several years ago French physicist Alain Aspect conducted a test of a proposition first formulated by John Bell in 1964 (Bell's Theorem). Bell's Theorem asserts that the nature of reality is *local*. What this means is that if you do something to x it cannot have any effect on y if the two are separated by enough distance so that even at the speed of light the effect on x could not transit the distance between x and y in the time it takes to measure y. Bell was reacting to the prediction of quantum physics that two particles that have interacted with one another are from that point on *entangled* (interconnected). What this means is that when something is done to one (x) it will instantly affect the other (y) and the distance between the two is of no consequence. This is what Albert Einstein once referred to as "spooky action at a distance." In short, what quantum physics predicted was that at root, reality is *non-local*. What non-local means is unbounded by space/time. Thus, a confirmation of Bell's Theorem would support locality and a refutation of it would support non-locality.

It was not until near the end of the twentieth century that it became technically possible to conduct a controlled experiment of the theorem. This experiment was done by Aspect, and the results supported non-locality. This resolved a debate that had gone on for 23 years between Albert Einstein and Neils Bohr (both Nobel Laureates in physics) in Bohr's favor. Unfortunately, neither lived to see the debate resolved. The finding has been replicated and extended by subsequent experiments by other physicists, much to the chagrin of many in the physics community who are committed to a local view and choose to ignore the implications of the experiments.

Physicist, Menas Kafatos, and Philosopher of Science, Robert Nadeau, recently wrote a book ([The Conscious Universe](#)) explaining and exploring the implications of Aspect's experimental findings. In their view, the implication is that given the 12-14 billion-year age of the universe, every particle comprising the

universe has had more than enough time to have interacted with every other particle. In short, every particle comprising the entire universe is entangled with every other particle. They propose that entanglement, non-locality, order and the manifestation of the physical dimension out of a wave of possibilities of varying probabilities through measurement or observation requires that consciousness be a fundamental aspect of the universe and is a primary, not an emergent, property. Thus, if conscious intent, as many experiments suggest, is required for a particle to be manifest out of a range of probable outcomes present in the quantum field, then consciousness is primary and matter an emergent property.

Their interpretation of universal entanglement is that the universe is an undivided whole. This has serious consequences for both the ontological (matter is primary) and epistemological (understanding the whole from the parts; i.e., reductionism) foundations on which science has been based since the time of Newton. They argue that in the case of the universe the whole cannot be known from studying the parts because an indivisible whole cannot be the sum of its parts. Further, they argue that this imposes an event horizon on human scientific knowledge. There is a point beyond which analytic study of apparent parts will yield no useful results. They do think that science can play a role in expanding human knowledge, just that it has an inherent limitation beyond which it cannot pass. They also suggest that for science to make much further progress it must undertake a serious examination and revision of its paradigm (reductionist materialism).

One possibility explored is that the whole might be knowable through an intuitive process referred to as "knowing by being," which is equated with reports by mystics through the ages. They suggest that it may be possible for an individuated aspect of Consciousness to intuitively access Source and experience the whole (The One, The Absolute, The Unified Field, God, etc.). However, the

knowledge of mystics is private and largely subjective whereas scientific knowledge is public and relatively objective. Each has a legitimate claim on its particular knowledge and way of knowing, and both are experiential as opposed to being mere beliefs. The authors also point out that given their mutually exclusive but complimentary natures, neither is capable of validating or invalidating the other. They discuss the Indian system of yoga known as Kashmir Shaivism (Tantrik Yoga) as possibly having the most to say to people from western culture about knowing by being. For a discussion of what yoga has to offer western science read the free ebook by Donald DeGracia, PhD, titled What is Science?.

Notes:

Epiphenomenon is a secondary effect or by-product of another phenomenon. If phenomenon Y is said to be an epiphenomenon of X then X is believed to be the source of or cause of Y. Thus, Y is a derivative of X.

Ontology, is the philosophical study of the nature of being, becoming, existence or reality as well as the basic categories of being and their relations. Traditionally listed as a part of the major branch of philosophy known as metaphysics, ontology often deals with questions concerning what exists or may be said to exist.

Chapter Ten
In the Beginning

A Creation Myth

Accepting that Consciousness just is, the issue of origination can be set aside. Let's explore a hypothetical description of creation, which is not to be taken literally but suggests how the perceived world might have come to be from a panentheistic view. In this discussion, Source and God will be used interchangeably. In the beginning there was God. God was, is and always will be a self-conscious, infinite and eternal field of creative and intelligent energy.

Let's suppose God chose to engage in self-expression and exercised the creativity inherent in Consciousness. First, Consciousness searched through the infinite possibilities extant within itself. One might think of these possibilities as "thoughts" within the "mind" of God. By way of an analogy, think of a novelist searching through his imagination for a story line. Once a story line suitable to the novelist emerges, the writer begins creating his novel. Similarly, when a possibility that could lead to manifestation of the perceived universe in which the potential for the evolution of life was inherent, that possibility became a focus of Source and began unfolding.

Think of this as being analogous to the unfolding of a dream in your consciousness. The unfolding began with the concentrated focus on one possibility within a field of possibilities and resulted in that possibility becoming particularized. Thus, the universe suddenly became manifest -- perhaps cosmology's "big bang." Once set into motion, Consciousness did not need to directly engage the emerging physical universe in order for the intentions within it to unfold. Since God as a self-conscious field of creative energy subsuming space/time but not a product of space/time would not experience time, the

evolution of the universe, we might say, was a happening. A happening that from our perspective has taken an unfathomable amount of time, which is meaningless to Source.

Soul, Spirit or Atman

Since all "matter" is a manifestation of Consciousness and life is inherent within this material possibility, the universe evolved the conditions that would lead to the organization of living matter, which functions as a limited expression of Consciousness. The universe and everything in it is, at root, a small subset of Source Consciousness. Living matter evolved into more and more complex forms as it adapted to the material conditions giving rise to it. Think of living matter as the vehicle within Source that is capable of expressing consciousness. One might think of Consciousness as an infinite carpet and each consciousness expressed through living matter to be a thread within the carpet. As organisms became increasingly complex, the thread of consciousness they could express became more complex.

Think of varying degrees of consciousness as different lengths of thread within the carpet. Once living entities evolved, they began laying down a collective trace or memory within Source of their "material" experiences. We might call this *field memory* as distinct from *neurological memory*. A field memory could be thought of as a pattern in the carpet comprised of multiple threads belonging to the same species. Complex biological entities ultimately evolved into self-conscious entities and began laying down *individuated memory* traces within the collective field memory of the species (a.k.a. Akashic Record). These individuated memory traces are like unique threads within the fabric of Consciousness. An embodied consciousness that evolves to the point of creating individuated memory traces in field memory is similar to what is commonly called a *soul*.

One might think of such embodied souls as having "structured memories"

reflected in the fabric of Consciousness. These structured memories or souls have essentially the same properties as Source Consciousness. Souls can be said to have been created in God's image, because they are really nothing more or less than immature or undeveloped aspects of God or Source (eternal eddies in the field of creative and intelligent energy or Consciousness).

As the complexity of these structured memories in Consciousness developed, they came to be called *over-souls*. A reciprocal relationship developed between each over-soul and its associated embodied soul or human consciousness. In this relationship, an embodied soul draws on aspects of the accumulated memory of its associated over-soul. An embodied consciousness is not usually aware of its connection to an over-soul. In most instances, the connection operates indirectly through dreams, inspiration, intuition and other similar mechanisms. The experiences of each embodied consciousness in turn contribute to its over-soul through new field memory traces.

Non-human animal forms have a collective or species "memory" field within Source but probably have not individuated sufficiently to have developed over-souls and therefore do not have a reciprocal relationship with an over-soul. However, animals may have unconscious connections to their species memory field.

Each soul has what might be thought of as a symbiotic relationship with an over-soul, and each over-soul is capable of more than one such relationship at a time. Embodied consciousnesses are connected to over-souls by what some refer to as *subtle* energy, where matter is comprised of *dense* energy. Once entangled in matter, subtle energy is masked by the dense energy of matter and conscious recognition of the connection to the over-soul, and thereby to Source, is masked. The entangled soul 's feelings, thoughts and actions are articulated by the nature of the form occupied, that is, the primate that came to be called human.

The continuing evolution of this form to make it more suitable as an experiential vehicle for consciousness was and continues to be collectively influenced by the over-souls or *transcendent consciousnesses*. Embodied consciousness expressed through the physical form of the human species provides an opportunity for experiencing consciousnesses or souls to explore their potential and learn to appropriately employ and develop their inherent creative energies in a limited environment. Think of the the material and social environment in which humans operate as a self-directed learning environment within Source.

Reincarnation

Our over-soul (a.k.a. transcendent Consciousness) exists outside of space/time and thus represents all realized and unrealized possibilities in what we would call the past, present and future. Possibilities within an over-soul are affected by what we would call previous entanglements and experiences in the material world inside space/time. In all cases, an over-soul represents far more aspects than could be manifest in a single physical form or at one time.

A given unfolding of a strand of consciousness from an over-soul elaborates and articulates an embodied consciousness generated by the aggregate of consciousness arising in a developing human form. The transcendent Consciousness of an over-soul influences the development of a physical form in a context that has a strong correlation with karmic patterns comprising a thread of karmic needs in an over-soul. In other words, an over-soul focuses on a developing physical form that has the biological foundations (for example, sex and temperament) and the situational circumstances (for example, ethnicity and nationality) to support, in whole or large part, karmic needs. The Consciousness of the over-soul then joins into a reciprocal relationship with the developing physical form and embodies an aspect of its consciousness in the form. As an articulation of an embodied consciousness takes place, it unfolds in graduated stages.

One elaboration that unfolds is a subtle energy body called the *vital body*. This subtle (non-material) body or energy field contains patterns that contribute to the development of the physical body. Another elaboration that unfolds is a subtle energy body called the *mental body*. The mental body contributes a complex of patterns of meaning acquired through prior experience and encoded in the over-soul that articulate complex thoughts and feelings. Some influences associated with the vital body can begin quite early. However, there can be no mapping of the mental body, which in traditional religious terms is most closely associated with the idea of a soul, until a sufficient level of neural development has taken place. Thus, the mental body probably begins mapping onto the nervous system after about six months of development.

The third subtle body is the *theme body*. The themes represented in this field are similar to what Jung called *archetypes*, which may have both universal and individual components. The individual components of the theme body are what might be call karmic patterns. Thus, the structure of the physical body is influenced by the "blueprints" in the vital body being mapped onto the physical body. The mental body "writes" or maps its program onto the nervous system, contributing to the meaningful processing of experience. The theme body provides broad parameters within which experiences are understood and related. The theme body, however, is not mapped onto the physical form but is always accessible through a supra-conscious connection. While the theme body exerts broad influences, it is most often expressed as general tendencies or karmic patterns. In addition to karmic patterns, the theme body may exert influence through synchronicity, dreams, intuition and insights. An articulation of an embodied consciousness by an over-soul provides a pathway for the embodied consciousness through the theme body to the over-soul and thereby to Source Consciousness.

Karma

Specific field memories important to the self in past incarnations, such as recalling how to tie a shoe or speak French, are potentially accessible. Access to specific field memories from previous incarnations is possible because the over-soul component of Consciousness is outside of space/time. In a sense, all incarnations are simultaneous and the field memories for one is as accessible as another. However, such access to specific field memories from previous incarnations is relatively rare. Usually, the operative memories will be field memories of general patterns such as character traits like generosity or jealousy, of talents such as music or mathematics or of behavioral tendencies such as risk-taking or phobias. It is from these *generalized field memories* that the over-soul selects what is manifested through a new incarnation. The generalized memory patterns held in field memory are what is known as karma.

Karmic patterns or generalized field memory patterns influence current incarnations by biasing the probability that certain choices will be made within a given context. In short, the conditioned response biases acquired in one incarnation can be carried across into a new incarnation. For example, one may have developed a pattern of responses we would call *jealousy* in a previous incarnation. The embodied consciousness of the over-soul may choose to manifest that pattern in the next incarnation. Thus, an individual with a karmic bias toward jealousy will in suitable contexts be predisposed to making habitual responses associated with jealousy. The purpose is to provide the individual with opportunities to rise above this obstacle to Self-realization.

The converse would be true for a more positive pattern such as a musical talent. Having such a talent manifest within an incarnation will increase the probability that one will make choices that create appropriate contexts for further developing the talent. The purpose is to exercise the ability and make positive use

of the creative energies available. Each incarnation brings with it a collection of patterns or karma accumulated during prior incarnations. In other words, there is an opportunity for each of us to overcome negative patterns and to creatively enhance positive patterns.

Karmic patterns do not impose outcomes. They set the conditions that are likely to lead to certain types of learning opportunities. When a material form is prepared for a projection of consciousness, the physical configuration created by its genetic code and the rhythm of its gestation set up a unique frequency pattern for the form. This frequency pattern acts as an attractor. It will draw to it individuals with certain types of character and cause the form to resonate with particular settings and events. Further, the field of Consciousness contains all possible thoughts, ideas, emotions, impulses and desires. From this infinite variety, the frequency of the form will attract those of similar frequency. Habitual response patterns predispose one to respond in a certain way to what is attracted.

Because of self-agency, there is always the possibility that one will choose a less probable or creative response that is more positive than the response offered up by an AP. A more negative response is also possible when choosing an untried alternative response. Making a more positive response entails being creative in the face of a challenge rather than being habitual or reactive. Repeated success in exercising self-agency to make better choices will result in a change in the conditioned pattern and thus in one's karma. The single biggest obstacle to the unveiling of our spiritual self is the belief that we are our fictive-self or personal narrative. Learning to step out from behind this mask and see the world and our choices with "fresh eyes" is to be "reborn" or "awakened" and is an essential step in overcoming ignorance and changing our character.

Birth and death are complimentary aspects of the karmic cycle. Death is the end of one turn of the cycle and usually the antecedent for the next turn in the

cycle. Death is simply withdrawal of consciousness from a degraded physical form, a form that has served its purpose as a temporary vehicle for gaining experience in the material world. Death is a phenomenon of the material world and therefore an illusion. Source Consciousness and the over-souls within it are immortal and eternal.

It is taught in some traditions that death is also an exceptional window of opportunity. A conscious death is a process that can lead to liberation. As consciousness withdraws from the physical body, it is possible to become fully aware of all of one's past incarnations and the obstacles that need to be overcome. Genuine regret for and understanding of past errors arising out of ignorance can result in their resolution through Grace. There are, however, some karmic issues that can only be resolved by working through them in a physical incarnation. Grace leads to a moment of total clarity, spiritual joy and enlightenment. Conscious dying requires preparation and intent for which a prior spiritual practice is important.

One effect of having karma is an egocentric conception of the world. This egocentric conception is at the center of the cognitive simulation of the world that we construct for ourselves and that guides our interactions with the external world. A cognitive simulation or one's internal reality can be mismatched to varying degrees with external reality. This leads to a state of high contrast between external reality and the diverse forms taken on by internal realities operating in human consciousnesses. High contrast results in a plethora of possibilities. Possibilities require choices. Choices produce experience. Experience is the effect of choices that create our *personal reality*. Our personal reality can be thought of as the product of feedback from our choices. This feedback leads to growth in understanding, albeit often by a highly circuitous route.

In addition to our personal reality, there are *group realities* and *consensus reality*. These realities are analogous to templates that are unfolded out of the

Implicate Order and into the Explicate Order. These templates are drawn on by each individual as they construe reality and represent the commonly shared aspects of reality. Thus, we each have a personal reality that is part consensus (template) and in part unique to us. A group reality may be generated by a small group of friends or in a platoon of soldiers. Political parties, scientific societies, religions and nations are examples of larger group realities. Group realities often evolve out of an individual's personal reality or a small group of individuals with similar aspects to their personal realities. Group realities can expand through emotional contagion, persuasion and coercion. Group realities based on emotional contagion are often short-lived (e.g., a mob). Group realities formed by coercion tend to be unstable and not very durable (e.g., dictatorships). Group realities formed through persuasion tend to be the most resilient and the most persistent.

Group realities often compete with one another and competition can present as anything from a friendly rivalry to total war. Consensus reality as commonly perceived is created through what might be thought of as a consensus of consciousness about the properties of the world. It is the relationships between group realities within consensus reality that creates the web of the world described earlier in another Chapter.

Finally, we have the freedom to make choices that affect our personal reality and can influence group realities, especially if they are not too large. We can't personally change consensus reality. However, we can collectively, by the aggregate of our personal choices, affect consensus reality. Refined experience and understanding within the context of our realities ultimately contribute to the evolution and refinement of Consciousness or Absolute reality itself.

Chapter Eleven
Inner Space

The self

The illusion of *self* develops as choices are made, neurological memories are formed and habitual responses are elicited or established and reinforced. We begin as young children with very few if any conditioned responses. Over time and through experience, conditioning shapes our response repertoire into a limited set of probable responses. As this conditioning process progresses, the probability of unconditioned responses declines. Thus, consciousness repeatedly acts on conditioned outcomes from among the possibilities actually available. At any given time, we are free to make any of the choices available among the possibilities in the flow of consciousness. However, conditioning makes habitual choices the most likely.

Personal identity or what we call ego is created through a conditioned pattern of perception and response or an *automatic program* (AP). Habitually responding from automatic programs is what is often referred to as following the path of least resistance. It is following the path of least resistance or making habitual responses that leaves one with the impression that simple determinism governs our behavior. However, we have *free will,* where that vernacular term is defined as *complex determinism*. Complex determinism posits that more than one possibility exists in almost all situations and that human beings are capable of *self-agency,* which means that one can be a causal factor in one's own life history.

When a stimulus is presented that is associated with a habitual response, it is processed by an automatic program that is outside of conscious awareness. The AP will predispose one to the most probable response. Between the response bias generated by the AP and the implementation of this response, there is a brief delay. It is this delay that opens the door to choice or self-agency. Through this brief

window there is an opportunity to choose not to respond or to make an alternative response from the possibilities that exist. This is accomplished through the exercise of intention and willfulness to manifest a possibility other than the most probable or habitual choice. Of course, one might choose a worse or equally bad response, but one can also choose a better response. Better in the sense that it weakens rather than reinforces a problematic, habitual pattern.

Thus, automatic programs operate outside of conscious awareness, and what we often call *character* in a person is related to the patterns that have come to dominate his or her thinking, feelings and actions. Such general patterns are impressed upon Source Consciousness through field memory. These habitual patterns or automatic programs contribute heavily to the development of what can be called the self, ego or *fictive-self.* The fictive-self evolves as a *personal narrative* that is employed to explain to ourselves and others why we act the way we do. Implicit within this narrative is our view of the world, a world in which we place ourselves at the center. We usually become fully identified with our narrative and the body with which it is associated. Much of the cognitive dialog that dominates our thoughts is related to editing, elaborating or reinforcing our personal narrative. We live in a personal, mental simulation of the world that we fervently believe is the "real" world. The freedom to make creative choices is obscured by our fictive-self but is always present, even if seldom exercised. Understanding that we have this freedom and the exercise of it allows us to step beyond *ignorance* and discover our true nature.

Ignorance

The material universe is an artifact of Consciousness that has rendered a portion of itself ignorant of the rest so that dualistic representations of itself can interact. One might think of the material universe as a canvas created by an artist for the development of his or her creative talents. In short, the dynamic interactions

that we think of as life are permutations of dualistic subject/object relations grounded in Consciousness. Ultimately speaking, subject and object are ONE and the dualistic material universe is an illusion. If we don't identify with the subject in the subject-object pair, we can escape the illusion. This state of consciousness is what the American mystic Franklin Merrell-Wolff called *introception*, which denotes consciousness-without-an-object (and thus also without a subject).

The belief that spirit is distinct from matter or that man is distinct from Source are dualistic illusions. Thus, the traditional view of the soul is a dualistic conception that has each and every soul standing alone and separate from Source and from the material world. The panentheistic view of the soul is one in which each soul is merely a projection of Consciousness, as is the material world. In the panentheistic view, the soul's separateness or independence from Source is merely an illusion. From this perspective there is only Source Consciousness. Everything is a manifestation of Consciousness that permeates and fills our being. Our brain then is a conduit for the infinite possibilities arising in consciousness from our over-soul and ultimately from Source. When our over-soul makes available a possibility, that possibility is made manifest in the mind as an insight, idea or thought. Once one is aware of a possibility, it can be engaged in an effort to make the possibility manifest in external reality.

The most fundamental split experienced by humans is that of subject and object. This pair is the product of the dependent co-arising of the subject that chooses and the *objects of consciousness*. Objects of consciousness are anything that is perceived as "not me," and can include thoughts as well as material objects. Both the subject and the object arise within consciousness but the self identifies with the subject pole of the pair. This gives rise to the mistaken perception that there is a subject independent of objects. This mistake or illusion is necessary in order for experience, as we know it, to occur. The basis for this mistaken

perception or illusion is the phenomenon of *self-reference*, which is not unlike the circular meaning in the statement "I am a liar."

In such a sentence the predicate defines the subject and the subject redefines the predicate, the predicate then redefines the subject, setting up an endless oscillation or a *tangled hierarchy*. The meaning in a statement like "I am a liar" seemingly forever eludes us, as does the recognition that I (ego/self) and it (object) are part of a tangled hierarchy within a single source.

The key component governing most subject/object interactions involving human beings is ego. Ego is the identity cloaking that obscures the connection between embodied consciousness and its Source. The development of ego draws a veil obscuring the link between consciousness and Source Consciousness, thereby creating the dualistic illusion of me and not-me. Everything animate and non-animate beyond one's self-awareness is not-me.

The apparent reality of good and evil has long posed a conundrum to humanity. This dualistic pair expresses a range of potential that is applied to intentional actions by ego in the material world. From the perspective of panentheism, this dichotomy too is ultimately an illusion because Consciousness is beyond good and evil, since it is a *spiritual singularity*. However, it is a very "real" dichotomy for individuals living in the material world, especially those lacking direct experience of Source and awareness of the illusion. If Source Consciousness manifested the material universe in order to impose a counterpoint to itself for the purpose of gaining experience, then the human "struggle" between good and evil would appear to be an important and necessary dimension of experience.

In other terms, good and evil can be thought of as the difference between enlightened actions and actions grounded in ignorance. When construed this way, actions grounded in ignorance blind one to one's true nature, that is, as an aspect of Source Consciousness or God. Thus, evil arises out of spiritual ignorance that leads

one to invest one's sense of being in ego or self. Life ultimately consists of each individual's struggle to overcome ignorance and thereby achieve enlightenment. This dichotomy between enlightenment and ignorance might be thought of as a bipolar construct, where one end is anchored by *selflessness* and the other end is anchored by *selfishness* or, conversely, love versus egotism. The further one's identity falls toward the selfishness or egotism end of the scale, the greater one's ignorance and the potential for "evil" actions.

Spiritual Practice

Given the discussion above, it seems clear that if one accepts that one has a spiritual nature that is a manifestation within Consciousness or Source, then one should take an active interest in the evolution of that nature and its contribution to the whole. What follows will draw upon material offered to us by spirit entities, communicating through individuals incarnate in the material world. If one believes consciousness is indestructible, then one must believe in spirit entities, for what else would a dis-incarnate consciousness be? If one believes that there are spirit entities, then what is so unbelievable about the possibility of some type of communication? Bear in mind that there can be a lot of diversity in channeled messages. Simply dying doesn't necessarily make you more astute. Leaving all that aside, if one has doubts about these sources then just disregard the source and simply read and be open to the message. If it resonates with you and you learn something from it, then great. If not, then dismiss it and go on your way.

It almost goes without saying that the goal of developing one's consciousness will be for most people a task requiring some organized effort, which is generally thought of as a *spiritual practice*. Edgar Cayce (a.k.a. the Sleeping Prophet) frequently addressed the core and most important step in developing a spiritual practice. That step was setting a *personal ideal* with the *intent* that it be used to guide one in interactions with others. Cayce recommended

that such an ideal should encompass such qualities as *love, service, compassion* and *understanding*. He further suggested that as an aid to focus, a historical or fictional exemplar of one's personal ideal, e.g., Yogananda, Gandhi, Gautama or Jesus, might be useful.

Simply setting an ideal is not enough, because to be useful it must be put into practice. An ideal is applied by using it as a standard to *self-evaluate* one's thoughts and actions on a daily basis. Cayce counseled that the evolution of your consciousness is not determined by spiritual knowledge but how well you apply that knowledge in your actions. Cayce emphasized both thought and behavior. Thought because of his repeated admonition that "mind is the builder." What he meant here is that consciousness is primary. Who and what you are ultimately derives from your thoughts, and it is these thoughts that motivate behavior, including behaviors that conform to one's personal ideal. Behavior then must be motivated by positive intent if it is to contribute to one's spiritual evolution. "Good" behavior motivated by ego, imposed by religion, coerced by social opinion or enforced by law is done for the wrong reason and contributes nothing to spiritual evolution. *Setting and following a personal ideal then is spiritual practice in its most basic sense.*

The Seth entity that channeled through the writer Jane Roberts also spoke of the importance of ideals and supported Cayce's view that the primary way in which ideals need to be expressed is through interaction with others within the context of daily life. Seth cautions that we often set very broad and general ideals as a way of avoiding having to act upon them. Such ideals seem beyond the ability of a mere individual to significantly impact, so we fail to act or expect institutions to act on our behalf. Seth also warns that people "...often believe that any means is justified in the pursuit of the ideal...Each act that is not in keeping with the ideal begins to unravel that ideal at its very core." Seth, like Cayce, suggests that "...in your job

and in your associations, are the places where you intersect with the world." It is in these very personal and daily relationships where you have the most power to affect the world. Personal ideals can only be realized through acting on them. Seth argues that it is the cumulative effect of this type of action that changes the world. *Changing the world is a bottom-up process that begins with oneself.*

The Aaron entity that channels through Vipassana teacher Barbara Brodsky takes a somewhat different but compatible focus. Aaron would not disagree with Cayce or Seth about *doing* (acting in the world) but suggests that another important component in a spiritual practice is *being* (seeking the Self), for which meditation and Self-inquiry are appropriate methods.

One effect of a *meditation practice* is that it diminishes the temporal discontinuity obscuring one's automatic programs (APs) from conscious awareness. This makes it easier to become aware of APs and to exercise self-agency to deal with problematic APs. The other effect is that sitting quietly and allowing thoughts and feelings to arise into awareness and pass through provides practice in not being reactive to such thoughts and feelings. In meditation, one attempts to develop skill at not following or exploring the thoughts and feelings that arise into consciousness, which gradually exposes the true nature of the fictive-self and how it turns us, in a manner of speaking, into zombies. Thus, systematic application of meditation to develop embodied consciousness helps us see through the fictive-self and gives us the tools needed to explore our APs and to be more deliberate or *mindful* about our choices.

Aaron focuses on meditation as part of a spiritual practice that helps one reconnect with the inner core of love that is the essence of Source Consciousness or God. In Aaron's view there is only one emotion and that is love. The most basic corruption of that emotion is fear. Fear arises along with the development of ego or self that engenders a dualistic view of the world, a world that we essentially see as

separate from us and full of potential threat to the self and its interests. He also states that fear lies at the heart of many manifestations of negativity by whatever name we might call them, e.g., hate, greed, envy and even feelings that we don't usually associate with negativity, such as pride and righteousness. For Aaron, meditation is a method for helping us learn to neutralize fear and embrace our inner core of unconditional love, which is reflected in our behavior through what he calls *loving-kindness*.

Awakening then is achieved by first coming to understand on an experiential (as distinct from intellectual) level the true nature of the fictive-self or ego and how it blocks us from connection with the true, spiritual Self. This is aided by quietly observing in meditation the operation of the self and coming to understand it. Learning the true nature of the fictive-self and learning to stand aside from it allows us to recover our natural mind. Once one is no longer ruled by the fictive-self, it can be skillfully employed as a useful tool for existing in the material world. This opens up the possibility of moving through the barrier posed by the fictive-self to reconnect with that inner spiritual Self and the love reflected by it. The practice of Self-inquiry can be useful for facilitating that reconnection. Recovering the natural mind may or may not immediately lead to e*nlightenment* or a direct experience of the unconditional, universal love of Source or God. However, this connection must be nurtured to be maintained. This requires that it become the centered space from which one interacts with the world. It is the ultimate spiritual practice.

Realization of the true Self (enlightenment) can be a dramatic personal experience as reported by many who have had such an experience. It can also be a gradual, evolving experience that slowly colonizes the self. In neither case does it transform one into a miracle worker or saint. Many people may not even observe any outward change in someone who has become a *Self-Realized* being. To the

truly observant, however, one's way of being in the world will be apparent even if in many cases only subtly different.

Conclusion

Some might ask, is the account provided above true? If by true one means true in the public and factual sense, then it isn't and it probably will never be possible to say. It may be true in a private and phenomenological sense. Only you can make that determination based on your own experience. Don't simply believe in this or any other hypothesis about the nature of reality. I end with the following quote from the psychoanalyst and explorer of inner space, John C. Lilly:

"Whatever one believes to be true either is true or becomes true in one's own mind, within limits to be determined experientially. These limits themselves are, in turn, beliefs to be transcended. The limits of one's beliefs set the boundaries for possible experience. So every time you reach a limiting belief it must be examined and gone beyond...If you can examine old beliefs and realize they are limits to be overcome and can also realize you don't have to have a belief about something you don't yet know anything about, you are free."