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Building Your Spiritual Toolbox:

The Tool of Meditation.

Meditation is not just about sitting and relaxing but is an exploration of consciousness and of the mind's activities. It is an important tool for developing spirituality because it allows us to examine our relationship with the world and our perception of it. Meditation is not contemplation. While they may be similar, they are not the same. Meditation is about observing our thought and emotions without following them.

The mind has two positions: looking out and looking in. Looking out allows us to perceive what is called the dream reality, and looking in allows us to see our ideal reality. This inner reality is our ideal self, a creation based on the interpretation of others. Therefore, meditation is not about relaxing, but about discover our true reality, which must be experienced

Meditation as a Spiritual Tool.

Meditation is not what people believe it is. Most are of the opinion that meditation is simply sitting and relaxing. However, this is not the case. In order to understand what meditation is, meditation must be experienced.¹ You may wonder why meditation is important to developing your Spirituality? There is the world you see and then there is the world you perceive, meaning there is the world you take for granted and then there is what is in the world and the two are not the same. He who comes out of the world can no longer be detained in the world.² Meditation is for the exploration of consciousness, or for the investigation of the mind and its various activities.³ This means that meditation is used for examining the perceived world and your relationship with that world. Many confuse meditation with contemplation because they are cousins. Both require you to sit quietly, allow your thoughts and emotions to rise and fall, or to flow through your mind of their own accord. After this, meditation and contemplation depart. With contemplation, while these thoughts are moving through your mind you are observing them. The same as in meditation, with one exception. The purpose of contemplation is to discover solutions. You select a particular thought pattern or circumstance, usually a problem or challenge, and follow it,

¹ (Rappaport, 1998)

² (The Gospel of Philip, 1984)

³ (Rinpoche, 1992)

change it, and adjust it, searching for different outcomes. This is not what meditation is about. With meditation you observe those emotions and thoughts as they move through your mind, but you do not follow them. You allow them to depart, unhindered.⁴

What is meditation?

Reading about meditation is not experiencing meditation. All I can do through this written material is provide suggestions, descriptions, and the like. We begin by recognizing that the mind has two positions. Looking out and looking in.⁵ When we are looking out, we are perceiving our environment as it appears. This is what is known as the common reality. This is what Buddhists refer to as the dream reality. This is the illusion. What makes it an illusion? If you cannot answer the question, then take a moment and gaze at the world around you. What do you see, or more precisely, what do you not see? You will see everything that everyone else sees except yourself. You cannot see yourself. If you were to go further, you can only see what is shown. You cannot see beyond the surface. When the mind is looking in, we are seeing the internal reality. We see the workings of our mind, our thoughts, our emotions, our expectations, our disappointments, all of it. This is known as the true reality. The reason why this is your true reality is because it is your ideal self. This is how you see yourself. You do not see yourself as being portly, as being ugly, as being dumb, as being anything else but what you imagine others see when looking at you. You see yourself as you prefer others to see you. You do not see yourself as you appear to others. This is the inner reality. This ideal self you have created. You have created this ideal self, based on your interpretation of how others see you, meaning it is based upon the external reality, the common reality, the people who are part of your external environment and they see an illusion they call you. We build our ideal self, according to their reactions, according to their disappointments about us, according to their expectations of us, and it is because of this external reality we create a false façade, a false representation of who we believe

⁴ (Rinpoche, 1992)

⁵ (Rinpoche, 1992)

they perceive we are. The purpose of meditation is for you to peel away these misconceptions and rediscover who you truly are through exploring your awareness.

If we were to attempt to summarize all the definitions of meditation, it would be to focus on a single thought, a single sound, or a single image.⁶ The type of meditation most of us are familiar with is called Vipassana, or Insight Meditation, also known as mindful meditation⁷ because the mind is focused. Here you witness your inner life, your inner experience with detachment. We mentioned the idea of detachment earlier. You are to observe those images, those sounds, those thoughts, those emotions that move through your mind without interference, without judgment. You are to allow them to move of their own accord, to fill you up. This is mindful meditation, which is to focus on a single point, a single thought. The purpose is not to allow the mind to continuously reminisce, but to focus on a single point, bringing it to the present.

One of the most important things to keep in mind while meditating is what the mind thinks hard and long enough upon, will eventually occur.⁸ This means through your meditation you become a type of magnet, an attractor, which draws to you what is focused on. Thus, you must be mindful. You must be aware of what you are focusing on. While it is best to focus on a single point or a single thought, you must consider what that thought is. If you focus on love, then you must know what love is and what it means to you. When I speak of love, I am speaking of nurturing. If I were to focus on love, I would be focusing on nurturing others. Truth is another term that holds many meanings. We begin to search for universal truth, yet we never find universal truth because universal truth does not exist. There is only one truth, and that truth is your truth. Before you accept anything as true, you must first test it, you must measure it, and if it meets your satisfaction, then you must integrate it.⁹ Until then, truth is a fiction.

⁶ (Yogananda, 2005)

⁷ (Altman, 2000)

⁸ (Yogananda, 2005)

⁹ (Seed Corn (Tracts on Spiritualism), 1872)

What meditation does for you.

Why should anyone wish to meditate? Anyone with a desire to learn about themselves, or to awaken to their spirituality, should have an interest in developing meditation because its purpose is to awaken us to the nature of mind, and the nature of mind is awareness.¹⁰ Therefore, the purpose of meditation is to become aware. What is it that we should become aware of? There is more to ourselves than just the self or our inner reality. There is the outer reality, the dream reality, and meditation helps us navigate this illusion. Mindful meditation typically promotes an attitude of acceptance, objectivity, and metacognition.¹¹ Metacognition is an awareness that goes beyond the average level of awareness. Think of it like this. Most people are concerned about what will happen tomorrow, what is happening right now, or what may happen next. The person who practices mindful meditation does not have to be concerned about what happens next because they are able to perceive potential events and potential outcomes. This is why people choose to meditate, because their awareness expands beyond today, and moves into potentiality.

The most challenging task anyone can undertake is to discover or to explore themselves. There are many things that we have done, that we may be ashamed of, or that may disturb us. There are thoughts we have that we find disturbing. We also desire to know why we do the things that we do. Meditation is the only path to discovering our true nature. While many people are of the opinion that meditation is the path to enlightenment, it is also the path to deception.¹² Your endeavor into yourself provides insights into your motivation. When you understand what motivates you to do certain things, only then are you able to take steps to change or alter the manner in which you respond. This can only occur through self-awareness. Self-awareness is more than just being aware that you are separate from everybody else. Self-awareness is about understanding who you are. Through this understanding you are able to remodel who you are. There is a nostalgic verse in the Gospel

¹⁰ (Rinpoche, 1992)

¹¹ (Schreiner & Malcolm, 2008)

¹² (Rinpoche, 1992)

of Thomas which tells us to make the inside the outside and to make the outside the inside.¹³ What is being suggested is that through self-exploration, through meditation, we are able to calm our inner reality. Once we can do this, only then can we calm our outer reality. Only through mastering your inner reality can you hope to gain some kind of control over the Illusion or the dream reality you exist in, for you create all that you experience. If you understand what it is that you are creating and the experience that you are having, then you may be able to create a reality more suitable or more conducive to your continuing growth.

Regular meditation can be extremely helpful. For instance, it changes how we think. When meditating regularly, we are attempting to change the way we live. Meditation allows us to develop self-management skills and to continuously enhance those skills.¹⁴ Mindful meditation is the most popular form of meditation because it fills the mind, and by filling the mind we develop an awareness of the contents of our consciousness. This awareness develops because we are focused on the task at hand. Mindfulness is more than just being in the present. Mindfulness allows us to experience life events differently. What we mean by differently is that we are better able to cope with daily stress. We begin to identify signs of tension as it builds within us. When we begin to experience tension, we are beginning to experience stress, mental stress, and physical stress. Stress is one of the most dangerous, or I should say, one of the most influential aspects of our lives that we experience, and the manner in which we deal with stress determines whether we experience illness or adaptation.

When we say mind, or the brain, learns to adapt to the situations we encounter, what we are really saying is that we are developing our emotional intelligence¹⁵. Emotional intelligence is the ability to monitor your emotions and the emotions of others and using this information in a manner that benefits both.¹⁶ When developing this particular skillset,

¹³ (The Gospel of Thomas, 1984)

¹⁴ (Schreiner & Malcolm, 2008)

¹⁵ (Rinpoche, 1992)

¹⁶ (Palmer, 2019)

we are able to respond to those in our immediate environment, or we should say, to their obvious behaviors as well as to their implicit behaviors. By implicit behavior we are referring to those expressions known as body language.¹⁷ By developing emotional intelligence, we begin to understand the effects our emotions have upon others and their emotions upon ourselves. This is an important skill. Through emotional intelligence, we can avoid unnecessary arguments, we can diffuse confrontations, and we can prepare ourselves for potentially uncomfortable situations.

Problems with meditation

Like all experiences of life, meditation has what people call its positive aspects and its negative aspects. It is not that one is more potent than the other, but the experience may not be what you were led to believe. Ultimately, how you perceive the world around you affects the way you experience life. The most important thing to be aware of is the power of meditation, not only will it alter the way you think but it has the ability to reshape your brain.¹⁸ These changes occur in the executive area of the brain, or where you make your decisions. Some may consider this frightening. Some may consider this enlightening. In any case, regular meditation changes your perception and consequently your experience of the world around you. Your self-awareness, which is your inner reality, may expand causing you to move towards what is called a higher state of consciousness, altering your relationship with your environment and yourself.¹⁹

We must keep in mind that meditation is not a means of escape from the problems of the world,²⁰ or from responsibilities to yourself and others. Pursuits such as this may lead to experiences many consider frightening or negative. From the Buddhist perspective, life and death exist within the mind.²¹ If this is the case, then the experience of life, of your

¹⁷ (Palmer, 2019)

¹⁸ (Travis, 2013)

¹⁹ (Travis, 2013)

²⁰ (Rinpoche, 1992)

²¹ (Rinpoche, 1992)

life, exists within your mind. This is why meditation is a tool for self-exploration. When following this particular path, you will experience images of the past, whether it is earlier in the day, last month, or even childhood memories, all will eventually move through your mind independently. It is your responsibility to observe these events and to not actively participate in them. What we mean by participate is that you refrain from considering alternate outcomes or even to explore the experience. The purpose of meditation is to learn how to observe, and our most valuable teacher is going to be ourselves. So, if you can, observe these events, these memories that will move through your mind quietly, then You will have embarked upon a path towards progress. After you have mastered the skill of observation, you may then explore each past experience and evaluate it on its own merits.

Many of the practices of the various religions are of an experiential nature when you are able to move beyond the surface of doctrine. Meditation is an intentional experiential practice which has common points of reference that all experience. These experiences include an absence of time, an absence of space, and an absence of physical existence. They may also include a sense of an inner wakefulness, and sense of connection with something beyond comprehension, and a sense of interconnectedness with others.²² These common experiences are often associated with religion. Thus, they are known as religious experiences. When examining the cave paintings of early man, several patterns were noticed. Encouraged by them, an archaeologist discussed them with Native American shaman and discovered that people who meditate experience a variety of patterns and sensations that are inherent to the experience. One pattern being a vortex and a sensation of spiraling upwards or downwards. The shaman believed this to be a mystical flight, moving the subject from one world into the next.²³ This suggests that some of the cave paintings by early humans may actually be visual accounts of their experiences. Something else to consider is that many of the cave chambers go deep into a crevice or a mountain or some such natural orifice causing one to experience sensory deprivation. During such experiences, a person may physically feel as though they were falling or spiraling in a

²² (Travis, 2013)

²³ (Whitley, 2009)

direction. These incidents were experienced by archaeologists exploring these areas. You may recall a film titled *Altered States*, in which the main character explores the inner depths of the mind through sensory deprivation.

Experiences such as these have encouraged people to explore the use of various natural and synthetic chemicals, including meditation, to replicate the sensations. These practices may lead to some unsavory experiences such as anxiety and depression.²⁴ Remember, earlier we indicated that from the Buddhist perspective, life and death exists within the mind and as such you may experience variations of life and death through hallucination. This translates into what you deem to be true is likely to be what you will experience. Another way of presenting this is that what you feel strongly about may be reflected in your experience. For instance, if you are a distrustful person or one given to paranoia, you may experience anxiety during your exploration of self. At the same time, other experiences may include ecstasy, joy, and similar emotional states. It is these ecstatic states people often pursue through chemical usage. Instances such as these are a means of escape and may be indicative of addictive behavior. Even meditation offers similar experiences that can lead to questionable behaviors. The most important thing to remember is that all experiential experiences are at the heart of all religions. What we are trying to experience is truth. What we are being driven to towards is to know, to experience God, Buddha, or the self, through a religious experience.²⁵ It is these experiences which encourage us to pursue something more than the ordinary. We are no longer ignorant of who, or even of what God, Buddha, or any other classification of a supreme being, because we will have experienced them. Each person will have a distinct experience and each person will interpret their experience differently. It is these experiences that form the foundations of your religion or spirituality. It is individual interpretations and beliefs that take these foundational blocks and build religions. These experiences may also allow you to interpret your religious beliefs differently. The type of religion you build from these blocks will be determined by your particular view of the world. What I find interesting is that some

²⁴ (Murphy, 2010)

²⁵ (Rinpoche, 1992)

of the religions we are familiar with teach prejudice and separation, while the higher teachings of these same religions, or esoteric teachings of the same religions, teach kindness, inclusiveness, and similar skills intended to benefit humankind.

From an Occult perspective

When people hear the term occult, they often get these peculiar images of superstition, or superstitious practices including bizarre ceremonies. Many of the orgiastic rituals of so-called sex cults were believed to have been for the purpose of calling up some incarnation of the devil. This is not what the term occult is about. In an effort to cull the true inquirer from the sensationalist, authors will bury ceremonial requirements in exaggerated description. All that is required is that one achieves an altered state of mind, as was the purpose of the sexual acts that were condemned as being evil. The term occult means simply secret knowledge. Secret knowledge is that knowledge which is not obtained through normal channels, such as books, attending lectures, or some other educational method. From the occult perspective one must obtain knowledge through experience or experiential means. Meditation provides an avenue towards accessing information not available through ordinary means. We talked a little bit about what people experience during meditation. Now we are going to talk a little bit about the information people obtain through meditation.

What we typically search for is not power or information, but truth. The only place we are going to find truth, or I should say, the only place you will find your truth is through the exploration of the nature of mind, specifically, your mind,²⁶ and if you are in search of Universal Truth, you may discover there is no such thing. If there were, everybody would be in agreement and there would be no segmented religions within a religion. Truth is relative to the individual, meaning that truth is relative to your experience. There are two realities. There is the external reality, and there is the internal reality. One of these realities is an

²⁶ (Rinpoche, 1992)

illusion. The other is not. Our purpose is not to determine which reality is true and which is false, but to discover Truth.

Often, when meditating, we experience what can only be described as another reality. These experiences are sometimes referred to as pure consciousness, and they are brief, occurring without warning.²⁷ When we become aware of these occurrences, our very awareness causes the reality to collapse. This is similar to what occurs within the quantum realm. Quantum physics is about probabilities. One might say that within the quantum realm there is the potential of every possible event that can occur. When a certain event takes place in a reality, it is one of many potential events. Before an event can occur in your time it must first reach a threshold. When that threshold is reached it moves from a potential state into a state of reality, such as an idea transitioning into matter. Before an idea moves from your inner reality it must reach a threshold before transitioning into your external reality, or you must act on the idea. We are not going to talk about how these thresholds are reached or how events move from potentiality into reality. Our purpose is to access knowledge. When we enter these states referred to as pure consciousness we essentially are in a realm of potentiality. These realms of potentiality may also be referred to as cosmic consciousness, collective consciousness, or universal mind. There are several ways to describe this, but it all comes down to a single event. That event is what many seek and refer to as touching God, or becoming part of the Universal Mind, or mingling with the Universal Consciousness. During a recent seance a person described the experience as 'Walking around in the soup of everyone that has existed.' From an occult perspective we are tasting, we are partaking, we are merging and adding to that collective soup.

From a Spiritual perspective

Why do people choose to meditate when it is alien to them? For most, it is part of their spiritual wellbeing or religious practice, which includes faith, purpose, connection

²⁷ (Travis, 2013)

with a higher-power, and a connection with others.²⁸ People are told by spiritual gurus to be happy and to find happiness. They are also told that only they can bring themselves happiness, but what is happiness? This is a question I cannot answer. However, I can tell you that tending to your spiritual well-being is part of achieving satisfaction with your life and a satisfaction with yourself. When we add to this the idea of faith, we are talking about trust. When people tell you to have faith, to believe, what they are actually saying is trust that all will be as it should be. The only way this is going to happen is if you are acceptive of what happens. The only way this can take place is if you accept yourself as you are at this moment, right now. The only way this can happen is if you trust that what you do is the right thing and allow it to occur. When it comes to purpose, we need to believe that there is a reason for us to be here. It is difficult for anybody to accept that they were simply an accident that occurred when two people, when a man and a woman, strangers, came together for the purpose of recreation. We must believe that we came into this world, that we exist, that we were born for a reason, for a cause, and we must search for that cause. Only then can we find satisfaction with life. This sense of a connection with a higher power is sometimes due to our disbelief in ourselves. We want to relinquish responsibility for our actions to something we believe to be greater than ourselves, because if we are held responsible for our actions then we must become involved, and people do not want to be involved in anything but themselves, and even then, they try to avoid it as much as possible. The spiritual pursuit is messy. It is filled with challenges and the most challenging aspect of being spiritual is to cultivate connections with others. In the present age that we are living in, cultivating connections with other people is considered dangerous and discouraged. If we were to truly examine what appears on social media, we will discover that most of the people recommend a direction that drives us away from each other. Spirituality is not about separation. Spirituality is about Community.

What is this idea of mindfulness really about? Mindfulness is described as moment-to-moment, present-centered, purposeful non-judgmental awareness.²⁹ Moment-to-

²⁸ (Ando, et al., 2009)

²⁹ (Ando, et al., 2009)

moment is about monitoring your perception; more precisely, it is about monitoring your thoughts as they rise and fall within the mind. Purposeful nonjudgment is not about having no judgment at all, which is impossible. Purposeful nonjudgment is about acting in a way that is not perceived by others as being judgmental. We all make judgments because we must determine whether a situation, a person, or any potential act is going to be conducive to our well-being or detrimental. How we make our judgments and how we carry them out are of extreme importance. This is the purpose of mindfulness, it is about observing your thoughts, your emotions, and events in a nonjudgmental fashion. Again, there is this idea of non-judgment. Our emotions rise and fall moment-to-moment, action-to-action, based on the value we give to what is perceived. Events themselves are neutral, but the value we give those events are going to be far more potent than anything we might think. Therefore, it is the actions that are attributed to our emotions that we must be mindful of. This is why the various techniques of mindful meditation are for the purpose of developing an awareness of the contents of your consciousness because such awareness is an immensely powerful coping strategy when experiencing life's events.³⁰ We must learn to fill our mind with the purpose of acting in a way that does not cause harm to others.

We must keep in mind that mindfulness is not meditation. Mindfulness is the method of meditation. Meditation is the experience. This is why meditation belongs in the realm of esoteric practice and esoteric thought. The practice of meditation encapsulates and transcends religion, giving it meaning and purpose. Meditation is the essence of true religion. We must keep in mind that religion is not found in doctrine, creed, or dogma. These are the methods of religion that are practiced. The essence of any religion is found in the experience of the religion. The separation of one religious practice from another is not found in the essence of a religion. The separation of one religious practice from another is found in the doctrine, the dogma, and the creed of that religion. What meditation does for religion is it teaches you to accept yourself, to accept your reality, and to not be attached to the results of anything you do. This is what meditation does for religion. Meditation is not a

³⁰ (Altman, 2000)

religion. Meditation supports religion through the experience of meditation. Doctrine is not religion. Doctrine is the rule of Religion.

The practice of meditation

Spirituality is a progressive means of thinking or a progressive means of living your life. To move towards the spiritual path, one must be motivated to do so. As with all endeavors, the results are always going to be tied to your motivation.³¹ Before we begin, ask yourself this question. Why am I seeking to change?

The purpose of meditation is to become aware.³² We will review a few of the methods that carry us towards Meditation. Their goal, again, is to become aware. This is the common point of all meditations, to become aware. The question that you must ask yourself is, what is it that I want to become aware of? Do I want to become aware of myself? Do I want to become aware of the life that exists around me? Do I want to become aware of the flow of information? Do I want to become aware of God? The question you ask may lead to an answer. My experience in this endeavor is that the question you ask does not lead to the answer you expect, but often to another question.

There are a few rules you must observe while meditating. The first is do not allow yourself to get drawn into your internal commentary, events, or analysis of events because they are distractions.³³ All meditation is a type of mindfulness. Meaning that you fill your mind with what you have chosen to focus on. The natural state of mind is clarity. During meditation try not to impose yourself upon the natural processes of mind. Do not plan, do not direct or in any fashion control your thoughts. Most importantly do not make this a ritual or a means of escaping the confusion that may surround you. ☒ During your meditation, try to remain still and breathe naturally. The first step in your development is to become aware of your moods. The second step to your development is to accept your

³¹ (Schreiner & Malcolm, 2008)

³² (Rinpoche, 1992)

³³ (Rinpoche, 1992)

moods. The third step towards your development is to practice developing a non-judgmental attitude.³⁴

When you begin to practice meditation, you will find the urge to close your eyes. While many teach this method of meditation this is not a correct approach. When you meditate with your eyes closed, you are tempted to doze off. You are also tempted to get caught up in the internal dialogue that is within us all. Therefore, we recommend you learn to meditate with your eyes open. When you meditate with your eyes open, all that distracts you, all that encourages you to close your eyes, to shut out the distractions allows you to incorporate those distractions into your meditation. Remember, the purpose of meditation is to develop awareness. Thus, if you meditate with your eyes open, you are developing an awareness of your environment, which is especially useful. To begin meditating with your eyes open, select an object, a painting, or something similar to rest your eyes upon. We said rest, not stare at, but to rest your eyes upon. To gaze is not to stare at something. To focus is not to stare at something. To gaze, or to focus, is to rest your eyes upon a chosen subject and to allow them to focus naturally. This allows the energy of the mind to flow naturally. As you meditate with your eyes open, those images that impede upon you from your peripheral vision are just that. Images. They shall come and go as the thoughts in your mind move in and then exit. When meditating with your eyes open you are less likely to fall asleep. You are also less likely to adopt an approach towards meditation that is more of an escape.³⁵ That is not awareness. Meditating with your eyes open also discourages one from falling into a trance. While meditation may be a pathway towards this development, this is not the purpose of meditation. While meditating, your ears may hear noises in the background, do not focus on them. Allow these noises to enter into the mind and to exit the mind of their own accord. As you become aware of your emotions, allow them to rise and to fall of their own accord.³⁶ Do not get caught up in an attempt to understand them. They will explain themselves in due time. The entire purpose of meditation is to become aware of

³⁴ (Schreiner & Malcolm, 2008)

³⁵ (Rinpoche, 1992)

³⁶ (Rinpoche, 1992)

your thoughts, of your surroundings, of your emotions, of your being, and as you become aware of these things your awareness will naturally expand to include what many consider a higher sense of awareness, such as a oneness with God or a oneness with nature.

As you focus on your chosen object, allow your eyes to rest on it. When gazing at something, your eyes will move along the object, taking in its texture, taking in its shape, taking in its form, and its substance.³⁷ This will help you to practice not to participate in those thoughts that continue to move through your mind. You are practicing at being the observer. You are practicing at being aware of all that is around you while not actively participating. This is the purpose of meditation.

Vipassana Tranquility Meditation is probably the most common approach. You sit in a quiet room, while assuming a comfortable posture. This is where the challenge begins. You must focus on nothing.³⁸ Whether you choose to have your eyes closed, or to keep them open, you must focus on nothing. While focusing on nothing, all sorts of sounds images, thoughts, and such will impose themselves upon you. These distractions have a purpose. Their purpose is to disrupt your concentration. Their purpose is to disrupt your tranquility. Their purpose is to disrupt. Your purpose is not to interfere. Your purpose is to observe. When you feel yourself getting caught up in these distractions, you must return your focus to nothing. One approach you might use when your eyes are open is to pick a spot on the wall and to focus on that. Unfortunately, that is not tranquility meditation. Tranquility meditation is to focus on nothing. Your focus is upon tranquility itself. To achieve tranquility is to not become disturbed. That is the purpose of this meditation, to not become disturbed. You rest in the tranquility of mind, and the tranquility of mind is the observation of the flow of information.

When meditating on a mantra or sound, the focus rests on the sound itself. It is the sound that brings the mind to rest. Mantra or sound meditation is Transcendental Meditation, and you focus on the sound itself, its resonance, while allowing all else to fall

³⁷ (Rinpoche, 1992)

³⁸ (Gunaratana, 1998)

away.³⁹ You allow any thoughts to enter and exit the mind until only those thoughts that are sound are present. If, during your meditation, the sound or the mantra disappears then you must return your focus to the sound. It is through sound that silence begins, and through this silence, the mind begins to expand, your awareness begins to expand. It is not that objects or sounds other than what you are focused on impose themselves upon the mind, but you extend your awareness beyond them. While meditating with sound or a mantra, it is always best to develop this with eyes open. With eyes open, all that distracts you becomes part of the meditation, becomes absorbed in your awareness. As your awareness begins to expand, it moves beyond these distractions and towards something else.

When practicing meditation, it is always best to approach it with no expectations. This is difficult for most because they come to this with expectations of visions and supernatural events,⁴⁰ but the path of meditation itself is one of transformation. This transformation is slow and very subtle. You will not notice any changes until an accumulation of changes present themselves. When meditating, it is always best to allow your thoughts to flow naturally. Many people are of the opinion that the purpose of meditation is to stop themselves from thinking. This is incorrect. The nature of your mind is to think. Therefore, thoughts will enter your meditation because it is natural. Your role is not to latch on to these thoughts and follow them to imagined conclusions. Your role is to observe, and through observation you are able to explore. When you are done meditating take a moment and notice your state of mind. This is particularly important because when you become familiar with this particular state of mind you will discover that you naturally adopt a similar state of mind, a subtle state of alertness. Many spiritual practitioners lack the ability to integrate their meditation into everyday life. Thus, they fall into a trap, thinking that meditation is enlightenment. This is not so. Meditation is awareness. It is this awareness that you experience while meditating that you must learn to carry with you into

³⁹ (Travis, 2013)

⁴⁰ (Rinpoche, 1992)

your everyday life. It is your everyday life that presents you with your most difficult challenges. It is your everyday life that is filled with illusions.

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