

Meditation Group For the New Age

FIRST YEAR · SET II
March 21 – April 20

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Part I

REFLECTIVE MEDITATION

Introductory Remarks

Meditation is attracting increasing attention today. Thinking people are inquiring about it, and groups are being formed to discuss and practice it. This growing interest means that more and more people are beginning to recognize that the overactive outer life must be balanced by a meaningful inner life through giving attention, thought and concentration to the invisible realities.

But the word *meditation* is often used rather loosely, its meaning being vague and frequently including very different procedures and inner attitudes such as concentration, reflective meditation, creative meditation, some forms of prayer, visualization of symbols and consideration of their meaning, silence, contemplation, and inspiration from higher levels. Therefore, the first thing needed is clarification of the subject by defining the terms used.

In keeping with general practice we can call *meditation* the process of sustained, controlled inner attention to energy and thought. Under this general heading qualifying words will then define the various specific kinds, stages, and techniques. We have already dealt in Set I with the first stage of meditation—concentration. The principal types of meditation should now be looked at briefly, before we go on to deal with them separately.

First there is ***reflective meditation***, which is a strictly mental process. It is sequential, coordinated thinking on a definite subject, theme, word, or thought—such as those which are called “seed thoughts”; this is an apt term because the original or starting thought is the “seed” to the subsequent development of insight on the subject.

Then there is what can be called ***receptive meditation***, because its purpose is the reception by the mind of light on some spiritual subject, truth or realization. It is important to understand that *receptive* does not mean passive; it indicates, instead, a state of intense alertness without any autonomous functioning. It can be

compared to listening, or trying to see something which is far away, or, in radio terms, to the mind acting as a receiving station and trying to tune itself to the transmitting station. This transmitting station is primarily the Self, the Soul. The process is called inspiration or in some cases intuition, and the result is illumination of the mind. But the effects of such meditation are not limited to that alone, for the new and higher truths perceived have a transforming power over the whole personality. They change the whole person.

A third type is ***creative meditation***, which aims at the building of a “thoughtform” which is dynamic and effective, well-defined, charged with the energy of feeling, and animated or propelled by will, so that it fulfills a definite function or mission. This function may work out either in the inner worlds through radiation and telepathic action, or outwardly by supplying a pattern or an incentive for action.

Another aspect of meditation has been called ***elevation*** or ***ascent***. Here the endeavor is to raise the center of consciousness deliberately to ever higher levels of the inner world. It is like mounting an inner ladder towards the Self or Soul, and sometimes contacting it for a brief moment. When the highest point has been reached, an active interplay between the mind and the Soul may take place. This has been called the ***inner dialogue***.

It is evident, therefore, that approach to meditation requires that we first orient ourselves in this more or less new field, realizing the several different types of meditation; then we can begin to see the richness of such inner action and the great gifts it can yield. With this in mind we will explore reflective meditation in this booklet, and delve into the other types in later sets.

Reflective Meditation

The simplest definition of ***reflective meditation*** is just “thinking.” This is a correct definition as far as it goes, but it does not go very far, for generally we do not give much thought to thinking! We imagine that, being intelligent, we can *think*;

whereas just thinking about anything that interests us is in fact only an elementary state of mental activity.

We might say that usually the mind “thinks in us,” rather than that we think. This means that the activity of the mind is a process that as a rule goes on pretty much by itself, promoted by different stimuli or drives and flowing in a disorderly way. A more exact description is that the mind is normally independent of the Self and of the will. It is interfered with all the time by emotions, drives, images, and external stimuli. Such mental activity scarcely deserves the name of real thinking, for it is only when a strong urge or interest keeps the mind at work that it functions in an orderly and productive way.

Spontaneous, or what we might call unconscious or unrealized reflective meditation is often practiced by people who do not give it that name. The scientist working out a problem, the philosopher thinking out a concept, the business manager intelligently planning the organization of the company’s affairs, are all examples of this, for they are all demonstrating coherent organized use of the mind—of the thinking function. We must recognize the somewhat humbling truth that these people often think—indeed meditate—more efficiently than many of those who are endeavoring to travel the spiritual way. The latter are apt to be overly passive and to neglect or block the coherent, sequential activity of the mind by an excess of emotion and feeling.

As a preliminary to true meditation, we must realize, then, that the mind is in fact a tool, an inner tool, from which we must dis-identify ourselves in order to facilitate its proper use. The practice of concentration has taught us the first step: how to control the mind, how to keep it steady and one-pointed in the chosen direction. Now comes the next step: not that of keeping it still, but of making it proceed, walk, so to speak, along the way we want it to go, toward some chosen goal.

Thinking in this sense means reflecting upon a given, well-defined subject, and working out all the implications, ramifications, and meanings implicit in it. Even a little practice along these lines shows us how shallow and inadequate is most of our so called

thinking. We are apt to jump to conclusions, to consider only one side or aspect of the subject in question. The mind, instead of working straight, detours in response to emotional reactions.

The first requirement, then, for developing the art of thinking is to give close attention to the **actual process** of thinking; for example, to notice immediately when its course begins to deviate as a result of either emotional reaction or preconceived mental attitude, or—as is frequently the case—in response to the process of mechanical association, which carries the mind through a series of allied subjects to a point far from the starting place.

The second requirement is **persistence**—thinking *through*. Here some rather curious things can happen. At first, after a few minutes of reflective thinking, we are sure the subject has been exhausted, that there is nothing left to think about. But if we persist through this blank period and continue to reflect, we begin to discover other unrealized aspects; we may even find that what appeared at first to be a dearth of content is, in fact, an overabundance. Then a new difficulty appears: how to explore all the now perceived aspects and complexities of the subject, and how to deal with the inrush of new trains of thought.

But this does not always happen! At times we seem to reach an impasse, or get in a groove from which we cannot escape. In such cases external assistance can be helpful. For instance, one can consult a dictionary or encyclopedia on the subject under consideration, or read what others have discovered about it. Another way to escape from stalemate is to make a list of questions covering the many possible aspects of the subject. The following example from the prayer which was used in Set I will make this clear—

“I seek to love, not hate.”

At first consideration this seems so simple and obvious that it offers very little stimulation to thought; it appears to be almost banal. “Of course,” we think, “if I am a decent, well-meaning individual, I seek to love, not hate. Why not leave it at that!” But if we begin to put to ourselves such questions as the following, we may find the subject more meaningful than it at first appeared.

- What does “to love” really mean?
- What is love?
- How many kinds of love are there?
- How do I love?
- How will I try to love from now on?
- Whom do I love, and whom am I *able* to love at present?
- Have I always succeeded in loving as I intended to love?
- And if not, why not?
- What have been the obstacles, and how can I eliminate them?
- What kinds of love has humanity demonstrated in the various cultures and civilizations? (For there have been different kinds of love for which different words have been used, as, for example, the Greek *Eros*, *agape*.)
- How much does the quality of my love depend on the persons to whom it is directed, and how much upon my own inner nature?
- Then, coming to the word “hate,” we can ask ourselves:
- Under what disguises can it hide?
- Am I able to remain free from every kind of hate?
- What is the meaning of the paradoxical statement “An enemy is as useful as a friend?”
- What do I feel towards those who do evil? Is it a right attitude, and if not, how can I correct it?
- What attitude should one take towards evil in general?
- What are my attitudes and my emotional reactions towards those with whom I am in opposition?

It is obvious that all these questions cannot be considered adequately in one meditation, no matter how long we try to hold the mind to the task; in fact they provide ample food for a whole series of meditations, one question being probably quite enough to deal with at one time.

A third requirement should be consideration of the ***purpose of meditation***. Before undertaking this form of inner action we

should think clearly about our aims, for these will determine both the subject to be chosen and the procedures to be used. One general purpose of reflective meditation is purely mental or intellectual, that is, to gain clear ideas about a given subject or problem. Another important aim is that of acquiring ***self-knowledge***, and this will be given special consideration.

Innumerable subjects are suitable for reflective meditation, and mention can be made here only of different categories. Psychological and spiritual qualities offer an almost endless series—courage, faith, serenity, joy, will, and so on. Symbols constitute another type, one that will be more appropriately considered in connection with visualization, in a later Set.

One can also meditate on a phrase embodying a thought. Such “seed thoughts” are also innumerable, but they can be divided broadly into two classes: first, those that appear simple and obvious, but which turn out to conceal a world of meaning (such as, “I seek to love, not hate”); second, those that are formulated in a paradoxical and therefore challenging way. These are often in the form of an apparent contradiction, the reconciliation of which lies in a higher or more comprehensive synthesis of the two opposite terms, for instance—

“Act with interest and without interest.”

“Suffer with joy.” (Which does not mean to enjoy suffering.)

“Make haste slowly.”

“Live in the eternal and in the moment.”

“See action in inaction and inaction in action.”

Many of the sayings of Jesus reported in the Gospels belong in this category, and they are most valuable themes for reflective meditation.

Reflective Meditation on Oneself

Using one's own personality or self as the subject for meditation necessitates, more than does any other subject, holding the attitude of "Observer," as mentioned in Set I on Concentration. It requires clear discrimination between pure self-consciousness and the psychological "contents" of our personality, and it means the observation of the various psychological factors in us, such as our emotions and desires. Some knowledge of psychology is a great help in this.

This higher self-awareness and ability to observe one's personality from above should not be confused with what is commonly called being self-centered. Self-centeredness is an identification and preoccupation with one's personality and its shortcomings, and an over concern with the opinions and judgments that others may have of us.

Reflective meditation on one's personality should not be considered as simply passive observation, or as the making of an inventory or mechanical collection of data. It includes analysis of the facts observed, understanding of their meaning, and consequent evaluation of them, and this requires thought, consideration, and interpretation. It is therefore true *reflective* meditation and inner action. Realization of our personality deficiencies, problems, and conflicts urges us to bring about order, harmony, and wholeness in ourselves, and stimulates the will to do this. And it can be achieved, because the Self is not only the Observer, but is the Doer as well—the One who has the power to decide and control the direction of one's life.

Meditation on the Principle of Goodwill

The Principle of Goodwill is the theme for meditation during the present two months' period. At first, with only superficial consideration, it may appear a simple subject not needing to be given much sustained thinking. But this apparent simplicity—as in the case of the phrase "I seek to love, not hate"—is deceptive. The article on Goodwill (Part II of this Set), and particularly the tabulation at the end of the booklet, will help to indicate its many aspects, its diverse applications, and how far-reaching and

transforming can be its subjective and objective effects, both on ourselves and on the whole of humanity. It is, indeed, a magical key which opens the door to the New Age.

Technical Suggestions on Reflective Meditation

The first advice is never to concentrate on negative aspects, but to direct the attention to those that are positive. It is important to realize that we are seeking to create a better world rather than to become bogged down in what we sense is wrong. The second is to write down immediately any worthwhile thoughts or conclusions arrived at. Concepts that seem clear and vivid at the time have a way of disappearing from the consciousness very quickly and are lost if not fixed right away. The formulation of thoughts verbally also forces us to clarity and precision in our thinking and exposes any confusion and vagueness in our minds. The process of writing is itself a stimulus to meditation, and may lead to further valuable thoughts. Writing in this sense is a meditation technique. It definitely helps in keeping the mind oriented and active along the desired lines and in maintaining focus.

The length of time during which one subject should be used as a theme varies, but it should not be less than a week, and after some practice one often finds a month none too long. In fact some subjects appear to be virtually inexhaustible. A good method is to meditate on certain themes cyclically. Thus it is in our group that we go through a cycle each year of meditating on Right Human Relations; Goodwill; Group Endeavor; Unanimity; Spiritual Approach and Essential Divinity. Each year a deepening understanding of these subjects and of ourselves is attained.

The rewards of reflective meditation are many. First, it brings increasing proficiency in using the mental instrument; it brings a growing sense of mastery of the mind. This, of course, is reached only by degrees, and we cannot expect to achieve perfection. But even a fair degree of control of the mind is gratifying and most valuable, *for the mind is a bad master, but a most useful servant*. Other results will emerge if we seriously undertake and continue this form of inner action which, finally, should be seen as a necessary preliminary step to the other types of meditation which

will be considered in later Sets. Reflective meditation begins our training in this field of work and lays the foundation for all future achievement.

All the flowers
of all the tomorrows
are in the seeds of today.

Chinese Proverb

Part II THE PRINCIPLE OF GOODWILL

A most encouraging sign in our present confused world, so full of difficult cross-currents and alarming possibilities, is the fact that goodwill is commonly discussed, acknowledged, and advocated. But the familiar is not easy to see with freshness of vision. So it is with goodwill; and all that was said about the phrase “I seek to love, not hate” in Part I applies equally to the subject of goodwill.

All too often goodwill is considered as simple and obvious; something which any well-meaning person takes for granted and uses without much thought—and certainly without much drive. It is believed to be more or less synonymous with a good disposition and a kindly attitude, sometimes carrying overtones of condescension and an inference of patient tolerance towards the shortcomings of others who are tacitly considered as inferior or less developed than ourselves. Or, again, it is thought of as something that makes human contacts smooth and agreeable, an up-to-date substitute, expressed through good manners, for the courtesy which seems to have gone out of fashion. Since none of these popularly held ideas is adequate, it seems important here to call attention to the deeper meanings, the wider implications, and the positive and dynamic character of goodwill.

What, then, is it? Goodwill is a principle; and a principle has been called an “idea of God,” something which gives orientation and direction to our lives, which offers what might be called a measuring rod or a scale of valuation for our attitudes and actions. A principle is a spiritual reality, a truth to which the higher Self, the Soul, in each one of us responds, and it is always keyed to the greatest good for the greatest number. Upon principles are based the great laws and so, in this case, a study of the Principle of Goodwill takes us deeper into the fundamentals of the Law of Right Human Relations.

Now, let us look at the word itself, for its actual structure suggests the several related aspects which are included in it. First, **will**; second, **will-to-good**; third, **goodwill** as distinct from its two

components. An examination of each aspect may help to reveal unexpected dimensions of the concept.

Will is a potent energy—perhaps the most potent existing in the universe. It is the First Aspect of Divinity, the aspect which most directly expresses or indicates the essential nature of that Divinity. It has been said that humanity must achieve three realizations of Divinity, the first being that God is Mind, Intelligence, the Cosmic Mind, which some in modern science have begun to recognize and even to prove; the second is that God is Love, which is the great message—still far from being generally practiced—of the higher religions; the third is that God is Will, and this realization can be said to be only in an embryonic condition in humanity today. The further ***synthetic realization will be that God is an intelligent, loving Will***—synthetic in that it includes the three aspects known or surmised by humanity up to now. There may be others, but for the present it is enough to endeavor to realize these three!

As yet the synthesis—or even the harmony—of the three aspects is sadly lacking in humanity. There is much display of intelligence; much mental activity which has no love in it and which is often used for selfish purposes. There is also much love in its emotional connotation, with little or no intelligence to enlighten and guide it. But most dangerous of all, there is much will in humanity which is not loving at all and is used selfishly in order to achieve personality aims.

The widespread misuses of human power range from authoritarian individuals exerting their will power over their immediate circle of associates, to powerful leaders holding an entire people in abject submission to their bad will. Making a wide generalization, one might say that the present plight of humanity is due chiefly to the fact that those who have will, often have not the will-to-good, and that those who have love have little or no will—they are weak or fearful or lazy. Therefore, realization of the will must be accomplished with the realization of the purpose and direction in which the will is to be used. This, of course, should be towards the good. In other words, the will, in order to be constructive and not destructive, should be a ***will-to-good***. This requires a fairly high

level of development and a true spiritual awareness, but the will-to-good can and does manifest through the personality and when it does it is called ***goodwill***.

Functions and Effects of Goodwill

Goodwill fundamentally promotes harmony and unity, which in humanity finds expression as right human relations. Symbolically speaking, goodwill breaks down barriers and builds bridges, for it stimulates right action between individuals, groups, and peoples. It is a key to new and often unexpected ways of thinking, and there is an interesting reciprocal action between goodwill and understanding. On the one hand goodwill, in eliminating separative reactions and creating lines of communication, fosters understanding; on the other hand, true understanding creates or increases goodwill. Because goodwill dispels fear and evokes trust, true cooperation becomes possible through it. Because it works like a leaven, it can change the psychological atmosphere in personal relations and in any group activity. By eliminating the conflicts and obstructions within ourselves, and between ourselves and others, and in this way increasing harmony and unity, goodwill is effective in healing both individual and social ills.

Implementation of Goodwill

There are two general methods of implementing goodwill. The first is elimination of the obstacles to its free expression; this could be called the negative method, although it demands much positive action in working it out. These obstacles are, chiefly, self-centeredness, resentment, hostility, prejudice, criticism, and intolerance. The elimination of these requires an attitude of self-observation, of sincere self-analysis, and of detached assessment. An initial amount of goodwill is also essential to overcome them and enable goodwill to become a strong force in our lives.

The second method is direct cultivation of the positive qualities, which are for the most part the opposites of the hindrances. The most needed qualities in this respect are compassion, patience, generosity, humility, a sense of brotherhood (up to a cosmic sense of universality), a spirit of service, gratitude. This latter is, perhaps, the least evident as necessary to the implementing of goodwill, and so merits special comment.

Some people find it difficult to feel real gratitude, and even more difficult to express it. Then there are others who are more inclined

to give than to receive, and this attitude, when examined, often turns out to be less commendable than it appears, for in giving—especially if one has plenty—there is a pleasant sense of superiority. Receiving, on the other hand, often causes hurt pride and wounds vanity; this, perhaps, explains the well-known frequent lack of gratitude and goodwill towards a benefactor. There may also be an ambivalence between a loudly expressed gratitude and a more or less concealed resentment. A genuine gratitude, *felt and expressed*, is a positive way to create and increase goodwill.

Very often the lack of active goodwill stems from ignorance and from lack of contact with human sorrow and misery, both physical and psychological. People simply do not realize how much sorrow exists or how many aspects it has. A kind and loving disposition is sometimes conducive to laziness, to taking things easy; therefore direct contact with poverty, illness and the pain of others is frequently needed to galvanize people into action. Young people are particularly open to impacts of this nature, and through contact with suffering and injustice, they, and hopefully all of us, are aroused to recognition of the need for goodwill and service.

Practicing Goodwill in Groups

The techniques for the outer practice of goodwill, particularly in discussions and meetings, are largely those advocated by professionals in the Human Relations field for establishing constructive interpersonal and intergroup relations. They are described in many books, and we can here summarize only a few points:

- a. Examine a problem from every point of view. Include it in a larger frame of reference, a greater “whole”. See its connection to the total situation, recognizing close interdependencies. Consider it from “above”, from a higher level.
- b. Find and establish the points of agreement already existing or easily reachable. Then examine together objectively the points of conflict or disagreement (endeavoring to control emotional factors).

- c. Establish a common goal to be reached, formulate it clearly, keep it ever present, and refer to it often.
- d. Prepare to make partial sacrifices (rightful compromise) in order to achieve the *greater benefit* for all.
- e. Put aside some immediate benefits in favor of future greater returns produced by agreement and cooperation.
- f. Decide what needs to be done and take action, *together*.

Enlightened self-interest can be the motivating factor behind the use of these techniques. Keep in mind, however, that what is truly good for the Self will ultimately be good for all. On a higher level goodwill is motivated by recognition of a reliance on the Laws of Harmony, Justice and Affinity. Through their action good attracts good, generosity evokes generosity.

The Fields of Action of Goodwill

These fields might be visualized as a series of concentric circles. At the center is the individual, each one of us, and, surprising as it may seem, goodwill towards ourselves is precisely where goodwill should begin. Although it might seem that generally we have too much goodwill for ourselves, this is true only superficially and in so far as we are indulgent toward our weaknesses and drives. There is a deeper aspect of the situation. Such indulgence or self-excuse is simply weakness and absence of will, it is not real goodwill toward ourselves; in fact, it is harmful, and by self-indulgence we become our own enemies. In some people there is a curious ambivalence: while they give way to their less commendable desires through weakness of will, they also harbor a sense of self-condemnation or dissatisfaction. This, when strong enough, can develop into a real guilt complex, with consequent self-hate and self-punishment. Clearly, then, there is need for goodwill toward ourselves. This *enlightened* goodwill implies primarily a courageous recognition, arrived at with complete sincerity, of our shortcomings and personality faults. But, on the other hand, we should not judge these failings too harshly; they are part of the general “human condition,” and the constructive and successful way of dealing with them is neither by suppression

of guilt and the making of excuses, nor through self-punishment, but by means of an earnest determination to eliminate them, to grow out of them and transform our personalities. This determination calls for sustained and active goodwill.

The second circle embraces our closest associates—the members of our family. It seems scarcely necessary to emphasize the deep need of goodwill in the relationship between husband and wife and between parents and children.

Then come the successively wider circles that include our everyday contacts—those with whom we work, shop, commute, relax; our neighbors; our classmates and teachers; those who are members of our churches and temples; and if we are in prison, the inmates, staff and visitors.

Still wider circles take in the collective fields of human interaction—communities, nations, continents, and finally, the whole of humanity. In all these relationships let us remember the prime function of understanding. The endeavor to *understand* those with whom we come into contact should be a constant conscious exercise, so that the needed goodwill in interaction with them is built and maintained.

A principle ever to be remembered and put into action is that ***every creative transformation works from within outward***. It is the cultivation of the will-to-good within us that gives us the power and arouses the energy necessary for active demonstration of goodwill in our outer lives.

All these points constitute valuable subjects for meditation. The Tabulation on the following page may also be helpful in this respect, particularly if it is used in connection with the one on ***Right Human Relations in Set I***, for the two will be found to complement each other.