

Radio Talk 4, Station KECA, Los Angeles July, 1951

Many people tell me they cannot meditate.

This seems to me a bit like saying they cannot play the piano after one attempt. Meditation, as in every art or expression, requires constant practice for perfect results.

A truly great pianist, for instance, would feel he could not play his best if he missed one day of practice. If he missed a week or a month of practice he would know that even his most uninitiated audience would recognize his defects.

So it is with meditation.

If we practice daily with joy in this daily habit, we perfect it as an art.

I find that those who complain of the difficulty in meditation do not make it a daily practice, but rather, wait until something pressing appears in their world and then, through an act of will, try to fix their attention on the desired state. But they do not know that meditation is the education of the will, for when will and imagination are in conflict, imagination invariably wins.

The dictionaries define meditation as fixing one's attention upon; as planning in the mind; as devising and looking forward; engaging in continuous and contemplative thought.

A lot of nonsense has been written about meditation. Most books on the subject get the reader nowhere, for they do not explain the process of meditation. All that meditation amounts to is a controlled imagination and a well sustained attention. Simply hold the attention on a certain idea until it fills the mind and crowds all other ideas out of consciousness. The power of attention shows itself the sure guarantee of an inner force. We must concentrate on the idea to be realized, without permitting any distraction. This is the great secret of action.

Should the attention wander, bring it back to the idea you wish to realize and do so again and again, until the attention becomes immobilized and undergoes an effortless fixation upon the idea presented to it. The idea must hold the attention, must fascinate it, so to speak.

All meditation ends at last with the thinker, and he finds he is what he, himself, has conceived. The undisciplined man's attention is the servant of his vision rather than its master. It is captured by the pressing rather than the important.

In the act of meditation, as in the act of adoration, silence is our highest praise.

Let us keep our silent sanctuaries, for in them the eternal perspectives are preserved.

Day by day, week by week, year by year, at times where none through love or lesser intentions were allowed to interfere, I set myself to attain mastery over my attention and imagination. I sought out ways to make more securely my own, those magical lights that dawned and faded within me. I wished to evoke them at will and to be the master of my vision.

I would strive to hold my attention on the activities of the day in unwavering concentration so that, not for one moment, would the concentration slacken. This is an exercise . . . a training for higher adventures of the soul. It is no light labor. The ploughman's labor, working in the fields is easier by far.

Empires do not send legions, so swiftly to obstruct revolt, as all that is alive in us hurries along the nerve highways of the body to frustrate our meditative mood. The beautiful face of one we love glows before us to enchant us from our task. Old enmities and fears beleaguer us. If we are tempted down these vistas, we find, after an hour of musing, that we have been lured away. We have deserted our task and forgotten that fixity of attention we set out to achieve.

What man is there who has complete control of his imagination and attention?

A controlled imagination and steadied attention, firmly and repeatedly focused on the idea to be realized, is the beginning of all magical operations.

If he persists through weeks and months, sooner or later, through meditation, he creates in himself a center of power.

He will enter a path all may travel but on which few do journey. It is a path within himself where the feet first falter in shadow and darkness, but which later is made brilliant by an inner light.

There is no need for special gifts or genius. It is not bestowed on any individual but won by persistence and practice of meditation. If he persists, the dark caverns of his brain will grow luminous and he will set out day after day for the hour of meditation as if to keep an appointment with a lover.

When it comes, he rises within himself as a diver, too long under water, rises to breathe the air and see the light. In this meditative mood he experiences in imagination what he would experience in reality had he realized his goal, that he may in time become transformed into the image of his imagined state.

The only test of religion, worth making, is whether it is trueborn; whether it springs from the deepest consciousness of the individual; whether it is the fruit of experience; or whether it is anything else whatever.

This is my reason for speaking to you on my last Sunday in Los Angeles about The True Religious Attitude. What is your religious attitude? What is my religious attitude? I shall speak on this subject next Sunday morning at 10:30 as Dr. Bailes' guest. The service will be held at the Fox Wilshire Theater on Wilshire Boulevard near La Cienega. I shall endeavor to show you that the methods of mental and spiritual knowledge are entirely different.

For we know a thing mentally by looking at it from the outside, by comparing it with other things, by analyzing and defining it; whereas we can know a thing spiritually only by becoming it. We must be the thing itself and not merely talk about it or look at it. We must be in love if we are to know what love is. We must be God-like if we are to know what God is.

Meditation, like sleep, is an entrance into the subconscious.

“When you pray, enter into your closet, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father which is in secret and your Father which is in secret shall reward you openly.”

Meditation is an illusion of sleep which diminishes the impression of the outer world and renders the mind more receptive to suggestion from within.

The mind in meditation is in a state of relaxation akin to the feeling attained just before dropping off to sleep. This state is beautifully described by the poet, Keats, in his “Ode To A Nightingale. It is said that as the poet sat in the garden and listened to the nightingale, he fell into a state which he described as

“A drowsy numbness pains my senses as though of hemlock I had drunk.”

Then after singing his ode to the nightingale,

Keats asked himself this question,

“Was it a vision or a waking dream?
Fled is the music; do I wake or sleep?”

Those are the words of one who has seen something with such vividness or reality that he wonders whether the evidence of his physical eyes can now be believed.

Any kind of meditation in which we withdraw into ourselves, without making too much effort to think, is an outcropping of the subconscious.

Think of the subconscious as a tide which ebbs and flows. In sleep, it is a flood tide, while at moments of full wakefulness, the tide is at its lowest ebb.

Between these two extremes are any number of intermediary levels.

When we are drowsy, dreamy, lulled in gentle reverie, the tide is high. The more wakeful and alert we become, the lower the tide sinks.

The highest tide compatible with the conscious direction of our thoughts occurs just before we fall asleep and just after we wake.

An easy way to create this passive state is to relax in a comfortable chair or on a bed. Close your eyes and imagine that you are sleepy, so sleepy, so very sleepy. Act precisely as though you were going to take a siesta. In so doing, you allow the subconscious tide to rise to sufficient height to make your particular assumption effective.

When you first attempt this, you may find that all sorts of counter thoughts try to distract you, but if you persist, you will achieve a passive state.

When this passive state is reached, think only on “things of good report” . . imagine that you are now expressing your highest ideal, not how you will express it, but simply feel here and now, that you are the noble one you desire to be.

You are it now.

Call your high ideal into being by imagining and feeling you are it now.

I think all happiness depends on the energy to assume the feeling of the wish fulfilled, to assume the mask of some other, more perfect life. If we cannot imagine ourselves different from what we are and try to assume that second more desirable self, we cannot impose a discipline upon ourselves, though we may accept discipline from others.

Meditation is an activity of the soul; it is an active virtue; and an active virtue, as distinguished from passive acceptance of a code, is theatrical. It is dramatic; it is the wearing of a mask.

As your goal is accepted, you become totally indifferent to possible failure, for acceptance of the end wills the means to the end.

When you emerge from the moment of meditation it is as though you were shown the happy end of a play in which you are the principal actor. Having witnessed the end in your meditation, regardless of any anticlimactic state you encounter, you remain calm and secure in the knowledge that the end has been perfectly defined.

Creation is finished and what we call creativeness is really only a deeper receptiveness or keener susceptibility on our part, and this receptiveness is

“Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts.”

Through meditation, we awaken within ourselves a center of light, which will be to us a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.