

Helping our Neighbor and Promoting Theosophy



An experiment in offering some Theosophical principles
to the public in simplified and practical form

The Theosophical Society in Israel



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HELPING OUR NEIGHBOUR AND PROMOTING THEOSOPHY

BY

THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY IN ISRAEL

Helping our Neighbour

An experiment in offering some Theosophical principles to the public in simplified and practical form
by The Theosophical Society in Israel

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Foreword

Most philanthropic organizations focus on helping others by giving economic and material assistance. These organizations do the practical work of providing food, clothing, housing assistance, medical instruments, equipment, and medicinal help for the needy. There are also organizations that integrate psychological and rehabilitative aid for at-risk target populations such as marginal youth, battered women, and other such groups in precarious psychological situations.

This is indeed excellent, yet a vast majority of our society isn't considered poor or at a point of emotional collapse, but are very much in need of one thing that is quiet rare in our time: peace of mind. Who helps with that? Who provides tools to cope with tension, anxiety, anger, guilt feelings, and lack of self-esteem for the countless number of people who never learned such tools in school or for whom psychological counseling or workshops to raise awareness are beyond their reach?

Relatively simple tools and knowledge can empower any persons to help themselves in times of difficulty and distress. The individual's quality of life, as well as the quality of life in our society, would rise significantly if people would learn how to

calm themselves and release negative thoughts about themselves and others. What wonderful things would happen to our society if more and more people learned to channel destructive energy from their anger into constructive avenues?

Many of us don't understand that through negative thought patterns and erroneous beliefs, we ourselves create the difficulties in our lives. Imagine how our society would be if more and more people understood that their lives actually reflect their thought patterns.

The source of many problems in our society is that people do not learn to listen to others or to themselves. If we can become aware of the need to listen and learn to do so, we will be better able to understand others and ourselves - thus changing our lives accordingly.

To what extent do we weaken ourselves by emphasizing our failures and character faults - thereby minimizing our belief in ourselves, our strength, and our power? To what extent do we depend on the opinions of others for our own self-concept and remain unaware of our ability to find our own self-value and inner strength?

Every member of the Theosophical Society should be familiar with the inscription on the temple at Delphi: "Know thyself." The work suggested in this booklet is for those who are willing to look inside and recognize the emotional and mental patterns that govern their life and behavior.

Harmful emotions are outer expressions of hidden patterns of thoughts and beliefs. They are messengers from within, symptoms of the separative and disharmonious tendencies we

hold within us. We cannot change if we are not willing to see and experience our emotional states, even when these are painful. This can be done only when we learn to look within without judgment. To allow space for our emotions and make peace with them is also the best way to transform their destructive energy.

AWARENESS IS THE KEY

Society's greatest problem is one of awareness and not of economic resources. With all its importance, economic wealth is not what creates a society of calm, caring, responsible, and understanding people. The message for all those open to a change in their lives is this: Come, let's stop running away from ourselves. Let's become aware of the emotional and mental lenses through which we view ourselves and others.

Awareness is the key to creating a strong, moral society with values, a society where people are aware of the motivations, drives, emotions, and mental patterns that influence their conduct.

Developing awareness is a process that gradually leads to the release of negative mental and emotional patterns that are the source of suffering and dysfunctional relations with others.

As people learn to be less judgmental and to listen, inwardly and outwardly, they will start sensing that which is beautiful and good within themselves as well as in others. They will also increase their ability to be at peace and find greater satisfaction and enjoyment in their lives.

This booklet is intended for all readers but especially for community group-leaders who are willing to learn in order to teach, to receive in order to give, and for those whose motivation is the love of man and the desire to lessen suffering by teaching people how they can help themselves.



Abraham Oron, The Theosophical Society in Israel, March, 2012



Israeli General Secretary Abraham Oron (second from the left - second row) and workers of the Israeli Section who contributed to this wonderful experiment

Introduction

This paper deals with some of the problems which are encountered by the Sections and Lodges of the Theosophical Society:

1. How can we draw the interest of the philosophically inclined to Theosophy?
2. How can we offer the practical teachings of Theosophy on meditation, awareness, and dealing with harmful thoughts and emotions as a service to the communities within which we live, and thus gain their trust/confidence in the relevance of Theosophy and prepare them gradually for its deeper teachings?
3. How can we give more of our members a chance to gain experience in teaching, beginning with the simpler aspects of Theosophy?

At the Israeli TS we deal with these problems by offering the public a five-day workshop named "Learning to Help Ourselves", in addition to our introductory course on Theosophy. The objective of this program is to teach ways of coping with the distress and hardships of life using mindfulness and attentiveness as tools. The subjects studied in this program are as follows:

- Calming and releasing negative thoughts
- Ways of coping with and releasing anger and fear

- Understanding how we create the difficulties in our lives through wrong thinking and beliefs
- Exercising attentiveness, concentration and mindful listening - toward ourselves and others
- Believing in ourselves - finding our self value and inner strength

In this workshop we emphasize that all harmful emotions have their roots in ignorance and a sense of separateness. Ignorance of the power of our thoughts and desires creates harmful feelings and emotions. Since 2008 we have given about 20 workshops almost free of charge to about 200 participants, most of whom encountered Theosophy for the first time.

As a result, the participation in our introductory courses on Theosophy has increased and in the last two years we have had 8 courses with 98 participants, with quite a few of them willing to continue with their study of Theosophy and to train themselves to become volunteer facilitators at these workshops.

Popularizing Theosophy

We believe that the Masters expect us to be more innovative in promoting Theosophy and showing its relevance to every field of life. For example, how can a study of Theosophy help us to deal with our anger, fear, hatred or addiction; how the Theosophical teachings on the nature of emotion and thought, and meditation and the nature of consciousness can help us to deal more effectively with our harmful emotions and thoughts.

Introduction

Here is an excerpt from the Maha Chohan letter about popularizing Theosophy:

For our doctrines to practically react on the so-called moral code, or the ideas of truthfulness, purity, self-denial, charity, etc., we have to preach and popularize a knowledge of Theosophy. It is not the individual and determined purpose of attaining Nirvana - the culmination of all knowledge and absolute wisdom, which is, after all, only an exalted and glorious selfishness - but the self-sacrificing pursuit of the best means to lead on the right path our neighbor, to cause to benefit by it as many of our fellow-creatures as we possibly can, which constitutes the true Theosophist.

Are we in "... *the self-sacrificing pursuit of the best means to lead on the right path our neighbor, to cause to benefit by it as many of our fellow-creatures as we possibly can ...*"? We, the branches of the TS in the world, have to try to make Theosophy more understandable and practical for the average man and woman.

Some of the Leading Principles of the Workshop

The following are some of the principles which we teach and which I feel are in harmony with the principles of Theosophy:

1. Harmful emotions are outer expressions of hidden patterns of thoughts and beliefs. They are messengers from within, symptoms of the separative and disharmonious tendencies we hold within us. In other words, when you feel bad or when you do not have peace of mind following an action or event, then you need to look inside and see the attitudes underlying these feelings.
2. All harmful emotions are created through our ignorance of the creative power of our consciousness. By believing that a thought is true and by repeating it, we strengthen it and create a correspondingly strong emotion that becomes an automatic reaction to thoughts or events that trigger these thoughts.
3. Our character is the result of hidden patterns of thoughts and beliefs. By discovering these hidden patterns and the suffering they cause us we can start changing them.
4. We cannot change if we are not willing to see and experience our emotional states, even when these are painful. Usually we run away from unpleasant feelings, and that is why we are stuck

with the emotions that produce this feeling. I feel that this is what Krishnamurti meant when he spoke about running away from "what is".

5. We have to learn to differentiate between the consciousness, the witness/spectator, and the emotions. This can be done only when we learn to look within without judgment. If we can do this, then we can observe our emotional states without being emotional, and feel our emotions without hating them or ourselves. This is the beginning of real self-knowledge.

6. This kind of observation, in which we make space for our emotions and make peace with them, is also the best way to transform their destructive energy. If in addition we can bring to our observation some warmth and empathy for this part of ourselves which is stuck in anger or in fear, then in my experience the transformation can be really rapid.



7. Whenever we observe our emotions from a separative attitude we strengthen their destructive energy. If we do not hate our anger or fear, and we accept that we are still human, it helps us to investigate into the deeper causes of these feelings and learn how to transform them.

Go out to the sufferer and relieve his pain, but relieving his pain, let it wring your own heart, and let it remain there as a constant suffering until the cause of that pain has been removed. That is the first stage of non-separateness. Identify yourself with the sorrows and the joys of the world; let the sorrow of every one be your sorrow, the pain of every one your pain, the joy of every one your joy.

Annie Besant

Following are some of the detailed teachings of the five workshops:

Opening Words and Defining Lesson Objectives

You came to this meeting to learn how to relax and to release negative thoughts. Most of us have relatively short moments of peace and frequent moments of tension and stress. We all experience periods of edginess, negative thinking, unrest and fear. These reflect the anxieties and lack of tranquility of living in our time. Frequently it is difficult for us to even sit peacefully and we often find that our contracted muscles hold the tension. Sound familiar?! These things are not said to make life heavier, but rather to become cognizant of the situation and, most important, to learn how to get out of this situation and experience tranquility. Although there is no magic wand that liberates us from negative thinking and stress, there are ways and tools to help us return to balance and a sense of peacefulness.

The main idea is to create the quiet within us. When there is no quiet, the mind becomes agitated, bringing out anxiety and negative thoughts. The creation of quiet or stillness within quiets and clears the lake of our emotions. That doesn't mean that there is no "mud" in it. It's there, but it settles on the lakebed, waiting to be cleaned out at a later date. When the waters are tranquil and the "emotional mud" has settled we can experience moments of inner clarity.

** It is very important to guide these exercises in a clear loud voice.*

1. Exercises to release tension from the body by lengthening muscles (standing or sitting for those who find standing difficult)

Note: All exercises should not exceed each person's level of comfort and not cause pain.

2. Breathing Exercises (seated):

Begin by placing your hands on your abdomen and exhale three light exhales through your mouth. As you exhale through your mouth, imagine that you are blowing a feather away from your face. Your abdomen empties and is drawn in.

Inhale air through your nose, filling your abdomen, your chest (you can count 1, 2, 3) and imagine that you smell an exquisite flower.

Lesson 1

Calming and Releasing Negative Thoughts

Take a short break. Repeat each breathing cycle 4-5 times. Finish with a sense of free and natural breathing.

Close your eyes (allow open eyes for those who are more comfortable). Breathe normally...observe your breathing without influencing it ... be alert to the feeling in the area of the nostrils - feel the cool air enter the nostrils on their way to your lungs and the warmer air go out from the lungs to your nostrils.

If thoughts arise, let them pass and gently, softly return to breathing. Place your attention only on your breathing ... Begin to feel the breathing as your chest rises and falls ... feel your abdomen rise and fall.

Our breath becomes quieter and quieter ... the quiet penetrates inwards throughout your whole body ... to all the cells, tissues and organs.

The quiet penetrates into your mind - to your thoughts and emotions. As breathing becomes increasingly soft, relaxing and still - we experience the grace and loveliness of peace in our minds and bodies ... Enable yourselves to lock this sensation of peace and stillness into your memories to be available in times of distress ... Remember this sensation and become calm.

Slowly we begin to return to awareness ... We feel our body and our breathing, the environment in the room ... Slowly we exit the state of meditation.

1. Why do we experience stress, tension, lack of calm, disquiet and negative thoughts? There are three reasons:

(a) Attachments - We hold on - we are attached to out- comes. We come in with life experience of expectations, desires and yearnings that we have difficulty releasing; we form attachments and dependencies on outcomes, things, places and people. In short we chain ourselves and others.

(b) We are not living mindfully. We live our life in an un- focused, scattered manner without a sense of presence.

(c) We relate to others, to events and to ourselves in a negative manner.



2. What we need to learn in order to reach tranquility, quiet, peace? Where is the answer?

a. Letting go / Detachment.

When our attitude is that of grasping then we experience contraction. When we release we create expansion.

Contraction = tension, being closed-up, suffering, pain. (There is also positive tension in our lives that stimulates us.)

Expansion = pleasure, joy, freedom. The mind and body influence each other. When the mind contracts the body also contracts and we become stressed, uncomfortable and feel bad. When our body is tense and our muscles are tight, there is a constriction in the body's flow of blood and energy which then radiates negatively on the mind.

The body and mind remember - each time we are drawn into negative emotions (jealousy, hate, anger, etc.) our inner stress deepens causing more muscles to remain contracted.

We form attachments when we want something very much or when we resist something undesired or uncomfortable.

We can begin with muscle relaxation. The physical relaxation provides a temporary pause, a space for a comfortable, pleasant feeling so that we can then do some deeper inner work.

Let's do some relaxation exercises using guided imagery:
Contraction, Release, Deep Breathing

Take a deep breath ... tighten gently the muscles in your feet, your calves, and thighs. Feel the contraction ... release and relax muscles gently ... do the same for each of the following: the pelvic area, stomach, diaphragm, chest, back, hands and the

length of the arms, and face. Observe your breathing as you allow your breath to return to normal ... Let it flow without intervention ... feel your breath ...

Releasing tension and worry - (two versions)

We breathe a little more deeply than normal and focus on the sensation of the releasing of breath through our nostrils. We continue with it for some time, and gradually we will start feeling the sensation of release in our body and mind.

Visualizing spaciousness - After relaxing the body and doing deep breathing, visualize something very spacious ... the sky, the sea, the desert, the view from a high mountain ...

And as we continue to visualize this space, the sense of spaciousness will gradually appear within us, and stress and worry will dissolve.

b. Being Mindful and with Presence

The objective is to go from dispersion to concentration, to live from an attitude in which we are connected to our life experiences. Thus we can experience joy in situations that in the past were a burden and caused distress and disquiet.

How do we connect with what we are doing and live in peace? By being present, mindful, paying attention, being aware, alert and making conscious decisions.

When we do things, even routine things, with alertness and presence, we feel whole, connected and at peace. On the contrary, when our attention is divided and/or scattered (not alert) we experience superficiality, shallowness and feel disconnected from our activities, others and ourselves.

Actions from a place of wholeness, attention and alertness to what we are doing do not leave any space for worry or negative thoughts.

Let us not allow thoughts of doubt in ourselves or criticisms of ourselves and others to take roots in us.

Lack of awareness and attention enable these thoughts to overwhelm us (to rise up from memories) and cause a lack of peace and tranquility.

Let's try some exercises in mindfulness (attentiveness):

Listening within - Listen to the noises outside (the street, the office), the noises of the room (the breathing of people, the ticking of the clock), the noises of our body (breathing, heart beats), to our thoughts and the emotions that accompany them

...

Focused and attentive/mindful repetition of words that bring serenity: Silently say in your hearts "Peace ... serenity ... silence ... tranquility ... stillness"

Repeat this exercise a number of times.

c. Positive and appropriate attitude toward events, others and ourselves

The basis for an appropriate attitude is found in behavior that follows the two previous ideas and their recommended exercises.

Daily practice will bring strength and intention to the proper attitude. The third component is in-depth work to understand the reasons for our negative attitude.

The proper attitude is expressed by positive behavior standards: brotherhood, attentiveness to others and oneself, moral living standards, and avoidance of: gossip, bigotry, criticism, hatred, jealousy and envy.

Can we expect peace and tranquility if we are filled with pretension, greed, covetousness, anger and hatred?

Summary Exercise

Sit comfortably and take a deep breath into your shoulder area ... Release any tension and contraction that may be there. Take another deep breath into your shoulders and release tension and stress. Take a deep breath into your back and release the tension that is there with the exhalation.

With each breath the body feels more open ... Breath again into your back

Take a deep breath while you concentrate on your chest area ... Release the breath and with it all the worries and heaviness that you hold there ... Breathe again to the heart area and feel relief...feel it lighten. Take a deep breath to your abdomen. Can you feel the tension and contraction there? Release it and breathe again into that area. Continue for the pelvic area, the legs and the arms ...

Breathe normally ... As your breath slowly relaxes, your body relaxes and opens ... you feel wider within yourself. There is more space within you.

Visualize a spacious expanse as desired - the sea/ desert / a view looking out from a high place ... visualize the experience of expansion: an open, accepting space that contains external noises.

External open spaces perceived outside us cause us to expand within. It enables us to receive, to be at peace with ourselves, to receive, to love ourselves just the way we are. When we expand inside, we can accept even those places that are shrunken and contracted within us; we can be at peace with our feelings. If worries arise, we can accept them without resistance, just observing them with empathy. If criticism or judgments arise - we can just look at them ... From the quiet, still place look inside ... into your selves ... see what is possible to change ... to improve your attitudes ... to be honest and genuine ... with a big, accepting heart that can contain rather than struggle ... feel complete inside. With acceptance come peace, tranquility, calm and stillness.

Before we finish - we shall send light, love and healing ... Give thanks for the help that we receive, for the light, for the knowledge, for the privilege given to us to serve ... Each, according to his or her rhythm will come out of the meditation ...



Lesson 2

Ways to Release and Cope with Anger and Fear

What are emotions?
Emotions are ENERGY!

We are able to transmit emotions from person to person. When we enter a room filled with people we feel the atmosphere - if it is comfortable or charged or laden with discomfort. The energy (motivating force, activity) of emotions carries information to the body and when it hits a body, the body reacts to it.

We become aware of an emotion the moment it finds expression in the body.

Negative Emotions cause contraction - we can experience difficulty breathing or discomfort in the abdomen, diaphragm, throat, etc. This energy collects in the muscle tissue, wears out our bodies and causes great damage. On the contrary Positive Emotions expand - More blood and energy flows through the body and as a result, we feel good. Each emotion has its own vibration and each vibration influences our body in different ways: Vibrations cause our nervous system to activate our glands and our muscles to contract or expand. We identify each emotion by the physical feeling it creates: Emotions like anger, bitterness and jealousy influence our bodies differently than joy, affection, etc.

There are a few basic emotions that we are "programmed for", so to speak: fear, anger, jealousy, love, attachment, attraction to pleasure and repulsion to pain and suffering. Other emotions, like hate, are learned and are based on the above basic emotions.



Emotions are messages from the mind - information on what is happening within the mind. If I feel hatred, what does it say about what is going on within the mind? It indicates that the object I hate hurt me in the past and I have a memory of the pain or that it threatened me for some reason and I am afraid of it. In other words, we hate things that hurt us and frighten us.

Before we go deeply into today's topic, let's do a relaxation exercise and connect to our breathing. We shall repeat the

process we did last week. It is strongly recommended that you make this a part of your daily life, practicing it each morning or evening (and preferably twice daily). Part of the process of coping with anger and fear begins with calming your physical body. Consciously relax your muscles; look at and observe your body and any negative feelings that arise. When you give these your attention you become mindful, letting things arise as part of the process of release and relaxation.

What is anger?

Anger is a survival mechanism. Its role is to mobilize energy for the body to achieve something or to prevent something. Anger is a vibration that passes information to your body that you must achieve or prevent something! Anger is fear that gives the illusion of power.

Anger can reflect a repeated failure to actualize desires. It can also stem from fear that we want to prevent something but are not able to do so. Fear can hide under the anger; fear's message is that we lack self-confidence and don't believe in ourselves.

Repeated anger turns into an emotional pattern. Emotional patterns become stronger when they are repeated. The more we are pulled into the emotional pattern of anger - accompanied by non-objective thoughts saturated with insults, fear, jealousy - the more empowered the anger becomes. (This process is also true in the case of positive emotions, like affection.)

It is important to understand that aspirations, ambitions and expectations are instructions imprinted on our emotional brains and are programmed to be survival motivated - to achieve or prevent something. All desire or lack of desire, or reservations turn into standing orders imprinted on the subconscious and will

be activated by all events that stimulate it. Thus our thoughts, anger and fears are programmed by our pasts: The anger "program" takes over our body when obstacles to our achieving pleasure or avoiding pain appear. In extreme situations a person may lose control to the point that he even doesn't remember what he did.



The deeper the desire and expectation for pleasure imprinted on our emotional brains through thoughts and imagination, the greater the disappointment when they are not satisfied and the more anger fills us. The amount of disappointment equals the amount of expectations. The same is true for the need to avoid pain. As in a lake, the winds of desire awaken waves; the stronger the desires, the stronger the storm winds. After the storm passes, the waves continue their motion; in other words, patience is needed! It takes time for the mind to become calm.

How do we cope with anger and its harmful influence?

We shall divide the answer into two parts:

(a) Short term or Immediate work - We can release excess harmful energy resulting from some event that caused anger through strenuous physical activity (i.e. going for a walk, jogging, cleaning the house, etc.) The physical release does not dissolve the anger, but it relaxes us and enables us to work with the inner anger later on. Until we release the anger at a physical level, the body stays filled with energy and restlessness - which prevents further work. When we are aware that anger is beginning to arise, we should distance ourselves from the situation and not be drawn into it. To alleviate anger we should activate the awareness of our 'inner observer', identify the event and connect ourselves first with the sensations of our physical body. This way we won't be lost within our emotions.

Let's do an Anger Awareness exercise

Sit comfortably. Close your eyes and breathe deeply. As I inhale - I am aware of the anger. As I exhale I accept the anger.

As I inhale - I am aware of the anger in my body. As I exhale I release the anger from my body.

(b) Long term Coping - Learning to observe the anger, without being emotional.

Inner observation without emotionality helps us accept the emotion of anger and make peace with it. In other words, we allow the anger response to appear as a bodily sensation, we accept it and observe it without anger.

Alert, aware observation of and connection to the body are part of the process of avoiding being drawn into the negative thought

pattern that strengthens anger.

Let's allow ourselves to be in the now regarding our physical bodies. Look at the anger, be an observer; look at it from a distance and understand that this anger isn't you - you control it - it doesn't control you. It is very important not to identify yourself with the anger.

(Instead of "I am angry", think or say "I feel anger").

Connect to your feelings and allow yourself to experience the emotion without emotionality. This is how we release an emotion. Understanding and empathy for ourselves releases us from our distressful emotional load and enables us to experience the emotions surrounding the anger from a broad and objective place.

After becoming calm we ask ourselves - What awakened the anger? When a person arouses anger within us, is it possible that something in his/her behavior reminds us of ourselves and we are actually projecting our discomfort with ourselves upon that person?! If something in another person angers me, it is a sign that it touched a sensitive spot within me.

Non-critical self acceptance also leads to accepting others as they are.

If we are angered when we are criticized, we check to see if there is truth in it. If so, we can learn from it and if not, then why get angry?!

One way to dissolve anger at another (usually when it involves a close or significant other) is to enter his/her shoes and try to see things from his/her perspective. It's possible that he/she behaved that way with no intention to harm you; or the behavior came from his/her own distress and he/she actually needs your

compassion and your empathy.

We will examine our world view and behavior when negative thoughts arise regarding a particular situation and try to see something beneficial and positive there.

Converting Negative Thoughts to Positive ones

Is a specific person who arouses the anger within me a completely bad person? Could it be that he has something good? Is the world black or white? We expect others to relate to us with understanding and consideration. Are we always understanding and considerate?

We have already mentioned that behind the anger lies fear!

1. What is fear?

Fear, like anger, is an emotion.

Fear's message is:

I don't believe in myself - I am not confident in myself.

Fear is a survival tool and its role is to warn and distance us from potentially dangerous things and situations. Being careful to survive is fine; the problem is when we become stuck in the fear and it becomes a substitute for awareness. When we are in an aware state, we are mindful and do not need paralyzing fear to protect us.

2. What are we afraid of?

~ Recommendation: Open the discussion for sharing with the whole group and write points raised on the blackboard.

Anticipated answers: The fear itself, the unknown, loss,

separation, rejection, pain, illness, old age, death, closed places

...

~ Summarize what was said:

What the above points have in common is the fear of possible pain and the fear of the loss of pleasure. Our imaginations empower the fear by fuelling them. Imagination relies on personal experience and is also nurtured by the media that uses fear messages to increase its circulation and/ or rating.



~ To demonstrate, ask the participants the following questions:

What physical and mental sensations accompany fear? In the body: contraction, shaking, immobilization, butterflies in the stomach, heavy breathing. In the mind: disquiet, tension, stress,

restless thoughts, and a desire to escape or run away. When we are in the thrall of fear our lives are enchained. The fear causes us to shut ourselves off, building around us a prison. It kills us again and again. Where fear is in control, no love can exist.

3. What increases fear?

Rejection and repression of fear simply increase it. The struggle within us just makes the fear grow.

The wilder our imagination, the stronger the fear becomes.

- Negative thoughts are fear's elixir of life.
 - Exhaustion and low energy levels.
 - Loneliness (as opposed to being alone, with oneself.)
- It is important to ask these questions so that we will know what to avoid and how to cope effectively with fear.

4. How to cope with fear? How do we transmute it (transform it into something else)?

Short term: When we encounter a situation that frightens us (darkness, dangerous situations) - focus on your body (be mindful of your walking, your breath, etc.) and don't be drawn into thoughts and imaginations. Be conscious, aware and alert. This lessens the power of fear and enables us to find a solution.

In-depth work to transmute fear: The most important thing is to awaken the desire to release the fear. Be aware when fear arises and allow yourself to look at it, experience it, don't run away from the fear. Go inward ... into it. "Never run from your fears. When they finally catch up with you, you will be too tired to cope with them".

Divide the sensation of fear into its factors and examine your physical and mental situations when you are afraid. Connect with your feelings and do not get lost within your thoughts and/or imagination.

Examine the fear - Does the fear belong to the past? If so, there is no reason to fear it today. Is this a rational fear? If yes, we should examine what can be done to prevent that fearful event from happening.

Do what should be done and release the fear! If nothing can be done, make friends with the fear and be with it in peace rather than struggle with it. We can look at the fear as a kind of distress signal within us; part of us is in distress and needs assistance.

It is impossible to destroy fear because it is energy (that doesn't evaporate), but it is possible to change its vibration and make peace with the fear. How?

We shall learn to turn the negative thoughts that fuel fear into positive beliefs. We shall exercise seeing the positive side of situations and people that until now, we saw as only negative. This is the way we transmute difficult life situations from threats to challenges. The true solution to the problem of fear is KNOW YOURSELF in the deepest manner! Everything that has been said so far is a part of that knowing. You can learn this in the course "Insights and Tools for Awareness and Spiritual Development", which is the Israeli Theosophical Society's basic course.

Meditation including the process of coping with fear (15 minutes)

Observe your body, your feelings, be present in the now ... don't get lost in thoughts. Now we just look at our- selves ... go within.

Allow an experience of fear or anger that you have experienced to arise ... Let yourself feel it ... with all your senses ... Let yourself experience again what you felt then ... enclose these feelings, contain them ... without trying to change them ... just look at them ... be with them.



Be aware of your breath ... breath normally - don't breathe particularly deeply. Inhale - I am aware of the fear. Exhale - I accept the fear with compassion. Feel and clarify to yourself - what it means to accept - without struggle or resistance.

Slowly, within the process of awareness and acceptance, make peace with this feeling ... with that place of distress within you ... Connect to the little child you were and help him/her release the anger/fear ... through love. If it is difficult to feel love, think of someone that you love and then direct that feeling of love to that

place of distress within you ... Think of the people close to you and send them love.

Lesson 3

How We Create the Difficulties in Our Lives

Thoughts and emotions are the basis for all our actions and deeds - "The final result begins with a thought."

Everything we create is created first in our thoughts. Thought is the drawing board for planning a house and without it we couldn't even raise our arm. All the creations we see around us (table, airplanes, houses, paintings) are all the result of thought.

We are the product of our thoughts - "You are your thoughts." All our habits are products of firmly established thoughts. Thoughts create our character. Our thought patterns influence our bodies' state of health. The way we perceive events in our lives causes us to be happy or, on the contrary, to suffer. When we think negative thoughts, suffering follows us "like a wagon follows a horse." When we think positively, joy accompanies us.

Thoughts are powerful creators of our reality and experiences

The objective of today's lesson is to become aware of the power of thought - and to learn how to direct our thoughts to positively influence the quality of our lives. How does thought influence our everyday behavior?

Beliefs and opinions create reality!

Thought patterns create behavior patterns. "The world is what we think it is," says Serge King in his book, *Imagineering for Health*. To understand this idea, we must differentiate between fact and opinion. A fact is something that influences all people (life, gravity, natural disasters, birth, death, earth, air, heat, cold, electricity, etc.) Facts are things that are - and there are relatively few. Facts are not changeable! They can be maneuvered and used but they cannot be changed.

Belief or opinion is an idea about a fact, an interpretation we give to the fact. Our beliefs (thought patterns or the way we perceive reality) are formed after events - primarily those that took place during childhood - and afterwards they influence how we view our lives. We internalize this interpretation and it becomes fact for us. The moment we internalize the interpretation it is imprinted on our subconscious and becomes a guiding belief (as though it were a fact).

Beliefs continue to influence us as long as we accept them and believe in them. Our opinions and beliefs have great power since our opinions about life determine how we feel, what we do, what our relationships look like, etc. Opinions and Beliefs are different from facts in that they ARE CHANGEABLE. When our opinions change, our experience of the facts also changes.

Let us test this with an exercise:

Let's propose different opinions regarding a particular fact, for example - Life is a fact. Opinions or ideas about life can be "Life is hard." What other opinions or beliefs are there about life?

Every opinion/belief determines the experience of its owner. If our beliefs about life are actually the lenses through which we view the world, then this is the connection formed between life

(the fact) and our opinion of it. Our opinions don't let us look freely at what is - we see only what is compatible with them. Moreover, we receive confirmation from our surroundings about the way we relate to the events in our lives because we seek them.



Everything that we believe and feel strongly about attracts what we believe in - for good or for bad, and brings it to us. Frequently, people are not aware of their beliefs nor are they willing to admit that it is so. However, one's beliefs are expressed in one's life, like the examples you brought up. It is also important to note that people can camouflage behavior patterns when they know that they are not acceptable or popular behavior patterns.

We create our beliefs, establish them and they turn into behavior patterns. How does this happen?

We give enormous strength to our beliefs by repetitive thoughts and ignoring what doesn't suit our view of reality. For example: A teacher shows two children that they failed a test. One child doesn't practice, study or receive support at home, accepts that failing the test means he is a failure and this stays with him his whole life. Each time he faces a challenge - he already "knows" that he has no chance of succeeding and behaves accordingly - as a loser. The more frequently the belief in being a failure arises from the subconscious, the stronger it becomes and turns into reality. The second child has a good opinion of himself and believes in his abilities. He associates his failure on the test to the fact that he didn't study enough and was unprepared. He will also come to conclusions - to study more for the next test.

Beliefs are instructions for our subconscious that awaken the behavior patterns that direct our lives. When we are in the midst of some incident that awakens a belief "program" that is imprinted in our subconscious, behavior patterns erupt as if we are on automatic pilot. If our thoughts are positive - that's great. We are healthier, happier and more successful. On the other hand, negative thoughts weaken us and are not beneficial. We DO NOT HAVE TO keep these negative, harmful thoughts. Since WE CREATE our beliefs and thought patterns, WE are the ones who can CHANGE them.

How can we help ourselves and improve the quality of our life?

STEP 1: Identify Beliefs

Negative beliefs can be changed from a place of observation and awareness. We can identify the firmly established beliefs

that direct our behavior only if we are aware of them. That means we must live with awareness. Although identifying the negative beliefs that influence our behavior isn't necessarily simple, we must identify them before we can change them.



Here are some examples:

- If your health is poor, look for beliefs that interfere with your getting better. For example, "When you are sick you receive more attention and affection" or "Illness releases you from responsibility" or "Life is suffering - My life is terrible" - A person who lives a life of economic difficulties apparently has beliefs that prevent him from earning money, for example: "I am a failure and can't succeed, so why bother to try ..." Time is money. Since time is limited,

so is money. Conclusion - it doesn't matter how much I work, I'll never have enough money ..." or "I am a good person and money is bad ..." The thought that money is bad causes unconscious actions that prevent us from earning money.

- An old acquaintance passes me on the street and ignores me. If I believe that he did this on purpose, it will hurt me. But if I think that he simply didn't see me ... it won't.

Problems are caused by opposing ideas. One idea that causes most of our problems is based on notion: "should be" which is different from what is. A conflict is created between the desired outcome (what SHOULD BE) and what usually happens (WHAT IS). This conflict creates tension and a lack of satisfaction. For example:

- A mother believes that cleaning the house is not pleasant (a belief that she indirectly passes on to her daughters). On the other hand, she also believes that her children SHOULD keep their rooms clean and orderly. The children don't straighten their rooms and the mother is frustrated since things aren't as they SHOULD BE. She is not aware that her beliefs about housework were transmitted in her own behavior and are contrary to her demands from her children. She is the source of her lack of satisfaction.

Let's examine ourselves for a moment. When I use the word "should", does it cause me to contract or expand? Generally, when we say SHOULD tension forms, which expresses a dissatisfaction resulting from the gap between what is and what we think SHOULD or NEEDS to be done.

SHOULD BE has the power to negatively influence our health

and effectiveness in all areas of life. One of the most frequent SHOULD BE ideas is expressed in shouting "It's not fair". The belief behind that feeling could be that "Life SHOULD BE the way I want it to be." What do you think of changing the belief to "Life CAN be what I want it to be"? The first defeats positive efforts, the second encourages them.



Let's Practice Identifying Beliefs

Let's think about someone we know, who has a repetitive behavior pattern that creates difficulties in his/her life. What beliefs does this person have that are behind the behavior pattern that you pinpointed. (Write down what arises.)

After attempting to identify beliefs in another, can you examine

and identify your own beliefs. It is very important to adopt 'inward observation' as a part of your life-style.

STEP 2: Releasing Negative Beliefs

The process of releasing beliefs is composed of the following elements:

1. Avoid nourishing the belief that you want to release. Be alert to what happens within you when you allow yourself to be pulled back into defective patterns.

2. Define a new positive belief (affirmation) according to the following rules:

- No negative words are to be used in your affirmation.
- Your affirmation will describe exactly what you want to experience NOW, the situation you want to be in NOW.
- Your affirmation will be formulated in the first person.
- Your affirmation will be short and concise - one or two sentences at the most.
- It is desirable that your positive belief be a result of a deep examination of your beliefs and relate to different areas of your life.

3. Assimilating the new positive thought pattern in our subconscious enables new behavior patterns. How do we assimilate? In a relaxed or meditative state we re-experience various aspects of the new belief as though they were occurring just now. We do so with focused intention combined with intense positive emotions to awaken the desire for the change to succeed. At the same time, in our everyday life, being aware of actions that reflect our new beliefs is important and the repetition reinforces and empowers us.

Repeating the belief can be done in several ways:

- We can repeat this process in a relaxed or meditative state when the subconscious is more open to change.

Or:

- We can breathe in the new, positive belief 10 times a day for at least 21 consecutive days. Before sleep we breathe in our affirmative sentence into us. Afterwards we remind ourselves of the beneficial belief regularly - in moderation, without overdoing it.

Note: Excess can lead to fixation, which can cause the new thought pattern to enslave us. We can create new positive thought patterns but should never become enslaved by them.

4. Assimilating new behavior patterns:

- Choose a negative habit (behavior pattern) that you want to change
- Define a positive habit in its place
- Behave according to its definition for 10 days and think intentionally and with emotion - how the previous habit was bad and harmful and how good, pleasant and beneficial the new habit is.

5. Guided Imagery Work:

Meditation facilitating the change process (approx. 15 minutes)

- We choose a characteristic situation in which we frequently find ourselves and which ends in an unpleasant feeling that we want to change.
- See the frustrating situation using your imagination, feel it as it happens ...

- In the relaxed or meditative state, we repeat softly, within us, for a few minutes the affirmation or new positive belief, that we formulated before, letting it sink into our subconscious.

- Imagine the situation differently - positively ... with all those involved acting with good will and brotherhood, all those involved leave the situation feeling rewarded ... Feel the feelings of joy that the change arouses in us. We sense the sweet joy of success within us.



Anchoring the influence of meditation and a summary of insights from the lesson. (5-7 minutes)

It's a good idea to repeat this meditation several times until you

see a difference in how you relate to the situation you worked on ... like other situations in your life. It is important to emphasize that this is an experience that is contrary to our past experiences; we imprint it into our subconscious with feelings of joy.

Everything we believe in and give emotional strength to attracts what we believe toward us. Thought, desire and passion create opportunity - when we believe we are worthy of something, we will succeed at it. The release of beliefs is a process that demands focused intention and time because beliefs from the past still work on us. It is very important not to be disappointed if the change is not immediate, and to continue working as we learned.

Unless our hearts are throbbing with sympathy, unless we feel as they feel, and see as they see, we cannot help people. For we do not help them from outside but from inside, as we enter more and more into their hearts and minds, and live on that plane whence we can, in some proportion, pour our strength into them and enable them to share in that which we have achieved.

Annie Besant



Lesson 4

Practicing Attentiveness, Concentration and Mindful Listening toward Ourselves and Others

In the earlier sessions we learned how to be attentive to a situation we are in, to let go of tension and to release negative thoughts and emotions. We saw that when we are aware of our bodies, emotions and beliefs and observe them empathically, we can bring calm to ourselves and improve the quality of our lives. In the last session we especially concentrated on controlling our thoughts.

We learned how to transform our negative thoughts and habits to positive ones. You were asked to begin such a process during the past week. You are invited to share your experiences. The objective of our session today is to deepen our understanding and experience of being attentive, focused and mindfully listening to ourselves and others.

Is this an everyday experience in our lives?! Yes and no. We are familiar with such situations, of course - to be attentive, to concentrate, to be focused, to mindfully listen; but, do we use these abilities enough and properly to better our lives? Do we make use of these tools? We each have a different answer. Today we will define these situations, understand how they

influence the quality of our lives and practice using them.

Let us start with definitions.

Concentration: focusing our attention on one thing while all the rest remains in the background.

Attention/Mindfulness: complete conscious presence in anything we do.

Mindful listening/attentiveness to others: to give another all our attention, without criticism, judgment or distracting thoughts.

Mindful attentiveness/ listening to ourselves: to be completely attentive to the sensations of our body and mind (our emotions and thoughts).

We can see that these four elements are all connected to attention - four headings that articulate one idea TO BE MINDFUL! Why is this important?

HOW DO WE FUNCTION WHEN WE ARE MINDFUL? What happens to us when we "forget ourselves"? It's clear to all of us that our effectiveness decreases when we have difficulty concentrating and our thoughts wander. When we are not focused we make errors and have difficulty in remembering things. As a result our self-confidence is diminished and increases our chances of failing to perform our tasks properly.

When doing something with only partial attention, we are not present in what we do. When we are not present in the here and now experience, we become disconnected from what we are doing and our ability to enjoy the activity decreases. When we don't listen attentively to another, our ability to learn and get to know the other person decreases, hurting the relationship. When we are not attentive/ mindful to ourselves - to our body,

emotions and thoughts, we lose our connection with ourselves. As a result our ability to understand the forces that act upon us is weakened, impairing our ability to change the factors that are detrimental to us.

Let's try now to be fully concentrated, focused, and mindful to our body as we do some exercises that we are already familiar with.

Let's look first at the skill of concentration - or focusing - which is the ability to hold a thought about an object or idea (concrete or abstract) without wandering to other topics (that are in the background). When and if other thoughts enter our minds, not related to the topic we are focusing on, we see them; we don't fight them but just return gently to focus on the primary thought. This is an exercise that we initiate.

This situation is similar to the idea of placing a flashlight on a certain object while the rest of the area around it remains in darkness. Details of the enlightened object stand out and are easier to see. Our attention - awareness - is like the flashlight that pours light on the subject we are focusing on. When our thoughts are concentrated on a particular subject, we discern more meaning in it than when we are only partially attentive. Another illustration is like pouring water on a surface with an object on it. The water will disperse all around it. However, if the object is in an indented channel, the water will flow into the channel in the direction of the object and perhaps even pull it with the force of the flow.

Conclusion

Our energy is concentrated in focused situations and scattered when not focused. When we are focused and channel our

thoughts in one direction, we create power and forcefulness.

Exercise - Consciously experiencing situations of focus and dispersion:

Sit comfortably ... close your eyes and relax ... silently count your breath from one to twenty: inhale - exhale 1, inhale - exhale 2 ... Follow your breathing. When your thoughts wander (your attention scatters) count again from the beginning.

WHY is it so hard for us to concentrate? Here are a few reasons:

- The very tendency of the human mind of jumping from interest to interest requires us to make an effort to focus our thoughts on one thing.

- If there is an interest, you can elaborate: Concentration on one thing is a foreign thing for our minds because during evolution our thoughts needed to be very connected to our senses for the purpose of survival. At times of danger, staying alive depended upon the quick response to any stimulus and upon the ability to jump quickly from one stimulus to another. Today we are also more focused when in danger, but when there is no danger, we tend to jump from one thing to another (jumping from one thing to another characterizes children and animals today). The objective is to bring the mind to be focused even when there is no danger.

- An inability to ignore external background factors (noise, sights, smells)
- A tendency for chattering thoughts, like chewing one's cud, so that thoughts come and go and take over our attention. We tend to run from what is happening within us. Our cognition faces outward and has difficulty in being aware of what is going on within us, especially when

dealing with uncomfortable emotions and negative thoughts. If we focus on what is happening within us, thoughts disappear.

- Internal things disturb our concentration (as opposed to the second reason mentioned above).

In sum: Frequently our mind (emotions and thoughts) is not under our control. We focus spontaneously on what pulls at our attention (a pink elephant, for example) - something interesting, funny, surprising. The objective is to turn our thoughts into a tool that we control by INITIATED FOCUS.

Why is it important to control thoughts? How does the ability to focus contribute to the quality of our lives?

- It's very important to arouse the participants' motivation to practice focusing because: The ability to focus enables more acute discernment, sharpens memory, raises self-confidence and most importantly - promotes our ability to prevent negative thoughts and emotions from taking over, thus enabling us to choose not to be drawn into places of suffering.

The ability to focus enables us to consciously bring forth positive thoughts and emotions to promote calm and tranquility.

Further, concentration is necessary for meditation, which is the primary tool for improving the quality of life.

We can improve our concentration through exercises and practice!

Exercise - let's try another exercise:

Let's enter the quiet ... sit comfortably ... take a few deep breaths ... relax your body ... Silently say these words - PEACE ... TRANQUILITY ... QUIET ... Repeat these words several times

... with intention... and remain with them for some moments. Additionally, imagine the sky ... with a paint brush paint these words in the sky ... while concentrating on the meaning of the words



We very gently return from this exercise.

What did you feel?

These positive words - Peace, tranquility, quiet - positively influence our consciousness and create a positive change in how we feel. It is highly beneficial to use this exercise in our daily lives - to stop and connect to ourselves using positive words.

Let's go on to the second skill - Paying Attention / mindfulness

To be attentive/ mindful is to be completely present with our awareness in anything we do. It means that we are completely present in the experience, and not just with a part of ourselves. To work attentively is to place your heart - your 'self' - in the work. When we learn to be present in situations we begin to discover things that we had not seen before.

With our ability to be present in situations we change them. For example: There is a function in a company that is not highly estimated or valued. A new person who is mindful/attentive joins and takes over this job/function.

He/she discovers new potential in the job that no one saw previously and in so doing changes the nature of the job. What is the objective of attention/mindfulness?

The goal of mindfulness is to be in the NOW and not filled with mental chattering or judgmental thoughts. It means to meet life from an authentic, real and non imaginary place, to accept that ugliness is a part of life, also. When we are not mindful we miss out on life - we live in the past or in the future - but not in the present. The present can also be unpleasant - but that is part of life. When we allow ourselves to accept the uncomfortable or the painful it ceases to be so horrible. It is possible to lower the intensity of pain by mindfulness. By changing our attitude toward the pain and accepting it, we transform it into a bearable situation. On the other hand, if we habitually run from the uncomfortable, we will always be escaping.

We know that learning and lessons can appear through painful situations (and perhaps mostly through painful situations), and if we run from them we don't learn from the message of our pain. For example: If I'm having difficulty at work, what can I learn about myself from that? When we are mindful, we make fewer

mistakes and fail less because we can discover the pitfalls along the way in time, and avoid falling into them. We are able to discover the source of problems, reasons for results in time and change things accordingly. Only if we agree to encounter the good and the bad in life will we be able to see the beauty of the moments that constitute our lives (that we otherwise tend to see as not important).

Time is one moment after the other ... minute by minute.

Exercises - Let's experience mindfulness:

Let's eat a raisin mindfully.

- Give each participant a raisin. Ask the participants to hold it in their hand - to look at its appearance, its texture, color, at the shades of light in its folds ... bring the raisin close to your mouth, touch your lips with it and feel the sensation of your lips meeting the raisin ... take a tiny bite and sense the taste ... take another bite and another... see that the raisin can be a whole meal ... we are satisfied.

Let's consider the essence of mindful listening to another. What does it mean to mindfully listen to another? How do we listen mindfully? Mindful Listening means giving your complete attention to another person, to be completely present in that encounter - to be in the here and now. To mindfully listen is to be quiet within, to open ourselves without labeling or judging, without formulating our responses in our minds. When we listen - we avoid creating barriers and defenses because that prevents the flow of nonverbal information ... and the goal of listening is to absorb more than the words - we want to listen to the meaning and intentions that are beyond the words.

To encounter another truly, cleanly is not simple! The mind (the

calculator, the field of thoughts) has a tendency to chatter all the time and to contract when it is uncomfortable. The mind has expectations from encounters (what will I get out of it) and therefore, real listening requires practice over a long period of time.

Exercise - Let's try listening to another according to the qualities we learned:

We'll divide into pairs and each one will tell the other about a difficulty he/she experienced at some time. The partner will listen ... without confirming, advising, chattering thoughts and will be empathetic to the speaker. Each person will speak for 5 minutes - The listeners will observe the rules of mindful listening.

- During the exercise observe the couples, their body language, the amount of patience they display to sit quietly and listen to another, etc.

When listening one should express empathy from the outset and radiate "I'm with you." It is important not to shake your head in confirmation. Sit opposite the speaker and look into his/her eyes (unless you feel it is not comfortable for the person).

A number of levels of listening can be discerned:

Listening to the words and getting lost in thoughts; listening to the words and hearing all that is said; listening without trying to formulate responses and without judgment; listening while showing empathy to the other, which encourages the speaker to open up. More than verbal information flows in the last situation enabling the listener to understand the other person better. This understanding means that we truly know what can help the other and what can hurt him/her - which we should avoid. During the

process of empathetic listening energy is created that lifts both participants and forms a sense of connection and elation. In true listening our field of thoughts is quiet - so we don't create a separation of "I" - "thou". Our awareness is what is listening from a place deep within us creating the special energy of listening.

How can we mindfully listen to others in everyday life? It's recommended to form habits that help promote entering a listening state in addition to the rules of listening that we spoke of earlier:

- Paying attention to our breathing - for example: When the telephone rings we make a habit of paying attention to our breathing and taking a deep breath before answering. This way we begin the conversation with a connection to ourselves.
- Swallowing saliva - creates a state of transition to something new ... to a state of listening.
- Sitting up straight during the conversation, because uprightnes facilitates listening.

Lastly, we shall learn to mindfully listen to ourselves.

To listen to ourselves is to be with our complete attention on what is going on within us - in our bodies and in our minds. Generally, our attention faces outwards - external stimuli draw our attention. We don't really listen to ourselves and as a result we don't really understand ourselves - our inner world. When we don't listen to ourselves there is a lot of inner noise inside us. Why?

When we don't stop to give attention to our emotions they will continue to send us messages from our minds. If the messages

and their accompanying emotions are negative, we are creating inner pollution. Our inability to listen to ourselves results in our becoming filled with negative thoughts and emotions, which in turn, causes us to fear looking inside. This fear causes us to run from ourselves and thus we distance ourselves further from our inner world.

Where do we escape to? We escape to excessiveness and addictions - to work, reading, television, partying, traveling, excessive eating, drugs, alcohol, etc. This avoidance behavior brings us to a dead end, where we remain stuck with fears and angers.

How do we practice listening to ourselves?

- The beginning may be difficult because pain, anger and negative emotions can emerge after accumulating within us as described above. This process is a part of letting go of the excess baggage and we shouldn't be alarmed or discouraged by it.
- Afterwards, listening will give rise to insights about ourselves - Why do we feel these feelings? What is the source of our anger and pain? We shouldn't press ourselves to get answers, nor should we intellectually analyze them - we just let things be and come forth.
- The next step is to bring empathetic thought for OURSELVES in the process. We bring more heart quality to our mind; give more value to our soul and warmth to ourselves. Listening with this quality dissipates negative emotions and thoughts.
- A little by little Inner observation develops. We look inwards from the place of the empathetic investigator - not

the rigid, judgmental investigator. At this stage we pay attention to the hurt places within us, as if a deeper layer of our consciousness brings empathy to another, more superficial part of ourselves - Looking from the Soul to the ego. The deeper place within us observes the other place with compassion (not self-pity). We accept ourselves the way we are - the beautiful and the less beautiful. This situation creates peace.

Exercise - Now we'll experience mindfulness/ attentiveness during meditation.

Meditation focused on mindfulness. (About 15 minutes)

Enter quiet. Let's place empathetic attention on our body ... Observe your body in a friendly way ... accept its sensations ... breathe blessings into places where there is tension, contractions, and allow them to open up at their own rhythm...continue to observe your body ... relax it ... release tension without resisting any discomfort, if there is any ... Create a place ... a space for emotions ... identify them ... contain them ... accept them ... become friends with them ... listen to your feelings ... are they good for you? Is there any disturbance in the space created for your emotions? Identify it ... accept it ... do not struggle with it..let it dissolve of itself.

By empathetically observing the thoughts and emotions that come forth, by letting them be. They become less painful; the noise within us decreases. We begin to feel peace ... Be attentive and enjoy this inner peace ...

Money perishes in the using, but knowledge and love multiply as you give them away and share them with your fellow men; if you have knowledge and give it, you are none the poorer. You yourself know the better, because you have tried to teach.

Annie Besant





Lesson 5

Believe in Yourself - Finding Self-Esteem and Inner Power

At our fourth meeting we investigated the topic of mindfulness in depth and engaged in additional, related life skills: We practiced concentration which is a skill that assists our being attentive and mindful. We experienced situations of listening to another and to ourselves, in a way that only our attention can enable. You are invited to share your experience from these exercises and any insights you may have acquired during the week related to these topics.

Today we will further delve into the topic of listening to ourselves - as a way to regain our belief in ourselves; inner observation as a tool to find a sense of worth and power within us ... To believe in ourselves is to trust ourselves and to live with a sense of Self-Worth.

One of the most difficult things in life is to lose one's self-confidence and live with a feeling of worthlessness. To prevent this feeling, most of us continually compare ourselves to those around us; we rank ourselves as better or worse, more successful and less successful - according to our society's value scale or that of a group we are part of, like family, colleagues, sport organization, etc. These comparisons to others are detrimental because there is always someone better than us in something. Most of us value ourselves according to

how those around us value us - and frequently we live our entire lives with a feeling of worthlessness that stems from how others related to us in our childhood (or how we interpret how they related to us).

In other words, we are dependent on our surroundings for our sense of self-worth. True, when we were children or upon entering a new role, we needed feedback from our surroundings to learn how to behave, what was correct and worthy and what was not, etc. But this need becomes a problem in our lives when we are continually dependent on external esteem - when we don't develop our ability to draw self-esteem from within.



The objective of our meeting today is: To examine the assumption that our power and our self-worth come from within us; to learn what we can do find our self-esteem from within

and to regain our belief in ourselves. Here are some reference questions that will accompany us during this session:

It is recommended to write the questions on the blackboard.

- What causes us to lose our belief in ourselves?
- What weakens us and what strengthens us?
- What causes us to feel worthless?
- Where do we get the feeling of self-worth?
- Why do we reach situations of low energy and feelings of worthlessness and beliefs that we can't cope with?
- Why are we dependent on outside feedback of our worth?

The simple answer to all of the above questions is: Because we don't look inward to see who we really are. The root of the problem is that we don't know ourselves. What we do know is our self-image, which consists mostly of what we imagine people think of us. Is this possible? Does another really know me or is it only his superficial impression of me? Is that self-image really me?

There's a story of a woman who went to heaven and five judges asked her - "Who are you?" The conversation develops like this: "I'm Melissa" ... "I didn't ask your name" - ... "I'm the mayor's wife" "I didn't ask about your husband" ... "I go to church" ... "I didn't ask what you believe in" ... etc, etc, etc. The question is - WHO ARE WE? All the external characteristics don't bring us closer to the answer - they are only labels or information that relates to us. Our unfamiliarity with ourselves is the source of our weakness. Most of us don't bother to introspect and learn about ourselves from within. Instead we look outwards to form our sense of worth. We struggle for external worth to get attention - which is the energy and power that motivates our lives. Our running after a sense of worth hurts and weakens us.

Instead we can look within and find the energy and power within us.

How do we regain belief in ourselves and become empowered? The first element is LISTENING TO ONESELF. What does this involve? - Listening to oneself may be difficult at first because we encounter ourselves with a repository of our negative thoughts, flaws, difficulties and weaknesses. Flight is our first tendency- what do we need this for? But when we continue to listen and allow ourselves to be attentive to everything that comes up from within, we experience our attention as a sun whose rays disperse dark clouds. This is gradual process that develops as we refrain from struggle and observe our negative thoughts and feelings without condemnation and with a spirit of empathy and compassion for ourselves.

Being attentive / mindful to ourselves enables us to experience clarity, insights, intuitions and accept ourselves and other human beings. When we bring empathy and compassion into our inner world we will start seeing ourselves in a more balanced manner. We see that we might have difficulties and flaws but we also have good qualities which we could not see because of our negative attitude. Balance enables us to find qualities which we can love in ourselves.

The opposite is also true - a lack of balance and only seeing the negative within ourselves (that comes from negative and judgmental thinking) makes us feel worthless and unloved. Self-accusations and guilt about defeats weaken us immensely. Whereas we become more and more empowered the more we refrain from struggle and inner warfare and become friends with ourselves - relate to ourselves in a friendly way and be kind to ourselves as well as to others. This is not meant in a selfish way

of concentrating purely on oneself at another's expense, of course.

How do we do this? We sit quietly with ourselves - quieting our mind... but it is recommended to first be physically comfortable (using one of the exercises that we learned the first session regarding the subject of relaxing and releasing negative thoughts - for example: Contract and release, deep breaths - take a deep breath ... contract feet, calves, thighs...feel the contraction and release muscles gradually ... Take a deep breath... and contract ... and so on for the pelvis, stomach, diaphragm, chest, back, arms and hands, and the face. Then we let our breath return to its normal rhythm and observe it... letting it flow in its own way, without intervention ... we feel our breathing.

This physical relaxation brings mental relaxation and tranquility so that we feel good with ourselves. Inner peace and tranquility have their source in a deep and spiritual stratum of ourselves, in our souls. Experiencing inner peace helps us restore belief in ourselves and of our inner power. This requires daily practice.

We can also observe our thoughts and allow a dialog within us. If negative thoughts of difficulty and failure arise, we can respond to them by seeing situations in which we have succeeded.

The second element of regaining belief in ourselves is: Coping with weaknesses and habits that make us feel bad about ourselves. We make the decision to cope and do the following:

Define some weaknesses and habits that weakens you, like eating before going to sleep or going to sleep late at night and imagine yourself vividly overcoming this weakness. Try to do this exercise once a day. When we succeed in changing one habit it is a breakthrough for change and success in the future.

Form a positive affirmation (thought/belief) in which we put in words our resolution to overcome this weakness. There are never negative elements in an affirmation and it is always grammatically formulated in the first person.

Habits are formed by repetition, first in thoughts; afterwards it awakens feelings and finally new behavioral patterns. The change in thoughts and imagination will turn into reality - We succeed in changing habits. We adopt new positive habits and nurture them. We become empowered by our successes. And then move on to encounter further weaknesses.



The third element in the process of regaining our belief in ourselves is by helping and serving others.

Each one of us has something to give. When we help and serve others we feel a sense of worth and vice versa. This is an expression of brotherhood from the Theosophical perspective - integrating more giving into our lives.

In sum, it is important to emphasize: To return a sense of self-worth to ourselves, it is important that ALL the ELEMENTS described above are found together in our lives. We return our sense of worth when we:

Learn to listen with awareness to our feelings and thoughts in a friendly manner and without judgment (the first element)

Exercise, changing habits and facing weaknesses (second element),

Help and serve others (third element).

How is it manifested and how can we internalize it? We shall relate to two aspects:

1. The empathetic investigative approach

We examine: why our failures, which are a part of life, cause us to feel so bad about ourselves?

The cause can be found in how we take our failures, our interpretations of a lack of success:

- Do we see it as the end of the road...there is now no chance to succeed ... I'm a nothing - zero!
- Or do we ask ourselves: What can I learn from this failure? What is this telling me about the rest of my life?

We can learn a great deal by observing sincerely and empathically our response to failures we experienced in the

past. We can get many insights from within ourselves if we develop this kind of nonjudgmental observation.

2. Finding the positive in ourselves and our surroundings -

as an approach to life; practicing positive thinking as part of our daily routine, for example: (a) Write down positive things about ourselves. (b) Look at the members of a group and try to find something good in each one. (c) Think of three good things that happened each day before going to sleep. (d) Begin each day by reading a positive sentence and taking it with you throughout the day, for example:

- I feel strong because I know that divine love and order are part of my life.
- I give thanks for all the gifts that today brings.

The moment we catch ourselves thinking negatively, we immediately change our thought and transform it into a positive one. The field of thoughts, our mind, contains one thought at a time, so the moment a positive thought enters, it dismisses the negative thought and everything changes.

In our speech we focus on the positive instead of the negative - for example, we'll say "I want to be healthy" instead of "I don't want to be sick."

Meditation

Sit comfortably, bring your attention to the present moment... Be aware of your body, how the body feels... is your body relaxed?... Be mindful of the sensations in your body, sensations that remain for a while and then pass ... Observe your body warmly, with friendship and acceptance ... Be mindful of your

breathing ... breathing reflects the state of your mind-body ... Gradually your breathing becomes soft and quiet and this quiet permeates into your body as well as your minds ...



Remember a situation from the past in which you felt weak or worthless ... a situation in which you were flooded with critical thoughts about yourself ... Bring yourself to that situation again ... but ... as an OBSERVER ... From a place of observing the whole, see the event, and experience the thoughts accompanying it ...

Look at yourself empathetically ... at that part of yourself experiencing lack of love ... at that part of yourself experiencing self-criticism ... bring empathetic listening to those parts ... Be aware that your attention is like the sun that dissipates

clouds of thoughts ... attention that is wide accepting,
compassionate, without judgment ... Become friends with
yourself, with the places of your hardship. Be friends with those
parts of yourself that you rejected in the past ... listen to them ...
do not run from the difficulty ... all these parts with weaknesses
are parts of your self ... Listen to them with compassion ... They
will be able to change only when you accept them ...

Think of someone you love very much ... feel the love that you
have for this person ... feel this love again ... now take this
feeling of love and place it on those parts of you that you haven't
loved in the past ... that you neglected ... Place this love on them
and let these places accept this love ... By accepting love into
the places where you feel difficulty you can transform them ...
change them.

Be aware of your breathing ... look at the feeling now ... Is your
heart more open? Are you calmer? Do you have more space for
yourself as you are?

Gradually return to awareness, to your presence here ... at your
own speed, gently come back to your regular conscious state
as you leave the mediation.

*What are we here for, save to help each other, to love each
other, to uplift each other?*

Annie Besant

Epilogue

Since 2008 we have given about 42 workshops almost free of
charge to about 380 participants, most of whom encountered
Theosophy for the first time.

As a result, the participation in our introductory courses on
Theosophy has increased and in the last four years we have
had 16 courses with 98 participants, with quite a few of them
willing to continue with their study of Theosophy and to train
themselves to become volunteer facilitators at these workshops.



Offering our fellow human beings Theosophical perspectives on the following subjects:

- Calming and releasing negative thoughts
- Ways of coping with and releasing anger and fear
- Understanding how we create the difficulties in our lives through wrong thinking and beliefs
- Exercising attentiveness, concentration and mindful listening – to ourselves and others
- Believing in ourselves – finding our self value and inner strength

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