

**Perennial Practice: The Wisdom and Exercises of Spiritual Masters and Their  
Relevance to the Contemporary Struggle For Peace and Justice**

Andrew Belasco  
Senior Thesis  
Justice and Peace Studies

## *Chapter 1: Be the Change*

### *What is Peace?*

What is Peace? While the objective of and quest for peace is undeniably both universal and paramount, the meaning and entailments of such a word remain a mere abstraction. What does peace mean? How is peace achieved? What are the prerequisites to Peace? How is Peace measured? The elusiveness of peace as a realizable and practical goal is closely connected to the ambiguity surrounding such an idea. How can one strive towards something that he or she does not accurately understand? If one wishes to proceed in effectively discussing, proposing strategy for, and implementing peace, he or she must adequately grasp the meaning and concept of the word “peace.” Therefore, it is not only justifiable but also necessary to provide a satisfactory and workable definition of peace prior to beginning a thesis that centers on achieving a more peaceful society.

In its simplest and most limited definition, peace is nothing more than the absence of war. History, however, has proven time and again that such a definition is neither sufficient nor useful in resolving conflict. The Cold War and conflicts such as those in Northern Ireland, the Middle East, and the Balkans, which often experience remission only to surface again in an even more destructive form, prove as evidence to this assertion. This particular definition of peace commits a serious oversight in that it often disregards any number of external conditions including government, infrastructure, overall economic status of a respective population, and people’s access to basic human rights, or internal conditions such as residual feelings, ideas,

worldview, etc., which make up and are responsible for preserving a so-called “peaceful” state of affairs. A non-warring society whose people are politically and socially oppressed, economically impoverished, and/or involved in “peace through strength” tactics (arms build-up, nuclear stockpile, verbal and ideological intimidation, etc.) cannot claim to be truly peaceful.

Summarily, the definition of peace as the absence of war is too broad because it applies the label of “peace” to conditions that simply aren’t. A more comprehensive and less myopic definition of peace is needed; one that deals with the causes of violence, not only its manifestation.

According to leading peace researcher Johan Galtung, there are five primary values underlying peace: nonviolence, economic welfare, social justice, ecological balance, and participation.<sup>1</sup> A truer and more positive definition of peace must involve the voluntary interaction and cooperation between various groups of people in order to ensure that all of these values are realized. Additionally, peace must entail a respective society’s commitment to constructing just and mutually beneficial systems and institutions that will protect such values. Peace *must* be inclusive. Finally, peace must include the search for and implementation of preventive measures to help quell the root causes of conflict.

Attaining a more precise and all-embracing definition of peace subsequently provides a proponent and potential executor of peace with direction, because he or she now has a worthwhile and tangible goal to aim for. The individual now understands what peace is and what peace is not, and therefore can intelligently

---

<sup>1</sup> Johan Galtung, *Peace, War, and Defense: Essays in Peace Research* Vol . II. Copenhagen: Christian Ejlertsen

choose the activities and modes of living that will help bring about peace in the truest sense of the word. This being so, the primary objective of my thesis is to propose and argue for the essential nature of specific practices that will help a seeker of peace to achieve peace, not only in society but within themselves as well. In fact, I will assert that one type of peace cannot exist without the other. Outer and inner peace are inevitably linked.

### ***Inner vs. Outer Peace***

Too often, contemporary movements for peace emphasize only the exterior causes of injustice and human suffering. For example, if you are poor or subject to violence, it is because society has oppressed you. Such an assumption is not wrong, but it may reveal only part of the truth. What can be said of the interior causes of conflict and injustice? Can one's worldview, state of mind, and various attitudes influence the direction and events of the outside world?

Swiss psychologist Carl Jung dedicated the majority of his professional life to the study of psychological pathology and its effects on society. His concept of the "shadow" offers insight into the external consequences of internal affliction. The shadow, as Jung asserts, is simply the "dark side" of one's psyche. It includes everything that is incompatible with an individual's persona. "Persona," a Roman word literally meaning "mask," represents the image that an individual wishes to present to his or her environment. The persona acts as somewhat of a mediator between one's true self and the outside world, a psychological mask of sorts. The persona, while enabling an individual to operate within everyday society, represses natural but culturally "unacceptable" behaviors and characteristics, thus forming the

shadow. The shadow if not dealt with individually, manifests itself as both individual and societal pathologies. Carl Jung warns his reader: “The psychological rule says that when an inner situation is not made conscious, it happens outside as fate. That is to say, when the individual remains undivided and does not become conscious of his inner opposite, the world must perforce act out the conflict and be torn into opposing halves.”<sup>2</sup>

Such pathologies, on an individual level, can include anything from violence, abuse, and criminal acts to chronic depression, severe apathy, and thoughts of suicide. Collectively, shadow projection can give rise to the most catastrophic of events. An example could include Post World War I German society. After losing the war, many Germans projected their repressed anger, grief, and sadness resulting from the current political upheaval and economic devastation onto the Jews of Europe. German society’s collective shadow projection eventually led to the mass extermination of more than six million people. Jung himself reveals the severe consequences of collective shadow projection, when he explained how the United States’ tolerance and, in many cases, promotion of destructive behavior ultimately led to the rise of an equally destructive enemy. “What the West has tolerated, but secretly and with a slight sense of shame (the diplomatic lie, systematic deception, veiled threats) comes back into the open and in full measure from the East and ties us up in neurotic knots. It is the face of his own evil shadow that grinned at Western Man from the other side of the Iron Curtain.”<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Carl Jung in Brendan O’Regan. “The Hidden Mind: Charting Unconscious Intelligence.” *Noetic Sciences Review* no. 5. 1997

<sup>3</sup> Jung in Mclaughlin and Davidson. *Spiritual Politics*. Findhorn, Scotland: Findhorn Press, 1994, p. 176.

“The shadow,” affirms Jung, “is a moral problem which challenges the whole ego personality.” He insists that the shadow presents a social dilemma of vast proportion; one that should not be overlooked. Throughout his works, the Swiss psychologist conveys the dire need to confront one’s own shadow, but he cautions his reader that: “No one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort, because exploring the dark aspects of one’s personality generally meets with considerable resistance.”<sup>4</sup>

It is undeniable that Jung recommends we explore the depth of our own psyche, so upon adhering to his advice what can we expect to find? In addition to discovering a personal unconsciousness, Jung asserts that an individual might also uncover something known as the collective unconscious. Within the collective unconscious, there lies what Jung terms as archetypes, which, in Greek, means “first patterns.” Archetypes, Jung insists, provide humanity with fundamental psychological, behavioral, and perceptual characteristics and patterns that can be found across all cultures and in every corner of the world. Moreover, Jung attests that these archetypes, which make up the collective unconscious, represent the part of the mind determined by *heredity*.<sup>5</sup> As part of our humanity, we inherit this particular form of unconscious just as we inherit our physical bodies. Thus like our bodies, *the human psyche is subject to the process of evolution*. What are the implications of such a claim? If the evolution of our bodies prompts the development of certain attributes that allow humanity to adapt physically in an ever-changing world, will the

---

<sup>4</sup> Carl Jung. *Collected Works Vol. 9 Part II*. Ed. William McGuire and R.F.C. Hull. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1979, p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> Carl Jung. *Psychological Types in Collected Works Vol 6*. Ed. Michael Fordham and R.F. Hull. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971.

evolution of our psyche, both individual and collective, provide us with qualities to adapt psychologically, cognitively, and morally as well? Instead of mere survival, could we influence or accelerate the evolutionary process of our psyche so that we might flourish instead? All of these questions will be entertained and discussed later.

Carl Jung's model of psyche or consciousness evolution, as philosopher and psychologist Ken Wilber declares, is only one of over a hundred models that chronicle the ever-continuing growth and development of human consciousness. In his book *Integral Psychology*, the most widely translated contemporary American philosopher, Ken Wilber, assembles over one hundred conclusions of researches from around the world and throughout time, and proceeds to discuss the seemingly uncanny similarities among all of them with respect to the idea of evolving consciousness. From psychological and social theorists such as Abraham Maslow, Jane Loevinger, Clare Graves, Jurgen Habermas, James Mark Baldwin, Robert Kegan, and Deirdre Kramer to the religious/mystical traditions of Buddhism, Kabbalah, Vedanta and individual mystics such as Sri Aurobindo and Adi Da; all describe the growth and development of the mind as a "series of unfolding stages or waves." Wilber himself categorizes such a sequence into six specific stages of which he labels as: egocentric, sociocentric, worldcentric, shamanic, bodddhisatvic, and buddhic.<sup>6</sup>

Each successive stage, as Wilber explains, transcends but includes all previous elements of consciousness; thus leading to an ever-increasing embrace of more and more psychological potentials. For example, an individual expanding into a worldcentric stage of consciousness might now possess the psychology that moves

---

<sup>6</sup> Ken Wilber. *Integral Psychology*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1999.

him or her to promote peace, justice, and prosperity not only within his or her respective society but throughout the entire world as well. This does not mean, however, that he or she loses the traits associated with prior stages of consciousness. He or she can still activate egocentric levels, for instance, in times when self-defense is needed, or sociocentric characteristics when operating within the family unit, expressing a sense of patriotism, or involved in an activity such as team sports. Wilber further explains that as an individual moves through each stage of development, he or she inherits a psychology representative of the stage he or she is currently centralized in. His or her feelings, motivations, ethics and values, belief systems, education, economics, and political theory and practice are all apropos to the state presently occupied.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, evolving along the continuum of consciousness could translate into the acquisition of certain faculties, habits, and personal practices that are relevant to and could assist in achieving a more peaceful and just world. Wilber conveys the importance of consciousness development with regard to social progress as he discusses the state of our natural environment. “The ecological crisis—or Gaia’s main problem—is not pollution, toxic dumping, ozone depletion or any such. Gaia’s main problem is that not enough human beings have developed to the postconventional, worldcentric, global levels of consciousness, wherein they will automatically be moved to care for the global commons.”<sup>8</sup> Jung also highlights the overwhelming relevance of interior/individual growth: “The great events of world history are, at bottom, profoundly unimportant. In the last analysis, the essential thing is the life of the individual. This alone makes history, here alone do

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 144.

the great transformations first take place, and the whole future, the whole history of the world, ultimately spring as a gigantic summation from these hidden sources in individuals. In our most private and most subjective lives we are not only the passive witnesses of our age, and its sufferers, but also its makers. We make our own epoch."<sup>9</sup> As the evidence put forth indicates, interior causative factors are clearly at play in shaping the outcome of societal conditions and various world events. So why do a majority of those who struggle for peace and justice consistently ignore and fail to utilize positively such factors?

### ***The Modern Tragedy***

Traditionally, those who are involved in movements for peace (peace according to the previous definition given) and justice operate from a liberalist ideology. A liberal is defined as one who favors and often seeks civil and political liberties, democratic reforms, and protection from arbitrary authority.<sup>10</sup> Notice the emphasis on externals. As previously mentioned, liberals tend to focus only on the exterior causes of conflict and injustice, and perhaps for good reason.

Liberal philosophy arose with the Western Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, and from the outset, was explicitly anti-religious. Liberalism was largely a response to the nearly three thousand years of oppression (i.e. crusades, inquisitions, thievery, etc.) set forth by state-sponsored and fundamentalist religious institutions. Liberals were enraged by the countless myths and absolutisms that, despite lack of evidence, were continuously imposed on them. Such anger coupled together with the simultaneous advent of modern science prompted many liberals to reject wholly all

---

<sup>9</sup> Carl Jung. *Collected Works Vol 10*. Ed. Herbert Read. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979, para. 315.

<sup>10</sup> Definition in Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition, 1993.

tenets of religion. Subsequently, any claim that could not be rationally explained or empirically measured was declared at worst a falsehood and at best irrelevant. And so the examination and previous findings concerning the nature of subjective/interior realms were deemed obsolete. If the subjective realm was ill, it was due to the deficiency of objective social institutions, and nothing more. Such blatant reductionism and excessive materialism, in effect, proved and still proves today as a great tragedy. For, the modern and liberal rejection of everything non-rational has precipitated the popular invalidation and suppression of proven effective transrational ideas and practices that could lead to the healing of the subjective/interior realm and ultimately to the healing of our society.

Moreover, the liberal neglect of the interior has provoked a majority of those studying, promoting and struggling for justice and peace, particularly in academia, to adopt an extreme form of moral relativism when it comes to subjective matters. The coin words are “anti-hierarchy,” “pluralism,” “egalitarianism” and other non-marginalizing terms. In other words, “No stance is better than another, so do not tell me what to do! You do your thing, and I’ll do mine.” Besides being inherently contradictory, (anti-hierarchy over hierarchy is still a hierarchy) the moral relativism that pervades throughout liberal society has left many confused and overly critical. The majority of intellectual discourse today is disproportionately focused on critiquing current problems rather than proposing future solutions. In addition, no course of action can really be recommended with regards to interior development because value judgments simply lack the “evidence” most are looking for. Ultimately, the one who adopts the moral relativistic framework and dogmatically asserts that

there is no truth, in turn prevents others and him or herself from exploring the possibility that there are moral and ethical values that transcend a particular society or culture; that there is indeed a truth worth aspiring to and that does prove beneficial in helping to create a more peaceful and just society for everyone. Author Colin McGinn sums up this postmodern debacle nicely: “According to this (relativistic) conception, human reason is inherently local, culture-relative, rooted in the variable facts of human nature and history, a matter of divergent ‘practices’ and ‘forms of life’ and ‘frames of reference’ and ‘conceptual schemes.’ There are no norms of reasoning that transcend what is accepted by a society or an epoch, no objective justifications for belief that everyone must respect on pain of cognitive malfunction. To be valid is to be taken to be valid, and different people can have legitimately different patterns of taking. In the end, the only justifications for belief have the form ‘justified for me’”<sup>11</sup>

With respect to the consequences of moral relativism, collective disregard for and confusion surrounding the subjective/interior realms and their development has led to a worldwide waning of sorts. The absence of moral authority has led to a lack of moral direction. Many of us seemingly have no one or nothing to appeal to regarding our moral and ethical development, so we continue to act alone solely as individuals, unaware of or naïve to the horrific consequences of our disassociated thinking and isolated behavior. Our scientific and technological capacities continue to increase exponentially, while our moral and ethical progress lag far behind. The potential disasters resulting from such disproportionate growth are, at present, simply too many and too vast to even comprehend. Our technology has now given us the capacity to inflict damage of epic proportions. While someone operating from a

---

<sup>11</sup> Colin McGinn in Wilber. *One Taste*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1999, p. 285.

worldcentric perspective would never unleash such devastation, someone who possesses largely egocentric and socio or ethnocentric values might. History has already provided us with a number of examples. Nazi persecution, the American bombing of Hiroshima, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, racist recruiting on the internet, and even the excessive robotizing of our industries all prove as evidence of global scale technology being applied by people who have less than global values. The worst could be yet to come; mass biological, chemical, or nuclear warfare, worldwide ecological catastrophe, genetically engineered plagues unleashed accidentally or intentionally, etc. The possibilities are endless. In the words of Martin Luther King: “Our scientific power has outrun our spiritual power. We have guided missiles and misguided men.”<sup>12</sup>

The time to investigate and explore into the prospects of personal growth and conscious development is now! At no other time in history has the demand for practices and ideas contributing to inner evolution proved more apparent. This is not a call for us to abandon our efforts at improving exterior institutions, but rather an urgent appeal to supplement those efforts with interior work on an individual level in order to provide for a more integral approach that will better help in bringing about justice and peace to this world.

### ***The Perennial Philosophy***

The remainder of my thesis will be devoted to a body of ideas and practices, a set of core teachings, imparted and adhered to by every spiritual or esoteric tradition within every major religion throughout every part of the world and time in history.

Before proceeding, it is important to emphasize precisely what is meant by “esoteric

---

<sup>12</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. *Strength to Love*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1986.

tradition.” Frithjof Schuon, in his book, entitled *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, stresses that each major religion of the world has both its esoteric and exoteric aspects. The exoteric includes such things as ritual, symbols, language, dogma, commandments, etc. At an exoteric level, it is quite obvious to see the existing plurality among all religions. Moreover, from this level, religions even appear in irreconcilable conflict with each other (i.e. my religion is the *right* religion, believe in X religion or be eternally damned, Christ is Lord and Savior vs. the Messiah has yet to come, etc.) On an esoteric plane, however, this is not the case. The esoteric realm does not concern itself with the various methodological, ritualistic, or doctrinal differences between religious traditions, but only with the Absolute Truth, the core, or the heart, that serves to transcend and subsequently unify *all* religious traditions. The esoteric realm is based on a direct or personal experience of the Ultimate. Its wisdom is shared by and accessed to only a few spiritually devoted individuals who, by engaging in specific practices and partaking in a particular mode of living, have achieved esoteric or mystical experiences. Historically, they are consistently deemed as prophets, sages, “enlightened,” “wise” ones, or mystics, as I will refer to them in this paper.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Frithjof Schuon. *Transcendent Unity of Religions*. Wheaton, IL: Quest, 1984.

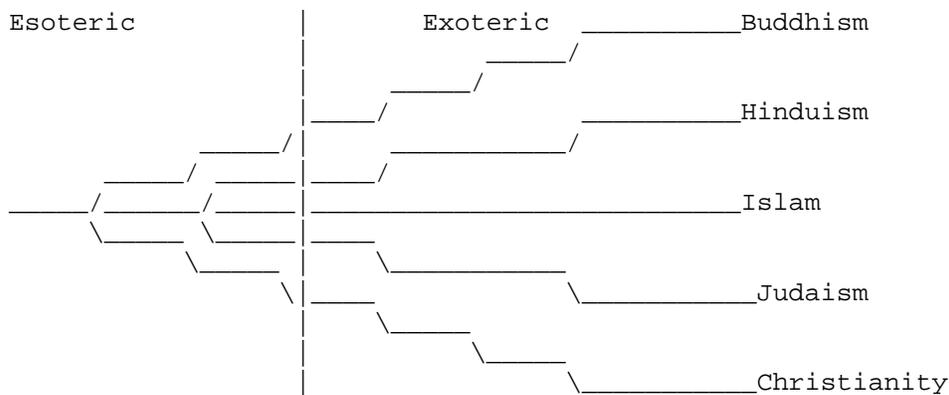


Figure 1.1. illustrates Schuon's concept of the esoteric realm as the transcendent unifier

Evelyn Underhill, perhaps the foremost expert of world religions and mysticism during her lifetime, describes the mystic's life as: "active and practical...an organic life process, which the whole self does: not an intellectual opinion...it is an enhanced life, the remaking of a character and the liberation of a new form of consciousness."<sup>14</sup> Underhill further explains: "Each great religious tradition, when we follow it back, is seen to originate in the special experiences of some soul who has acted as the revealer of spiritual reality; for the great mystics never keep their discoveries to themselves. They have a social meaning, and always try to tell others what they have known."<sup>15</sup> Included in this select group are people like Jesus Christ, Buddha, Lao Tzu, Mohammed, Confucius, Moses, Ignatius of Loyola, Thomas Merton, Chuang Tzu, Rumi, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Meister Eckhart, Teresa of Avila, Henry David Thoreau, Baha 'ullah, Ramana Maharshi, Kabir, Rumi, Osho, Francis of Assisi, Mahatma Gandhi, Thich Nhat Hanh, among others. Fundamentally, and as we will see later, all stood for and promoted essentially the same Truths and ideals. Their amalgamation of wisdom forms a well-documented and worldwide philosophical concord that, due to reasons previously

<sup>14</sup> Evelyn Underhill. *Practical Mysticism*. Kila, Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 1942, p. 81.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

highlighted, has been largely ignored for the last couple of centuries. World renown philosophy scholar and author Alan Watts discusses what could be modern era's most profound oversight: "We are hardly aware of the extreme peculiarity of our own position, and find it difficult to realize the plain fact that there has otherwise been a single philosophical consensus of universal extent. It has been held by (men and women) who report the same insights and teach the same essential doctrine whether living today or six thousand years ago, whether from New Mexico in the Far West or from Japan in the Far East."<sup>16</sup>

This common denominator of religious truths otherwise known as *philosophia perennis* or the Perennial Philosophy, has assisted people for millenniums in expanding their consciousness and realizing their inner potential; a potential that when realized evidently moves them to a sense of inner peace and a commitment to the betterment of humankind.

Theologian and writer Augustine Steuch first coined the term "Perennial Philosophy" in 1540 in his book entitled *De Perenni Philosophia*. Steuch described the Perennial Philosophy as the absolute truth revealed to man upon death, which throughout his life he had forgotten, and was only illuminated to in bits and pieces throughout the course of human history. German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz later used the term in 1715 in his attempt to reconcile differing religious philosophies. Aldous Huxley, however, was the first person to bring "Perennial Philosophy" to the forefront of public attention, when he assembled an anthology of the world's religious traditions appropriately entitled *The Perennial Philosophy*. Huxley described the Perennial Philosophy as "...the metaphysic that recognizes a

---

<sup>16</sup> Alan Watts in Wilber. *The Marriage of Sense and Soul*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1998, p. 9.

divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with, divine Reality; the ethic that places man's final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being -- the thing is immemorial and universal. Rudiments of the Perennial Philosophy may be found among the traditional lore of primitive peoples in every region of the world, and in its fully developed forms it has a place in every one of the higher religions.”<sup>17</sup> Since Huxley, scholars such as Huston Smith, Frithjof Schuon, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Arthur Lovejoy, and many more have expounded upon and attested to the universality of the Perennial Philosophy. Huston Smith, who today is arguably the foremost authority on comparative religion, says of the Perennial Philosophy: “...If we take the world’s enduring religions at their best, we discover the distilled wisdom of the human race...(the Perennial Philosophy) in its broad outlines is carried in (our) bloodstream...(it is the philosophy) of the human majority...”<sup>18</sup>

With respect to its fundamental teachings, the Perennial Philosophy reveals four core assertions:

1. **There exist two realms of reality.** In addition to the realm of phenomenal matter, a realm detectable by our physical senses and measurable by our science, there exists another realm. This realm is both timeless and unbounded, a divine realm from which all matter possesses its being.
2. **The nature of man is such that he or she is of both realms.** Man has a phenomenal body and ego, the self of which he is primarily conscious, but he or she has another Self as well. Man also possesses a non-phenomenal, eternal self, a divine self. This reality is affirmed by every major world religion: “Look within, you are the Buddha. (Buddhism)” “He is in all, and all is in Him. (Judaism)” “The Kingdom of Heaven is within you. (Christianity)” “Atman (individual consciousness) and Brahman (universal consciousness) are one. (Hinduism)”

---

<sup>17</sup> Aldous Huxley. *The Perennial Philosophy*. Philadelphia: Harper & Row Publishers, 1945, p. vii.

<sup>18</sup> Huston Smith in PBS Interview, “Wisdom of Faith,” 1998.

“Those who know themselves know their Lord. (Islam)” “Those who know completely their own nature, know heaven. (Confucianism)” Being that the Divine is in every man, each man is united, one with all.

3. **If man so desires, he or she may realize the Divine Self and thus the Divine Ground from which this Self is manifested.** The type of religion found within the Perennial Philosophy is not religion in a narrow sense. It is not a set of doctrine and myths to be accepted and adhered to on blind faith alone. Rather, this particular religion is a deep religion, composed of a set of contemplative and introspective practices that each of us can partake in and validate or invalidate for ourselves. This religion is non-coercive, non-oppressive, and not unfounded. It tells us, “Go ahead, see for yourself. You might be surprised by what you find.”
4. **Realizing the Divine is the ultimate meaning and end of man’s existence.** Such a process moves man to intuitively discover that This is why he or she was put on earth. This goal is paramount; all others dwindle in comparison. Nothing else provides more reward and happiness to oneself and to others.

While this auspicious collection of wisdom is termed as “Perennial Philosophy,” one must understand that it is not a philosophy in the traditional sense. Its concepts do not make up a conventional academic discipline that can be learned or grasped by mere intellectualizing. In his anthology, Huxley highlights the fact that he did not consult professional philosophers or theologians when writing *The Perennial Philosophy*. The Perennial Philosophy, Huxley insists, and as every sage, prophet, saint, and “enlightened one” will tell you, is centered on the direct apprehension of the divine, and therefore cannot be reached within the confines of the rational mind. Knowing is not merely enough. For, in order to “taste”, as Wilber says, that which transcends, one must transcend his or her intellect. Experience is required. Huxley elaborates: “But the nature of this one Reality is such that it cannot be directly and immediately apprehended except by those who have chosen to fulfill certain

conditions, making themselves loving, pure in heart, and poor (modest) in spirit.”<sup>19</sup>

The practices through which one fulfills such conditions will be detailed later.

Another factor contributing to the intellectual elusiveness of the Perennial Philosophy is that regarding subject-object distinction. The mystic (defined as one who achieves direct, subjective communion with the divine), while attaining and exemplifying *the* universal Truth embodied in the tenets of Perennial Philosophy, still expresses such Truth through a wide variety of cultural, social, and linguistic avenues. Consequently, this Reality, which is the true essence of Perennial Philosophy, is portrayed differently in each case and therefore cannot be captured on paper, in a particular word, through a specific idea, or within a certain belief. In other words, there is not and will never be a uniform doctrine sufficiently representing the Truths contained within the Perennial Philosophy. Wilber explains this paradox: “That one—the radical Truth—is not *in* the world of space in time, except as *all* space and time, and thus it could never be enunciated in formal or doctrinal fashion. We cannot make a statement about the *whole* of Reality, because any conceivable statement is itself merely *part* of that Reality, and thus the Perennial Philosophy, as a direct insight-union with that Reality itself, could never be adequately captured in any set of doctrines or ideas, all of which are partial, finite, and limited. Radical Truth can be *shown* (in contemplative awareness) but never exhaustively *said* (in discursive language).”<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Huxley. *Perennial Philosophy*. P. ix.

<sup>20</sup> Ken Wilber. *The Eye of Spirit: An Integral Vision for a World Gone Slightly Mad*. Boston: Shambhala: Boston, 1997, p. 59.

### *Epistemological Considerations*

Despite its unattainable nature within the phenomenal, material, or rational realm, epistemological justification for the Perennial Philosophy is still required. Because after all, prior to embarking on this heuristic journey, one needs to be convinced of the validity and benefits, both external and internal, the Perennial Philosophy presents. As implied previously, the Perennial Philosophy draws much of its legitimacy from the fact that its loyal and persistent devotees, many of whom were vastly separated by both location and era, followed the same teachings, employed roughly the same practices, and achieved similarly rewarding (individual and collective) results. However, is such validity acceptable according to contemporary methodological and scientific standards?

Francis Bacon's scientific method proves today as modern society's ultimate litmus test. If a proposed hypothesis, whether it being an observation, idea, or theory, meets the requirements of the scientific method, it is subsequently deemed as valid.

Ken Wilber reveals the three essential aspects of Bacon's method:

1. *Practical Injunction.* This is an actual practice, an exemplar, a paradigm, an experiment, an ordinance. It is always of the form, "If you want to *know* this, *do* this."
2. *Direct apprehension.* This is an immediate experience of the domain brought forth by the injunction; that is, a direct experience of apprehension of data (even if the data is mediated, at the moment of the experience is immediately apprehended). William James pointed out that one of the meanings of "data" is direct and immediate experience, and science anchors all of its concrete assertions in such data.
3. *Communal Confirmation* (or rejection). This is a checking of the results—the data, the evidence—with others who have adequately completed the injunctive and apprehensive strands.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Ken Wilber. *The Marriage of Sense and Soul*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1998, p. 135.

Thus, one must first engage the injunction (i.e. perform an experiment), directly apprehend or observe the particular occurrence, and finally review his or her results with those who followed the same directive. If his or her results match with the others, the injunction or experience is taken as “scientifically” valid. For example, I want to measure the temperature of the water in my pool. Therefore, I insert a thermometer into the pool (engage the injunction), and observe that the temperature of the water is seventy degrees (direct apprehension). My three friends then insert the thermometer into the pool themselves, and each one also observes that the water is seventy degrees. And so my observation is now regarded as valid.

This hallmark of scientific inquiry, however, and as Wilber claims, is not only restricted to the material. Wilber affirms that there are three specific modes of knowledge: by way the eye of flesh (empiricism), the eye of mind (rationalism), and the eye of contemplation (mysticism). Each particular mode possesses a corresponding faculty through which one engages in order to comprehend and then acquire a specific type of knowledge. They are respectively: *sensibilia*, *intelligibilia*, and *transcendelia*. Wilber proceeds to emphasize: “All three of these modes of knowing can be validated with similar degrees of confidence, and thus all three modes are perfectly valid types of knowledge. Accordingly, any attempt at a comprehensive and graceful understanding of the Kosmos will most definitely include all three types of knowing; and anything less comprehensive than that is gravely, *gravely* suspect on its own merits.”<sup>22</sup>

An example demonstrating the utilization of the eye of flesh has already been provided (measuring the temperature of a pool). An additional mode of knowledge,

---

<sup>22</sup> Ken Wilber. *The Eye of Spirit*. p. 84.

accessed through the eye of mind, involves the procurement, analysis, and disclosure of purely rational knowledge (i.e. logic, interpretation, etc.) For instance, lets assume one wishes to know Plato's *The Last Days of Socrates*. In this case, employing the *sensibilia* alone will not suffice. The fact that the *The Last Days of Socrates* contains so and so number of letters in black writing and is so and so number of pages clearly does not pass as authentic knowledge of Plato's work. Observing the color of letters and counting the number of pages is simply not enough. An individual must therefore use his or her *intelligibilia*, the eye of mind, and actually engage the injunction of reading the book. And so he or she subsequently reads *The Last Days of Socrates*, interprets its meaning, and confers with others who have read the book in order to determine if the meaning he or she extracts qualifies as substantiated knowledge. Like the empirical conclusions expounded by the eye of flesh, interpretive conclusions reached through the eye of mind can also be deemed as valid or invalid. An interpretation of *The Last Days of Socrates* as merely the trial and conviction of an Athens man is not nor ever will be labeled as correct or even suitable knowledge of Plato's writing. And while there is no one right interpretation of *The Last Days of Socrates*, there is a rational consensus as to what represents a logically accurate interpretation.

As the eye of flesh and the eye of mind prior, the eye of contemplation also contains the same methodological process through which one can determine whether knowledge respective to a particular realm is valid or invalid. So before validating or invalidating, promoting or denying the findings of contemplative inquiry, one must *engage the injunction, and partake in the specific contemplative experiment or*

*practice*. Wilber reinforces: "...in order to gain access to any of these valid modes of knowing, I must be adequate to the injunction—I must successfully complete the injunctive strand. This is true in the physical sciences, the mental sciences, and the spiritual sciences. If we want to *know* this, we must *do* this."<sup>23</sup> The Perennial Philosophy, which claims to represent contemplative truth, possesses its collection of proponents, who have engaged in contemplative practice, cultivated and utilized their *transcendelia*, and apprehended what they have presumed to be certain contemplative truths. Their findings form an unvarying consensus, irrespective of time and space, which embodies right contemplative knowledge. Thus, the Perennial Philosophy should be deemed as valid.

So, if the Perennial Philosophy should indeed be taken as valid, what relevance does this have to the here and now, to the improving of our global society. The Perennial Philosophy makes such grandiose claims as "the earth is an extension of ourselves," "all sentient beings are one with each other," "inflicting harm upon another is inflicting harm upon oneself," or "the divine is within;" claims that all of which appear to our rational minds as obscure at best and a downright falsity at worst. Why should we believe in the Perennial Philosophy, let alone that it can help us in achieving a more peaceful society, when our minds tell us otherwise?

The answer to this question lies in the fact that belief in contemplative truth can never arise from the eye of mind (intellect), it must arise from the eye of contemplation. When analyzing the Perennial Philosophy, most people only survey its tenets from a rational perspective. They merely read, think about, or discuss with others what the Perennial Philosophy proclaims. This is the precise reason why the majority of us,

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibid p. 90.

whether in academia or lay society, dismiss the Perennial Philosophy's assertions. One can never be convinced of the Perennial Philosophy's declarations through intellect alone. Since Perennial Philosophy speaks contemplative truth, we must engage the contemplative aspect of ourselves in order to comprehend its declarations. How is this accomplished? *Through practice!* Upon partaking in contemplative practice, one will be able to better grasp Perennial Philosophy's *real*, transrational concepts. Furthermore, it is affirmed by each exemplar of Perennial Philosophy that comprehension of such concepts leads to belief and ultimately action. Truly believing in or even acknowledging the power of Perennial Philosophy's claims will undoubtedly move each one of us to partake in providing peace and justice to society, thus healing our world. Imagine, if you really believed or even suspected that all beings are one, that the earth is indeed an extension of ourselves, that hurting another is indeed hurting oneself, how would you proceed to act? Who and what would you dedicate your life towards?

## *Chapter 2: Perennial Practice*

There are three fundamental practices the Perennial Philosophy highlights, and which I believe are relevant, even necessary, to the contemporary struggle for peace and justice. They are: the cultivation of happiness, ethical living, and meditative practice.

Before delving further into these three particular practices, it is imperative to note that partaking in Perennial practices does not require that one relinquish completely his or her present way of life. An individual need not become a “mystic,” nor does he or she have to engage in the extreme forms of asceticism that are often characteristic of those who are deemed “holy.” One can partake in these practices at his or her own pace, and according to his or her own needs and desires. Even the slightest of involvement can go a long way in helping to improve the world in which we live. Perennial practices refer to a set of practical and straightforward exercises that *every* individual can incorporate into his or her *everyday* life. Moreover, such practices require no particular religious ideals nor do they require the concession of any presently held religious views. The practices proffered by the Perennial Philosophy are concerned more with experience and pragmatism than they are with theory and belief. The only prerequisites are an open mind and a commitment to experimentation. Instead of insisting upon their truth and effectiveness, Perennial Practices rather ask us to try and determine for ourselves whether or not such exercises are beneficial.

While the spiritual practices set forth by the Perennial Philosophy are indeed accessible, they are by no means easy. It requires courage to engage in serious self-

examination and to subsequently reorient one's ideas and actions, despite the fact that they might run counter to the societal status quo. It requires discipline to remain committed, on a daily basis, to a set of practices that often appear as mysterious as they are invaluable. Finally, it requires patience to trust in the gradual process that is self-transformation.

With regards to layout of the following chapter, I chose to describe these three perennial practices partly from a personal and anecdotal perspective. I felt it necessary to incorporate personal narrative into the objective description and examination of such practices, so as to provide the reader with a social and cultural context within which he or she can best understand the concepts surrounding and benefits coming from engaging in the teachings of the Perennial Philosophy. Furthermore, I wanted to utilize this thesis project as an opportunity to share with anyone who desires to read on, the lessons I have learned from this ageless wisdom and the ways in which I have benefited from practicing these particular exercises. In many ways, I view this project as a culmination of my education during the past four years; an education that seems a bit alternative, even bizarre, but one that has truly led me to develop a greater compassion for all beings and a commitment to promoting peace and justice. I hope you enjoy.

## *The Cultivation of Happiness*

“When ambition ends, Happiness begins.”—Thomas Merton

“True happiness cannot be found in things that change and pass away. Pleasure and pain alternate inexorably. Happiness comes from the self and can be found in the self only.”—Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

“It is difficult for a person laden with riches to climb the steep path that leads to bliss”—Mohammed

It is undeniable that the attainment of happiness is the prime goal to which all humans strive. The quest for happiness drives our ambitions to grow individually and collectively. It is the catalyst from which entire civilizations spawn. Our societies, culture, laws, politics, and technology have all resulted in some way or another from our desire to achieve happiness. In his *Varieties of Religious Experience*, psychologist William James claims, “How to gain, how to keep, how to recover happiness is in fact for most men at all times the secret motive of all they do, and of all they are willing to endure.”<sup>24</sup> So what exactly is happiness? And what brings it?

In contemporary, modern society, the majority of us believe that happiness lies in an entity outside of ourselves, whether it be in a possession, person, idea, goal, etc. Consequently, we cannot help but become attached to such tangibles. Many of us follow this line of thought: I need to possess, obtain, or accomplish “X” in order to be happy. While “worldly” acquisitions do inspire feelings of happiness within us, such happiness is always fleeting. In addition to religion, science is also finding this assertion to be true. Psychologist David Myers, author of *The Pursuit of Happiness*, reveals that although the average American’s purchasing power has doubled in the past century (8500 (1995 US Dollars) in 1957 to 20000 (1995 US Dollars) in 1998)

---

<sup>24</sup> William James. *Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Touchstone Books, 1997, p. 76.

less Americans describe themselves as being “very happy” (35% in 1957 compared to 32% in 1998). Americans also possess higher levels of education, better homes, faster and more efficient technology, more liberties, and more human rights than ever before. Like purchasing power, none of these advancements have translated into increased levels of happiness. Myers indicates that since 1960, the teen suicide rate has tripled; the level of violent crime has quadrupled; and the level of depression has increased as much as ten fold.<sup>25</sup> Myers continues: “a surprising fact...in countries where nearly everyone can afford life’s necessities, increasing affluence matters very little.”<sup>26</sup> Myers asserts that while the meeting of our basic material needs is essential to achieving happiness, acquiring anything beyond that does guarantee that we will lead a happier life than those who possess less. Other findings support Myers’ claim that material affluence does not lead to increased feelings of happiness. University of Rochester professor and psychologist Richard Ryan reported that people who view material affluence as a top priority experience unusual degrees of anxiety and depression and have an overall lower sense of well-being than the average person. Ryan’s research includes data gathered from people of thirteen different countries, including the United States, Canada, Germany, Russia, and India. Ryan insists: “the more we seek satisfaction in material goods, the less we find them there...the satisfaction has a short half-life, its very fleeting.”<sup>27</sup> Researcher and sociologist H. Wesley Perkins’ study of 800 college alumni concluded that those people surveyed

---

<sup>25</sup> David Myers. *The American Paradox: Spiritual Hunger in the Age of Plenty*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2000, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ryan in Alfie Kohn, “Desire to be Rich and Famous Called a Sure Path to Discontent,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 6, 2000.

with “Yuppie Values,” who preferred high income, occupational success, and prestige to developing close relationships were twice as likely as their counterparts, who highly prioritized relationship building, to describe themselves as being “unhappy.”<sup>28</sup>

It appears that in our seemingly endless pursuit to satisfy various desires and attachments, we engage in a destructive cycle filled with perpetual disappointment and dissatisfaction. Upon acquiring or attaining something we think will provide us with the lasting happiness we seek, we later learn that “it” was simply not enough. Either we change, the world changes, or both. Something that we assumed sufficient is no longer so. If observant and ultimately wise, we can infer from our experiences that the kind of happiness found within amassing and consumption is always relative, inevitably impermanent, and never quenchable.

Humanity must acknowledge the consequences of our erroneous presumptions regarding happiness before too late. The incessant craving characteristic of modern society has already inflicted destruction of epic proportions upon our planet. Excessive consumption, perhaps the most devastating byproduct of such craving, is poisoning our world. Nearly half of the six billion hectares of forest that once blanketed the earth are now destroyed. Sixteen million more hectares are being destroyed each year. Global warming and pollution resulting from our exorbitant and irresponsible use and consumption of energy has precipitated the loss of over 40,000 species per year and the destruction of entire ecosystems. Our biodiversity is being severely threatened. Each day, the world provides an average of 2720 calories per person, nearly 400 calories over the amount needed for proper nourishment as

---

<sup>28</sup> H. Wesley Perkins. “Religious Commitment, Yuppie Values, and Well-Being in Post-Collegiate Life.” *Review of Religious Research*, Vol 32., no. 3, pp 244-251.

indicated by the United Nations. Our greed, however, has made access to the needed amount of calories impossible for nearly one billion people.<sup>29</sup> More than eight hundred million people throughout the world suffer from malnourishment. As Mahatma Gandhi said, “There is a sufficiency in the world for man’s need but not for man’s greed.”

The path on which we travel to suppress our cravings and to understand what truly provides happiness is a rewarding but difficult one. I would even argue that attaining complete freedom from materialistic desires proves as an impossible task. However, this does not mean that we shouldn’t try. Considerable effort and a little progress can go a long way in helping to restore our earth and ourselves. The Perennial Philosophy offers a number of practices, so that one may begin to subdue his or her cravings and truly know happiness.

### ***Reflect on the Connection Between Attachment and Suffering***

*“The tighter you squeeze, the less you have”*—Zen proverb

*“Suffering is a call for inquiry, all pain needs investigation.”*—Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

*“We must not wish anything other than what happens from moment to moment, all the while, however, exercising ourselves in goodness.”*—Saint Catherine of Genoa

It is important to understand that simply wanting something such as a nice home, a good job, a family, or any number of possessions is not bad in and of itself. Only when one depends on a specific acquisition in order to experience fulfillment does the experience of wanting invoke suffering and subsequent problems. Needing something outside of oneself in order to attain a certain state of mind or being most likely indicates attachment. When you suffer, is it because you are attached to something,

---

<sup>29</sup> Statistics taken from [www.un.org](http://www.un.org), Nov 23, 2002.

someone, or some particular idea about who you are or who you want to become? If so, examine the underlying beliefs, thoughts, and expectations that cause you to form such an attachment. Furthermore, recognize how such an attachment affects the physical, mental, emotional, and even financial well-being of your self and others. Do you feel tension, anxiety, fear, or depression? Is the time, energy, and effort spent trying to satisfy this attachment diminishing your capacity to allocate attention to other matters that are possibly more important? Who do you affect during this process? And how?

Upon arriving at university I was consumed by my desire to become an accomplished author. Throughout my first year, I spent the majority of my time fiercely competing with others and worrying about whether or not I had what it took to succeed in the academic world. I eventually began to develop very low self-esteem. I was so overcome with self-doubt and shame that I began to resent, suspect, and even downright ignore everyone and everything occurring around me. I hated myself and therefore wasn't of much help to anyone else. So desperate, I frantically sought anything and everything that I believed would help to reverse my downward spiral. I eventually began to acquire things of material worth in order to compensate for my lack of self worth. Such a strategy proved futile, however. While all the clothes, electronics, expensive meals, concert tickets, and other luxuries did provide me with momentary satisfaction, they ultimately proved as just a temporary distraction from my seemingly incurable and chronic unhappiness.

Such an overwhelmingly negative and unhealthy state prompted me to examine my suffering and explore the specific reasons as to why I was feeling this way. What was causing me to suffer? Was my goal of becoming an author inhibiting my ability to enjoy

and positively impact the people and places of now? Did I really seek such a goal or was I rather seeking the feelings that such a goal could potentially provide me? Why couldn't I experience such feelings at this moment? How did my blind and overly zealous drive to succeed affect others and myself? After months of careful and thorough reflection, I eventually became aware of my attachment to future goals and accomplishments. The goal of becoming an author wasn't bad and destructive in and of itself. It was my attitude towards and dependence on such a goal that proved destructive. Over the next year, I learned how to strive for and work towards a specific end without being attached to any particular result. While I still hope to someday become an author, I now understand that such a position is not the only avenue through which I can access desired feelings and states of mind or being. Instead of wasting time and effort needlessly competing with others and worrying about achieving future accomplishments, I dedicate myself to more productive pursuits, especially the helping of others. I act, not with a specific goal in mind, but only because I wish to demonstrate the person I am and who I'm capable of being. What I give, I receive in return in the form of gratitude, love, and companionship, which is all I ever really wanted in the first place. I still dine out, attend concerts, and purchase material luxuries, but not nearly as much as I used to. Relationships, meaningful work, and feelings of self-fulfillment now offer me the genuine satisfaction that was never found in the excessive purchasing and consuming I once partook in. I am finally, just now beginning to understand that happiness comes not from without but from within.

### *Exercises in Self-Control*

“...knowledge is hidden by selfish desire—hidden by this unquenchable fire for self satisfaction.”—Bhagavad Gita

A common strategy utilized by people in practically every world religion in order to understand the true nature of happiness involves exerting self-control and relinquishing certain attachments that have proven unsuccessful in providing the lasting and true contentment we seek. Choose something to which you feel attached and that has proven destructive to your happiness, health, and/or well-being, and attempt to be without it for a designated period of time. If you are attached to smoking, try to quit for a day. If you are attached to purchasing clothes, try to refrain from going to the mall for an extended period of time. If you are attached to a particular goal or future scenario, try to spend a couple of days focusing your thoughts elsewhere, especially to the present task or moment at hand. Whatever attachment you choose to work on, make sure that you set realistic goals, so as not to become discouraged early on. Remember, self-transformation is a long and gradual process. Saint Phillip Neri declared, “In this life there is not purgatory, but only heaven or hell; for he who bears afflictions with patience has paradise, and he who does not has hell.”<sup>30</sup>

As you perform this experiment in self-control, make sure to carefully observe the thoughts, sensations, and feelings that surface. What experiences do you gain that seem beneficial to coping and dealing effectively with future attachments? While such an exercise initially is very difficult, many people gain valuable insight into their suffering and the suffering of others. Additionally, they begin to distinguish themselves from their attachment and understand that they really can *choose* to suffer or not to suffer.

---

<sup>30</sup> Quote found on [www.catholic.org](http://www.catholic.org)

Furthermore, they find that they are capable of coping better than they had previously thought, and thus develop the courage to continue exploring their inner potential. Choosing to suffer temporarily through exercises in self-control can prove extremely rewarding in the long run. As a Chinese Confucian Proverb tells us: “The gem cannot be polished without friction.”<sup>31</sup> Gandhi said, “The quest of truth always involves self-suffering.”<sup>32</sup>

### ***Satisfy an Attachment***

A student at the Tassajara Zen Monastery in California once told famous Zen master Suzuki Roshi that he could not overcome his addiction to sweets. The student asked, “What should I do?” Suzuki reached under his table and replied, “Here, have some jelly beans.”<sup>33</sup> Suzuki’s cleverness reveals an age old and wisely used strategy in which one attempts to indulge an attachment as much as possible and simultaneously reflects on what satisfying the attachment has offered. Partake in this exercise for an extended period of time. Does the particular indulgence offer as much pleasure or happiness as compared to a couple of minutes ago, a week ago, a month ago, a year ago, even a decade ago? I remember once as a child I wanted desperately to have a Nintendo video game system. My parents eventually gave me the system as a birthday gift. Upon receiving it, I remember the satisfaction it provided me initially. After a couple of months, I started playing less and less. After a year, I ceased playing. Today, the system sits in my attic, unused for about nine years now. In microcosm, this example

---

<sup>31</sup> Quote in Ruthanne Lum McCunn et al. *Chinese Proverbs*. New York: Chronicle Books, 2003.

<sup>32</sup> Quote in Raghaven Iyer ed. *The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993.

<sup>33</sup> David Chadwick ed. *To Shine One Corner of the World: Moments with Shunryu Suzuki*. New York: Broadway Books, 2001.

portrays what most of us do throughout the majority of our lives. Whether it be a big house, nice car, or the high-powered job that we don't necessarily like, we strive blindly to attain that which provides a period of satisfaction much less equal to the amount of time spent and sacrifices made towards acquiring it. We spend years, decades, even lifetimes believing that our happiness depends on these various acquisitions and accomplishments, all the while failing to realize that happiness can be achieved at this very exact moment, right here and right now.

*“For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul”*—  
Jesus of Nazareth

### ***Give and You Shall Receive***

*“He who obtains has little. He who scatters has much”* –Lao Tzu

The number of previously wealthy mystics who have shunned potential riches and relinquished their attachments to acquiring worldly possessions are many: Gautama Buddha, Tibetan Sage and Empress Yeshe Tsogyal, Kabbalist Abraham Abulafia, Japanese Zen Master Hakuin, founder of the Baha'i faith Baha'u'llah, Hindu master Krishnamurti, spiritual teacher Meher Baba, modern American sage and founder of the “Sedona Method” Lester Levenson, Indian government official turned sage Gopi Krishna, and countless more. Their various acts of renunciation, however, are not nearly as important as their reasons for doing so. Every spiritual master and adherent to the Perennial Philosophy's teachings understood that everlasting happiness is not something that we strive to acquire but rather an innate quality that all of us are entitled to, regardless of outside circumstances. In other words, happiness is a state of mind or

being. Happiness is truly unattainable simply because we *are* happiness; there is nothing to attain but only that which can be realized.

Assume for a moment, that you are indeed happiness and attempt to provide happiness to another. Providing something to another creates the experience of “having,” whereas wanting something will always produce just that: the experience of wanting. This is precisely the reason why many of us who continuously seek to consume and amass are never really satisfied. Our endless quests to attain wealth, status, power, possessions, etc. create a life filled with experiences of wanting. We never feel complete, let alone adequate. We always assume that something is missing, so we grasp and cling to whatever comes our way, sometimes holding on for dear life. The exponents of the perennial philosophy ask us to let go of and ignore such a futile approach. Instead, if you want something, give it away. If you want happiness and all the feelings that come with it, provide happiness to another, thus demonstrating and creating the experience of *possessing happiness to give*. The effectiveness of such a strategy is not limited to providing happiness alone. For example, you do not need a title or status to feel important, special, or loved. Cause another to feel important, special, or loved and after doing so you will undoubtedly feel the same. Moreover, you do not need an exorbitant amount of possessions in order to feel complete, accomplished, or satisfied. Cause another to feel complete, accomplished, or satisfied, for there is an undeniable sense of completion, accomplishment, and satisfaction in doing so. A. Ramana: "You can have what you want to have, do what you want to do, or be what you want to be in this lifetime-including Self-Realization. You only need to tap into the Infinite Power within you, which is pure Consciousness, and from That Awareness assume the feeling that

would be yours if you were *already* who and what you desire to be."<sup>34</sup> The Perennial Philosophy's belief in giving in order to receive is embodied in the many forms of ethical living it promotes.

### **Ethical Living**

*"This is the sum of duty. Do not unto others that which would cause you pain if done to you."*—Mahabharata 5:15 17 (Hinduism)

*"What is hateful to you, do not to our fellow man. That is entire Law, all the rest is commentary."*—Talmud (Judaism)

*"That nature alone is good which refrains from doing unto another whatsoever is not good for itself."*—Avesta Dadistan-I-dinik 94:5 (Zoroastrian)

*Surely it is the maxim of loving kindness, do not unto others that which you would not have done unto you."*—Analects Lun-yu XV, 23, (Confucianism)

*"One should treat all beings as he himself would be treated."*—Agamas, Sutrakrtanga 1.10, 1-3 (Jainism)

*"Regard your neighbor's gain as your gain and your neighbor's loss as your loss."*—Tai-shang Kang-ying P'ien (Taoism)

*"Therefore all things whatsoever you desire that men should do to you, do you even so to them. For this is the Law and the prophets."*—New Testament, Matthew 7:12 (Christianity)

*"No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself."*—Koran, Sunnah (Islam)

*"Do not do to others that which would anger you if others did it to you."*—Socrates (Greek Philosophy)

Every major religious tradition throughout the world promotes what is commonly referred to as the "Golden Rule." Most every ethical principle and guideline within each of the great world religions evolved from this universal message, which suggests to us: "Treat others as you wish to be treated." It is important to note that this

---

<sup>34</sup> A. Ramana *Consciousness Being Itself*. Aham, Inc.

deceptively simple teaching, like other perennial teachings previously mentioned, should not be interpreted as command. Many people, especially those who claim to be religious, unfortunately do interpret this suggestion to be a command, which if not adhered to, promises to bring eternal damnation. Many religious leaders still today preach that if one does not engage in proper conduct, he or she will be subject to condemnation, God's hateful wrath, and worst of all, the fiery depths of eternal hell. Is such a notion valid or even useful? There must be a better way to inspire and move people to ethical ways of living other than through instilling fear. Such a practice only serves to feed the resentment, disbelief, and anger within many people towards religion. How many people do you know who have been turned off to God and/or spirituality altogether because of the threats, self-righteousness, and non-evidentiary claims put forward by some religious institution?

The practitioners of the Perennial Philosophy, exemplars of a different, more compassionate, and all embracing type of religion, never command(ed) anyone to do anything. Rather, they suggest to us that unethical living should perhaps be avoided because it has proven, time and again, destructive to others and *ourselves*. Once again, science is beginning to echo the claims of the Perennial Philosophy. When we deliberately harm, deceive, and steal from another we cannot help but be trapped by feelings of hostility and guilt. Such feelings, findings indicate, lead to overwhelmingly negative effects that deteriorate our health and well-being. A study reported by the American Journal of Epidemiology in 1997 reveals that people who possessed high levels of "cynical hostility" were twice as likely to die from any potentially terminal disease

than their less hostile counterparts.<sup>35</sup> In the November 2002 issue of psychology journal *Health Psychology*, a study was published indicating that an individual's level of hostility may be a better predictor of heart disease than other traditional risk factors such as weight, high cholesterol, lack of physical conditioning, and smoking. A research team at Brown University, led by Raymond Niaura M.D., utilized a sample of 800 white males with an average age of 60 at risk of heart disease due to various physical conditions. They concluded that males with higher levels of hostility had more instances of heart disease than those with other more physical risk factors such as tobacco use, alcohol intake, and high cholesterol.<sup>36</sup> With regard to feelings of guilt, a research team at Hull University conducted a study in 2002, which discovered that people with high levels of guilt possessed lower immunoglobulin levels and consequently had weaker immune systems.<sup>37</sup> The studies just detailed concerning the negative health effects of hostility and guilt represent only a few of many.

Collectively, the deliberate harm and mistreatment of others have spawned cycles of perpetual conflict and violence throughout all areas of the world. The mass hostility expressed by many Jews and Arabs towards each other, for example, has led to death and destruction of devastating proportions for both sides. Perhaps most important, however, is that such ill will and intention has instilled the fundamental and root feelings of hatred and despise within so many people that the conflict will take years, decades, maybe even centuries to resolve. The same can be said of similar situations in Northern Ireland, the Balkans, the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Angola, Somalia, Colombia, Iraq,

---

<sup>35</sup> S.A. Everson et al. "Hostility and Increased Risk of Mortality and Acute Myocardial Infarction: The Mediating Role of Behavioral Risk Factors." *American Journal of Epidemiology*. 1997, Vol. 146.

<sup>36</sup> Raymond Niaura et al. "Hostility, the Metabolic Syndrome, and Incident Coronary Heart Disease." *Health Psychology*, Vol 21, No. 6.

<sup>37</sup> Julia Hartley-Brewer, "Guilt May Damage the Immune System," *The Guardian*, April 17, 2000.

Afghanistan, and many other regions. Deliberate and widespread harm and mistreatment can also lead to widespread guilt. Many former soldiers in the United States and abroad live lives filled with mental anguish and torture because of what they did in war years ago. Author and Vietnam Veteran, Philip Caputo, offers insight into such feelings: “There is the guilt all soldiers feel for having broken the taboo against killing, a guilt as old as war itself. Add to this, the soldier’s sense of shame for having fought in actions that resulted, indirectly or directly, in the deaths of civilians. Then pile on top of that an attitude of social opprobrium, an attitude that made the fighting man feel personally morally responsible for the war, and you get your proverbial walking time bomb.”<sup>38</sup> The killing that Caputo refers to applies not only to our physical being, but our mental, psychological, and emotional well-being as well. Every time we deliberately kill the rights, aspirations, and basic dignities of others, we not only become vulnerable to the hostility and ill actions of others but we become entrenched in feelings of our own, hostility, guilt, and self-shame as well. We do not like ourselves. We might even hate ourselves. And therefore, we cannot love another.

As mentioned previously, what you give to another you inevitably give to yourself. Love and compassion, like hate and hostility, is undeniably reciprocal. Treating others with love and compassion in turn provides love and compassion for oneself. If we are to heal others and ourselves, we must begin expressing ourselves in a more loving and compassionate manner. In other words, we must begin engaging in more ethical modes of living. There are a number of practices we can partake in order to begin leading a more ethical life.

---

<sup>38</sup> Phillip Caputo in *The Columbia World of Quotations*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

## ***Harmlessness***

*“The meek shall inherit the earth”*—Jesus of Nazareth

*“Harmlessness is the only religion”*—Jain Maxim

*“All men desire peace, but very few desire those things which make for peace”*—Thomas Kempis

Harmlessness is what Gandhi would call, “living the change we seek.” If we desire a world filled with peace and justice, we must first conduct *ourselves* in a peaceful and just manner. I can think of no other exercise more indicative and expressive of peace and justice than an act of harmlessness. Acts of harmlessness undoubtedly can help to break the cycle of conflict and hostility both within and without.

Harmlessness involves the vow to developing within oneself three fundamental attributes: a commitment to right intention, right speech, and right action. Each of these three undeniably positive qualities are absolutely necessary if we are to live in harmlessness. Choose a period of time, possibly an hour, day, or even a week, and utilize these three qualities to attempt to refrain from harming anyone in any such way physically or emotionally (that one might cause through deceit, verbal abuse, neglect, etc.) In addition, try refrain from acting in a way that you suspect might cause future harm to others. This can include harmful acts such as gossip, which often leads to the cultivation of negative feelings among many towards someone who has had no opportunity to defend him or herself, and littering or anything else that is environmentally disruptive, which is more impersonal but arguably has the equal potential to cause significant harm to someone or something later in time. Ideally, harmlessness extends to all sentient beings, both human and non-human. It is also important to note that harmlessness is not an exercise in passivity. If someone or something is committing

wrong to you or another, honest confrontation and subsequent action to right such wrong is still required. Inaction can be just as destructive as action when it comes to perpetuating harmful behavior. Utilize your judgment.

As you're partaking in acts of harmlessness, reflect upon how you feel and how people treat you. What kind of state-of-mind do you find yourself to be in? Are people reciprocating the disposition of harmlessness that you have initially reverberated?

Upon reflection people usually find that expressions of harmlessness are often contagious. The sensitivity and care that one resonates outwards is usually received well and subsequently returned by others. Not only do you become conscious of and sensitive to those people around you, but they, in turn, begin to become more conscious of and sensitive to you as well. This mutual exchange of love, care, and compassion can lead to unbelievably rewarding results for everyone involved. For anyone doubting the overwhelmingly positive effects that can come from engaging in harmlessness, I offer the examples of Martin Luther King and Gandhi. Both spiritual individuals, who were oppressed and presumably without any significant power, utilized the practice of harmlessness to motivate and inspire many, and ultimately accomplished more than any other person struggling for peace and justice throughout all of history. King won civil rights for an entire race, while Gandhi brought independence and freedom to hundreds of millions of people.

### ***Reconciliation: The Power of Apology and Forgiveness***

*“Concern over remorse and humiliation depends on the borderline. The urge to blamelessness depends on remorse.”—Confucianism I Ching, Great Commentary 1.3.4*

*“If one hides the evil, it adds and grows, if one bares it and repents, the sin dies out. Therefore, all Buddhas say that the wise do not hide sin.”—Mahaparinirvana Sutra*

*“He who forgiveth, and is reconciled unto his enemy, shall receive his reward from God—Koran*

*“The offended person is prohibited from being cruel in not offering forgiveness, for this is not the way of the seed of Israel.”—Maimonides*

The practices of apology and forgiveness are powerful tools one can utilize in order to incorporate ethical living into his or her everyday life. Apology allows us to undo the wrongs that we have committed, which have caused harm to others and ourselves. It rids us of the guilt, shame, and self-doubt we may be experiencing and allows all parties to move forward with a freer conscience, better understanding of each other, and a further commitment towards positive growth.

Like apology, forgiveness is equally beneficial in allowing oneself and especially others to move towards establishing more positive relationships. Forgiving another enables you to relinquish feelings of hatred and resentment that might be impeding your ability to empathize with and cultivate compassion for others. Forgiving another also allows the person confessing to rid him or herself of the guilt and/or self-hatred that he or she may be experiencing and that is detrimental to their growth as well.

International actors, government officials, and various scholars are beginning to take note of the extreme importance and potentially positive and macro effects apology, forgiveness, and the entire reconciliation process can bring about. Widely acclaimed conflict resolution theorist John Paul Lederach describes reconciliation as “a

meeting where trust and mercy have met,” and where “justice and peace have kissed.”<sup>39</sup> In his book entitled *Preparing For Peace: Conflict Transformation Across Cultures*, Lederach explains that the development of peaceful and just communities require reconciliation. He asserts that reconciliation undoubtedly promotes and provides for the systemic transformation that indigenous peoples, peace activists, and others affected by conflict are seeking, and it must therefore be diligently pursued in order to produce real social change.<sup>40</sup> CR theorist Joseph Montville reinforces Lederach’s claims as he elaborates upon the reconciliation process: “healing and reconciliation in (protracted) violent ethnic and religious conflicts absolutely depend on a process of transactional contrition and forgiveness between aggressor and victim.”<sup>41</sup> Montville stresses that the cycle of apology and forgiveness is essential to the process of resolving deep-rooted and protracted conflicts, because such conflict is the objective manifestation of subjective affliction and ill will. Consequently, if objective injustices are to be put to rest, certain negative and destructive feelings and modes of thought must be put to rest as well.

The assertions and scholarly findings by Montville, Lederach, and other CR theorists are not abstractions but evidentiary claims based on true to life examples that have demonstrated the significantly positive results that can come from apology, forgiveness, and reconciliation when attempting to resolve protracted and wide scale conflicts. For example, the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, like other such commissions formed in countries throughout the world, has helped to

---

<sup>39</sup> Quote Lederach borrowed from Psalm 85 in Book of Psalms.

<sup>40</sup> John Paul Lederach, “Introduction” and “A Framework for Building Peace,” in *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation Across Cultures*, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1995, pp. 3-23.

<sup>41</sup> Joseph Montville, “The Healing Function in Political Conflict Resolution,” in *Conflict Resolution Theory and Practice Integration and Application*, ed. Dennis J.D. Sandole and Hugo Van de Merwe, Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1993, p. 112.

formalize the process of apology and forgiveness. This particular commission in South Africa has provided both perpetrators and victims of the recent apartheid and post-apartheid violence to tell their stories, express their grief, and confess their wrongdoings. Dullah Omar, former Minister of Justice of South Africa, claims the South African TRC “is a necessary exercise to enable South Africans to come to terms with their past on a morally accepted basis and to advance the cause of reconciliation”<sup>42</sup> The success of TRC’s in providing for reconciliation is evident in how many countries have utilized this approach to begin the healing process within their respective societies. In the past 30 years, El Salvador, Paraguay, Rwanda, Argentina, Bolivia, Uruguay, Zimbabwe, Chile, Chad, Guatemala, Germany, Lithuania, Haiti, Nigeria, Philippines, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Brazil, East Timor, Ethiopia, and Honduras has all established their own forms of truth and reconciliation commissions in order to upstart their own versions of a peace process.

### *Service*

*“Let everyone understand that real love of God does not consist in tear-shedding, nor in that sweetness and tenderness for which we usually long, just because they console us, but in serving God in justice, fortitude of soul and humility.”—St. Teresa of Avila*

A study published in the December 2002 issue of Psychological Science finds that older people who are engaged in service of others reduce their risk of death by more than 60 percent as compared to other seniors who provide neither emotional nor practical support to those around them.<sup>43</sup> University of Michigan researchers conducted a study of over 2,700 males and discovered that men who performed regular volunteer work possessed death rates that were two-and-one half times lower than men who did not

---

<sup>42</sup> Quote on the Official Truth and Reconciliation Website, [www.doj.gov.za/trc](http://www.doj.gov.za/trc).

<sup>43</sup> “Volunteering Cuts Death Risk,” *Psychological Science*, December 2002.

volunteer.<sup>44</sup> Psychologist Robert Ornstein and physician David Sobel, in their book entitled *Health Pleasures*, revealed that partaking in altruistic acts increases one's T-cell count, thus boosting his or her immune system, and stimulates the dilation of blood vessels, consequently provoking a sense of energy and calmness.<sup>45</sup> The few of many such studies just detailed, which highlight the personal benefits that come from serving others, attest to the overwhelming connection between and mutually beneficial nature of internal and external transformation. As with every other exercise mentioned prior, service to others is not regarded by the Perennial Philosophy as a type of sacrifice. Though service might initially be viewed as sacrifice, such an exercise ultimately provides as much benefit to oneself as it does to others. Every practitioner of the Perennial Philosophy, who lived his or her life immersed in acts of altruism, never thought of him or herself as making sacrifice. He or she was only acting out of self-interest, albeit an enlightened self-interest. All mystics understood that in helping others they, in effect, were helping themselves. Which is why Buddha claimed: "Whatever you do, you do to yourself."<sup>46</sup> Reinforcing what was said earlier, the Perennial Philosophy and the wisdom traditions found within each religion that serve to make up such a philosophy, do not put forth any commandments. The Perennial Philosophy merely suggests to others what practices have been consistently proven, throughout time, to be beneficial to others and ourselves.

So go ahead and partake in the perennial practice of serving others. Choose an activity or two that centers on providing support of any kind to those who are in need. Immerse yourself in this activity and reflect on how you feel during this practice? What

---

<sup>44</sup> *Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences*, May 1999.

<sup>45</sup> Robert Ornstein and David Sobel. *Health Pleasures*. New York: Addison-Wesley, 1989, pp. 233-238.

<sup>46</sup> The Buddha in Roger Walsh. *Essential Spirituality*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1999, p.121.

are some of the emotions that surface while serving others? How do you feel after serving? Are you aware of any personal benefits that have come from serving others? It is important to note that embarking on acts of service with expectations of euphoria or praise from others will only lead to disappointment. Service is rarely glamorous and never easy. The will to serve must come from within and from a natural desire to alleviate the suffering of others. Recall a time when you felt strong feelings of compassion for another. It could have been the time you passed a homeless person on the street, witnessed the suffering of others in far away lands on your television screen, or listened to the cries of a friend, close relative, or even a stranger. Develop these feelings of compassion, and subsequently act on them. Aligning yourself with the natural and inherent qualities of empathy, compassion, and will to help others can provide benefits to many people, including you. However, do not take my word for it. Try performing various acts of service yourself, and see what you discover.

Historian Arnold Toynbee, upon studying the figures he believed, throughout world history, contributed most to mankind, concluded that those who served most also benefited most. Toynbee asked: “Who are...the greatest benefactors of the living generations of mankind? I should say: Confucius and Lao Tzu, the Buddha, the prophets of Israel and Judah, Zoroaster, Jesus, Mohammed and Socrates.”<sup>47</sup> Toynbee also claimed that history’s greatest contributors *and* benefactors also engaged in a strikingly similar cycle “of withdrawal and return.” This cycle refers to when one withdraws temporarily from the ordinary world in order to subsequently gain insight into the seeming mysteries of life; insight that proves helpful in ending their suffering and the suffering of others. Mythologist Joseph Campbell refers to the final stage of this cycle as “the hero’s return.”

---

<sup>47</sup> Toynbee in Roger Walsh. *Essential Spirituality*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1999, pp. 256, 257.

The Zen Buddhist tradition calls it, “reentering the market place with open hands.” In Christianity,<sup>48</sup> it is known as the “fruitfulness of the soul.” Whatever its name, the Perennial Philosophy suggests that we each perform this particular act of withdrawal and return in order to enable ourselves to better serve others. Each esoteric or mystic tradition within each major world religion possesses its own form of withdrawal, intended to offer people newer and more beneficial perspectives on the world and life and to help move people to develop the feelings of compassion that are so vital to the healing of our world and absolutely necessary to providing peace and justice. Such withdrawal is commonly called contemplative practice or meditation.

### **Meditation**

*“More than those who hate you, more than all your enemies, an untrained mind does greater harm. More than your mother, more than your father, more than all your family, a well-trained mind does greater good.”—Buddha*

The practice of meditation seems a widely misunderstood concept in today’s Western society. Most people view meditation as primarily a monastic practice native only to Eastern religions. Contrary to popular belief, however, meditation is an age old and worldwide practice, used in almost all religious traditions, including Christianity and Judaism, that can lead to spiritual and non-spiritual benefits in any individual. The Buddha’s detailed stages of dhyana/prajna, Patanjali’s eight-step *Yoga Sutras*, Lao Tzu’s hierarchic Taoistic contemplation, the encompassing zen meditation system, the Victorine’s multilevel course of *contemplatio*, the specific and detailed stages of contemplation explained and taught by Saint Teresa and Saint John of the Cross, the Kabbalist methods of contemplation as expounded by Abraham Abulafia, contemporary

---

<sup>48</sup> Walsh 257.

transcendental meditation; all types of meditative practice have been proven to induce higher stages of consciousness and improve a person's physical, mental, and emotional health. There is an abundance of scientific evidence revealing the many positive effects that can result from engaging in the practice of meditation.

Perhaps the single most reported scientific finding regarding the practice of meditation is that it significantly reduces blood pressure. The Mind and Body Medical Institute at Harvard University, the Center For Mindfulness at the University of Massachusetts, the Medical College at Georgia, a West Virginia University research center, the International Stress Management Association in the UK, and countless other medical research organizations and institutions attest to the overwhelming effectiveness of meditation in reducing blood pressure. The National Institute of Health now recommends meditation over prescription drugs for people with mild to medium hypertension.<sup>49</sup> Meditation has also been proven in many cases to lower blood cholesterol levels, reduce pain resulting from backaches, headaches, and muscle tension, and lower the risk of heart disease.<sup>50</sup> One study published in the journal "Stroke", revealed that meditation, if practice for 20 minutes a day, reduces the risk of heart attack by 11 percent and the risk of stroke by 15 percent.<sup>51</sup> In addition to the physical benefits provided, meditation has also been proven to positively effect an individual's mental and emotional health. A study published this year in the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* revealed that subjects, who meditated when undergoing cognitive therapy for symptoms of depression, relapsed half as often as other depressive patients who received

---

<sup>49</sup> statistics on [www.nih.gov](http://www.nih.gov).

<sup>50</sup> Richard Peterson. *Creative Meditation*. Virginia Beach: A.R. E. Press, 1990.

<sup>51</sup> Alexander, Charles et al. "Effects of Stress Reduction on Carotid Atherosclerosis in Hypertensive Americans." *Stroke*, March 2000.

“treatment as usual.”<sup>52</sup> In another controlled study, published in a 2000 issue of the journal *Psychosomatic Medicine*, University of Calgary psychologists Michael Speca, PhD., and Linda Carlson, PhD, discovered that meditation significantly reduced stress and anxiety in cancer patients.<sup>53</sup> In the past 25 years, nearly twenty separate studies have concluded that meditation increases an individual’s sense of equanimity. Researcher and meditation teacher Jack Kornfield reported, “mindfulness practice (meditation) frequently enhances adaptation to a large range of fluctuating experiences.”<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, since 1965, more than twenty-five studies have also reported that meditation increases feelings of empathy and sensitivity within the individual.<sup>55</sup> Even businesses are taking notice of recent research concerning the positive effects of meditation. A Dutch insurance company now offers a thirty to fifty percent discount on auto insurance to those who practice meditation. Their findings indicate that people who meditate are low risk customers due to their likely low levels of alcoholism, reduced anxiety and stress, quicker reaction time and better perception.<sup>56</sup>

While meditation can offer clear-cut and specific health benefits, it is important to note that such a practice is much more than just an ordinary medical technique designed to target a particular symptom or disease. University of Toronto professor and psychologist Scott Bishop, PhD, says of meditation: “It’s a whole affect management approach...It’s a way of developing a different relationship with our

---

<sup>52</sup> J.D. Teasdale et al. “Prevention of Relapse/Recurrence in Major Depression by Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy,” *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, Vol. 68, pp. 615-623, 2000.

<sup>53</sup> Michael Speca et al. “The Effect of a Mindfulness Meditation-Based Stress Reduction Program on Mood and Symptoms of Stress in Cancer Patients.” *Journal of Psychosomatic Medicine*, Vol. 62, no. 5, pp. 613-622.

<sup>54</sup> Michael Murphy and Steven Donovan. *The Physical and Psychological Effects of Meditation*. San Rafael, CA: Esalen, 1988, p. 72.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. pp. 38-42. For more detailed information on studies, please consult Donovan and Murphy’s book.

<sup>56</sup> Corrine McLaughlin and Gordon Davidson. *Spiritual Politics*. Findhorn, Scotland: Findhorn Press, 1994, p. 392.

experiences of stress and affect and thinking that helps with all aspects of life.” Medical doctor Diane K. Reibel of the Center of Integrative Medicine at the Thomas Jefferson University hospital in Philadelphia elaborates upon the holistic offerings of meditation: “...meditation helps in facing all aspects of life, however painful, with increasing degrees of equanimity, wisdom, and compassion.”<sup>57</sup>

No one can better attest to the comprehensive and transformational power of meditation than myself. In addition to the perpetual state of unhappiness I was enduring during the first year and a half of my college career, I was also suffering from an acute anxiety disorder. I experienced severe panic attacks almost daily. Initially, I sought out and subsequently took several forms of medication designed to alleviate my anxiety. Xanax, Zoloft, Paxil, Klonopin: I tried them all, but none were able to relieve my symptoms. If anything, the medications only added feelings of detachment and aloofness to my already anxiety-ridden state. Gradually, I became aware of the underlying, root, and deeply personal issues causing my anxiety. I began to understand that such problems could not be solved through ingesting some quick-fix gimmick in the form of a pill. If I was to heal myself, I would have to confront, not mask these issues. Moreover, such healing would not occur all in one night. This was to be a long and gradual process. I eventually began to seek alternative and more long-term forms of therapy.

In addition to psychotherapy, my newfound theoretical interest in religion, particularly mysticism, prompted me to experiment with the practice of meditation. For those who are unfamiliar with such a practice, meditation involves silently focusing one’s attention on a specific thing, usually the sensation of your breath, a mantra (a sound or phrase repeated silently to oneself), or a very particular vision or image, while attempting

---

<sup>57</sup> “Meditation,” *The Telangana Science Journal*, August, 2001.

to relinquish all other thoughts for an extended period of time; five minutes, ten minutes, a half hour, hour, or even longer. The practice of meditation is intended to cultivate an elevated sense of calmness, concentration, and a potentially higher level of consciousness. (note: Meditation practice will be explained in much greater detail later in this paper) Countless spiritual masters have sworn by meditation's ability to provide a sense of inner peace and greater wisdom:

*"Meditation is an effort in the beginning. Later on it becomes habitual and gives bliss, joy and peace."* – Swami Sivananda (Hinduism)

*"The gift of learning to meditate is the greatest gift you can give yourself in this life. For it is only through meditation that you can undertake the journey to discover your true nature, and so find the stability and confidence you will need to live, and die, well. Meditation is the road to enlightenment."* – Sogyal Rinpoche (Buddhism)

*"Control the mind. Attain one-pointedness. Then the harmony of heaven will come down and dwell in you. You will be radiant with life. You will rest in Tao"*—Chuang Tzu (Taoism)

*"A person who does not meditate cannot have wisdom. He may occasionally be able to concentrate, but not for any length of time. His power of concentration remains weak and cannot be maintained"*—Rabbi Nachman (Judaism)

*"There is a way between voice and presence where information flows. In disciplined silence it opens. With wandering talk it closes."*—Rumi (Islam)

Initially, meditation offered little to nothing in the way of therapy. For about the first month, my own experiences with this particular practice were anything but rewarding or even pleasant for that matter. I was unable to focus my attention on a single thing for any more than a minute. While meditating, my mind continued to race, filling itself with distressing thoughts that only served to compound my anxiety. Moreover, the physical posture I assumed while practicing proved extremely painful. After a month of

meditating, I was left with a sore back, cramped legs, a still tortured mind, and nothing to show in terms of progress, or so I thought.

Though I was feeling quite discouraged, I was resolved to persist in my practice. I continued to remind myself that healing was a *gradual* process. After approximately six more months of meditating, my practice finally and dramatically improved. The panic attacks were beginning to subside. In addition, I was reaching personally unprecedented levels of concentration and focus. Whether it was in the classroom, at a meeting, on the baseball field, or even at a party I was able to allocate my full attention to the present task or moment at hand. As a result, I became overwhelmingly more effective in my volunteer pursuits and in my efforts to promote peace and justice throughout my local area. I found myself to be much more attentive, patient, and willing to listen to the perspective of others, whereas previously I possessed a tendency to be overly aggressive, intimidating, and dismissing of opinions and values contrary to mine; all negative qualities that I have unfortunately discovered within many well-intentioned people struggling to create a more peaceful and just society. Because I am more accepting of and sensitive to others, others are more willing to listen to my perspectives. I now find it easier to establish meaningful and mutually beneficial dialogues with the people I encounter.

In addition to my newfound patience, ability to focus, and improved listening skills, meditation prompted the development within me two other attributes that were rather unexpected and helpful in creating peace both within and without. The first was a certain mindfulness of the people and things around me. Roughly two years into my meditation practice now, I notice myself becoming increasingly conscious of the normal

everyday activities I partake in. For instance, when I take a shower in the morning, I often become aware of and subsequently experience every drop of water hitting the surface of my skin. This seemingly total awareness fosters an intense love within me for the most ordinary of experiences. When I walk to class, I now consciously feel the soles of my feet pushing against the ground. I find myself feeling an overwhelming gratitude towards the earth and all that it has provided me. When I sit outside or even in my home, I often become aware of and attempt to immerse myself in the various sounds around me. Sometimes, I become so immersed that even the honking of car horn sounds so beautiful. I feel myself becoming more sensitive to my surroundings. The love, gratitude, and sensitivity that serve to form my widely embracing mindfulness soon transforms into compassion, a second attribute that the practice of meditation has provided. In my experience, becoming conscious of that which surrounds you provokes feelings of deep and genuine affinity. When you become aware of a specific entity, it becomes a part of you're experience, a part of you. You identify with it, and are therefore more inclined to treat it as you would yourself. For example, prior to meditating I usually went about my business day to day, interacting with others but not taking the time to attain insight into or contemplate on what people were truly feeling or thinking. Now that meditation has sparked a greater awareness within me, however, I take the time to notice and empathize more with the people I come across or interact with. I feel more now for the person crying over the phone, the stressed out student sitting across from me, the homeless man outside the store, the family member conveying to me his or her problems, the friend seeking advice. I am more aware of and better understand the extent to which they suffer, and I feel strongly moved to provide assistance in any way that I can. Like

suffering, I experience other people's joy more intensely as well. The child who plays innocently, the stranger who laughs, the friend or family member who succeeds; all of these people and positive moments have increasingly become a part of me. I experience them more deeply, and thus I am further moved to help others experience the same joy. My compassion and desire to positively impact that around me extends beyond people to all things, especially the environment. I find that whatever I develop a positive awareness for; I treat with a higher respect and increasing care.

Meditation has proven very therapeutic and extremely beneficial. Yes, I do still experience anxiety and stress from time to time. I still feel afraid. I still become angry. And I still can be insensitive to the feelings and plight of others. However, meditation has gone a long way in helping me to cope with, even rid myself, of these negative feelings and characteristics that I know do not serve me. My personal journey is far from ending, but at least I feel that I am making progress.

With respect to the journey to help others, meditation has undoubtedly helped to provided me with the soft heart, peace of mind, and unremitting determination needed to successfully implement positive social change. I am not the only one who attests to the overwhelmingly transformative power of meditation. Many activists and leaders in the struggle for peace and justice have utilized the practice of meditation to heal society and themselves. Those people include: Mahatma Gandhi, Nobel Peace Prize nominee Thich Nhat Hanh, Nobel Peace Prize winner Martin Luther King Jr.,<sup>58</sup> Nobel Peace Prize winner and His Holiness the Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso, Nobel Peace Prize winner

---

<sup>58</sup> Martin Luter King discusses the influence of meditation on his life in *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King*. Clayborne Carson ed., New York: IPM/Warner Books, 2001.

Mother Teresa, Nobel Peace Prize winner Nelson Mandela,<sup>59</sup> Nobel Peace Prize winner Desmond Tutu, Nobel Peace Prize winner Kofi Annan,<sup>60</sup> Nobel Peace Prize winner Jimmy Carter,<sup>61</sup> Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, among *many, many* others.

### ***Stop and Be***

Upon thinking of meditation, the first word that always comes to mind is “stop” Meditation truly is a practice in stopping; stopping to become a witness of the present moment, without attempting to change anything. Meditation asks us to just stop and observe what is. That is all, nothing special. Most people usually take up the practice of meditation with a specific goal in mind. They meditate to reduce stress, to inherit better personal qualities, even to liberate themselves from all suffering. While it is important to understand the particular benefits that meditation can bring, one must not become hung up on achieving any specific end. Otherwise, meditation becomes the antithesis of itself and its intended purpose. If you come into your practice, expecting and wanting to experience certain benefits or a special state, you are missing the point of meditation entirely. Not only you will soon become discouraged and most likely quit your practice because things don’t happen fast enough, you will also remain oblivious to meditation’s most fundamental claim: *that every moment is special*.

In today’s society, we are consumed with the habit of doing and trying constantly to manipulate our surroundings. What if you were to just stop, become present,

---

<sup>59</sup> Nelson Mandela’s meditation practice is highlighted in the PBS Frontline Interview entitled, *The Long Walk of Nelson Mandela*, 1999.

<sup>60</sup> Kofi Annan has established a meditation room at the U.N. headquarters in New York, New York.

<sup>61</sup> Carter discusses his meditation practice with Bob Abernethy in a PBS Interview on “Religion and Ethics Newsweekly,” October 1999.

and accept a particular moment, reality, or situation, as it is this exact moment, as if it were perfect just the way it is? What if you were to stop and assume the role of that eternal and timeless witness, who has nothing to lose or nothing to gain because he or she is always and ever perfectly present? This is what meditation asks of us. Try practicing in such a way. What happens? Do you see things in a different light? Do you feel different? What are your thoughts? Are there any? If you develop this attitude and outlook towards meditation, maybe your practice will bring you benefits, but maybe it won't.

Upon developing a bit of insight into right attitude, one can now attempt to practice. First, begin by assuming an upright and dignified posture. Such a posture is the optimal position for focusing our attention. If we are not upright and if we slump, we have a tendency to become tired and our mind is more likely to wander. There are many specific sitting, standing, even walking positions one can assume, all of which cannot be detailed in this paper. However, let's presume, for the sake of example, that a person wishes to sit upright in his or her chair, feet flat on the ground, shoulders back, head straight ahead, arms at one's side, hands on lap, while attempting to adjust the body as straight up and down as possible. After taking on this posture, choose something, whether a sound, phrase (or mantra), a particular vision, or your breath and proceed to focus only on that particular thing. You may choose to close or open your eyes while attempting to concentrate your attention; whatever you prefer. Do this for a specific amount of time. The time period can be anywhere from five minutes to a few hours, depending on your preferences, time constraints, and experience. While meditating, thoughts will most likely surface to distract your focus, especially if you are a beginner. Do not worry and do not

reject such thoughts. Simply observe your thoughts as if they were just another entity apart from you, proceed to let them go, and return to focusing. Remember, *be a witness*, even unto your own thoughts.

This practice can be performed a number of times throughout the course of a day, once again depending on your commitment or preference. I, for example, choose to meditate twenty minutes at a time, twice per day; once when I wake up, and once before I go to bed. As mentioned before, do not expect to be able to focus for a significant period of time upon beginning. To successfully focus your attention for a specific length of time requires commitment and practice, as with anything else. Remember to trust in the process.

Always try to utilize and apply your practice throughout the day. Meditation develops within you a certain mindfulness of the present moment. When you drive to work, clean your house, walk your pet, go running, or perform any other such task, use this mindfulness to become conscious of the present activity at hand, the present moment. Mindfulness allows ourselves to allocate our complete and undivided attention to what we are doing at this specific moment in time. Even when involved in complex thinking, such as when in class or at a job, one can utilize such mindfulness he or she has gained from his or her meditative practice to concentrate on those things that prove beneficial and not wasteful to achieving desired ends.

For example, meditation has made me a much more efficient and effective writer. Prior to meditating, I used to spend more time worrying about completing an assignment and turning out a good product than actually writing. Now I write with intention, with focus, and completely conscious of the task I am engaged in. I am no

longer consumed with worries and other thoughts that prove destructive to the writing process. Being present and totally attentive to my writing has undoubtedly has made me a better writer.

Mindfulness not only enables me complete certain tasks at a higher efficiency; it also enables me to help others with every ounce of our being. I am a better listener; I am more sensitive to the thoughts and feelings of others; and perhaps most important, I am more often than not at peace with myself and thus able to offer such peace to others. I am not mulling over past events. I am not worrying about the future and what it will bring. I am right here right now. Mindfulness and the act of being present has provided me with much personal reward, but maybe it won't for you. Practice and find out.

### *Chapter 3: Spirit in Action*

This third and final chapter of my thesis is devoted to the lives and contributions of two perennial practitioners, both of whom employed each of the three practices previously mentioned, thus transforming themselves and the world around them. I have chosen to focus specifically on the lives of 16<sup>th</sup> century Catholic Saint Ignatius of Loyola and Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, who currently lives in France, where he devotes the majority of his life to the quest for a more peaceful and just society.

As is presumably evident, Ignatius of Loyola and Thich Nhat Hanh are two people who come from vastly different parts of the world, historical eras, and religious groundings, which is precisely the reason why I decided to focus on these particular individuals in my case study. Despite their varying backgrounds Ignatius of Loyola and Thich Nhat Hanh employed roughly the same types of practices and stood for essentially the same ideals. Their lives and teachings help to form a philosophy that is truly perennial in every sense of the word.

Prior to beginning, it is important to note that the rare figures described here do not represent a call for everyone to abandon worldly and material pursuits and live a life immersed in religion and spirituality. These two individuals are simply meant to inspire and to show the reader the potential benefits these practices offer to oneself and society at large.

#### *St Ignatius of Loyola*

St Ignatius of Loyola was brought into this world in the year 1491, born to Dona Marina Sanchez de Licona and Beltran de Onaz at the family castle near the small town of Azpeitia in the north of Spain. Inigo, the name by which he was referred to throughout

his life, enjoyed an extremely wealthy upbringing. His family was not only financially secure but also possessed strong ties to the government and church of Spain. It was because of such connections, that Inigo, at the age of ten, was provided with the opportunity and privilege to serve the household of Don Juan Velazquez de Cuellar, who was then treasurer to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of the Kingdom of Castile. Inigo was a resident of the Velazquez household for over a decade. During this time, a young Inigo indulged in all the worldly pleasures afforded to a family that was akin to royalty. While serving under the Velazquez family, Inigo was characterized as a properly dressed, excellently groomed, and very mannerly young gentleman who loved partaking in the indulgent lifestyle typical of the Spanish royalty, which included dining on multicourse meals, regularly attending royal balls, training in the ways of horsemanship, learning the art of dueling, gambling, and fighting. Inigo's excessive liking to a great number of women also earned him a reputation as quite the ladies' man. Though Inigo enjoyed immensely serving in the Velazquez household, his stay was not to last.

In 1516, Don Juan Velazquez suddenly died and Inigo's tenure at the Velazquez household unexpectedly came to a quick end. After Velazquez's death, Inigo would turn to more chivalrous pursuits, serving under Duke Viceroy of Navarre for nearly five years. Now a young man, Inigo spent the majority of his service to the Duke acting as both a soldier and peacemaker between various disputing cities in his own Spanish province of Guipuzcoa. During the fifth year of Inigo's service, however, Francis I, then King of France, attempted to capture the city of Pamplona, capital of the province of Navarre in Spain. Inigo immediately returned to the Duke in Navarre in order to defend Pamplona. In the Battle of Pamplona, Inigo sustained serious leg injuries resulting from being hit by

a French cannonball. It was during his recovery from such an injury, that Inigo would begin his spiritual journey.

After a series of excruciating operations in order to repair his leg, Inigo spent nine months at a manor in Loyola, owned by his older brother Martin, allowing his body the appropriate time needed to heal. Practically bedridden, Inigo sought activities that would help to relieve his boredom and assuage the monotony of the day. Inigo would eventually turn to books. Initially, Inigo searched out and requested novels detailing the lives and various acts of chivalrous knights. Unfortunately, and to Inigo's dismay, the manor possessed no such books. The only books available were those concerning the lives of religious figures. Reluctantly, Inigo began to read.

Though the books Inigo was reading were far different from anything he had previously enjoyed, the young soldier soon took an extreme liking to such writings and the figures described within them. Inigo was especially interested in the lives of St. Francis of Assisi and St. Dominican. St Francis, like Inigo, was formerly a soldier who came from a very privileged background. St Francis, however, after spending a year in captivity and enduring a series of illnesses, shunned the previously indulgent lifestyle he was once a part of in order to serve God. St Francis, realizing that a life of service would be the only life that could provide him with sense of inner peace he was looking for, relinquished all of his unneeded possessions and dedicated the remainder of his life to serving the poor.

Like St. Francis, St Dominican devoted his life to the service of others. When a famine struck his kingdom of Leon, Dominic sold all of his possessions and donated the proceeds to the starving and needy. In addition to his care for the poor, Dominican went

throughout the countryside preaching on the importance of education and adhering to a type of faith motivated purely by love. St. Dominic and St. Francis both eventually found religious orders, dedicated to religious education and the serving of others.

As a young Inigo continued to read about and reflect on the lives of these two saints, he developed a strong interest in religious matters and a deep passion for and commitment to leading his life in a manner similar to St. Francis and St. Dominic. Inigo asked himself, “Why cannot I lead the life of a Saint and do what St. Francis and St. Dominic had done?”

Nine months of practical solitude and silence provided Inigo with the time to contemplate on God and the potential benefits and happiness that could come from a life filled with God. In addition to reading, reflection, and his newfound practice of religious prayer, Inigo contemplated on his thoughts, particularly searching for those thoughts which he derived true happiness from. While engaging in such an exercise, Inigo noticed that when he thought of material things and other such worldly matters, he initially became happy but such happiness never lasted. The happiness found within worldly gains and accomplishments was always temporary, and therefore Inigo was convinced that such thoughts concerning these material things could never be thoughts or emotions truly originating from God. It was only upon thinking about his love of God, performing various religious duties, and living his life like that of the Saints, that Inigo discovered and experienced an enduring and seemingly permanent state of happiness. Inigo thus concluded that a life serving God was not only helpful to others but most helpful to him as well. Despite the wishes of his family to remain as a soldier, Inigo turned away from a life of indulgence and violence in order to pursue a life of religion. Inigo soon

relinquished all of his old worldly desires and embarked on a life of faith and service to God.

Immediately after his recovery, Inigo set out on a pilgrimage to the holy land (Jerusalem) in order to trace the steps that Jesus had taken. Inigo believed that such a ritual was necessary if he was to truly follow in the way of God and those saints that had come before him. Before departing by ship for the holy land, however, Inigo stayed for nearly a year at Dominican monastery in Manresa, Spain. It was in Manresa, where Inigo's spiritual life grew and where he first began to experience an intense communion with the divine. In addition to adopting relatively extreme forms of asceticism that included fasting for nearly a week on occasion, shedding his clothes during the cold winter months, and kneeling in prayer with his badly injured legs for seven to ten hours at a time, Inigo also dedicated a large portion of his time to serving others. Inigo volunteered at a local town hospital by the name of St. Lucy's, in which he assisted in feeding, bathing, and dressing the sickest of patients. Perhaps more important than his service and ascetic practice while in Manresa, however, was Inigo's efforts in creating what is now known as the *Spiritual Exercises*. Originally recorded as a loose series of notes on prayer and meditation, the *Spiritual Exercises* have been incorporated into a book centered on contemplative practice, which has helped countless Christians grow closer to God.

St Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises* are divided into four weeks of meditations, although the term "week" is very flexible, as each segment may last months, even years. The first "week" consists of a series of meditations that aims at invoking a sense of sorrow and contrition, ultimately leading to the purification of the soul and a desire to

lead a life detached from worldly desires and dedicated to the service of God. The second week is intended to develop an interior knowledge and love of Christ as God. The third week is intended to assure and enforce one's commitment to Christ. And the fourth week is intended to arouse a selfless love for others and an unwavering sense of joy and trust in the power and glory of Christ as God.<sup>62</sup> It was Inigo's *Spiritual Exercises* that were most effective in alleviating the suffering of people, including himself. The *Spiritual Exercises* reformed countless people into religiously devout followers who were dedicated to the service of God's people. It also attracted to Inigo a great number of close companions who would later be responsible for creating, along with Inigo himself, the Society of Jesus.

On September 27, 1540 Pope Paul III agreed to establish the Order of the Company of Jesus. Inigo intended the Order of the Company of Jesus to be centered on work in the world and not only on prayer and meditation, as many priests and monastic communities had done in the past. For the remainder of his life, Inigo supervised the order and oversaw the creation of curriculum and even universities throughout Europe, South America, and Asia dedicated to religious education and service. In addition, Inigo initiated several ministries in Rome that included organizations responsible for distributing alms to the needy, homes for reformed prostitutes, and safehouses for Jewish men and women catechumens.<sup>63</sup>

Even after his death in 1556, Ignatius's Society of Jesus continued to grow by leaps and bounds. By the end of the sixteenth century, there were almost as many as

---

<sup>62</sup> *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius Loyola*. Anthony Mottola Translator. New York: Image Books, 1989.

<sup>63</sup> All historical and biographical information received from Peggy A. Sklar in *St. Ignatius of Loyola: In God's Service*. New York: Paulist Press, 2001.

9,000 Jesuits serving in areas throughout the world. Today, the Society of Jesus and the legacy of Saint Ignatius of Loyola are stronger than ever. There are currently more than 20,000 Jesuits serving in 112 nations, on six continents. Jesuits can be found assisting in hospitals throughout Africa, serving at leprosy colonies in India, working in barrios and reservations all over the Americas, providing guidance to prisoners in Europe, and helping refugees all across the world. Jesuits are also active in peace and social justice endeavors. They teach in a number of colleges, write books, perform research, serve as lawyers, act as diplomats, and organize countless campaigns in order to address the needs of the poor and oppressed.<sup>64</sup> The Jesuits' positive work and overwhelming contributions to the global community are truly an outgrowth of the deeply spiritual experiences of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. Saint Ignatius exemplifies that the realization of God's love and/or one's own spirituality can result in the love of and consequent service to millions of others.

### ***Thich Nhat Hanh***

Thich Nhat Hanh was born in 1925 in what was then the French colony of Indochina. Unlike St. Ignatius, Thich Nhat Hanh never did partake in worldly indulgences at an early age. Even as a child, young Thay (as many of his followers still call him today) seemed on a quest for everlasting happiness and inner-peace. He unceasingly searched out the people, places, and conditions that could provide him with what he was so desperately looking for. This existential search, however, and as Thay was later to find out, would prove futile.

At the age of 11, Thay, who was already well into his search, attended a picnic at the Na Son mountain range. During the picnic, he overheard people talking about a

---

<sup>64</sup> [www.jesuit.org](http://www.jesuit.org)

hermit who lived atop the mountain. Quite intrigued, Thay inquired as to what a hermit actually did. “People said a hermit is someone dedicated to becoming peaceful and happy, like a Buddha.” Almost immediately, Thay climbed the mountain in search for this hermit that could perhaps provide him with insight into the secrets of inner-peace and happiness. In the end, the hermit was to elude Thay. Nevertheless, on that day, the young boy realized what true happiness was. As Thay knelt down to drink from a well, a drop of water fell and splashed, bringing Thay immediately into the present moment. And at that moment Thai looked down into the body of water, and saw a reflection of himself. Thay recalls: “It was as if I were meeting the hermit face to face.”<sup>65</sup> In that exact instant, Thay understood that there was never any need to seek out this happy and peaceful hermit, simply because he was that hermit himself. He *was* happiness. He *was* peace. These qualities were Thay’s true nature. Right then and there, Thay’s life vocation was decided. He was to become a Buddhist monk in order to show others the way to happiness and peace through individual introspection and inner transformation as once taught and expounded upon long ago by the Buddha himself.

In 1942, at the age of sixteen, Thay was initiated as a novice monk at Tu Hieu Pagoda near the city of Hue in central Vietnam. Thay would be fully ordained in 1949. From the outset, Thay engaged in intense contemplative practice, meditating for many hours throughout the day. Tu Hieu Pagoda embodied a traditional Vietnamese Buddhist philosophy, and consequently focused almost solely on monastic practice. Though Thay believed in the power and effectiveness of meditation and other forms of monastic practice, he believed that such forms of study and practice would not suffice alone. Thay

---

<sup>65</sup>Thich Nhat Hanh in Dharma Talk given at Plum Village in December of 1997 in [www.buddhist-canon.com](http://www.buddhist-canon.com).

believed religion should not only entail contemplation but should also consist of positive action as well, especially action that was committed to bringing about peace.

After leaving Vietnam to study religion in America for a few years, Thay returned to his native land in 1963 in order to help alleviate the tension and suffering that was resulting from the current political situation in Vietnam. In 1964, with the help of fellow monks and nuns, Thay established the School of Youth for Social Service; an institution that trained individuals to help relieve the many sufferings people were enduring from the war. The members of the School of Youth for Social service offered assistance to all Vietnamese people, regardless of political orientation. The SYSS rebuilt bombed villages, setup medical centers and schools, resettled displaced persons, and organized agricultural cooperatives. Rallying nearly 10, 000 students, the SYSS based its work on the principles of non-violence and compassion. In addition to practical training, Thay taught his students how to properly engage in harmless service and to develop a sense of empathy and forgiveness to those who perpetrated the existing violence and inhibited SYSS's efforts. The School of Youth for Social Service fully exemplified what is now popularly known as *Engaged Buddhism*, a term Thay coined and has since grown largely in currency.

In the following years, Thay would expand his efforts beyond Vietnam in providing for peace. Thay wrote a series of books and poems, speaking out against the continuation of war in Vietnam. He even visited the United States in 1966, where he argued his case to government officials, including Robert McNamara, for ending the war in Vietnam. Perhaps Thay's biggest accomplishment in the United States was persuading Martin Luther King Jr. to publicly protest U.S. involvement in Vietnam, thus spurring the

U.S. peace movement.<sup>66</sup> King was so impressed with Thay's commitment to peace, that he nominated Thay for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1967. King wrote in his letter to the Nobel Institute, "I do not know personally of anyone more worthy of the Nobel Peace Prize than this gentle Buddhist monk from Vietnam."<sup>67</sup>

While struggling for peace during the Vietnam war, Thay was banned by the Communist and non-Communist governments of Vietnam, both of which claimed that Thay was attempting to undermine war efforts. Thay has lived in exile in France ever since. Despite his banishment, Thay is still working to provide peace and justice throughout the world. He is now more effective than ever. Thay's "Engaged Buddhism" movement and United Buddhist Church has attracted thousands of followers in six continents all across the world. Thay's philosophy and resultant institutions are those, which seek to incorporate meditative practice into peace activist efforts. The Buddhist monk believes that the spiritual/meditative element of the peace movement is absolutely necessary, as one cannot seek to provide for peace unless he or she possesses peace within him or herself. Thich Nhat Hanh: "I have been engaged in peace work for more than thirty (now forty) years: combating poverty, ignorance, and disease; going to sea to help rescue boat people, evacuating the wounded from combat zones, resettling refugees, helping hungry children and orphans; opposing wars, producing and disseminating peace literature; training peace and social workers, and rebuilding villages destroyed by bombs. It is because of the practice of meditation—stopping, calming, and looking deeply—that I

---

<sup>66</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh. *Fragrant Palm Leaves: Journals 1962-1966*. Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1998.

<sup>67</sup> Martin Luther King Jr. letter to the Nobel Institute on January 25, 1967, on [www.mindfulnessdc.org](http://www.mindfulnessdc.org).

have been able to nourish and protect the sources of my spiritual energy and continue this work.”<sup>68</sup>

Thay now lives in southwestern France, where he found a retreat center thirteen years ago by the name of Plum Village. Plum Village is a center that offers monastic training to monks and nuns as well as provides training in non-violent civil disobedience to peace activists from the around the world. Plum village also welcomes thousands of visitors each year who wish to partake in the various retreat programs the center now offers. In addition supervising the operations of Plum Village, Thay leads his own religious order of the United Buddhist Church and the Order of Interbeing, gives lectures and retreats throughout the world, and writes extensively on issues pertaining to peace, justice, and conflict resolution. In his lifetime, Thay has published over 100 books.

Although Thich Nhat Hanh has experienced an extraordinary amount of suffering during his lifetime (exile from his homeland, witnessing hundreds of his fellow monks, friends, and students die during the Vietnam War, etc), this Vietnamese Zen Buddhist Master has continued his quest to help heal people of their suffering, and in turn, help to heal this world. Through the process of contemplation and seeking within, Thich Nhat Hanh has been able to cultivate an unwavering sense of peace, happiness, and commitment to others, which has sustained him for more than forty years on his journey towards becoming one of the most influential leaders of our time in the struggle to provide peace and justice.<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh. *Living Buddha, Living Christ*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1997, pp. 2, 3.

<sup>69</sup> Information discovered on [www.plumvillage.org](http://www.plumvillage.org).

***Conclusion: Practice! Practice! Practice!***

I consider this paper to be the culmination and outgrowth of my own four-year experiment with perennial practice; an experiment that is still and always will be ongoing. I am not the same person that I was four years ago. On the whole, my life has far more meaning and depth than it had when I first entered college. I feel that I possess a greater understanding of who I am and where I am going. I also know where I fall short and what specifically inhibits me from becoming the person I desire to and know that I am capable of being. Furthermore, I have realized that personal growth and seeking truth is often a painful, messy, and tumultuous affair, filled with extreme ups and downs. I have often moved forward on the path only to find myself regressing. After a while, however, I learned not to become so easily discouraged when I find myself falling back. I know this particular kind of transformation doesn't occur in an instant, nor does it take place during the course of a weekend retreat or workshop. Change requires time, commitment, and long sustaining practice. Even the most devout and accomplished of spiritual practitioners, like St Ignatius and Thich Nhat, spent years perfecting themselves and their practice, all the while knowing that they, like everyone else, would never reach perfection.

It is important to understand that personal exploration, inner transformation, and the search for wisdom means little unless it expands and enriches the quality of one's participation in the external realm and his or her care and compassion for others. One must be extremely careful not to fall into the trap of self-indulgence and narcissism, as all too often happens when one works to improve the interior. Remember, the key is balance. As said before, this paper is not intended argue for inner work alone; it is intended to

argue for the supplementation of inner work to our work within the external world, which I will believe will provide for better, more integral, and increasingly comprehensive results in our efforts to bring about peace and justice. In ending, I encourage anyone who reads this to not merely accept or deny the claims made here based on my word alone. Please practice! Find out for yourself whether or not anything of what I have said here is true or has any relevance to you.

## Bibliography

- Alexander, Charles et al. "Effects of Stress Reduction on Carotid Atherosclerosis in Hypertensive Americans." *Stroke*, March 2000.
- Carter, Jimmy. Interview. *PBS Religion and Ethics Newsweekly*, October, 1999.
- Chadwick, David ed. *To Shine One Corner of the World: Moments with Shunryu Suzuki*. New York: Broadway Books, 2001.
- Everson, S.A. et al. "Hostility and Increased Risk of Mortality and Myocardial Infarction: The Mediating Role of Behavioral Risk Factors." *American Journal of Epidemiology*, Vol. 146, 1997.
- Galtung, Johan. *Peace, War, and Defense: Essays in Peace Research Vol II*. Copenhagen: Christian Ejlertsen, 1976.
- Gandhi, Mahatma. *The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*. Iyer, Raghavan ed. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993.
- Hanh, Thich Nhat. *Fragrant Palm Leaves: Personal Journals 1962-1966*. Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1998.
- Hanh, Thich Nhat. *Living Buddha, Living Christ*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1997.
- Hartley-Brewer, Julia. "Guilt May Damage The Immune System." *The Guardian*, April 17, 2000.
- Huxley, Aldous. *The Perennial Philosophy*. Philadelphia: Harper & Row, 1945.
- James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Touchstone Books, 1997.
- Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences*. May 1999.
- Jung, Carl. *Collected Works Vol VI*. Fordham, Michael and R.F.C. Hull ed. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971.
- Jung, Carl. *Collected Works Vol IX Part II*. McGuire, William and R.F.C Hull ed. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1979.
- Jung, Carl. *Collected Works Vol X*. Herbert Read ed. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1979.
- King, Martin Luther Jr. *Strength to Love*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1986.

- King, Martin Luther. *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr.* New York: IPM/Warner Books, 2001.
- Kohn, Alfie. "Desire to Be Rich and Famous Called Sure Path to Discontent." *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 6, 2000.
- Lederach, John Paul. "A Framework for Building Peace." *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation Across Cultures*, Syracuse: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1995.
- McCunne, Ruthanne Lum. *Chinese Proverbs*. New York: Chronicle Books, 2003.
- McLaughlin, Corinne and Gordon Davidson. *Spiritual Politics*. Findhorn, Scotland: Findhorn Press, 1994.
- "Meditation." *The Telangana Science Journal*, August, 2001.
- Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, Tenth Edition, 1993.
- Montville, Joseph. "The Healing Function in Political Conflict Resolution." *Conflict Resolution Theory, Practice Integration, and Application*, Sandole, J.D. and Hugo Van De Merwe ed., Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1993.
- Mottola, Anthony trans. *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola*. New York: Image Books, 1989.
- Murphy, Michael and Steven Donovan. *The Physical and Psychological Effects of Meditation*. San Rafael, California: Esalen, 1988.
- Myers, David. *The American Paradox: Spiritual Hunger in the Age of Plenty*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1997.
- Niaura, Raymond et al. "Hostility, the Metabolic Syndrome, and Incident Coronary Heart Disease." *The Journal of Health Psychology*, Vol. 21, No. 6.
- O'Regan, Brian. "The Hidden Mind: Charting Unconscious Intelligence." *Noetic Sciences Review* no. 5. 1997.
- Ornstein, Robert and David Sobel. *Healthy Pleasures*. New York: Addison-Wesley, 1989.
- Perkins, Wesley H. "Religious Commitment, Yuppie Values, and Well-Being in Post-Collegiate Life." *Review of Religious Research*, Vol. 32, No. 3.
- Peterson, Richard. *Creative Meditation*. Virginia Beach: A.R.E. Press, 1990.

- Ramana, A. *Consciousness Being Itself*. Aham, Inc.
- Schuon, Frithjof. *Transcendent Unity of Religions*. Wheaton, IL: Quest, 1984.
- Sklar, Peggy A. *St. Ignatius of Loyola: In God's Service*. New York: Paulist Press, 2001.
- Smith, Huston. Interview. PBS Series "Wisdom of Faith," 1998.
- Specia, Michael et al. "The Effect of a Mindfulness Meditation-Based Stress Reduction Program on Mood and Symptoms of Stress in Cancer Patients. *Journal of Psychosomatic Medicine*, Vol 62, No. 5, pp.613-622.
- Teasdale, J.D. et al. "Prevention of Relapse/Recurrence in Major Depression by Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, Vol. 68, pp. 615-623, 2000.
- The Columbia World of Quotations*. New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1996.
- The Long Walk of Nelson Mandela*. PBS Frontline Interview, 1999.
- Underhill, Evelyn. *Practical Mysticism*. Kila, Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 1942.
- "Volunteering Cuts Death Risk." *Psychological Science*, December, 2002.
- Walsh, Roger. *Essential Spirituality*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1999.
- Wilber, Ken. *Integral Psychology*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1999.
- Wilber, Ken. *One Taste*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1999.
- Wilber, Ken. *The Eye of Spirit*. Boston: Shambhala, 1997.
- Wilber, Ken. *The Marriage of Sense and Soul*. Boston: Shambhala, 1998.
- [www.buddhist-canon.com](http://www.buddhist-canon.com)
- [www.catholic.org](http://www.catholic.org).
- [www.doj.gov.za/trc](http://www.doj.gov.za/trc)
- [www.jesuit.org](http://www.jesuit.org).
- [www.mindfulnessdc.org](http://www.mindfulnessdc.org).
- [www.nih.gov](http://www.nih.gov).

[www.plumvillage.org](http://www.plumvillage.org).

[www.un.org](http://www.un.org).