

Meditation Talks

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12th March 2015 London

Welcome to that there meditation class. I'm Vinay. This is intended as a private recording (and transcript) so please don't stick it on YouTube. I will pass it around to people who should have a copy.

Most of the time when people talk about meditation, what they're fundamentally talking about is something that leaves you more-or-less where you are, but as a calmer, nicer version of yourself. The notion is that meditation is an incremental improvement to quality of life - like getting regular exercise.

This is not that. I am teaching these classes now because in about ten years I'm going to need people that are enlightened to do some of the things I'm currently doing or new things and in order to be able to trust somebody's judgement with tens or hundreds of thousands of other peoples' lives on the line, I need those people to be enlightened.

So if I'm in a position where we get the hexayurt refugee camps going, I can't be everywhere at once. If we wind up with extremely serious geo-politics around cryptography, I can't be everywhere at once. In order for people to be able to do the things that I'm currently doing, or to be able to help at that level later, I need there to be people that have done enough spiritual practice that I can trust them with tens or hundreds of thousands of other peoples' lives, and not worry that they will make a mistake.

Forging people to the point where they are capable of dealing with trouble on that scale without flinching requires a long process. I'm able to do it because I was put through that process and now if I want helpers at that level of capability in ten years, I have to teach it.

I don't expect that everybody who learns this stuff will choose to exercise it in

that way. It is not a responsibility that passes with the material, to teach it - but if I don't teach this stuff relatively widely, then not enough people will try to have enough succeed to be inclined to actually help out with this stuff when the time comes.

For me, I'm making an investment in having an extraordinarily highly-trained spiritual elite to back me up, and I have to make that investment a decade before I know I need these people trained up. There may also be a side-effect which is a whole bunch of other people get a bunch of spiritual experience they wouldn't otherwise have had - greatly to their benefit and possibly to the world's benefit.

This is a completely different rationale for meditation than the vast majority of the processes people are meditating inside of. They're usually meditating for different reasons and different goals. This is - the world is a pretty screwed-up place and you need a pretty strong whip-hand to be able to manage those processes if you want to improve it. Here is an armoury of usefulness. Most of the weaponry won't fire until you've got a pretty high level of development - this is why it's relatively safe to do.

Does this sort of make sense as a theoretical framework?

The original lineage I was trained in is the religious wing of the Gurkhas - the Nath Sampradaya, which is in itself a sub-department of the thing that you might call the Mahavatar Babaji activity, which includes things like the Kriya yoga lineage.

Now that we've got the notion that the meditation is inside of a different context, then we need to talk about what meditation is. The normal thinking around meditation is that you kind of sit there and you do something with your mind, and the something you do with your mind makes you more peaceful, calm, happy and relaxed and that over a period of time this kind of soaks into your awareness and you become a nicer, better, rounded kind of a human. That model is true for the kind of meditation that most people are doing, which is meditation de-coupled from any

kind of urgency about the state of the world.

Most meditation that we have access to is descended from monastic meditation traditions where people first renounced all future involvement with the world, either personal or political, and then sat down to try and find enlightenment. It turns out that those people are very well positioned to get enlightened and terribly positioned to do anything about the state of the world because the detachment of the initial practice also makes it impossible for them to fully rehash the world at a political level to go and beat the tar out of Dick Cheney or whoever the demon of the day is.

If you want the ability to do heavy-weight social engagement later, you have to start on a non-renounced footing. You either have to have kids, or you have to have family who have kids that you're still attached to, or you have to have the possibility of having kids, or you have to be greatly attached to somebody else's welfare who is not you, in a direct personal sense. It is the family tie that connects the meditator to the world. In my case the family tie is largely a lineage tie but that is not for want of trying. I could have settled down and got married half a dozen times if I was a slightly less obnoxious character.

Once you conceptualise that we are not stepping back from the world and meditating on a cloud, we're meditating right where we are, then the second question is - what is it that we're doing if we're not renouncing first? We're sitting there in our lives on a cushion or a chair doing nothing. How is this different from going down to the shed and having a nice cup of tea? And the answer is, it's actually not. Most of the essential practices of meditation are as natural to human beings as sleep, where you just kind of settle down for a minute and kind of go - sigh. You take a nice little break and you have a little breather. Typically there's some recreational activity like you smoke a cigarette or you drink some tea. You do it for five or ten minutes and then you get up and go back to work.

Imagine that reflex, which we all have, extended for an hour a day. *I should really get up and do some work. Oh no I'm supposed to be meditating, this is work. Sigh. I*

just can't be arsed any more. Had enough of this.

What you get is this deeper and deeper settling into a state of relaxed composure. It's a continuation of the reflex of taking a ten minute break from your day, only the ten minute break stretches out to be 40 minutes, an hour, half-an-hour, two hours - however long it is and you sink deeper and deeper into this kind of relaxed awareness.

What goes along with that process is an enormous amount of awareness of unfinished work and incomplete tasks. So, simple stuff - *I just noticed that the kitchen is filthy, I can see it from here and as my eyes fall over it I can see this really needs to be cleaned. Awful.* One kind of awareness.

Another kind of awareness. *I have two meetings tomorrow and I haven't done the documentation for them. I really need to do some analysis and I need to call somebody. Wow, I'm really tense about that. This is not good.*

So you enter into the relaxed state. All the incomplete transactions in your life then begin to surface and try to claim pieces of the relaxed state for themselves. Those incomplete transactions can go back to childhood. *I am really upset about the way my mother talked to me on the phone yesterday. In fact I've been upset with my mother since I was four. I'm still upset with my mother and now I feel like an angry four-year-old.* And this can go all the way back.

If you think of your life as being a sea of incomplete open transactions and within that sea of incomplete open transactions you have a desire to complete things, to finish them and to put them down, meditation provides you with an alternative to completing, finishing and putting down. The alternative it provides you is - *I just don't care any more. It's not worth finishing. Drop.*

This reflex of taking incomplete things in your life that you've been carrying around as open transactions and dropping them is the business end of meditation as it is practised by house-holders. You're taking things that are draws on time, draws on attention, draws on energy. In your relaxed state you're looking at these things and you're saying - *this is just not worth doing. Chuck.* For the things you can do that with,

you do that. For the things you can't do that with, for the first couple of years, it's often worth keeping a notepad beside you so that when something completely urgent that you must remember to do comes up in meditation, you can just write it down and then drop it from your awareness again. I don't recommend that as a practice but for many people meditation is impossible without doing it. So it's worth considering as an option.

We sit, we relax as if we're about to sit down for a nice cup of tea, and then we continue to be relaxed. Eyes can be closed, eyes can be open, be half-open. If you're uncomfortable, move. Zen is very much about, if you're uncomfortable just sit there and face the pain of being alive. No, if you're uncomfortable, move.

The kind of vibe that you're looking for is a contentedly retired person with a really rather excessive pension sitting down in an armchair in their shed and staunchly ignoring doing the lawn. A sort of middle-class king in their middle-class castle who just doesn't care. *Right now I'm going to have a cuppa. Sod it. I'm not going to fix the lawnmower. Its bolt is broken and I just don't care. Nothing to be done.*

One of the things that will tend to come up in this state of profound nothing-to-be-doneness, this kind of regal indolence, is irritations at an emotional level. Because our lives are filled with incomplete emotional transactions, trauma, or if you're unlucky, post traumatic stress disorder. There can be an ocean of incomplete emotional stuff.

The stuff which can simply be put down are the petty emotions like the murderous desire to have revenge upon the person who has finally succeeded in scuffing your new white shoes. Eventually this will just go away.

The hard stuff is the deep emotional trauma. The places where our parents betrayed us. The places when death came into our lives when we were far too young to deal with it. People that we might have accidentally got killed in a car accident if we were profoundly unlucky. All kinds of really bad real-world stuff that leaves us scarred and broken.

These kind of issues have two levels. There is the primary trauma level where there is still the open wound of the thing that happened, and the secondary trauma level, where our world model gets broken by the fact that this has happened. The primary emotional trauma, meditation is not a great way of dealing with. The primary emotional trauma is best dealt with by therapy and getting a hug or potentially things like MDMA for PTSD. All of those emotional trauma-related workloads have to be worked out somewhere if you're going to be doing a lot of meditation, because meditation will tend to stimulate them. But meditation is a not a great way of resolving them, because if the emotional injury causes you to feel isolated and alone the best place to work that out is not when you are isolated and alone because you're meditating. You need secondary and tertiary mechanisms for processing the emotional stuff that will come up. Meditation alone is not enough. It will cause re-traumatisation for things which are isolation-based problems.

However, in terms of coming to peace with emotions which you should have felt and choose not to, things you distracted yourself from because you stayed busy, things that you just always blocked out from thinking about, the places where you have to feel things that you already feel and acknowledge the feelings you already have, all of those kind of processes can be done alone on a mat.

What can't be done is the stuff where you've become disconnected from humanity because you're not going to get more connected to humanity on your own. That's quite important to remember. A lot of people will say that meditation will get everything. I don't think it will - at least it's not the short path through everything.

The world model adjustment stuff is also very intense because once you realise that people die, you're permanently changed by it. Death is the great forbidden mystery. Western civilisation takes it a long way away from us. It's a very, very rough set of things. When we get to this death business, the death business is at the heart of other trauma. More or less anything that happens to us which feels bad, feels bad because we're animals that were evolved to stay alive and things which are three steps

ahead of potential death feel terrible, two steps ahead of potential death feel horrific, one step ahead of death feel unimaginably horrific. So we're constantly navigating away from things which are associated with death because we're animals.

We're also constantly navigating towards things that are associated with life because we're animals. Whatever spiritual nature we might have is completely nebulous compared to the utter blunt reality of our evolutionary heritage, which is with us every second of every day whether we like it or not. Respiration and eating.

As you sit, gradually, gradually in the relaxed state the world model is made manifest. *I am uncomfortable because my parents are getting old. One day soon they're going to die, and then I'm going to have to bury them and this is a terrible thing. Woah. And then one day it will be me.* This is really, really rough.

The cycle of life that human beings experience, the current regime that we operate under where we don't have massive life extension, we don't have physical immortality, we don't have evidence of heavens - you go around the wheel and you will in all probability snuff it. I say in all probability because the trans-humanist thing is getting closer and closer. Maybe in our lifetime, maybe not in our lifetime. But until that becomes matter of fact, if it becomes matter of fact, we still have to deal with death as a primary teacher.

Most of our psychological blocks are psychological blocks that are designed to prevent us from having to deal with the reality of other peoples' death, or our own. By making a direct approach on the subject of death, you can relatively quickly cleave through more or less all of the fundamental monkey psychology problems of the human mind.

Once you are comfortable with the fact that you will die, and that everybody around you will die, modulo trans-humanism, once you're really comfortable with that, life is joyous because you're no longer struggling against fate and once you're no longer struggling against fate, you can surf on it. As long as we're not afraid of death, then all the things in life which are normally far too risky to do, become open, fun

and enjoyable. *Wow that's really dangerous. What's the worst that could happen? I could get killed. That's going to happen anyway. Oh you mean we can do pretty much anything? Yes.*

This is very much a kind of Fight Club thing. Once you realise that your death is inevitable, the only question is what are you going to do between now and then? That is a completely different framing from the pre-conscious model that we have which is probably unconscious and perhaps genetic inheritance - which is that if we do everything right, we'll never die. This feeling that if we do everything right we'll never die, this kind of latent immortality that we often feel, is why we're constantly risk averse and constantly living below our potential. We're unconsciously holding back because we think that if we never make a mistake, somehow we will become immortal. And this turns out not really to be an option.

In fact it is the complete certainty of our own death that liberates us to live. This is not a new thought, this is a very old thought, but it is the central fact of any kind of meditation which is not based on escaping into lala land and then barricading the door.

If we are not doing rainbow unicorn bliss meditation with some new age weirdo from California who lives in Mount Shasta and has a terrible attitude problem about parking tickets, then you're going to be on the other side of the fence, meditation for bad people, death is a fact, get used to it.

Let's talk a bit about time-scales. Actual enlightenment is about a PhD's worth of work. And by actual enlightenment what I mean is, you should be able to take an angry person with an AK47 - they should be able to wave it in your face with all probability that they will pull the trigger and your consciousness should not fluctuate at all. Absolute rational calmness in the face of your own immediate demise or the death of somebody close to you is the baseline for enlightened consciousness. There's a lot more to enlightenment than that, but the traditional way that enlightenment is demonstrated in the lineage is that you hand your student an enormous razor sharp

knife and you have them hold it to your throat and apply a little pressure. They look you straight in the eye and you just comfortably settle. And they go *you're really not afraid of dying at all - there's no instinct to flinch - none - OK*. That is a very disturbing thing to see. The samurai talk a lot about that - The Way of the Warrior is the way of death, all this kind of stuff. It makes quite an impact seeing that. Instinctively we can tell when somebody else is unafraid in a situation where they should be terrified.

Much more comes with enlightenment. The great spiritual vision. The insight into the fundamental goodness of the nature of the Universe - all the rest of that stuff. All of that is absolutely there. But if you chase enlightenment as a path into infinite light, it's very easy to get side-tracked by states which are closer and closer to enlightenment but will never turn into enlightenment. It's like a Zeno's paradox where you can get closer and closer and closer to perfect light and bliss, but you'll never actually arrive until you go right the way down through all the levels of consciousness and unhook yourself from mortality.

It's much easier in this culture at this time to go inwards, unhook from mortality and then ascend. Hence an approach which is very much based on the here and now mortality human life is a much better vehicle.

It's a PhD's worth of work to get enlightened. Some people start with natural pre-dispositions which will make it much easier. Some people start with a ton of life experience which has forced these issues. Some people start with intellectual practices that turn out to be very cross-correlated. If you've spent an enormous amount of time, say, as a composer of classical music, in all probability you've got first-rate mental focus and you could apply that mental focus to meditation. You might also find yourself just sitting there on the mat composing all day and getting nothing done at all meditation-wise.

There's no way to know for any individual which way it will go, but you have to be thinking about this stuff as being roughly an hour a day for roughly a decade, at the end of which you will become essentially super-human. No fear of death. Infinite

psychological flexibility. The ability to regenerate from almost any kind of tragic event. The ability to inspire and lead people on a scale which is largely defined by how much work you feel like doing that day. This is a path of mastery which has been conserved inside of different traditions all over the world for millennia and millennia. It's where you get your wizards from. Every culture has wizards. All the wizards are pretty much the same. It's where you get your wizards from. They go in. They fix it. They come back. Then they can tell people what they did and they can do things that nobody else can.

Because I'm in a position where I'm expecting to need a lot of help in about ten years, I am basically starting the wizard factory now. Not everybody that comes to the wizard factory has to become a wizard or has to help me, but if I'm going to get any helpful wizards in ten years, I have to start the wizard factory now. This is very much the wizard factory. It will produce a certain betterment of quality of life if you sit down and do it - but so will Hatha Yoga. It will produce a certain kind of psychological insight - but so will Vipassana.

What it will produce that most other traditions won't produce is a condition of consciousness that in Sanskrit is called *vīra*. The tradition of the great spiritual hero - the ass-kicker for God - and if we're going to get those people produced, it takes about a PhD's worth of work, which is roughly ten years of part-time effort. So I'm going to lay this stuff out for people. I'm going to teach it on some kind of basis. I expect that there'll be a slow growth over a few years. Then some kind of semi-stable group will form. Six to eight years after that it will begin to produce people who actually have their shit together at the required level of play, where I can hand them a situation at a level of risk and complexity that I would consider challenging, and then I can turn my back on that situation, walk away and consider it done.

This is a very, very high level game. It's a very, very serious offer. I've been at this kind of spiritual hero thing really since Spring of 2001 and my batting average in that time is absolutely terrifying. The things I have achieved in that period are completely

beyond human comprehension. If I lay them out end-to-end, most people assume that I'm lying and then I send the URLs.

Anybody can do that - you just have to stop being suburban. But the price of stopping being suburban is literally tearing apart the foundation of the world in which you exist and getting down to the absolute primal fundamentals of human experience. It feels in some places like walking through hell and in other places it feels like you're being toured through heaven by a bunch of extremely giggly angels.

But the actual practice is - you sit in a chair and breathe. Your mind drags you through all of these layers of consciousness and all of these permutations, as it works out the fundamental kinks in your awareness and, one at a time knots come undone and when the final knots begin to go, your universe expands until you are literally at one with everything.

It is everywhere, it is continuous and I'm not going to die. Or at least the Universe is going to continue and I am so completely woven into that Universe, my own death is really rather irrelevant. No fear. Once you make that escape, you're free to do anything you like for the rest of your life. It's basically time off.

Getting there requires letting go of everything else. What makes this a householder tradition is that you maintain the facade which allows all of the other things in your life to continue to exist more-or-less as they do now or slightly improved. At the same time you completely dismantle the bondage and attachment to those things. So you wind up maintaining the superficial structures of your life because they make the people around you happy, while you yourself liberate yourself from all of these things. If you get it right and you're perfectly good at it, you can sit there being exactly the person that everybody else expects you to be and be completely liberated within.

So that is basically the offer. I'm going to be running the hero factory, wizard factory - whatever you want to call it. Anybody who I get on with at a personal level is

welcome to come and do that stuff. People that I just don't like will not survive the process. That is a constraint - if I was a better kind of teacher I might be able to teach everybody, but people that I don't like just won't survive. So it's pretty important that it's the kind of people that I get on with. Over time there will be less of a need for me to be deeply personally involved because I'll have other people doing a lot of the training. That will broaden the kind of people who can do it and get a lot out of it.

I can't think of anything I should add, but let me cover two little technical points.

In the guru-disciple tradition of India the guru makes guarantee that they will get the student to enlightenment if the student does exactly what they're told. Unfortunately there is no mechanism in Western society which allows people to form a guru-disciple relationship properly. The necessary psychological hooks just don't exist on either side of that divide. I don't think it's possible for the guru-disciple relationship to come across from India and function here. That slows these processes up a good deal because it means that the student has to generate their own sense of safety and well-being and in-charge-ness because they can't basically throw themselves on the mercy of the guru and then feel safe. We just don't have a society that works that way. So there's a whole bunch of additional labour that has to be done to compensate for that. I have mapped that stuff out and I know how it works. So far it looks pretty successful.

Second thing is - this stuff has been tested. I went back and re-formulated the systems in 2010 or 2011. I have been bench-testing that with a small number of people in secret. Results are extremely promising. It seems to perform more or less exactly as I would have predicted.

Although this seems like the first time the machinery is being run, it's the first time it's being run in public. The reason that it's a public or semi-public tradition rather than a secret tradition is that for people to make their way into a secret

tradition is basically impossible. So by having something which is a little more open, the offer is there for anybody that wants it - as long as they get on with me well enough that if they're on fire I will choose to put them out in preference to going home and having a good night's sleep.

That safety criteria is very real. If I was a universal teacher it wouldn't matter, there wouldn't be that proviso. I'm not a universal teacher, I'm a tribal or clan teacher. It's a different kind of consciousness.

I think that is all of the theory.

The actual technical process of meditation.

You sit in a comfortable position with your spine straight. Probably the most important part of the meditation is getting the butt correctly positioned on the chair. Typically you'll lean forward and scoot your butt back as far as possible and as you sit back there's not very much of your muscle between the hip bones and the surface that you're sitting on. It produces a very firm platform for meditation. You can also sit cross-legged or in full lotus but for any position that you're in, you're going to have to do this lean forward and scoot, like the butt scoot, get the firm contact position which gives you the solid posture. Typically you also want to roll the shoulders back. Any decent yoga teacher can teach you how to sit properly. It's worth doing enough yoga that you learn how to sit properly. It's quite a complex technical skill and when you get it right the fidget rate drops by an order of magnitude.

So, butt scoot for solid position, shoulders rolled backwards, open the chest. Breathing - traditional yogic breathing. First the lungs are completely emptied, then the diaphragm fills, then the chest fills, then the shoulders fill. Complete the breath in. Then reverse the sequence - shoulders empty, chest empties, belly empties. That's literally the entire technical part.

Hands palm down or palm up, slightly different effects. I always got a lot of mileage putting them at the *dantian* kind of folded over each other. That was actually the position I used most.

Physical practices - hatha yoga, tai chi, things along those lines - very, very highly recommended. It's super important that you do something along those lines as well. They are complete paths in and of themselves in many cases but it's really worth doing them anyway, as well as or instead of. My primary practice in that line was Chinese martial arts - it fitted my character well. But anything will do.

Ditto therapy level stuff. Bunch of therapies - pick one. Hakomi, Feldenkreis, Rogerian therapy, Reichian therapy, Gestalt. They're all workable.

Now, the mind. This is the one part where I have to vaguely try to remember how it was, because I haven't actually had a mind for twenty-something years. 1993 or 94 was the last time that I had a mind. It's getting to be a bit of a dull memory.

Typically you have this kind of flow of narration that is kind of commenting on the environment that you're in. Some of it is external stuff like the grass is green or my shoe is blue or was that the dog. So it's narration on the environment. Some of it is internal stuff like I feel cold, I am worried about something, where is my whatever it is. This is a line of chatter. The chatter is essentially like a log file being generated by a computer or it's stuff being written to a white board by a bunch of people in a room who aren't allowed to talk to each other. Most of that is internal messaging from one part of yourself to another part of yourself and if you just sit and listen to the internal messaging as if the internal messaging is a mantra, the internal messaging greatly accelerates in efficiency and eventually burns itself out. So the internal chatter is not to be suppressed, it is to be focussed on and it is to be listened to as if it was a radio in the room that you're meditating in. *I am meditating. There is the sound of the radio. I am listening to my mind. I am listening to the teletype in the corner as the teletype in the corner continues to process messages for different parts of me.* It's not suppressed

and it's not revelled in. It's just acknowledged as being a kind of sensory stimulus. Eyes can be open or closed - usually open is better. For any of these things you want to do both - sometimes opened, sometimes closed.

This is the first kind of meditation. You sit and if there is mental chatter, you listen to the mental chatter as if it was a radio.

The second activity is mantra. You think of a word like clouds. Visualise clouds, say the word clouds. Focus the attention on the concept of clouds. For this, if the mind is pulled off in another direction by another image or another thought, that constitutes something where you're going to make an effort to pull your mind back onto this object of clouds.

In the first kind of meditation where you're just sitting there and having open awareness, there is no mental effort. You're just relaxing into the stream of consciousness - whatever it happens to contain, it happens to contain. Type one.

Type two - mantra meditation, you pick the attention up and you put it back on clouds. *Clouds dammit, clouds. cheeseburgers - no, clouds.* Mantra meditation is proper difficult. It's really, really frustrating. Nobody is going to be good at mantra meditation for literally months or years. But being good at mantra meditation builds this massive muscular power where you can pick up the mind with your will and put the mind where you want it to be. There might be some little corner that still says cheeseburger but it will basically behave itself most of the time and stay on clouds.

If you just do mantra meditation, you don't get to know yourself any better because the mind is always filled with the mantra. This is no good. If you just do sitting there and getting to know yourself meditation, you never develop any muscle or any willpower so the mind continues to roam around like a feral animal. You have to have both the getting to know yourself better meditation and also the working meditation. You need both processes.

The final kind of meditation is the meditation on being miserable. This is where the real hard-core psychological, spiritual transformation stuff is.

You sit back and relax and all you get is anxiety thoughts. Then you do the mantra. *Anxiety fear. Anxiety fear. I can't shut this thing up.* Neither mechanism will work because in the passive listening mode, you can't change anything because you're just passively allowing the stream to go through you. In the mantra mode you're putting the attention on the mantra rather than on the anxiety.

The third mode is this kind of investigative mode. Oh I'm having a problem. I'm going to meditate on the problem by trying to feel deeply any emotional core of this thought stream. *I wonder where my cheque book is.* I feel the visceral anxiety about money. *Am I going to be able to pay the rent next month? What if I lose this job?* You feel it and you feel it and you feel it and as you really deeply feel the emotion, eventually the emotion will lessen. You keep feeling it and eventually you've actually felt the emotion. The part of you that's been holding that tension finally lets it into consciousness. Then it's experienced and released. You often feel very tired after getting rid of one of those.

That process is an emptying out of what the Indians would call karma. The emotional content of the mind that tends to produce cyclical activity is lessened because you deeply feel the emotions and then you release them. Sometimes these things will come around and come around for literally years and then you'll have some enormous breakthrough and realise - I've been holding myself back my entire life because when I was thirteen, one of my teachers was mean to me when I did something that was just genius. I've been afraid of that happening again ever since so I've refused to compete.

Those kinds of processes - deep psychological insight - you can have the emotion come around and around. It's the ability to feel these things super-deeply using the muscle that you've built up from mantra meditation that allows you to get through the material more quickly - because you use the muscle from mantra

meditation to park your mind on the unpleasant emotion. *Tell me why it is that we feel this awful feeling of dread?* The muscle is how you get yourself to pay attention to it. The receptivity and the sensitivity from just listening to yourself think is what gives you the ability to feel and experience the stuff and actually understand the meaning of what's happening.

This is very much a kind of yin and yang thing. You need the muscle for paying attention but you also need the ear of listening to what's happening. You combine those two things to unlock the psychological and emotional patterning which allows deeper and deeper levels of experience to come up. That process is a lot like lighting a rocket engine under yourself because it hugely accelerates the speed of your life because instead of going round and round in little circles like a hamster in a wheel - it gets you out of the emotional hamster wheels.

So you're constantly having problems but they're constantly new problems. It begins to open the cycles of life so that you begin moving actively forward rather than going round in loops. After a few years of that, you begin to pick up a certain kind of forward momentum where everyday you meditate you release more emotional stuff, it accelerates your life even further because you're even more fluid and flexible and capable and strong. You get into this kind of mode where you're just rushing forward because you're burning away your karma and you're getting bigger and stronger all the time.

At the top end of that process, you break into this kind of supersonic terrain where everything goes batshit crazy and at that point you should call me. I'm not saying don't call me until then, but you definitely get to a point where you become so fluid in the constant processing of emotional stuff that you begin to pick up this kind of superfluid quality where you're always in the right place at the right time. You seem to have perfect luck and perfect health, and at that point it becomes important to do some additional practices before you just slide right the heck off into another dimension.

That pretty much concludes the technical bit.

Meditation II of III

19th March 2015 London

Tonight we're going to do forty minutes of actual meditation with all the phases that we discussed last time. The purpose is to fine-tune the practices to the point where it's possible to do them at home and be doing them correctly enough to make some progress. This is not to say you go through the stuff once and you get it, and that's all there is to it, but to get to the point where you've got enough technical precision that you can do it and not feel you don't know what you're doing or that you're wasting your time.

Let me restate briefly the theoretical framework.

The objective is, over the course of approximately a decade or a PhD's worth of work, that you have an experience which comprehensively overcomes and removes the fear of death. That is a Western-compatible shorthand way of saying "get enlightened", but enlightenment has got such a lot of cultural baggage that people don't really have an idea what it looks like. So the most tangible outward symptom is that all fear of death and all fear of life permanently evaporate in an understanding of the situation, of the fundamental nature of things that just makes that fear seem irrelevant - makes it just evaporate.

Meditation as a direct path to enlightenment is pretty well established. Everybody will tell you that's what they're teaching. This specific branch is a retread or a modification of the traditional practices of the Nath Sampradaya. It is not kriya yoga, which is one of the things you'd expect it to be. It's associated with tantra, but it's not tantra, although some of the later stage stuff could be described as that, or actually be that.

The reason for laying that path out and teaching it, is not because I think the world needs more meditators in an abstract sense and I'm devoting myself to that.

The way that my life works involves me being an enlightened actor in the world. I am getting to the point where my life is getting so complicated that I could easily need much more me than I have - so I have to teach some of the technical stuff on a wide enough scale that there will be an intersection between the people who get enlightened or nearly enlightened and the people who feel like giving me a hand with doing things like managing refugee camps. Because I don't trust unenlightened actors to make decisions about large numbers of other peoples' lives because they get emotional and being emotional is a disaster if you're doing this kind of stuff.

So that framework affects the nature of the practice. Because the objective is explicitly, you start here, you do about a decade's worth of shove, at the end of that period you get enlightened. If you've got a ton of relevant experience, it might be five to eight years. But it's a long haul. It is not a practice that is optimised for producing the highest quality of life between A and B. It's a practice which is optimised for getting to B safely.

Now all of this contextual stuff changes the nature of the practices. It changes what practices you do, it changes why you do them and therefore changes the results that you get. All the stuff that you've got in terms of cultural baggage around meditation - meditation is something that people do to feel better, it's for managing stress, all these kind of things - all that sits in a different bucket. All of that is true but those are different practices done in a different context with a different intention. This is about going through layer after layer of mental obscuration until you hit the fear of death and pass through to the other side.

The three practices again. Practice number one - mantra meditation or mantra meditation with appropriate casual visualisation. If you think cloud, in-breath, cloud, out-breath, cloud - if the mind is going to form an image, let the image be of a cloud. The first practice. It builds mental muscle because you're constantly putting the attention back on the object you've chosen to meditate on. You could pick an abstract concept like peace or calm. You could also pick an object which has broadly positive

associations. Flowers, nature - things like that. You don't generally want to use something that's got a ton of cultural resonance - you don't want to be meditating on, for example, the Buddha, because that just brings in all of these additional layers. This is really just weight-lifting for the consciousness. Mantra. Make the mind strong like a bull.

Second practice, which I think is written up in the old book, *Eternalicious*, as Nath sitting, which is as good a name for it as any - awareness - technically it's probably vipassana. You sit and you listen to the content of your senses, internal and external, as if it was a mantra. So, external sense, you can tune in to the noises in the room and you listen - but you may also get an internal voice - narration and all the rest of this kind of stuff - you also listen to that.

Whatever you're hearing is to be paid attention to as if it was the mantra - it's a state of pure receptivity. There are no bad thoughts. There's just attention to the thoughts. *I am listening very carefully to my thoughts and the room.* This builds high quality awareness but it doesn't build mental muscle in the same way that mantra does. It doesn't provide controlled focus.

The third practice is that you often find yourself having strong emotional reactions because unprocessed emotions that build up, tend to get repressed on a day-to-day basis and as you sit and make space for those emotions to come up, some of the emotions will begin to come up. *In my case I am tired and mildly grumpy - turns out that work is a lot of work and it's all very confusing and there are too many moving parts and it's really a lot. Why didn't I do something easy?*

That kind of discontent - if I sit and I specifically feel that feeling, there's some muscular tension associated with it, there's some emotional stuff associated with it, there's strong feelings there. Those are things which have built up over a few days being kind of busy, kind of ill, kind of tired, kind of over-extended and everything happening faster than everything else. If I sit and feel that, I get to know how I actually feel, and after a while, the backlog of unfelt feeling clears and I'll feel better

about it.

If you only do the mantra, you build tons of muscle but you don't build any self-knowledge. If you only do the Nath Sitting, you build lots of self-knowledge but you don't get any mental discipline or mental control. If you only do those two practices, the emotional backlogs that tend to accumulate never get proper attention put on them.

The theoretical model is that you take the attention and you put it onto the difficult emotion and you use the mental discipline to keep the attention on the emotion that otherwise you might tend to suppress. You keep feeling it and you have the awareness of it - so the strength is to put the attention on the emotion - the awareness is to have full awareness of the emotion as you experience it. You keep doing that for a while. Once you've felt it deeply or you've done as much of it as you can really comfortably do, then you'll typically return to mantra or occasionally to listening but usually you go back to mantra. The notion is that you're rocking into the difficult emotion a little way, and then you go back to mantra for a while and you chill out again. Then you do some listening to your thoughts and then maybe you go into the difficult emotion again. It's this notion that you're gradually rocking backwards and forwards between the different practices, in a way that allows you to get through more and more of the emotional material without really getting ground down or burned out.

That's the theoretical frame in a nutshell.

Ingredients of successful sitting.

You need an environment which has predictable rather than unpredictable noise. It doesn't have to be silent. It could have things like street noise but, if it's outside of something like a playground where the noise has semantic significance

rather than being a background roar, it will tend to be much more difficult to meditate. Music is usually quite difficult to meditate to, unless it's something which is unbelievably static and repetitive. There's quite a bit of drone music which is OK for meditating to. In general, music is better than noise with semantics, but silence is better than music.

The butt scoot - lean forward, move as much of the gluteus maximus out from under your hip bones as possible, and then, when you sit back, you get a nice stable point of contact between the hip bones and the floor.

Roll the shoulders back.

Hands can be palms down, palms up or kind of folded over the belly.

If you get physical discomfort, move. It's way, way better for this meditation to wiggle until you're in a comfortable position than to sit there with discomfort. This is very different from Zen where you just sit when you're uncomfortable. We don't do that - it just doesn't help.

Breathing - traditional yogic breathing. Belly fills with air, chest fills with air, shoulders fill with air. It's kind of the upper lobes of the lungs. Then exhale in reverse order. Shoulders empty. Chest empties. Belly empties. Breathe through nose or mouth depending on taste and degree of allergies.

Make sure your body is as comfortable as it can reasonably be.

* * * * *

[After 15 minute mantra meditation]

Eyes open or eyes closed? The answer is - either one is fine. For mantras usually eyes closed is easier.

There is an argument in favour of chairs. When I was doing the majority of my meditation, I was young, I'd done a ton of martial arts, I was in pretty good physical condition. Long static sitting was very comfortable and easy. It's actually a fair amount of effort. Hatha yoga is very good for getting a body that's good to sit in - that's why it was invented.

If you're doing a lot of meditation, kinks in posture tend to work themselves out over time.

Falling asleep is definitely not meditating. However as long as you don't snore, it is acceptable.

You often want to point the chin down slightly which kind of relaxes the neck, changes the body mass a little.

Just getting the mechanics right is a third of the struggle. It's so much easier with the mechanics right.

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Leaning against the wall is quite good - I'm quite a fan of that. The sitting stuff does get easier with time. You get better at sitting and you find positions that are more comfortable by little micro-adjustments, and also, muscle builds up.

The notion that you're consciously listening to whatever the mind generates is a way of getting the mind to really empty itself out, which eventually starts to produce silence, produces a very robust, durable silence. But you definitely don't want to sit with the intention of the mind quieting itself. You want to have the intention of listening. If the mind runs out of things to say, that's great. The durability of the silence comes from the mind being fully emptied. Some things which are more technique orientated will tend to create an artificial stillness and then when you stop, the mental noise comes back. This approach is a multi-year emptying of the mind until the mind just completely runs out of content.

The being it versus watching it line is very subtle. It doesn't actually matter which side of the line you're on on any given day. It's better to wind up being it and relaxed rather than watching it and strained - because over time the watcher position naturally emerges because you're doing a lot of it.

With a lot of this stuff, what you're optimising for is the endurance in practice. You want to sit in a way that makes it more likely that you will sit the next day. Because getting it all right on a single day, but finding it so difficult you don't want to

do it again, is intensely self-limiting. It's all about establishing a multi-year practice that has this slow glide-path into more and more profound material.

Lots of weird random memories is perfect because that is the mind doing exactly what the mind does. Giving the mind the space to do what the mind does, is half of the purpose. All of that weird random memory stuff is the mind decompressing things. You could have six months or a year of that kind of decompression and then it'll move into another phase.

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Let the mantra soothe and stabilise the mind. Let your body unwind. Typically you would do two rounds. Something like -
do some mantras, do some formless sitting, do some emotional feeling,
do some mantras, do some formless sitting, do some emotional feeling,
do some mantras, done.

Roughly ten minutes of each activity, maybe a bit less. You don't have to start with mantras, you can start with the other things. You can switch them around a little, but you don't want to do less than about ten minute blocks. Having something that goes ding every ten minutes is not a bad approach.

I've been trying not to describe this as circuit training for the mind, but it's actually circuit training for the mind.

Some kind of physical practice - Tai Chi, Hatha Yoga, Pilates, whatever it is. It's very useful to be able to get a good stable position for sitting in. Practising sitting by sitting is good. Chairs are an amazing invention. Although the body does get used to the sitting stuff pretty quickly - apart from losing blood-flow to your legs which never seems to get better. For that one the quality of sitting equipment is about all you can do as far as I know.

The emotional processing step is not commonly built into meditation systems. In most meditation systems, that may happen in the process, but it's not done as a specific thing. The reason for making it an explicit step is that, if you're in a Western

context, which is quite an emotionally messy culture, people don't have strong family ties, they don't have extended family units, they tend not to have a guru-disciple relationship with anybody. Most of the sources of primary emotional stabilisation are not present in the culture, which tends to produce a ton of aggregate wear and tear that the Indian systems will not typically expect to find. So there's need for more of an emphasis on that and as you get better and better at processing the emotional garbage, and you run out of ordinary emotional garbage, it also prepares you for dealing with some of the fundamental-level cultural emotional garbage.

The primary reason that tantra and advanced meditation don't really work very well for Westerners is the fear of God. If you've got practices which produce an awareness of God, whatever that might mean, and you're very afraid that God is not very nice, the tendency is to get into that territory and then avoid it like the very plague. The last thing that you want to do is to come face-to-face with your maker only to discover that he really doesn't like you. *I'm sorry, I'm very sorry, I'm very disappointed, it's the other place for you.*

That fear is very deep inside of Western culture. Part of the reason for the additional emphasis on the emotional practices is so that those cultural level fears can be dismantled at the same time as the rest of the meditation process is going on. As you get into these very high states of consciousness which eventually come, you know how to handle fear, you know how to handle the difficult emotions, the fear of God can be released at the same time as everything else is being released. That sounds kind of abstract but it took me about five years to figure out that's why people were having such enormous trouble in high states of consciousness. It was a major discovery, an insight.

The best approach I can see for handling that is to build much stronger emotional processing machinery so that as we get closer to those kind of states, we've got the equipment for getting rid of those cultural level fears. It's not easy.

In the same way that a Hatha Yoga or Tai Chi process is good for training the

sitting stuff, some kind of body-oriented psychotherapy - Hakomi, Feldenkreis, Roling, Reichian therapy if you can find it - those kind of things are very useful adjuncts to these kind of practices, not necessarily for the entire period, but it's worth doing that stuff if you begin to get a serious build-up. Meditation alone will not move a lot of the deeper body stuff. You do need external third-party help for some parts of it in almost all cases. So do not be shy about therapy.

Just for the record, if there is some kind of movement built around doing these types of meditation, peoples' therapists should never come from inside of that movement. The last thing you want is a closed system. People should always have their therapists from outside whatever cultural block they're part of. That's how the therapists can tell you that the cultural block is screwing with your head, if it is.

The impulse to fix any revealed emotion is not wrong, but it's really important to feel it all the way first. Getting good at feeling bad is a really important part of getting through the harder practices. Being able to sit with genuinely unpleasant emotional material until it loses its power is a huge part of the long-term meditation experience. Some of this stuff is about clearing up the emotional mess. A lot of it is also about getting good at living with very unpleasant emotions for extended periods and not getting overwhelmed by them. You might say, why would one want to do such a thing? The answer is that there are some unbelievably unpleasant fundamental facts about human life and this civilisation, the culture that we're in and being able to process our real emotional feelings about those things is a really important part of getting the mind to full coherence. Nobody wants to die. Having the fully-felt emotional reaction to death and the fear of death, is an essential part of getting over it.

If you think about the emotional feeling part, we're getting good at processing toxic emotions and negativity and really feeling and experiencing and releasing these things. In the long run we have to do that for all the stuff that we try not to think about. It's that inevitable grinding down to the fine point of - I'm going to face my

fear of death and I'm going to get over my fear of death. That's deconditioning the deepest levels of the monkey mind. It's going right the way to the core of our biological substrate and changing the way it works. It's not actually very much fun for large parts of that process and all of this stuff is like prologue for that experience. Not fun. But really efficient.

The thing is that, for those levels of fear, there is no psychological fix for them. Psychological fix - you have an emotion, you feel the emotion, the emotion goes away. You have a realisation that things aren't the way you thought they were - everything lines up again. For the big primal fear stuff, you just hit deep. What has to happen is - you can't get away from the fear or process the fear or get around the fear. What you can do is, you can basically change what fear is to you. Changing how fear fits into your life is actually kinda sorta how those final stage practices work.

Although that seems very distant from the present, it's really important to think of these practices as being like landing a plane on a very long runway - a convergence to a set of experiences that causes this kind of systemic transformation. If you lose sight of that, it becomes very hard to understand why the practice is so bloody difficult. It's difficult because it's building the toolkit necessary to address the fundamental human condition and then to have victory over the bad parts. It's ambitious stuff.

The cycle of life stuff, family life is the hard path for people that are serious about their spirituality. Traditionally in India the householder path is the hard path. Monks, easy. Family life, hard. Because you're constantly being exposed to all the stuff that you know about, and which I have carefully avoided.

The notion that you need a body-oriented psychotherapy practice - you could certainly get a lot of that material from those kind of practices - moving with the emotions. It will not do quite the same thing as sitting with them, but the thing that it does is very useful and is worth doing at some point, but it doesn't substitute for that part of the practice. You can make a pretty good argument that you need both. You

might find that some people will mix them. It'll probably be all right. Definitely it's both and, largely because the more abstract difficult emotions are very difficult to metabolise in the body. They're genuinely in the energy field rather than in the flesh and for that stuff you don't want to run it through the body to get rid of it.

At a technical yoga level, the koshas, the layers of energy around the body, the different practices are clearing different levels of the energy body. The sitting with difficult emotions is clearing the emotional body. The mantra practice deals with the mental body. The receptive stuff does the psychic body. You're exercising different parts of those bodies in such a way that the bodies as a whole begin to have the kind of self-cleaning mechanism.

Once the self-cleaning mechanism comes fully back into presence, the whole emotional psychological nature of things begins to completely settle out and then the meditation can really begin to work on the mind. The six months of an hour a day thing is basically enough to get that process started and after that, different kinds of meditative experiences become important.

With all of this, it's far more important to do it, than to do it right. You can fine-tune it over months or years.

Do not forget to get the posture comfortable because sitting trying to meditate when you're uncomfortable is three times harder than it has to be.

The relationship between the three activities - I want to stress this very much - the notion that you're rocking into the uncomfortable emotions as far as is comfortable - then you rock back out to the mantra or whatever else you do - having the sensitivity to know when to move further into the emotions and when to back out of them again is quite important. If the process is so unpleasant that you don't want to do it, you'll stop and at that point, no benefit. It's moving in as far as is reasonably manageable but doing it regularly enough and often enough that that is still enough to get through the emotional terrain. That's the balance point. The practice has to be performed in such a way that you continue to do the practice otherwise the practice

doesn't work.

It's not meant to be really, really hard work - it's meant to be kinda sorta hard work that leaves you feeling better afterwards than you were before. That's quite a difficult thing to balance, because it is quite an intense practice but you've got to have this balance between the enduring will-power to get through it and the fact that the process itself is kind of good on its own. That balance point is the most difficult part of the practice to get right, but once you get it right, the practice will endure and it's the endurance of practice that is the fundamental objective.

You can't cross the terrain quickly so you have to build a practice that allows you to cross the terrain however slowly and it still requires about an hour a day to really get moving. So how do you do something for an hour a day which is superficially unrewarding and contains a lot of difficult material but still keeps you coming back to it. It's psychologically solving that challenge that is building the necessary vehicle, the necessary machine, to cross over all the territory you have to cross to get to the fundamental enlightenment. A ton of what you're doing is practising how to practise and learning how to adjust the practice until it gives you enough satisfaction and feedback that you know you can continue to do it month after month, year after year, until the fundamental breakthroughs come.

As a theoretical model, building a practice that you're able to sustain for a decade is the objective and a good part of the practice is about figuring out how to maintain it. As you go through the early stages of it, a lot of what you're doing is fine-tuning the experience of doing it such that it's pleasant enough for you to continue it and you feel you're making progress - those are the things of which the enduring practice is then constructed. Brute will-power alone isn't enough. It has to be fine-tuned for your own psychology and your own needs and that's how you get the endurance to really cross the plains. It's a big sandy desert walking exercise. It's tromping across the big desert feeling - everybody tromp a little further - how do you make sure that you're going to keep tromping?

This is quite a delicate balance point. The notion that the emotional processing stuff is done every day or very regularly at least, is what allows the emotion to process at a speed that causes it not to be too unpleasant. The more regularly you're doing it, the less pressure tends to build up. If you think of these balances between - we're going really fast and it's really hard - or - we're going really slowly and we're not seeing any benefit. You're trying to find a personal balance point where it's enough progress that you're seeing tangible progress, but it's not so unpleasant that you're tempted to stop.

Finding where that personal balance point is, is actually the key to the enduring practice, and the enduring practice is the key to getting to a transcendent relationship to the basic material. If you think I am practising, but I'm also learning how to practice in a way that I can sustain. It's like learning how to maintain a bonsai that you're going to be keeping for many, many years.

That is something that I think is not usually stressed enough - the idea that in the early phases you're building the foundations of being able to do it all the way through. Every day you have to say what's my level of motivation like - how do I do this in a way that causes me to get more rather than less motivated? How do I make sure it's fitting into the ecological balance of my life in a way that I can sustain it, because you have to frame it as an hour a day for ten years or a bit less - because less than that is unlikely to produce fundamental transformation and if the meditation is not about fundamental transformation, there are much easier kinds of meditation to do. That's the real bedrock.

Meditation III of III

26th March 2015 London

I'll start from the top with the basic theoretical framework. The objective is that in ten plus years of practice, one attains a state of awareness where all fear of death evaporates resulting in a radical freedom. The best tool that I'm aware of for starting that is meditation and the meditation that I think works best for Westerners is the one that starts with mantra meditation of the very standard kind - you can learn it from a book called the Calm Technique.

Secondly a technique which is written up as Nath sitting [*in Eternalicious*]. It's basically a kind of sitting where you just have static awareness of what is happening. You sit, you listen to your mind, as if your mind was the mantra. You just pay attention to the content of the mind whatever it happens to be at the time - as if whatever is in your head is the mantra.

Third kind of meditation - you find a strong emotion, which for most people will be a difficult emotion and you just sit and have awareness of the emotion. That can also be done, after you've done a bunch of practice, as just sitting and having awareness of feeling. It can include physical sensation, it can include the senses. But it's important as you begin, to cultivate the practice of sitting with strong emotions, particularly difficult ones, because later on in the meditation practice you're going to go through an enormous amount of difficult emotional stuff and you want to build up the muscle of doing that as early on in the practice as possible.

A lot of the difficult material you'll hit later is inherently difficult. Everybody's parents are likely to die before they are. Nobody will enjoy this experience except for a very few people who have already suffered a lot in that case. That inherent difficulty of life is always going to have to be experienced.

What I want to talk about before we do the sitting on this round is mythology

and props. Most of the time meditation is embedded in complex mythologies with ornate props. An example of an ornate prop for meditation is Angkor Wat temple. The Sistine chapel. Mediaeval cathedrals. That's what a meditation prop looks like. Not some four inch tall plastic Ganesha. That is a prop but the scale of meditation props historically cannot be over-estimated.

Similarly the mythologies are all-encompassing. You have some kind of crazy rabbinical jew two thousand years ago who has a bunch of visions and tells people about them, may or may not raise a bunch of people from the dead and similar impressive special effects. That mythology becomes a dominant force inside of western culture two thousand years later. The props are enormous and the mythologies are titanic. We sit in this sea of partially digested mythology and semi-aware props.

Capitalism is an extension of the protestant work ethic, and is in some ways a mythology that got completely out of control, that started out from mediaeval christianity. How big is the prop? The British empire comes out of a bunch of ritual magic done by a guy called John Dee, who is Queen Elizabeth the First's court magician, and writes books saying that Britain should replicate Rome but using ships and ports rather than roads. Titanic impact.

For this kind of meditation, and for this system or stream of teaching, I thought it was important to have some mythology and a couple of props. The recommended props are basically two. The first is a meditation jacket. Something that you wear when you're going to meditate and you don't wear the rest of the time. My suggestion is anything you can buy from an industrial supply catalogue, that isn't white. Lab coats, warehouse coats, anything along those lines. The texture should be regular, so shouldn't have a pattern, shouldn't be covered in lots of little squares like you get with a rip-stop. You probably like it more if it's cotton rather than poly-cotton, but it's just a thing that you wear. Not white, because frankly when you see spiritual people gathered together and they're all dressed in white, usually they're completely nailed

to some kind of ideology. Large numbers of people dressed in white - they tend to have very uniform beliefs. We don't really want to do that.

The second thing that I think is worth investing in, in terms of props, and this is a little harder to define, is the notion of sacred time. The mental construct that there is a chunk of your day in which you do spiritual practice, sometimes physical like Tai Chi or Hatha Yoga, sometimes meditation or it could be something else - art, writing, whatever it is. The notion that you have a block of sacred time and the psychological and narrative constructs around that block are in some ways the equivalent of the jacket. You put the jacket on, you're now in the sacred space. You put the jacket on, you're now in sacred time. But you need to make the time to put on the jacket.

How you narrativise that to the people around you who want to put pressure on your time, including yourself, is the first part of the constructive mythology. The sort of constructive mythology that over the course of a decade, you're going to do about a PhD's worth of work, and at the end of that you'll become liberated from fear. That's actually quite an odd mythology. If you actually compare that to scientific rationalism, that is quite peculiar. If you go to academic psychologists and say I'm going to sit on my butt for an hour a day and at the end of that, I'm going to lose my fear, all of it. At least all the good parts. *Really - how do you think that will work? Gupta said it would work. Gupta seemed kind of mad, but in a good way - sometimes.*

It's worth accepting that at the very first outing we have a mythology and the mythology is all the stories that I'm telling you about this stuff that you haven't personally verified yet. I am still not entirely sure of the things that my teachers taught me, which parts were just hogwash and which parts are impossible but still true. There are still some things that they gave me on the reality map that I haven't seen yet. Are those things actually there or are those things stuff that was put in to see whether I was paying attention and actually testing the hypotheses? Yoga is meant to be an experimental science. You're meant to go and verify this stuff. Have I taken

things on faith or have I checked everything for myself? Hard questions.

These are narratives that protect a block of sacred time over the course of about a decade. Lots of people, when they talk about meditation and how do you get the time to meditate, will tell you you can sleep less. If you live in London, you already sleep less. Sleeping even less is not going to help. Generally speaking you have to take a couple of things out of your life to put meditation in. What kind of things can you take out? Television. Not many people I know watch television, but it is the source from which people who do watch television, can reclaim life. If you're already living fairly efficiently, you generally have to jettison a goal or an objective. I'm going to take this objective and I'm going to admit that it's never going to happen. I'm going to park it. Learning ancient greek is probably not going to happen, but I am going to meditate.

You need some sort of mythological construct that defends the block of time that you're going to put into these practices. It's really helpful to think about ten years and to have the PhD as a template. There are lots of ways you can do meditation - ten, fifteen, twenty minutes twice a day - that stuff is very effective, but it's also not for this. That's health maintenance meditation or it's part of systems that have this very gradualist approach. This kind of stuff is much more technical, much more hard-hitting, much more scientific in big quotes.

Physical prop - jacket - whatever it turns out to be. Psychological prop - narrative prop - mythology, block of sacred time.

Next part of that - understanding that all of the stories you have about meditation are not true until you verify them for yourself. If I say - *if I concentrate really hard, I can astrally project over the internet*. This sounds like nonsense right? Ah, but how do you know? *Could Gupta astrally project over the internet - it sounds ridiculous?* That is absolutely a tame story compared with some of the stuff that my teachers told me they'd seen.

I'm just refusing to go to the places in India where you're supposed to go if you

want to know if that stuff is real. I am very content with my current level of understanding. I don't want to know whether there are immortal men who can walk through walls, living in caves. Even if everybody I know who's reached the very highest levels of this stuff says that they learned it from those guys. Imagine the strength of mind that it takes to live perfectly comfortably with the ambiguity about whether or not there are immortal yogis in India that can walk through walls and live forever. When all of your teachers at the very high levels say - *those guys, yes I met those guys*.

That is an example of the benefit of meditation. Normally you would want to pursue that story until you knew the truth of it, one way or the other. Or you'd have to form an opinion about whether it's there or whether it's not there. In my case, I'm perfectly comfortable with my decision that I'm just not going to go and investigate. I have other things to do, these things are priorities. If these guys exist they're welcome to come and visit me at home at any point of their tele-porting convenience. Otherwise I'm not having any of it.

The detachment from the mythology is a way of returning to your own experience. I don't even believe my own mythology. I don't believe it or disbelieve it. It just sits there as something I don't have to invest in and I don't have to interact with, unless I choose to.

What you want is this notion that the sitting practice is its own objective. Yes, there is a meta-structure that in ten years of sitting practice something dramatic will happen. Yes, there are a bunch of supportive practices like ritual which help contain the sitting practice, make it easier to do and in the long run give better results. At the end of the day, the sitting practice's goal is the sitting practice and the accumulation of experience. The mythologies are just contents of the mind. They are not the sitting practice. You take the mythologies - when you sit, you put the mythology on one side. If the mythology returns to you as part of your awareness, it's just another thought.

This is quite a subtle mechanism. You might believe in the mythology when

you're not sitting - when you are sitting, the mythology is just another object of awareness. Over time, if you're lucky, that will result in a position where you can have these beliefs which are neither true nor not true. You don't feel compelled to investigate and if any evidence ever shows up, that's fine.

This is the notion that you can live with an open hypothesis. Living with an open hypothesis is the second greatest reward of meditation, because actually our knowledge about the world is extremely limited when we really pay attention. If you really, really think about what we know and what we don't know about our experience, we actually know vanishingly little. We still don't have a definitive scientific explanation of what matter is. You can get as far as quarks and after that it gets a little strange, we're not really sure. It's just fundamental particles that obey their own rules and come from nowhere, and we have no model of what's going on. Also we're not too sure about space-time. It does this expansion thing. It's a bit funny - the math looks funny. Dark energy.

So we are living in open hypotheses all the time. We don't know what matter is. We don't know what space-time is. We're rock-solid sure of about a billion years of evolution. There's a little bit of fuzziness about how it gets started. That's about the most solid object that we have and even that might turn out to have large areas of ignorance embedded in it. Epigenetics, who knew? *What do you mean the DNA changes when they think really hard?* Who's to say what they'll find out? That's a joke, but who's to say?

This notion that you're prying the mind back off the hypothesis and just sitting, over time turns into this relationship with life for when you don't know things, you just don't know them. We don't have to tell a story about what it is. We don't have to have an opinion about whether we should know. We just get into the position where, over time, the mind settles down into - I'm just not sure about that yet. It becomes comfortable to not know. Once you're comfortable with not knowing, you can open into the enormous ocean of things that we don't know. Is there reincarnation? Is the

milk still fresh? What happened to Margaret Thatcher's soul if she had one?

As you unpick that protective structure of certainty that we build around us, this is the second great fruit. Freedom from the fear of death, freedom from the need to be certain, the need to know, opening out into this formation of hypothesis. Maybe it's this, let's investigate that. Turns out not to be that, something else.

This is essentially a scientific perspective on life, but without the repeatable experiment. We acknowledge that life is a bit too complex to do repeatable experiments on most of the time, but we sit in a basically scientific relationship with what's going on. Can I prove it? What do I actually know? Have I seen it? Is there evidence? If not, it's mythology.

Some of that mythology might be useful sometimes. When you sit down in the meditation coat, in the meditation window, you take your sacred hour and none of that stuff is real for that period. This is a cultivation of a very specific attitude towards life, mind and knowledge. That specific attitude is kind of like Aqua Regia. It's a universal solvent. You want this ability to dissolve out all the certainties we have about things that we don't actually have certainty about.

What you're left with is a bedrock not knowing, which is actually the real human experience. It's where children are. Adults gradually lose sight of the unknown as they acquire knowledge but they also lose sight of the things that they don't know about because they just don't have time to investigate or they gradually lose curiosity. As a kid you can ask why and why and why. You get a little bit older and eventually somebody hands you six hundred pages of a mathematical physics textbook and says - once you get through that we can talk about it. Slowly we become dissuaded from this primal curiosity.

Meditation is a space to return to this kind of primal curiosity without having to constantly tell ourselves that we understand things we're not sure about. The raising of the tolerance for uncertainty and unknowing, comfort in the face of not being certain, comfort in the face of open hypotheses, settling the mind down. *I don't know.*

I'm not sure. I kind of want to understand but I don't right now. I have an open hypothesis. Or I'm just gathering data. That attitude, when you take it into areas of life where there are actual practical things going on in, turns into this openness to understand what is not yet understood. You can map the unknown and you discover that we're completely immersed in it.

Actually the unknown is enormous. I'm not actually sure about much of anything. At that point, if you are lucky, things become mysterious. Wow, actually the world has these patterns, it rhymes, it seems to have a certain kind of intentionality, it seems to smile. There is a sense of humour to life that seems to emerge acausally. That kind of stuff comes out of living in this condition of open hypothesis. It begins to sound like mysticism. In a sense it is, but it's only the mysticism of ordinary life. It's magical realism only in the sense that reality is kind of magical and it's not that much of a mental shift to access that because after all, we were children and everything was magical when we were kids. *Cardboard box is space-ship because we say so. This is how powerful our magic is. When we are seven, it might not work any more. We had better get out there and do it.*

I'm describing this stuff as a set of fruits, useful things that come out of the practice. They're partly there as bait - this stuff is actually good and it's hard for me to explain why it's good without setting up a set of expectations that are bad. But these are the kinds of things which come out of it and are useful. They're not a priori reasons to practice, but what I'm trying to point at is modes of transformation of the mind that meditation can achieve when approached in a particular way, that are not particularly well discussed or documented.

There's a lot of discussion about mystical experience as - sit here until you see luminous figures from other dimensions come and give you blessings in the form of little purple raindrops. There's very little in the sense of you'll get really comfortable not understanding things and trust me, you're human, there's going to be a lot of that. The thing that I'm attempting to frame is the notion of a small miracle mysticism. That if you get really comfortable inside of the life that you have, inside of

the mind that you inhabit, what emerges from that as you begin to get more comfortable with the unknown, is this kind of small miracle thing where actually it's kind of wondrous. This is sort of amazing. We really don't understand and yet it is endless.

That is basically the deal. It's not actually very impressive in comparison with what a lot of the hard core mystical traditions will tell you. It is de-mysticising, de-mythologising, largely within a western rationalist framework as long as you don't do too much weird stuff. A gradual, gradual shedding of certainty, shedding of hardness, emerging into ...

It doesn't actually sound all that much like heavy mystical weirdness. It is, but it's heavy mystical weirdness approached in this kind of cat-petting way. You just settle the thing down on your lap and you pat it on the head and eventually it starts to purr. We're not going to actively catch the cat. It's like - I'm just going to sit here ignoring the mystical weirdness. And eventually - *oh no Mr Tiddles wants a pat on the head - oh there's mystical weirdness on my lap. Pat, pat, pat. Purr, purr, purr. I've hit a great mystery. It is everywhere and nowhere. Look you can see it. Miaow.* Versus this approach of going out and catching the great mystery. No, it is not going to be caught. It is eventually going to come and sit on your lap because you show up in the same place at the same time every day and wait for it. *That is a comfortable lap, I will come and sit on it.*

This is very much about defusing the mythology of enlightenment. It's just that set of processes, bunch of unknowing, the cat of mystical consciousness that may eventually just come and sit on your lap if one does not scare it off and pats it enough, eventually there will be purring, and perhaps the cosmic miaow.

Then there you are, right back where you started, with everything open and flowing in some ways it wasn't before, having a full experience of being human. But you were having a full experience of being human before - it just wasn't as much fun

because it was kind of entangled. The sink is now empty of dishes - how wonderful. *It is still a sink. Yes, you are still an ape - you're just an ape with an empty sink. Is an empty sink better than a full sink? They are both sinks. Yes, but I think you'll find the empty one is better. But it's still a sink. Yes, we told you it was meditation, we did not say it was miracles.*

Some of the reason that this is not the way that meditation is typically taught and framed, is because most meditation is taught by people who want to make a living teaching meditation. Or you've got institutions that want to hold wealth and power over us for multi-century periods. So you've got a bunch more mythology which is essentially advertising and you've got a bunch of stories about certainty because it's really easy to motivate people with certainty.

If what you're basically selling people is - you'll get into a position where you'll be filled with mystical doubt of everything that you think you know and you won't care because you'll be super-comfortable with doubt as a way of life. Wow, that sounds amazing! No, wait, What? Or I could go over here and they're going to promise me that sparkly cartoon beings from other dimensions will come and

There is an inherent participation bias against the traditions which have this kind of much more settled, much more laid back, much more continuous approach to these things. People love fireworks. There are no fireworks except when you get into certain kinds of high-stress, high-difficulty situations and it turns out that the mystical feline presence of the universe is capable of 0 to 60 in an eighth of a millisecond and can climb glass. I'm not denying that there is the great mystical thing. I'm not denying that there are mystical and magical experiences that are totally life-transforming. I've seen them, but they are products of crisis.

If everything is fine, you can go through a lifetime as a meditator simply sinking deeper into the mystery without ever seeing the spectacular pyrotechnics. If you do see the spectacular pyrotechnics, it is usually because something has blown up. You can see this - the traditions that are from the hardest and most difficult times and places tend to have much more spectacular pyrotechnic stuff. You look at the cultures that had warrior monks and usually they've got spiritual practices that are quite

pyrotechnic. Turns out if you're a warrior monk, there's a whole bunch of running around trying to not get killed, or similar, and at that point mystical experience takes on a much more ferocious aspect.

It's not that one must actively avoid that stuff, but it is important to understand that if you see fireballs, it is because something is on fire and usually that is an error condition. This is quite an important reframe. We acknowledge that those things are there. Usually they are there because something has gone horribly wrong. Being able to cope with that having gone horribly wrong is a good thing, but seeking out the environments where those kinds of experiences are available is madness.

It's like enlisting in the French Foreign Legion of meditation. Plenty of people go into the jungle to take Ayahuasca because they want to see these kind of things. Confrontational experiences with jungle spirits that are in an eco-system that is dying because we are idiots. Of course these spirits are really willing to show you what you're made of. *It's another white man. Maybe if we fix this one, they'll stop doing it. Zap! How many of these white people are there? I don't know - we seem to have fixed like 4 dozen of them in the last two weeks and they're still coming. We're still getting poisoned. What is going on?*

In terms of personal practice, try and stay out of spiritual crisis as a lifestyle. Other peoples' problems to a large degree are very difficult to resolve. If you get a bunch of meditative awareness and you take it to the trenches, you will discover that there are a whole bunch of surprising angles on these things that the samurai know all about and the rest of the stuff. The Shaolin monks are very content meditating. It's not until you kick them out of the monastery you discover that they know kung-fu. So try not to grasp after high spiritual weirdness, it's usually a sign that you're in danger. *Oh I didn't know that I could do that. I seem to be running away much faster than I thought was possible. Amazing.*

I'm really stressing this because it's very, very easy for people to mistake sparkliness for progress. Comfort with the unknown is real progress, because the unknown is essentially infinite and you're in it and that is your actual condition.

Sparkly stuff and fast, hard moving objects - these are not progress. They're signs of danger. They're warning indicators. You might develop a bunch of capability for dealing with those kinds of problems but that is not the same as progress.

Two more little technical points and then let's do a bit of sitting.

The butt scoot. Of all of the great mystical secrets of meditation, the butt scoot is the most important single thing. Lean forward as far as you can, scootch backwards on your hip bones as far as you can, sit up so that you've got solid contact between the hip bones and the floor without too much muscle or your bottom getting in the way of your bones. Bones on solid ground. That in itself, just getting the sitting posture right is six months of work. Perfectly relaxed, perfectly straight, chin tucked a little bit. When it clicks, meditation becomes much easier. But it never clicks unless you get the butt scoot right because there's just no way if you just sit the body will align perfectly unless you happen to have done a huge amount of yoga. The butt scoot is critical. I keep stressing that, but it's important.

The second thing is this. The breathing is as important as the mental part. The kind of inhalation where the belly expands, the chest expands, then the upper part of the chest expands and it feels like it's going into the shoulders. Then the upper part empties, the chest empties, the belly empties. That breath is very strong, just on its own. Some would say inherently healing - it's certainly inherently good. Correct sitting and correct breathing will get you a long way. The mental practice sits inside of that.

It's funny how long it's taken me to get the inappropriate mysticism back out of meditation. When I was trained, all I really got was massive amounts of inappropriate mysticism. My teacher was inappropriate mysticism to the max and it's taken me years to figure out how to back that out of it.

[Some brief sitting instructions not transcribed.]

It's definitely worth studying the breathing. There's a bunch of stuff about square breaths and circular breathing and a few other bits and pieces that are worth knowing. Offering the in-breath to the out-breath. There's a lot of knowledge there, some of which is very useful, different things useful to different people. For most of that stuff, I know what was useful to me, but I don't understand the whole systems. What I specialised in was meditation itself, so it's definitely worth looking at hatha yoga, pranayama, tai chi, all of those systems and disciplines.

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Mantra meditation on its own is quite nice. You have a very nice practice which is just the mantra part, very effective - people do that. If you relax the mantra away, and then listen to the rest of what's happening as if it's the mantra, you see a different set of phenomena. You learn different things.

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Nath sitting in itself, is a complete practice. You can do lots and lots of this very productively. As you do different practices, you see different things. The skill of doing practice is pretty much constant. One of the descriptions of meditation is that it's like grinding the mirror of a telescope. There's a lot of just sitting and grinding. Once it's perfectly smooth and the mind is pretty well settled, you can then point the attention at different things and see what is very profound.

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If the intensity of emotion is too uncomfortable, back away a little. If it's really bad, restart the mantra, move back a good deal. You want a slow rocking. Move into the unpleasantness, move back a little until you are comfortable. Move in a little, move back a little. You want to train your mind so that you can feel unpleasant emotions in little manageable pieces, and this gives you the confidence to really feel things. As always, less is more. Little pieces, regular work.

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This is quite a busy practice. There's a lot of different pieces. The physical posture and the breath. Three different mental postures and an executive function which positions you from one practice to the next. There's a lot going on. Typically you'd practice these things fairly slowly. You might spend a couple of months largely doing mantras. You might spend a lot of time working on just breathing. The practice extends over years because all the different bits are large in and of themselves. That's very much a self-guided study. You do the stuff that interests you. You do the stuff that you want to improve on. If something is difficult you tend to do more of it.

But when it all comes together and the components are well practiced, what you have is a kind of engine. It's a thing which moves you forward through your personal experience in a way that deepens you into being yourself.

Lots of natural processes. The mind given time and rest will process lots of unmanaged emotional stuff from the past. It'll do lots of intellectual and psychological integration. All kinds of new knowledge will be formed in your mind, because you finally get a chance to reflect on what you know. Different kinds of thinking can emerge, synergistic, holistic, all these things can emerge. Useful, healthy side-effects.