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Cannabis and Meditation

An Explorer's Guide 2nd Edition

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Cannabis & Meditation

An Explorer's Guide

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Simon Jackson

SECOND EDITION



CANNABIS & MEDITATION

Cannabis & Meditation

An Explorer's Guide

SECOND EDITION

by

Simon Jackson



Cannabis & Meditation – An Explorer's Guide

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Sittingbourne, Kent.

***For my Wife, who life would
not be the same without.***

With special thanks to Simon Cooke
and Karen Gentleman.

**Do not believe in anything
simply because you have heard it.**

**Do not believe in traditions
simply because they have been
handed down for many generations.**

**Do not believe in anything
simply because it is spoken
and rumoured by many.**

**Do not believe in anything
simply because it is found
written in your religious books.**

**Do not believe in anything
merely on the authority of your
teachers and elders.**

**But when, after observation
and analysis, you find anything
that agrees with reason,
and is conducive to the good
and benefit of one and all,
then accept it and live up to it.**

The Buddha's *Kalama Sutra*

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Introduction

Why do some cannabis users seem to get strange shifts in awareness, or find themselves growing more 'spiritually-minded' as time goes by? And how can a drug that seems to induce soporific states have any place in meditation? Doesn't Buddhism in particular warn against the use of any intoxicant as being detrimental to meditation?

Well, yes - Buddhism would certainly advise its followers not to use drugs, that's beyond question, but there may be good reason to actually allow the use of cannabis as a helpful tool in meditation. What the Buddha actually warned against was the use of intoxicants that may result in you losing proper awareness of reality, or 'mindfulness'; and using cannabis (depending on the type, dosage and your personal circumstances at the time of ingestion) doesn't always result in us becoming vegged-out and unmindful. On the contrary, the states that it can bring on are sometimes anything but vegged-out, and it can actually create a far more balanced and lucid frame of mind than just about any other recreational drug. Although it does have other useful effects, the ability of cannabis to get you to this state is one of the main reasons why it's of so much use when combined with traditional focussing

('shamatha') meditation styles.

One of the aims of the supporting techniques in traditional meditation is to get you to a point where you can turn on, or remain permanently in, a state where you feel happy, totally relaxed and very mindful (aware) of the here and now. So if we have a drug like cannabis which allows us, with practice, to access this frame of mind, then it can quite substantially reduce the time that you would normally spend on preparing your mind for deeper meditation methods. Being at just the right level of high can provide a good basis, a solid 'ground', for us to meditate very effectively within.

Unfortunately, cannabis enhances the effects of both correct and incorrect meditation too. Obviously if you're tired, or doing too much cannabis, or the wrong type, or you pretty much go about your normal life while being high, then it's less valid as a tool - and it can actually become a barrier to progress. In light of this, I'll also be talking about how to avoid these pitfalls, and so how to keep the high, and the usefulness of cannabis, at its maximum.

Reality

But there's more; and the earlier question, “why do cannabis users tend to become more 'spiritually' sensitive?” is a very important illustration of the processes in play at higher levels of meditation.

To explain this effect, you have to understand that at one end of the spectrum there are the traditional meditation methods that most of you will be familiar with; but there is also, at the highest levels of practice, a kind of meditation (the 'wisdom teachings') that's far less

about reaching specific states of mind, and much more about understanding the true nature of reality in an ultimate sense. Understanding reality in the right way is one of the most powerful triggers for experiences of enlightenment that there are. The highest Tibetan Buddhist traditions of Dzogchen and Mahamudra in particular rely heavily on correct understanding ('View') in their teachings; and the annals of Zen history are also filled with stories where right knowledge has triggered realisation, or 'Kensho', in its practitioners.

Now, although this understanding can trigger experiences if you're straight and/or meditating, sometimes the right high will put us into a very receptive and stable mental state where they're even more likely to happen. This means that when we're high we can sometimes be very receptive to correct knowledge about reality, and we can have spontaneous blisses, or altered experiential states, just by thinking about reality in the right way – even if we don't truly understand what that 'right way' is. With this in mind, 'Cannabis and Meditation' also explains the basics of how to begin looking at reality in its deeper sense to get this kind of experience, a theme that I'll explore in more depth in later chapters.

~*~

Meditation and its supporting methods make the effects of the high much more apparent and, in terms of exploring consciousness, combining meditation with a cannabis high can lead to some interesting and even life-changing experiences. The content of these experiences can range from feelings of deep pleasure, expansiveness or disembodiment, to periods of sudden vibrant clarity, a sense of connectedness with the universe, or even an understanding of the nature of reality itself. Described as

'cosmic awareness' (also transcendental experience, peak experience, moksha, satori, etc.), it's an experience that people around the world have reported, in and out of meditation, for thousands of years. According to polls carried out in the UK and the US over the last two decades (by both GAP and Gallup), that's around 54% of us at some time in our lives.

Many people are constantly at the edges of the larger experience of cosmic awareness, regularly feeling smaller 'glimpses' of the full state in spontaneous bouts of deep bliss, or sensations of 'energy' at various points in their bodies. If you've already had some of the experiences above then you'll be naturally more sensitive to the techniques here than the average person, and you could find that your body and mind react instantly to them, rather than after practice.

But, that doesn't mean that we should believe everything we see and hear whilst we're meditating and/or high. There's an old Buddhist saying that sums up the attitude you need to have towards anything that might happen in meditation: "If you see Buddha, spit in his eye" - meaning that even what might be considered by some to be the ultimate vision does not necessarily have any meaning for the meditator. Things happen, sometimes for no other reason than a random twist of awareness. Be objective but at the same time prepared for those things which really are true. Knowing the difference takes time, but you will learn to recognise those events with real importance – least of all because of their indescribable nature and the sense of undeniable authority they seem to carry. You *will* know.

~*~

I've been taking cannabis for about 25 years now,

eating solids mainly for the first 15 years, then moving into bong and pipe use as the better resins*, like red leb', became harder to come by. I didn't actually get into using it (or even trying it) until I was 30. The idea of a drug 'high' had always seemed interesting, but for reasons of upbringing and general cowardice, I was very much a late starter. Ideas of 'altered states' had always intrigued me though, particularly the deeper experiences meditators seemed to reach and their similarity to what sounded like the best of a cannabis high, so it was really only a matter of time before I actually got around to trying weed.

**In the following pages I talk at times about using cannabis 'resin', by which I mean one of the fine blocks of cannabis oil that originate from places like Afghanistan and Morocco, not the black gucky stuff that clogs up bongs.*

Given my background as a Buddhist meditator, it might seem strange that I should be using cannabis in the first place, yet alone be writing a book about it. But there are a number of reasons for me doing both. Cannabis has not only helped me to relax and become a calmer, more well-adjusted person, but it's also helped open me to a variety of meditation states too. You could argue, as many serious meditators are likely to do, that drug-taking and meditation do not mix and that the states that a cannabis user could achieve are nothing like those found by meditators; but that's far from true. There are good reasons why cannabis has been one of the drugs of choice with many people on spiritual paths for at least 3,000 years - and I can guarantee that some of the experiences you might have whilst high are exactly the same as those any meditator would reach.

Whereas on the whole this book won't be talking

about meditation in a 'spiritual' context, there will come a point where what we do here and what meditators looking for enlightenment will do will overlap. Both are on the same path, looking mostly for the same events. We can't totally isolate these exercises from their roots, so there will be times when I have to talk about what you might experience within that larger context. But that doesn't mean I'm going to try to sell you any particular dogma or way of thinking. In those cases where the esoteric possibilities are interesting, even unavoidable at times, I'll offer a general Buddhist or Hindu explanation as a matter of interest. Practise, experience, then make up your own mind about exactly what might be taking place.

As cannabis *is* being used more regularly by people wanting to learn to meditate, it was important that the first chapters of this book contain all of the tricks and tactics - many of which have never appeared in print before - which help make a better, more consistent high. From there on, the 'Explorer's Guide' takes you logically and a step at a time through all the things that you need to know about your mind, and your body's physical reactions to it. You'll learn how to do very simple things that can literally change how happy you're able to feel at any given moment, and you'll also learn a wide range of techniques for actual mental exploration that you can use with or without cannabis.

Whether you choose to read the 'Explorer's Guide' purely as an end in itself to increase your highs, or as a means to delve deeper into states of consciousness, I hope that you're going to find it useful and interesting for a long time to come.

Simon Jackson



Basics



1 Using It

What is 'exploring consciousness'? Who does it? Why?

People explore and try to understand the contents of their consciousness in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons. Some, like athletes, do it to help surmount mental barriers to endurance; others do it to overcome fears, or to help regain mental clarity to allow themselves be more creative or less stressed. Many do it purely for fun to see what they might find, trying to discover new states of awareness and pleasure; or, through more traditional meditation, some see it as a means to try and reach enlightenment and an understanding of existence.

Why you personally decide to explore your mind, whether it has a deep spiritual meaning for you or not, really doesn't matter: the methods here will help sensitise you to *whatever* kind of work you want to do.

Here, exploration covers both the fun experiences you can reach, and the more meaningful states too. How you explore and what techniques you use really depends on what each individual high does to you in terms of which of your senses it enhances. Sometimes a batch of weed will increase, say, your sensitivity to your hearing;

another your sight, another your sense of touch, so some techniques here will respond better to certain kinds of cannabis than others.

Being High

One of the problems with using cannabis is that it tends to make us free-form ideas much more rapidly and creatively than usual; something that many artists and writers have taken advantage of for hundreds of years. Whilst this creativity is desirable in the right circumstances, it can easily take over your mind to the exclusion of all else, particularly during the rise into your first high of the day. Thinking about the wrong things during this rise can lead you to becoming locked into a stream of nagging, and usually negative, thoughts which may then run on continually throughout the high, stopping you from enjoying it as you should. Obviously then, it's a good idea to learn to counteract this effect, using meditation *before* you get high to allow you to create a happy, calm state of mind that will slow down and even eradicate this kind of involvement once you are high.

Using meditation and a variety of other methods, we're ideally wanting to be able to control our minds very lightly, just enough for us to be able to point our attention at any stimuli that we want to be aware of, rather than the random details our minds want to entertain. This leaves us free to focus on and explore whatever perceptions we choose and therefore to experience their effects on us much more deeply.

Different Kinds of Cannabis

There are many factors that contribute towards your success, or lack of it, during this exploration: your mood, your level of fatigue or alertness, when (and what) you last ate, where you are, the lighting conditions, who else is with you, etc. But obviously what kind of cannabis you're using, how you're using it, whether you're new to that particular batch or not, and at what point in the high you start exploring – all these factors count very much too.

Although you might think that a good, heady Cannabis sativa would be better for all of this than a dreamy Cannabis indica, it's not necessarily the case, and it's really down to personal choice and reaction as to which types will be best for you. As I say above, eating good hash (though there are few good ones available at present) will give a far broader and more pronounced high, which is perfect for mental exploration; but the point is that it's not about the strength of any cannabis you use, it's just down to whether it takes you, personally, to the right state of receptivity and alertness.

The most common kind of exploration that you can do - simply seeing what the high can do to your perceptions under different circumstances - is the easiest, and probably something that you've already experimented with to some degree, every time you've been high. Cannabis heightens your perceptions of *everything* you eat, see, hear, think and feel; sometimes to the extent that the sensations it brings are nothing short of awe-inspiring, and may even turn into a kind of synaesthesia, where you feel sounds in a physical and visual way, particularly music. As you'll see later, gaining ordinary pleasure from physical and mental sensations isn't just a nice way to pass the time, it also brings us closer into the

present moment and makes us even more sensitive to what we might feel in meditation, or when we're high. So, by adding the heightening effect of cannabis to the mental clarity of meditation, and the refining quality of pleasure, we can open ourselves to all kinds of experiences.

How to Begin

On a simple, but very effective level, the first thing to check is whether your high (and any of the stimuli you choose to explore) works best with eyes open or closed. Closing your eyes automatically makes your brain produce alpha waves as a precursor to sleep, which can affect the high in a good way by making you more relaxed. The difference between having your eyes open or shut can be remarkable, and I've had highs which were slightly jangly and less than enjoyable turned completely around just by closing my eyes.

The next thing to look at (even if you do have your eyes closed) is the strength and position of the lights in the room where you're getting high. Some highs can be kicked along nicely by strong light; others will be made too intense, or your high might turn off almost completely. But these things are only the beginning, and if you're going to gain maximum effect from cannabis then it's best to run through all the other possible influencing factors that I outline later in this chapter, before you begin to explore.

Once these things have been dealt with, basic exploration is just about seeing how the things around you are affecting your high, such as sounds and trippy or colourful visuals. Try foods, smells, touch – anything that might give an extra buzz to the high or open up as a set

of sensations that can be explored.

Some people, for example, are exceptionally sound-attuned, and they simply have to play the right kind of music at the right volume and they're away. Some people react very well to looking at a starry sky, or even just photographs of galaxies and planets, and find that they give strange, hard-to-describe feelings of pleasure and understanding that are very much worth cultivating, particularly if you're going to try for enlightenment. Everyone has things that tend to affect them better than others: there is no standard mind, or standard approach, that's guaranteed to work for everybody, so experiment until you know what effects that the cannabis you're currently using has, and what your own mind best responds to.

Basics

Let's start by talking about some of the easy, obvious things that anyone taking cannabis can do to mess up their highs. There's a lot of simple stuff that even learned tokers can miss the importance of, and if you do ignore this 'simple stuff' on a regular basis, you'll kill off the best of your highs - and not do yourself a whole lot of physical or mental good either.

First off - tolerance. Sadly, take cannabis anything more than every other day and your tolerance to it *will* rise, and you will lose at least some of the best effects of the high - we can't escape that fact. Bad news for people like me who are, and who want to stay as, daily users. If you really want to get the best out of cannabis then you need to regulate your intake to about once a fortnight which is, of course, a horrendous notion for many. Estimates of how long THC (the oil responsible for most

of the high) stays in the bloodstream are anything from five to seventeen days – although a week's abstinence is usually enough to get a much fresher high back, if only temporarily. But for those of us for whom even the thought of cutting back to that extent is not a consideration, there's still hope - a way that will help keep the high fresh and make it a more stable and pleasurable experience, which I will show in the following chapters. Let's just go over all the basics:

The High

The length and intensity of your high relies on the following things. Get these right, and your highs will be far broader and more enjoyable:

- The type of cannabis you use and its THC content.
- The method of ingestion.
- What you do on the way up to the first high of the day.
- What mood you're in.
- What you've eaten and your current level of blood sugar.
- How aware ('mindful', in Buddhism) of the moment you are.
- How relaxed (physically and mentally) you are.

Of everything that I could possibly hope to tell you about getting good highs, understanding the role that awareness plays is the most important. If you learn how to clear your mind and be mindful, and you're using the right type of cannabis, then the high can become an

internal landscape to be explored, just by being closely aware of what it's doing to your mind. You can boil everything down to just one statement: the more clearly aware and emotionally positive you are whilst high, the higher you become - within limits, of course.

THC

The main active ingredient in cannabis is THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol, to be precise), the amount of which determines the drug's strength. The THC level in any particular batch of cannabis is affected by many different factors, including plant type, weather, soil, and time of harvest. The sophisticated cannabis cultivation of today produces higher levels of THC in *some* types of marijuana than was found, say, ten years ago. Although the anti-drugs faction have tried to capitalise on this, in fact a higher THC content usually leads to slower, lower consumption, not higher as they claim.

The ratio of THC in cannabis governs how trippy as opposed to how soporific each high is. A lot of THC, and the high will be an 'upper' that gives strong mental effects; too little, and it'll have a nice, relaxing high that will slowly tend to push you towards sleep. Where you want to go with the high, and how far 'in' you go in terms of mental exploration, are both very reliant on what kind of cannabis you take and how.

At the time of writing, the most popular forms of marijuana are varieties of sinsemilla (from the Spanish 'without seeds'), made from just the buds and flowering tops of female plants. The THC content in these plants will vary from around 7.5 percent of total content up to 14 percent. For a detailed illustration of the rise and fall in THC content of hash oil, sinsemilla, hashish,

marijuana, Thai stick and American ditch weed over the last 32 years see the website:

<http://www.briancbennett.com/charts/fed-data/thc-content.htm>

Methods of Use

Yes, again basic, but very important, as each method delivers different amounts of active chemicals into your bloodstream, causing a major difference in the breadth and depth of any high you might experience. Each kind of cannabis has its own subtleties and ways it will affect your mind. If you want to explore, stay away from super-skunks (too buzzy and uncontrollable) and low-quality weed (too inclined to make you sleepy). You have to experiment a lot to find the right strains and methods of use that give you personally the best high for this kind of work. Mental exploration is more easily carried out with a bright, deep high, although any level of high will increase your sensitivity to the techniques we use here.

As I've said, the broadest and deepest of all highs are those created by eating cooked cannabis in some form or another, but it's important to note that overdosing with this ingestion method is very easy and the results of it can be anything from "impressive" to "can I have an ambulance now please?". Be careful. When you *do* get the dosage right though, things happen with ease in the high that eating creates. If it's good cannabis, a better resin of some kind, then there's no question of you needing to do anything to have interesting experiences; you just need to learn to let it all flow naturally and it will come to you by itself.

Your chosen method of use also has an impact on how

quickly your tolerance to the cannabis rises, and how long it takes the first hit and its ensuing peaks to come on. The following is not meant as an exhaustive list, as there's a range of new smoking methods that have emerged in the last 20 years, such as 'blunts', 'bubbles', 'hot knives', etc.

Methods of Use

- **Spliff/Joint** – Usually contains cannabis and tobacco mixed to the user's taste. The tobacco acts as a carrier which helps increase the effectiveness of the cannabis.
- **Pipe** – Without filter, much stronger than the average bong or spliff. Gives a broader first hit and a good later series of peaks, sometimes up to two or three hours later, due to the inhalation of smaller particles of cannabis that later enter your blood stream and give you a similar, but lesser, version of the eating high. Not recommended without a filter though, as it doesn't take long for the ash and tar deposits to build up in your lungs and for hearty coughing to take up much of your day.
- **Bong** – The water filter makes it a much smoother smoke, but it will give a slightly lesser high than a straight pipe. Use a bong, or some other form of filter, regardless of this.
- **Vaporizer** – I'm not the world authority on vaporizers, I've had just two over the years, but both were good and made inhaling the smoke hardly noticeable. But vaporizers never seemed to give the full breadth of high that I was used to, which made me use more cannabis each evening as I tried to

push the high I was getting into something broader. For occasional smokers who don't like tobacco and/or those who really don't like smoking that much at all, a vaporizer is the way to go. My opinions about them are based solely on my experience of them some two years ago, and they may have come on in leaps and bounds since then. Obviously though, much much better for you and your lungs than most other methods.

- **Eating it** – All forms of cannabis can be cooked into a variety of foods to give a deeper and much longer high than that gained from smoking; although for lack of adequate words to describe the differences between the two, I can only call the eating high 'broader' and far more intense, without necessarily being frightening.

An Alternative

Whilst trying to get myself a slower burn in an attempt to cause more THC to be released to create a better high, I've recently discovered another way of smoking that gives the benefits of a vaporizer whilst still maintaining the full breadth of high that a bong offers.

Pack the bowl of your favourite bong almost to the rim, then lay a gauze (or two) over the top to enclose it. Let the flame of your lighter heat the gauze up until it's hot, but don't get it too hot in just one place or the cannabis will instantly ignite. You're aiming to roast the weed rather than burn it, so less ash and more THC.

Because what smoke comes off is so fine and pure, on the first toke you'll probably think (like with a vaporizer) that you're not getting anything out of it at all, but in fact

you're getting a quite pure hit of THC.

Now turn the cannabis over in the bowl and repeat the above again. As the first token will have dried out the cannabis in the bowl, if you're not careful, your second token will burn it all away in a single flash. Just roast it rather than trying to light it, the idea being to leave as much unlit plant matter behind while forcing the THC into a vapour you can inhale. This second hit won't be as pure, but it'll still have advantages over a normal burn in that it contains more THC - and it's also a smoother smoke, as you aren't burning the cannabis ash again from your first token and inhaling that too, as you normally would in a bong. It leads to less coughing, a richer high (better than a vaporizer for some reason), and it also helps bring out the flavour of the cannabis too.

Lung Cancer, Mental Illness, Hell & Damnation

As I am talking about smoking cannabis, I think it would be useful at this point to allay a lot of people's fears by reiterating some interesting research that was published in 2006. According to the findings of a new study at the University of California, Los Angeles, smoking marijuana - even for long periods of time - doesn't increase the chances that you'll get cancer. The new findings "were against our expectations," said Donald Tashkin, a pulmonologist who has studied marijuana for 30 years. The study, which compared the lifestyles of 611 lung cancer patients and 601 patients with head and neck cancers with those of 1,040 people without cancer, found no increase in the risk of cancer for even the heaviest cannabis user – although it did find

a 20-fold increased risk of lung cancer in people who smoked more than two packs of cigarettes a day. *(The study results were presented in San Diego at a meeting of the American Thoracic Society.)*

Cannabis has also been accused for many years of actually creating mental illness in people, which is another idea that new research has dispelled. Cannabis exacerbates existing conditions, it does not create them; and many of the allegedly harmful mental effects it's supposed to produce are simply due to problems with blood sugar levels, as I describe in a later chapter, and these can be easily overcome. If you have panic attacks and are worried that you're going to have them when you're high, then don't get high, because you're pretty much certain to psychosomatically create them for yourself if you do. Getting high makes you very suggestible, and you can think yourself into having all kinds of strange – but imaginary - effects.

Does cannabis kill off brain cells forever? No - it's been known for nearly a hundred years that cannabis has no damaging effect on brain cells. In fact, research over the last ten years has shown it to be beneficial as it actually increases brain cell production. Israeli researchers found that cannabinoid drugs are helpful in cases of nerve damage and trauma, and the US Department of Veteran Affairs found similar results working with veterans suffering from PTSD in the 1980s - but, of course, suppressed these embarrassing results.

In 2008, a team at the University of Saskatchewan, Department of Psychiatry in Saskatoon led by Xia Zhang, may have found evidence that the drug promotes the formation of new brain cells in the hippocampal region of the brain, which in turn reduces anxiety and depression. Zhang and his colleagues wrote in the November issue of

the Journal of Clinical Investigation that cannabis appears “to be the only illicit drug whose capacity to produce increased ... neurons is positively correlated with its (anti-anxiety) and anti-depressant-like effects.” The paper was posted on-line at the Journal’s website: <http://www.jci.org/>

What about the accusation then that cannabis destroys motivation and turns every toker into a lethargic, uncommunicative zombie with zero ambition? Let's split my response to that in two parts: firstly, it's an unfortunate problem that many adolescents go through a period of deep disillusionment with life at some point between, say, 12 and 21 years old, and act like uncommunicative zombies no matter whether they're on drugs or not. The reasons for this are many – hormones playing havoc with mood and emotions, feeling like you're being treated as a child by family and society, a lack of direction caused by not wanting to go down the same 9 to 5 route as the rest of the world – and each reason enough to take the glitter out of most people's lives. It's a horrible time, and probably the loneliest for most people. My own zombie period lasted from about 9 years old to 20, during which I spent much time alone, laying in bed reading, or just getting away from home and the pressures of family life and the expectation that I should be 'normal'. I didn't touch drugs, ever, but I still had that same, awful time when everything seemed pointless to me, and I didn't have the resources, money or energy to do anything much at all except hang out.

However, if a cannabis user has these same symptoms then everyone leaps to the conclusion that it must be the cannabis that caused this mindset, when in fact it's probably the only thing keeping the user sane and happy.

Yes, there are certainly some people who take cannabis and do lose impetus, but they may well have lost it whether they'd used drugs or not.

Secondly, does regular use inevitably lead to a permanent loss of mental capacity and logical reasoning, and can cannabis use ever be a positive thing? 'No', to the former, and 'certainly' to the latter. I live in the UK where cannabis is used quietly across the board by a good proportion of those in responsible jobs. Of regular users, I personally know two barristers, four police officers, two accountants (one being the owner of a large company), three prominent businessmen and an assortment of other successful people whose cannabis use hasn't led to them becoming down and outs, begging for money on street corners. I'm a daily user myself, and have been for many years, but I've worked (very often high) as a PR account executive, a journalist, a computer graphic artist, I've written four books and worked in adult education as a lecturer and facilitator – all since I *began* taking cannabis.

Would we all have been even more successful without it you might wonder? I'm really not so sure. Cannabis helps me be more creative, and gives me far more stamina to work the long hours that I need to put in. I honestly could not have done what I have done without it. Being high rarely puts you into a state where you don't want to do anything or stop wanting to experience things altogether - quite the opposite. Weed makes you want to experience life and reality *more*, because your perceptions are enhanced and you want to take advantage of that.

Is cannabis innocuous in itself? Yes and no. What we're doing makes us unhealthy in many ways if we're not careful, especially if we use it to extremes, don't eat

properly, and don't exercise. In terms of physical health problems, over-use of cannabis can result in sore throats, sore eyes, coughs and nasal problems. Is it good to suck smoke of any kind into your lungs, including incense or tobacco? No, of course not, and if anyone can afford to move onto a vaporiser, or eat weed instead and avoid smoking altogether, I'd recommend it. But I certainly don't see anything medically damaging in the long term from use of cannabis (unless in conjunction with tobacco) over and above these things.

Just as with the mental aspects of use, if anyone has existing lung problems or has a tendency towards them then again, cannabis use is bound to have an effect on them. But, use for use, cannabis has been shown time and again to be far less damaging (mentally and physically) than either tobacco or alcohol, despite what government misinformation may say to the contrary.

Clearing the Throat & Chest

While we're talking about the negative aspects of smoking cannabis I think it would be useful to talk about ways of getting rid of the build-up of cannabis oil and general gunk that can settle at the back of your throat and in your chest after prolonged use. Abstinence for a decent period will obviously help get rid of it entirely, but as you might not find that idea very attractive, I'll just mention a couple of other ways you can help overcome it.

- **Exercise** – probably the only way to loosen deep-seated congestion effectively and maintain lung capacity, but you'll probably also need to use one of the other methods here too.
- **Liquorice Root** – note that this is not the soft

liquorice candy that you can buy, but short lengths of a woody root. This is a well-known decongestant amongst herbalists. It takes some initial chewing to begin releasing its active contents – and it's very much an acquired taste - but it's very effective as a throat and chest cleanser. I chew on a stick for 20 minutes or so every day, and it helps get most of the congestion out.

- **Salad** – a good, varied salad meal is surprisingly good for getting rid of old build-up on the tongue, as are apples, oranges and pineapples.
- **Chillies and Curries** – chilli, root ginger, garlic, onions and turmeric are the active ingredients in these meals. Garlic, even dried, has potent antibacterial and antiseptic properties.
- **Horehound** - reduces any swelling or soreness of the throat. Also thins mucus, which makes it easier for you to clear it from your throat. To make a tea, steep 2 teaspoons of chopped herb in 1 cup of boiling water for 10 minutes; strain and drink.
- **Pickles** – anything with vinegar in it, such as pickles and preserves, helps to cut through the gunk.
- **Salt** - an old-fashioned salt-water gargle acts as a mild antiseptic, and also draws water out of mucous membranes in the throat, which helps to clear phlegm. Dissolve a half-teaspoon of salt in a glass of warm water, gargle and spit out. Repeat up to four times a day.
- **Baking Soda** - gargle with a baking soda solution. Dissolve one-half teaspoon of baking soda in a glass of warm water.

Cannabis and Capsicum

A cannabis high will also increase the potential effects of small highs which can be triggered by eating particular foods. Capsicum, a chemical found in cayenne, paprika, sweet pepper, tabasco and chile peppers, causes the body to release endorphins and gives a very similar rush to a 'runner's high'. Although the feeling lasts only a few minutes and can only be repeated a limited number of times before tolerance sets in, it's certainly a pleasant feeling and a useful way to help a dull high back on course. Capsicum is also worth mentioning here for its broader properties as a healing medicine. It is an:

“...abortifacient, aids in assimilating foods, alterative, anthelmintic, anti-fatigue, anti-scorbutic, antibacterial (topical), antibiotic, anticoagulant, antidote to poison, anti-infective, antimicrobial, anti-rheumatic, antiseptic, antispasmodic, aphrodisiac, benefits digestion, blood detoxification, boosts immunity, cardi tonic, carminative, circulatory stimulant, counter-irritant, decongestant, diaphoretic, digestive aid, emenagogue, expectorant, febrifuge, fumitory, gargle, hemostatic, improves metabolism,, increases appetite, invigorates blood, irritant, lowers blood pressure, lowers blood sugar, lowers cholesterol, nutritive, opens the chest, opens the nasal passages, promotes sound sleep, psychedelic, purifies blood, regulates blood pressure, relieves gas, relieves pain and inflammation, retards ageing, rubefacient, shark repellent, sialagogue, stimulant, stimulates gastric secretion, stimulates endorphins, stimulates saliva, stomachic, tonic, vesicant...”

Of course, eating any kind of food will give you a brief sugar high that you might trade on when you're using cannabis. I've found that although you can get a warm,

pleasant feeling about ten minutes after eating the average plate of fries and eggs for example, the bigger highs come from salads, and varied meals containing a lot of individual elements. After a meal where a good range of different kinds of foods have been combined, the feeling you can get is exceptionally comfortable and happy. Whilst it's certainly not a big rush and in no way 'trippy', it's something nice to experience and enjoy.

On the Way Up

A good high is, by nature, internal and is therefore best enjoyed alone; but the chances are that you regularly get high before going out for the night, or while watching TV, reading or even working. There's nothing wrong with this at all, you're using the high to enhance the sensations of what you're doing and that's exploration in itself - but by using cannabis in that way you miss out on the best effects of the high; it gets lost in a mix of other perceptions, and you accidentally stop yourself feeling it anywhere near as well as you could.

Some people have a strange attitude to cannabis, a kind of 'go on, make me stoned, if you can' feeling towards it. They've been high lots of times before, they know weed inside out, they smoke 7 inch packed blunts and can write, juggle, and do brain surgery while high - and they're proud of it. Any weed has to prove itself to them and fight its way through all the things they do while they're high - obviously, their highs suffer because of this, and they eventually have to smoke more and more to get any decent sensations out of their weed. To keep your highs strong and fun it's really best to just be high and enjoy it, not to go off and do the things that you'd normally do while straight.

If you're a regular user, you'll probably be able to go from high to fairly straight pretty quickly when you need to, because you know how to override the effects that cannabis can have. But this isn't a good thing. By obscuring the high you learn to override it and create *mental* tolerance to it which, once created, is very hard to get rid of. At that point, being high or not being high is a choice that the user makes, and it's very easy for us to continually make the choice of not being fully high while we're busy doing other things. The longer you've been using cannabis, the more you have to remember to listen to what it's doing to you; if your attention wanders to other things, then the high will fade pretty quickly. Mental tolerance usually comes on much sooner than physical tolerance from THC build-up, so retaining the novelty of the high, and your attention to it, is critical.

Next time you think you're straightening up and want to reach for your bong, think about sitting back, closing your eyes and just being high for a while - and see how much of the high that you thought you'd lost is still there, bubbling away in the back of your mind.

In terms of depth of the high, it isn't the amount of cannabis you take that leads to big highs, but what you actually do *whilst* high. What you do on the way up to the first high of your day profoundly affects its depth and length, and doing anything more than a bare minimum will kill off most of the effects you're hoping to reach. More importantly though, if you 'break' this first part of the high by busying yourself through it, that high and *all later highs that day* will be diminished too. The first high governs the mood and depth of your whole smoking session, so do your utmost not to damage it.

On the first rise into the high, your mind has to be very aware of the difference that the high is making to it

- a contrast between being high and straight that it can judge the depth of the high against. So, doing anything like working or even going for a walk, as you first start getting high, will muddle your transition from straight to high and stop it from being such a deep, enjoyable experience. Don't do anything that needs your close attention, period. No studying, or complex calculations. No conversations where you have to appear straight. Certainly no driving, and nothing either strenuous or stressful.

Rhythm of the High

Every type of cannabis has a particular rhythm to its high that you need to pay attention to as you take subsequent hits. A high isn't just straight up and then down the other side, but is actually a series of peaks and troughs that occur over a period of hours. In fact, some of the peaks that you can get a couple of hours after a heavy session is over may be deeper than those you might have had within the session itself. This is because the larger particles of cannabis that slowly find their way into your system from your lungs are being metabolised as though you'd eaten them, giving a broad, deep high that takes some time to come on. If you're partaking at night (and particularly if you're using a pipe with no filter), that can mean that a lot of the high is happening whilst you're asleep.

It's a common to mistake a trough in the high for a signal that you're about to straighten up, so you duly take more weed to get yourself back up again. But if you're not as straight as you think, the peaks and troughs of these two highs will almost certainly clash, and the chances are that you'll kill off much of both highs. For

many types of cannabis, this will prevent any 'layering' of highs, i.e. taking more and more cannabis, hoping to push your mellow high into a big trippy one to explore within. If your highs do clash, every subsequent shot of cannabis you have is then going to make you straighter and/or more tired as the hours wear on. The only way around this is to try to keep a good gap of at least an hour between bowls, making sure that what you think is the end of your high isn't just you not paying it enough attention.

However, the idea of using one high to kill off another is a useful one to bear in mind if you're too high and want a way of coming back down relatively quickly. I wouldn't recommend this for someone who's very deep into a low blood sugar scenario, but a fresh, strong high from another token should help lessen the more uncomfortable effects of an anxiety-filled first high. You will still need to attend to your warmth, the light levels and noise in the room you're in though (as I explain later), until you come down to a safer level, just to help things along; but it should help cut the less pleasant symptoms back a little.

Too Much At Once

It sounds counter-intuitive, but for tokers with a high tolerance, it's a bad idea to have too big a bowl on the first hit of the day, or two or three bowls in quick succession, to try and get a strong high that overrides your tolerance. It may well give you a good high (which will tend towards being a bit too 'bright') – but this big first hit is creating instant tolerance to the following hits you're going to take after it. Later bowls can't have the same impact as the first ones did, because the first bowls

filled up the THC receptors in your brain. If you do take more, even a lot more, you'll either end up falling asleep, or the highs will clash and cancel each other out. No matter how high your tolerance is and how much weed you think you need to get a good high, try just one single bowl on your first hit of the day, just as an experiment. You'll be surprised how high it can get you and how long it will last if you let it run its full course.

Mood

You're going to hear the following words a lot during this book, and they're something you should take to heart: whatever you normally think, eat, drink, smell, etc., you will feel the effects that much more intensely during a cannabis high. That's one of the ways that it works, why it feels like it does; and as this is the case, you quickly learn that getting high whilst you're tense or anxious can increase those feelings rather than reduce them, as you might hope. Don't do cannabis as a means of escape from depression or stress - it doesn't always help in that respect, and it will tend to lock you into negative thoughts and worries rather than freeing you from them. To help you get around this, I'm going to be talking soon about how you can learn to quickly establish a better frame of mind to get high in, via the use of chakras and 'metta'. What goes into the high is what comes out of it.

The Setting

Maybe surprisingly, where you get high is just as important as how. If you're a regular user and you get high every night in the same room – even sitting in the

same chair – then that too will dull your high. For the high to have an impact on you, it has to be novel to your mind when compared with normal reality. If you do exactly the same things every time you get high, then that sameness becomes part of your norm, your everyday reality, rather than the departure from reality it should be. If you were to get high constantly every day from the second you got out of bed, then that would become what your brain would recognise as normal - and being high would then quickly become mundane and uninteresting. Try varying where you get high, even if it's only sitting in a different room. Go out to a park or the country (take food and drink) and notice how much fresher and bigger the high is.

What's in the room with you as you get high is important too, especially if you're new to cannabis. But, new user or old, think about:

Setting

- **Light** – Avoid getting high in bright sunshine or intense light (especially with flashing lights), as it can create a sensory overload that leads to painful headaches and a high that's messy and hard to control. Some types of cannabis can also give a high that can be heightened by bright light, and this can push you deeper into the high than you might want to go. However, keep this in mind if you're looking for a way to perk up a high.

Heavy users may find that if they try to watch TV, or even sit in a well-lit room, it will be hard to focus their eyes comfortably and they may feel short or long-sighted. Usually this is simply

because the cannabis has made them light-sensitive, and the brightness of the TV or lighting is affecting their ability to see. In fact, it's best to stay well away from television altogether whilst high. I have pretty reasonable powers of concentration, but as soon as a TV is turned on, even with my back to it without the sound on and a static 'Teletext' screen showing, it affects my mind in such a way that really does stop me from doing the kinds of things here with any real success.

- **People** - High, other people can be hard to cope with sometimes, especially if they're loud or the the sort that you might end up getting into games of psychological one-upmanship with. Cannabis increases your awareness of other people's psychology along with everything else, making you feel much more involved with or pressured by them, sometimes to the point of paranoia. There really should be as few people as possible with you as you get high, and you should be able to trust all of them.
- **Comfort** - Obviously, how warm and comfortable you are as you get high is very important. Feeling a little on the cool side before you get high can easily turn you into a shivering, white-faced, white-handed wreck as the high comes on. Don't wait until you're too cold and high to dig out that woolly jersey from the cupboard. Get the ambient temperature of the room you're in up to a decent level and get a hat (yes, a hat!), blankets and even a room heater of some kind, if you think you might need them – but *before* you become incapable.

Food and warmth should be well sorted out before you even start. Be prepared.

- **Smells** - Find an incense or two that you like and burn one on occasion (not constantly) throughout the high. Classically – and for good reason – some of the incenses and resins listed below have been used in spiritual settings for thousands of years. Try some of the proprietary essential oils too, such as peach or apple, as many can be used to give a little push to a dwindling high. My own favourite is the blue/white boxed 'Nag Champa', a nice sweet incense that doesn't fill your room with the 'wet dog' smell the following day like other incenses can. The perfume of 'Nag' gives a nice sense of cosiness and relaxation to the high.

Note that men and women have vastly different preferences in incenses. What aromas suit you perfectly may well be disgusting to your partner. Although everybody will have their own personal likes and dislikes, try these as a beginning:

- Sage (most types, but in particular NA White Sage)
- Frankincense
- Myrrh
- Sandalwood
- Peach
- Musk
- Apple

Smells can be a real landscape of sensations and emotions, so exploring what they do to your mind as they first reach your brain is an excellent way to build up your sensitivity to subtle changes in awareness – and something that you can easily do on a quiet afternoon just casually lying around.

To improve the effects of any aroma: with your eyes closed, flare your nostrils as you draw just a single waft of the smell in through your nose. If you're doing this correctly, you should feel a small cavity behind the bridge of your nose open. Try to keep your attention firmly on the inside of your nose and what you can still smell of the perfume for a minute or two, and just sit for a while, savouring it. If you're able to, keep your nostrils gently flared too. With the right smells, this will give the high a push off into a new direction for a little while.

However, do note that when you're using smells to create psychological effects, you have to think of them as drugs in their own right - each with their own level of tolerance, with minimum and maximum doses. Some aromas, on a single inhalation, provide either a pleasant push to the cannabis high or may give you a slight high of their own; something that you can sometimes feel whilst you're straight. But others, when burned continuously or even for anything more than a couple of minutes, will tend to make you sleepy or 'flat' rather than actually doing anything special to the high, because you quickly reach a tolerance to them. Like cannabis, how many times you use any aromas in an evening will govern how strong its effects are, so learn to use them at the right points in your high – say, when you're feeling exceptionally chilled (the sensations will be even more pronounced), or when you want to change the mood of a high for the better, or to give a session of closed-eye

meditation a push in an interesting perceptual direction.

North American silver sage is amongst my own favourites for giving a nice, relaxed colour to a high, and I can use it to good effect by sniffing it briefly three or four times a night, without developing tolerance. If you *do* buy sage in one of the large, tightly-rolled 'smudge sticks', be sure to trim off burned sections of the leaves before relighting and inhaling, otherwise you'll be taking in ash at the same time. Trim down to clean leaves to ensure that when you singe the 'stick you get a good burst of sage oil coming from the fresher herb.

Cannabis and Alcohol

Alcohol in any form may reduce – or in some cases, completely negate - the effects of cannabis pretty quickly, and will stop you from exploring the things here with any degree of success. The real problem with it though is that it will continue to affect your mental abilities for at least the first six hours of the following day - or even some *days*, in the case of heavy use. Not a problem? Well, actually it is, because alcohol is a depressant that will affect your mood well into the day after its use. If you decide to get high the day after using alcohol, it will probably help to relax you and to remove some of the negative effects of a hangover - but it'll also emphasise all of the down or uncomfortable mental feelings that the alcohol has given you too. So on the one hand you might begin to feel physically better, but on the other, you might feel mentally worse.

However, if you do want to drink but avoid a hangover, having cannabis once or twice during the night will help stop the dehydrating action of the alcohol and so reduce its more unpleasant effects.

Cannabis and Sleep

Too many late nights will considerably impair your ability to have fun with your high and to explore it. Get your eight hours' sleep in without fail, as little can be done with a mind that's suffering from even slight sleep-deprivation.

There's also research carried out during the 70s which seems to show that cannabis reduces the amount of REM (dreaming) sleep that users can have per night, possibly causing sleep-deprivation and light symptoms of the same in heavy, regular users. In extreme cases, lack of sleep will cause schizophrenia-like symptoms, which can quickly be alleviated by a couple of good nights' rest. There's no heroism in doing the things here into the early hours of the morning and messing up your sleep patterns, it's really not going to help you further your skills.

People who combine alcohol and cannabis regularly can also induce sleep-deprivation in themselves, as alcohol's effects on sleeping patterns will combine with those of cannabis:

“...Alcohol consumption can induce sleep disorders by disrupting the sequence and duration of sleep states and by altering total sleep time as well as the time required to fall asleep (i.e., sleep latency).

Alcohol consumed at bedtime, after an initial stimulating effect, may decrease the time required to fall asleep. Because of alcohol's sedating effect, many people with insomnia consume alcohol to promote sleep. However, alcohol consumed within an hour of bedtime appears to disrupt the second half of the sleep period. The subject may sleep fitfully during the second half of sleep, awakening from dreams and returning to sleep

with difficulty. With continued consumption just before bedtime, alcohol's sleep-inducing effect may decrease, while its disruptive effects continue or increase. This sleep disruption may lead to daytime fatigue and sleepiness. The elderly are at particular risk, because they achieve higher levels of alcohol in the blood and brain than do younger persons after consuming an equivalent dose. Studies show that a moderate dose of alcohol consumed as much as 6 hours before bedtime can increase wakefulness during the second half of sleep..."

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) - U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services:
<http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/aa41.htm>

Batch Tolerance

Of course, there's a simple reason for cannabis tolerance in many cases - that of batch tolerance. Again, you have to think in terms of a good high as being one that feels fresh and novel to your mind. If you were to continually have exactly the same weed every day, then its effects would be more and more recognisable to your mind every time you took it, so it would therefore be less striking and effective. No novelty means less reason to stay aware of the high, so your feeling for it is reduced. If you're a heavy user and if it's possible, once a week you should try to change the kind of weed you have to another batch, or even a new strain, to keep the novelty value up.

Eating Tolerance

The bigger the high, the more quickly the THC

receptors in your brain will 'fill up', increasing tolerance to lesser highs a lot. I love the deeper effects I can get from eating cooked cannabis, but ingesting something like hash brownies every day gets lacklustre quickly, usually by the third session; and any more than that gives an increasingly diminished high on further consumption. Give yourself at least one day off cannabis after eating it to get your tolerance levels back to normal.

Mixing

If you have two or three different kinds of hash and weed and want to do them all in the same night, I'd avoid mixing a resin/hash high with a weed high. Every kind of cannabis has a different feel to its high, and it's just as likely that two radically different types of cannabis can clash badly and give you headaches, or cancel each other out, as it is that they might combine into one big super-high. Obviously it's easier to get a decent mix of weed strains, as so many share a similar feel; so it isn't so much of a problem as is trying to successfully mix resin with weed. Some people actively mix their own favourite weeds together to try and create a better high, but it does take some experimentation to get it right.

This is not to say that hash and weed can't ever be combined, it's just that the effects are usually less than you might expect, even from mixing two powerful strains. The high from hash can be very broad and powerful, but some of the best subtleties will be swamped by the general 'mood' of a good strain of weed.

As an example, I currently have a very nice skunk weed here that I use each day, and a soft black Afghani hash, both of about equivalent strength when smoked.

Using the hash and weed together doesn't add very much range to the weed high - so, especially considering the cost of the hash, it's just not worth mixing the two. To really use it effectively I have to have a day on hash alone so that I can remind myself what its high feels like, expecting only to be happy with it as a high on the next and subsequent days of using it exclusively.

Hash

Because the effects of eating hash can be extreme, it's not something I'd recommend everyone to just leap in and try it. It's easy to get into the land of really scary highs doing it, way beyond dope-anxiety, so it should only be done in a controlled and sensible way. This aside, it can give tremendous experiences, particularly once you've learned to exert gentle control over your mind using meditation, and are able to take advantage of some of the techniques here.

Hash is for introspection and exploration at home in a warm bath with the lights down (yes, seriously the best place to explore from), not for going out clubbing on. If you're going to eat hash for the first time, I'd recommend you being with an experienced, confident and trustworthy cannabis user who can watch over you. Be somewhere you feel totally and utterly safe, and with people you like and trust, paying attention to everything I say here regarding mood, food, relaxation and setting; it's five times more important to think about.

You have to learn with hash though that the high it can give you isn't going to be in the same 'place' as your favourite weed high is, and will tend not to have the same body symptoms and may lack its relaxing qualities. But once you've had a chance to explore it properly, hash

has other effects that make up for these differences considerably. If you *do* get a chance to take it, do it on two different days; the first time to get used to it, and the second time to immerse yourself in its intricacies. That first time, chilling and enjoying it, only lightly exploring it, will help you better feel the full range of what it can do to you the next time around, and will increase the pleasure in the subsequent highs you can get from it.

I don't want to give the impression that it's all abject horror when you're high on eating hash, it's just that it can be that way if you get silly with it. I've been 'silly' far more times than my wife cares to recall, and have sometimes ended up quite a sad and sorry sight after too much of my favourite black hash. There's never an advantage in going that little bit further and extending the boundaries of the high, as you get completely beyond enjoying it. Whereas with most weed highs it's usually a case of you seeing how things react to the high, with eating hash the effects come to you (see more on 'level 4 highs' in a later chapter). It's hard to look at anything that has an intensity of colour, emotion, light or sound without it making a ripple in your consciousness, a wave within the high. It turns perception into a range of feelings that are linked to your emotions, sense of time, space and self – and you have to be very prepared for that as an experience and be confident within it.

Remember though, no matter how deep your high gets, nobody has ever become irrevocably mentally lost or has died whilst using cannabis; *but* if you are not prepared or you have the slightest apprehension about doing so, do NOT eat hash as it will not be a positive experience.



2

Anxiety & Pleasure

The causes of cannabis anxiety and paranoia are both mental and chemical.

Although some episodes of anxiety can be created by your expectations and fears about having a bad high, it's more likely that much of your discomfort is being created by the things I talk about in the previous chapters and below. Even if you've never had a moment's anxiety with cannabis in your life, it'll be useful if you can read through the following just in case it should ever happen – and just to check that you really are avoiding these pitfalls.

One prime trigger of cannabis anxiety is a change in your blood sugar levels. In order to keep the right amount of sugar in your blood (around a teaspoon), whenever you have something sweet your body releases insulin to tell your body's cells to mop up the sugar and turn it into energy, then to convert any excess into body fat. If you eat too many processed foods and carbohydrates like pasta and potatoes, then over time your body will have released so much insulin that your cells will start to lose their sensitivity to it. They mop up less of the excess*, and more is turned into fat, which leads to clogged up arteries and a whole list of other

health problems. If your body isn't working in the right way because of a bad diet, the things I talk about below which can happen during a bout of low blood sugar can be extreme. That's not to say that we can't all continue to succumb to the occasional bout of the munchies though, as long as we know what the sugar is doing to our systems. And the range of what it *can* do to us in a very short space of time staggers belief.

**Although I've explained the once standard blood sugar model above and it does illustrate pretty much what happens, modern medicine has moved away from describing the system in the way that I do here. What it's been replaced with takes some getting your head around at first, and I think it would be better for me to pass those interested parties into the capable hands of the following websites that will be able to explain what's now believed to take place within the body far better than I.*

There are a number of other sites that carry a full list of foodstuffs and their glycemic index ratings, which are worth wading through to sort out dietary/high problems. A good start is the home site of the index: www.glycemicindex.com/

Wonderful as the new system is, I'll continue to describe cannabis and blood sugar action in its former way, below, as it's still as accurate as it needs to be for our purposes.

Blood Sugar & Mood

Changes in blood sugar levels can be responsible for pretty extreme effects (both good and bad) when you're high, so you have to pay real attention to them if you want to get, and keep, a good high.

Too much blood sugar, from eating a lot of candy for example, and you get a rush as the cannabis high and the sugar high combine – but the sugar high is short-lived,

and will make you want to fall asleep as soon as your system burns off the excess insulin that all the sugar has forced the release of. Too little blood sugar, and things go from uncomfortable to extremely unpleasant very quickly. As you first start to get high, your metabolism may hike up a notch and causes a sudden dip in blood sugar. That's no problem if you've just eaten, but if you're already on the edge of being hungry without realising it, that first tokes can make you feel pretty nasty in less than ten minutes. Never take the chance of getting high when you're somewhere without access to the right kinds of food and drink, just in case. If you have the added 'pleasure' of being a borderline diabetic and you don't know it, you could get into quite a state from just that one first high, if you're not careful.

In terms of the things that make you feel mentally and physically good or bad, blood sugar is way up there with the best of them. As the effects of even slightly low blood sugar can be so extreme as to literally stop us thinking clearly and sanely, it *has* to be something to consider all the time you're high. Because of our continual reaction to the rise and fall of our blood sugar level, we move constantly between being either 'loved up' and happy or being snarling dragons on the verge of misery and depression. We can't make rational judgements under either circumstance. If we're negotiating a deal, for example, and it's just after lunch and we have a blood sugar high after eating, then we may be more lenient and magnanimous than we should be. If, alternatively, it's an hour before lunch and we've got low blood sugar, then we may not compromise enough.

This over-simplified description really doesn't do justice to the effects that changes in blood insulin levels can create. Who you are, how you react to people, your

mood, your emotions, your sanity, even how well you see – these all change regularly on the drop of the chemical hat called blood sugar. Although the worst effects of having low blood sugar come about when your reserves have dipped considerably, *any* variance in it is going to change the way you act. Because of these ups and downs, it's almost impossible to tell when you're being the real, rational you. If you double or even treble that effect, that's how much you react to your changing blood sugar levels when you're high. A small fall in your blood sugar level caused, say, by eating an hour later than normal is enough to change who you are very noticeably. Regularly feeling suddenly sad is a prime indicator of a problem with blood sugar and insulin levels that should be checked out. Depression and mood swings are common to anyone who tends to binge on cakes and sweets, or who has other problems with BSL (Blood Sugar Levels).

Question: *Are you eating enough of the right things at the right times of day to keep your blood sugar insulin at a correct level?*

Answer: Unlikely. Even if you do know which foods would best do this, “probably not” is going to be the honest reply from most of us. It's not feasible in some cases to have a good diet every day or to be able to eat at all the right times, so every one of us will suffer the effects of low insulin levels at some time or another. But if we know that on the whole we can't avoid having these highs and lows, it makes it easier to cope with them when they do happen.

As well as its effect on your mood, low BSL reduces your dexterity and physical ability too, so ideally you should avoid doing things like driving, or in fact anything that requires you to be focussed whilst you have it. High

and hungry? Bad combination. This is not stuff to mess around with.

Let's labour the point - low blood sugar isn't just a matter of feeling good or feeling bad - it makes you crazy, literally. And the worst of it is that you probably won't even know when it's happening, because madness is like that. You'll only be able to recognise that some of the things you're doing are irrational, or that you're lacking judgement, once your blood sugar levels are back up again.

4.20pm, And Why It May Be Bad For Us

There are good reasons why the traditional idea of starting toking at 4.20pm may not be the good idea we all tend to think it is. Many regular cannabis users begin their day's session in the late afternoon as work is winding down, and maybe an hour or two before their evening meal – just at the very time when their blood sugar is already on the wane. If this is you, you'll more than likely feel a lot of the symptoms below within ten minutes or so of getting high. Eat! Better still, make sure that you've eaten well in advance of getting high.

For any cannabis user, even without food binges, the increase in metabolism that cannabis may create burns off blood sugar very quickly, so you're much more likely to have the symptoms listed below. Look out for any of the following as indicators of low blood sugar:

- Sweating, shaking, anxiety, hunger, dizziness, faintness, pounding heart, personality changes, confused thinking, impatience, numbness of lips and tongue, headache, nausea, blurred vision, slurred or slow speech, convulsions, coldness,

white hands and face. Eventually, if it is not attended to, it can lead to unconsciousness.

As I said earlier, the rhythm of your high and the amount of cannabis you've taken could mean that you get your best highs when you're asleep at night. As the cannabis will still be working away on your metabolism into the early hours of the morning, you may wake up with some of these same symptoms.

There's no getting away from the fact that too much cannabis can sometimes make getting out of bed the following day a bit of a struggle, but if you get headaches, muscle aches and a grogginess that you can't seem to shake and that seems disproportionate to your cannabis intake, then low blood sugar could be the cause. If you're already prone to night-time dips in blood sugar (as many people are), then the cannabis will exacerbate that and make you feel much worse when you wake up. Check out your diet. Bear in mind that many people develop new food sensitivities or have an increase in the effects of old ones as they get older. Anyone can become strongly sensitive to lactose or gluten, for example, in a matter of months, after having shown no earlier symptoms at any time in their lives.

Adrenaline & Cannabis

A second cause of dope anxiety is something I term here the 'adrenaline cascade', which is really a mild form of 'shock'. After any event that has made you anxious, the anxiety causes your system to dump adrenaline (also called epinephrine) into your bloodstream, creating a rapid heartbeat, a growing demand on your BSL, and thus deeper and deeper feelings of anxiety as your BSL

drops. Of course, you'll usually find these effects uncomfortable or worrying, thus causing the release of even more adrenaline and a worsening of symptoms. This vicious circle of adrenaline release will be increasingly hard to overcome, and the deeper it gets the more likely it is to lead to a 'white-out' due to its effects on your blood sugar.

Many things can trigger the release of adrenaline, including:

- Apprehension about potentially bad highs
- Stress
- Anxiety
- Fatigue
- Stimulants, such as alcohol, caffeine, cocaine, and heroin
- Bright lights
- Loud noises
- Exercise
- Sugar sensitivity
- Abnormal glucose metabolism

Again, do not underestimate the effects that adrenaline can cause by itself, such as an irregular heartbeat, palpitations, abnormal behaviour, anxiety and headaches - even before it starts reducing our BSL to a point where it can no longer support full brain function (about 60% of our blood sugar is used by our brains).

Unfortunately, there's very little you can do to remove excess adrenaline from your system once it's in there, and it can only really be counteracted by noradrenaline, something that usually only our bodies can provide. It *can* be burned off by exercise, but if adrenaline has caused a very deep dip in your BSL then that may not be a viable option. The only things you can truly do are to

eat to get rid of some of the more unpleasant symptoms or to simply wait it out, knowing that it is a brief physiological effect.

I've seen a number of people offering advice to 'just suck it up and it'll go away' about this particular kind of anxiety, and to some extent that *is* helpful, as relaxing and trying to be calm will help break the cycle of adrenaline release. On the other hand, if someone is having an intense version of this then relaxing is far easier said than done and, if you should experience the anxiety yourself, you need to treat yourself as you would for low BSL and the effects of a level 4 high (see later), removing yourself from any strong stimuli - lights, noises, etc. - which might help promote the effects of the high and further adrenaline release.

In brief, there are two scenarios:

a) Low BSL, leading to anxiety and the release of adrenaline which compounds the loss of blood sugar and its effects; and

b) Having any form of excitement/anxiety prior to, or during the course of, getting high causes the release of adrenaline which, depending on a number of personal factors and depth of high, will cause an adrenaline cascade that causes deeper anxiety and a loss of blood sugar.

Of course it's possible to get a mixture of the two very easily. In unhealthy people, or those with existing blood sugar problems, it may be that only a slight dip in BSL or an occurrence of mild excitement will cause these same symptoms.

So, does weed actually *cause* a surge in adrenaline or a dip in blood sugar? It depends on each person individually and how they are feeling, their diet, and

what they've eaten on that particular day. Bear this in mind and eat before you get high - about 20 minutes or so before, and NOT sugary or high-calorie foods - then at least you can be sure to avoid the low BSL variety of anxiety.

Cannabis & Diabetes

It's interesting to note that (up until the time of writing in 2009) there has been little research into the effects of cannabis on blood sugar, or on cannabis use in controlling diabetes, despite there being a mass of anecdotal evidence showing that it *does* help many diabetics to control their illness (possibly through a reduction in catecholamines and/or stress-related hormones (glucocorticoids) caused by cannabis). Not only is there limited research in this potentially life-saving area, according to various world-wide diabetic societies, there are currently NO studies currently being carried out or or even planned in the coming years. This is a very odd state of affairs considering the number of diabetes-related illnesses and deaths there are each year. As with much cannabis research, the truth tends to be covered by contradictory evidence, and it's very easy to get the feeling whilst researching the subject that the beneficial effects of cannabis are already well known in this respect, but that they're being suppressed, for whatever reason.

Some diabetics have found that it lowers BSL and helps control their illness, and others that it has no effect at all, which may simply be down to the amount of adrenaline they may or may not produce when they're high. Many have rigorously self-tested their BSL and found that cannabis causes an initial rise in blood sugar

(caused by increased hydrolysis of glycogen to glucose), followed by a low period where they're unable to return their background sugar levels to a normal level, especially if they're under stress.

If we look at the actions of adrenaline in this respect then the mechanism that prevents this rise becomes obvious (remember that this same effect will be present in anyone who has a burst of adrenaline in their systems, not just diabetics): adrenaline prepares the body for 'fight or flight' in an emergency by increasing the supply of glucose and oxygen to the brain and muscles, whilst at the same time suppressing other less important processes, digestion in particular. This means that the initial elevation in blood sugar (through increased catabolism) may be short-lived, and whether it then leads to a later dip and anxiety is dependent on the amount of adrenaline present in the blood at the time. Not only does it reduce the body's ability to take in new blood sugar to redress the balance, but it increases speedier depletion of stored blood sugar, preventing restoration.

Some people, particularly those with bad diets or those who are subjected regularly to stress, may have semi-permanent hypoglycaemia (a deficiency of glucose in the blood), resulting in adverse reactions to cannabis through their body's inability to control adrenaline and/or cortisol through 'adrenal fatigue'.

On the positive side, cannabis is widely accepted as proven treatment for various symptoms common to diabetes patients (and of course non-diabetes sufferers too), such as:

- Restless Legs Syndrome (RSL).
- Reducing inflammation, providing protection for the myelin sheaths around the nerves.

- As a vasodilator, improving blood flow.
- Reducing blood pressure over time. Whilst cannabis is not generally thought to be an anti-hypertensive and is no replacement for ACE inhibitors, it does contribute to lower blood pressure which is vital in diabetes management.
- Lessens the pain of neuropathy by activating receptors in the body and brain. Some components of cannabis (perhaps cannibidiol) act as anti-spasmodic agents similar to the far more toxic anti-convulsants like Neurontin. This action of cannabis also helps relieve diabetic muscle cramps and GI upset.

Testing for Hypoglycaemia

*"Many more people believe they have hypoglycaemia than actually test positive when given blood sugar tests...Dr. Callaway **suspects that people can experience pharmacological effects from sugar, even if blood sugar levels remain within the normal range.** People's responses to fluctuating blood sugar levels vary greatly. Some people experience symptoms when blood sugar levels are well within the normal range, while others report no symptoms even when blood sugar levels have dropped substantially. It is **likely that each person has a unique blood sugar range,** with fatigue or mood changes occurring when levels fluctuate above or below these levels. (Pages 109, 112)"*

'Food & Mood' Somer, Elizabeth, M.A., R.D. (Henry Holt and Company, LLC, 1999.)

What foods then?

When you appreciate that not eating properly is going to diminish the amount of fun you can get from your cannabis, then things have become truly serious. You want to eat foods that release sugars slowly, if they contain them. 'Slow-release' sugars, such as fructose – as opposed to fast-release, quick up and quick down glucose sugars - are poorly absorbed (hence why they're referred to as 'slow'). Potatoes and bananas are slow-release foods, for example; bread is possibly the fastest release of all. At the very least have toast, a couple of portions of fruit and cereal two hours before you start getting high; that way you're sure to begin with a steady glucose supply to keep you and your brain going for the first portion of the high.

If you're going through a sugar crash and are in need of quick relief (without the downside of see-sawing blood sugar levels that you'll get from things like chocolate), I've found that bread, figs and especially dates, are very good for getting you rapidly back to normal. Take a look at the GI listings I suggest above, if you'd like to go into this more deeply and construct a proper dietary regime for your highs.

The Answer

In light of the above, those who know they're already at risk from fluctuating BSL will find that their symptoms of anxiety during cannabis use will be significantly reduced if they can pay full attention not only to those levels before use, but also to setting and mood, as recommended in other chapters here. What emotions you take into the high – including feelings of anxiety or excitement – are going to be fed back to you at an

increased intensity. Preparation is everything.

Mr Date is our friend

Dates have been a surprise and a life-saver to me. I'd had high quality boxed dates before, some even with a coating of honey, but I just found them so cloyingly sweet – and imagined them to be higher in calories than chocolate too – that I rarely bothered with them. But, caught late one night by an attack of the munchies, and nothing in the cupboard but two tubs of McDonald's creamer and a pack of cooking dates, there was no alternative. I quickly found that dates are the best – seriously - and they're low-calorie too. A 250g bar of English 'Fruit & Nut' milk chocolate, for example, contains about 1200kcal; a 110g block of cooking dates, about 350kcal or less. If you try – as I have – to wade through the equivalent calorific value of dates as is in that bar of chocolate, you'll have a real struggle on your hands. One pack of dates is usually, and pleasantly, more than enough for days of evening scoffing. They not only fill you very quickly, but also to keep you going for quite some time too, and are full of all sorts of vitamins and minerals that people like me (a lactose- and wheat-intolerant vegetarian) will rarely get elsewhere.

For a kind of pudding-candy-cake thing, try the following 'recipe':

Crush up about 30g of unsalted cashew nuts in a mortar with 250g of dates, adding a little fresh orange juice (as in: take an orange, grip and squeeze). Form what you eventually get into small balls, to be eaten as the mood takes you throughout the evening. Unbelievably tasty. Although it does put the calories up quite a bit, you can also crush a few oatmeal cookies into

the mixture to add more bulk if you want to. This is munchie food of legend: sweet, rich and just the kind of thing to keep your BSL up.

Do, in life

- Regularly eat non-starchy vegetables like lettuce, tomatoes, celery, cucumber, cabbage, kale, swiss chard, bok choy, zucchini, broccoli, cauliflower and any of the other trendy, but largely horrendous, green vegetables that now abound. By the way, just in case there's anyone reading this who runs a restaurant, please note that not every vegetarian thinks that toasted goat's cheese, weeds (rocket), roasted peppers, soya, tofu or any of the loft insulation-like meals that you're serving are yummy, or even classifiable as food.
- Exercise. It clears your head (and your body in general) allowing you to come back to a fresher high. An efficient circulatory system will push new THC into your brain more quickly, and push out old THC clogging up your receptors. Also, the more muscle tissue you have, the better you can regulate your blood sugar and insulin levels too. Try going for a brisk walk about thirty minutes before getting high and note the effect it has.

Don't, when high

- Don't drink fruit juices when you're high. I know that cannabis will tend to make you thirsty, but

even freshly-squeezed fruit juice taken over the long term can lead to high blood sugar and messed-up insulin levels. Because they're usually fruit concentrates, juices and sodas in general usually contain so many chemicals, including masses of caffeine and sugar, that you shouldn't touch them while high. Look instead at drinks with fructose as a sweetener rather than glucose, as many contain either no fructose at all, or are a mixture of fructose and glucose. If you must have fruit, have whole fruit - as the fibre and vitamins it contains will help to slow down the speed at which the sugars enter your blood stream.

Food Sensitivities

Another thing to take a look at is whether you've got any food sensitivities that you aren't aware of, as they too will be emphasised by your use of cannabis. I was sensitive to dairy products and wheat (actually, the wheat sensitivity creates my lactose sensitivity) for years without realising it. I felt ill quite frequently, but not in a way I would associate with having eaten something that was bad for me. As a vegetarian, I ate cheese regularly and didn't have what I thought would be the symptoms of a sensitivity to it at all, so I didn't even look into it as a possibility. Though you might think that the first thing that would happen if you were to eat something that you were sensitive to would be an upset stomach, that might not be the case. Indicators of food sensitivities include: mood swings, depression, sudden bouts of fatigue, muscle/bone pains, bloating, stomach cramps, an inability to focus or concentrate, light sensitivity, broken

sleep (usually waking up in the middle of the night for an hour or so, feeling very anxious) and coughs/asthma. Left untreated, other problems with malabsorption (like weight loss, iron deficiency or chronic dehydration) can come about, and further neglect can lead to anaemia and even osteoporosis.

Believe it or not, all of these are very common symptoms that can arise if you have a problem with dairy foods. Dairy. One cheese sandwich. Mood swings big and small. You might not have all of the symptoms above, but if you have one or two it's certainly worth having a close look at your diet to see if a dairy sensitivity could be the problem. If you're getting high during a period of sensitivity (which will come and go, usually depending on your level of stress) do remember that cannabis will emphasise these effects.

Research has shown that everyone is prone to being sensitive to the things that are dominant in their diets. Many Japanese, for example, are sensitive to rice, and Norwegians to fish, whereas these sensitivities are rarer in countries where rice and fish are just a small part of the average diet. Wheat and dairy sensitivities (not out-and-out intolerance) are becoming more and more common in all countries throughout the world, and it's believed that almost all adults over the age of about 35 grow intolerant to them, even with no previous history of sensitivity.

People of certain heritages, such as Asian, Middle Eastern, southern European, African or Aboriginal, often develop a lactose sensitivity as they grow older due to lower levels of lactase production. Current estimates indicate that about 75% of the world's population are now dairy-sensitive to some extent. For many people who accept their sensitivities as 'just one of those things',

alternating bouts of nausea, diarrhoea and constipation have become an everyday occurrence – but obviously its not normal and can lead to serious health risks, so it's worth really taking a look at to see if it affects you too.

If you want to find out if you are sensitive to dairy yourself, then unfortunately an exclusion diet may be only way to spot it. I say 'unfortunately', as dairy products in various forms (usually as whey powder and lactose) are in just about everything you buy, and even small amounts may affect you, depending on your current state of mind and body. Read the ingredients labels on everything you eat and drink. Note too that if you do decide to investigate a dairy sensitivity, you may either be sensitive to the lactose in milk, or to the milk protein casein (a rarer condition, with about 3% of population suffering from this form).

In terms of cannabis as a medical aid for reducing the symptoms of both wheat and dairy sensitivity – or even Crohn's disease, the nasty, full-blown version of wheat sensitivity – I can't speak highly enough of it for providing fast and effective relief.

In the long run, if you have what you think is excessive coughing or phlegm when you smoke, then avoid all milk products whilst you're high and on the day of usage. If you have even a slight sensitivity to dairy, then eating it will make your throat and lungs stickier with mucus, making you more likely to develop a cough and/or wheezing lungs when smoking weed.

I don't want to turn this into an 'only eat healthy stuff' crusade. Eat how you want to eat, but know your enemy. Dairy alters your mood, alertness, and level of comfort, so be careful what foods you choose to satiate the munchies with.

Coffee & Tea

Well, probably not what most of us want to hear, but tea and coffee both have a pronounced effect on our moods, life and the way that cannabis affects us too. Although we tend to perk up after having any kind of caffeine, it gives a slightly over-grasping awareness with a jittery edge, and sometimes a detached feeling of looking at the world through a murky window. If you have just one of those triple shot, hair-curling coffees (especially with sugar) whilst high, you can't avoid feeling pretty unpleasant for a couple of hours afterwards.

To make matters worse, you can't even replace your tea and coffee intake with many cola-style drinks, as they also contain so much caffeine that they can easily give you the same unwanted symptoms. Being inadvertently wired on caffeine from a lunchtime overload isn't going to let you get the best of any later high you might be hoping for. Obviously, as a drug in its own right, caffeine will keep pulling you away from a high and will ruin your focus until it wears off.

A strong coffee will affect your awareness for three hours or more. Just five cups of either coffee or tea a day, and you're permanently not quite here. Seven cups or more a day, and you're into dependency, you just don't feel right without it. If you feel that you can't live without tea or coffee, at least try to avoid having them a good hour before getting high or meditating, as they make calming the mind much, much harder to achieve.

Symptoms of excessive caffeine intake are: headaches, muscle twitching, nervousness, depression, high blood cholesterol, listlessness, heartburn, dehydration from excessive urination, rapid/irregular

heartbeat, stomach upsets, increased blood pressure, diarrhoea, and a much reduced depth and quality of sleep. Withdrawal from caffeine addiction is not pleasant, and can last for between one and five days. Symptoms include: headaches, fatigue, irritability, drowsiness, stomach ache, nausea, nervousness and insomnia, etc.

As this section on food is sounding ever more like a page from 'Healthy Living', I will finally add that as a replacement for my usual tea I now take a herb called 'gotu kola' (a harmless, non-addictive herb) as a light infusion. It has a natural clearing action on the mind, so I find it's a good way to brighten up my attention some mornings - though again, don't take it to excess.

It seems a shame to have to devote so much time to such a simple subject as food, but there can be no doubt about the effects that our diet has on our minds. When you're working with consciousness, you really do have to pay close attention to its supporting systems within the body and make sure that they're as healthy as possible. Going from being muggy and lacking calm to being clear and focussed can sometimes be achieved by something as simple as having more fresh salad in your diet, or by cutting back on coffee or soda.

Other Causes

Obviously, not everything bad you might feel when you're high is down to just what you're eating, and there are a couple of other causes of cannabis anxiety that I'm going to talk about in a later chapter that are just as common as blood sugar deficiencies and, thankfully, are just as easy to get rid of.



3

Bad Highs

I broke many, if not all, of the rules during my own first time taking cannabis, but luckily it was a phenomenally good experience.

Mostly.

As I was then very anti-smoking, I'd taken a small piece of 'Red Leb' resin about the size of my little fingernail and boiled it in a quarter of a cup of milk in a microwave. Each time it boiled up I'd let it cool down again, then give it another blast for a few more minutes. I did this about six times in total then, when the resin was reduced to almost nothing but bits floating in a brownish sludge, I added sugar and drank it down in one.

To this day I'm not quite sure why, this being my very first time and all, but about half an hour later I went out for the night with my girlfriend to a busy pub. What I thought was the high had come on in a pleasant but brief burst of silliness that seemed to quickly fade to a nice feeling of well-being. I grinned a bit, stared at things for a time, then it was over - or so I thought. But in actual fact I would remain very deeply and (again I say 'mostly') happily high for another seven hours.

By the time we got to the pub I was coming up again

like a speeding train, and doing my best to keep the alternate smirking and staring to a minimum, but it wasn't easy. As soon as we walked inside, I started to wonder if the other people there could tell how high I was by looking at me (which they undoubtedly could, I had mere slits for eyes and kept saying “whoaaaaa...”), which of course made me self-conscious and a little bit paranoid.

I didn't like the idea of having to order drinks at the bar, so my girlfriend went off to get them while I found us somewhere to sit. Although it didn't strike me as strange at the time, there were just two seats left empty in the pub's lounge, on a big couch that was set in a corner under a shelf. For a high man looking for warmth, comfort and somewhere to hide, it was perfect. I squeezed down onto it and tried to relax.

Almost straight away I began to discover what 'high' really meant. My mouth grew drier, and although I was cold, I began to sweat. My hands drained of blood and felt like paper. Some of my hand movements left slight visual trails. Colours were richer, sounds had a new dimension of physicality in my mind that I rode in waves. But the first thing I really noticed was that my heart had got a funny rhythm to it. It started pounding, doing all kinds of strange, fluttering beats that I was quite sure were the beginnings of a heart attack. I did my best to keep it together, assuming that this was normal and all part of the high. “Yeah,” I told myself, “I can take it, I'm not worried...” But it was adding to my growing paranoia. How did I look to everybody around me now, I wondered? If they thought I was high *and* freaked-out, that would obviously mean ambulances and police, which wouldn't have been my course of choice. I just had to hope that I didn't look as sweaty and white-faced as I felt.

Almost as I thought those words, table by table people's eyes turned towards me. One man squinted disapprovingly at me and shook his head. Another smiled. One tapped his girlfriend's knee and asked to her to join him in staring at me. The scowling man then raised a fist and shouted, "Yes!", whilst another man, with what I fearfully took to be lust in his eyes, smiled at me in a disturbing way. All this time more people were coming into the room, standing at the door and making a real and obvious effort to look at me. I knew that drug-taking was frowned on big time by the fishing community I was a part of, but this was turning into a lynch mob. With this thought to boost my adrenaline, my heart now began to beat so loudly I was sure that other people could hear it too. Gymnastic patterns, with gaps even, some so long that if nothing else I was a medical marvel to be still alive and standing. *Now* I was worried.

This continued for 'some time'. How much time I don't know, but it was one of those stretches that are usually associated with the birth and passing of galaxies. All I know is that people came and went in endless streams, either in loathing or gleeful cheer, shouting and jeering. And every one of them added considerably to my growing fear.

My girlfriend had been gone for about 3.7 billion years, my time, and I was holding it together far less well than I had been when she reappeared. 'Worried' was a dot on the horizon, whilst 'mortified' was a 5-ton wildebeest that had rapidly galloped towards me and now danced on my shivering body. I had considered all possible escape routes, including actually burrowing into the couch so that I could hide there until closing time. I sweated more than would comprise a normal human's body weight, and had lost all use of my legs. At this rate, I might have ended up never wanting to do drugs again...

The second she sat down, I grabbed my girlfriend's arm and blurted out everything that had been happening. Far from being concerned, she laughed heartily. Everyone was looking, she said, but not at me. There was a soccer cup final on that night, and it was showing on a TV just a foot above my head. And my racing, fluttering heart? - it was, in fact, the drum beats of the various songs that were playing on the bar's jukebox.

Levels of High

Most of the more extreme effects of a cannabis high are associated with eating it, or over-use of some of the newer skunk-quality grasses. I think just about every user has had an uncomfortable experience at some point, so it's just as well to talk about what to expect and how to cope with it all, should it happen. Let's firstly class the various highs into 'levels':

Level 1

Pleasant buzz. Everything is pretty normal, except that you probably have the munchies and an increased awareness of things like music and visuals from time to time. Good for fooling around with initially, but very easy to accidentally break out of with focussed tasks or conversation. By doing the right things, you can keep a nice high like this going for an hour or more.

Level 2

The high is with you fairly constantly for a good hour or two, and it's interspersed with pleasant

rushes, particularly when you experience things like nice smells or echoing sounds. Good for experimentation, as it's harder to accidentally break out of by doing too much exploration. *Note that it's much more important to keep your blood sugar at the right level when you're this high or higher.*

Level 3

Can be different from anything you've experienced before. In level 3, you're no longer in control of the rush - it brings the sensations to you, usually quite intensely, instead of you trying to get to it. Still good for experimentation though - but be careful, as you can go in far too deeply without realising it and get into a level 4 state with just the wrong lighting or lack of food. Best just to experience it and enjoy it. Try a *short* session of mindfulness of breathing (see later chapters) to see how bringing your attention back to the immediate moment affects the high and your mind. If you feel you have the clarity, experiment with two or three of the techniques here in a nice relaxed way. Try simple things to begin with, like seeing what sound or light does to your mind.

Level 4

An all-out, full-on mass of strange effects that do whatever they want with your mind. Stay calm and quiet. Leave techniques well alone. A really bad level 4 high can have a lot of nasty little effects which include: loss of recognition of the external world, acute awareness of your own psychology and

character to the point of self-loathing, 'popping' (limbs lurching out of control during high peaks), head and arm pains, an unsteady heart rhythm, inability to swallow, cold sweats, pins and needles, tunnel vision, uncontrolled thoughts and a feeling of insanity, and the 'stutters' - usually noticed when walking outside - where your movements and view of the outside world are seen as though via a stroboscope, missing 'frames' of movement. Though these things might sound nasty, they're not ultimately life-threatening, and it's actually fear that's your worst enemy. What you think and believe whilst high are easily turned into reality by your own mind. I've already explained how many of the bad effects of most highs are due to too much sugar or caffeine, but obviously the cannabis will also be affecting how you think at this level.

If you're regularly with other people who are getting high too, sooner or later you'll have to cope with one of the group having a bad level 4 high. The things I detail below are those that have helped me get through bad highs, and have helped other people through them as well. Helping someone else is a delicate game, and the psychology that you try to use on your 'patient' will be very apparent to him/her, as they'll be that much more perceptive whilst high. This is the key: don't think that because anyone is very high that they're not aware of what you're doing or saying - they're actually *hyper*-aware of everything people are doing around them, and of why they're acting as they are.

Someone in a level 4 state is completely at the mercy of the high. Everything they do and feel actually helps to increase their sensitivity to things around them and the

depth of the high. They might see sounds, hear colours, feel interactions between inanimate and inanimate objects, etc. There are worlds here. Be prepared. The victim of a level 4 high is feeling things in ways they had never dreamed of before. If you're less high than they are, then you probably won't even begin to understand the things that are freaking them out.

What to do for someone in a level 4 high

- Firstly, find out how much the person has had to eat: if it's less than one damn good meal in the last two hours give them fast-release sugar via a piece of bread or some dates, so that you can see which of the bad symptoms are caused by stress and which are caused by low blood sugar. If it's just blood sugar, they'll come back to normal a few minutes after eating, probably feeling a little bit cold and shaky, but well enough. Check also to see how much coffee or tea they've had recently - they could be suffering from sensitivity to caffeine jitters.
- If you have to talk someone out of a bad high, you need to be sincere, flowing and calm. The person you're trying to help will be very aware of every nuance of what you're saying and how you're saying it, so there's no place for humour or sarcasm – or anyone saying that they just need to pull themselves together. Some people will respond well to a confident voice reassuring them; others won't, because any attempt to calm them down is seen as proof that you also think that their high is bad (or even life-threatening).
- If you have the choice, then the person doing the

calming should be female and the calmest, most highly respected of your group. Everyone else standing around panicking and talking about ringing ambulances within earshot of the 'patient' will not help. Either get everyone but the person who is to do all the talking out of the room, or make sure that everyone else sits down and stays quiet – without any worried mutterings behind their hands.

- The first thought for someone in a level 4 high for the first time is that the cannabis they've taken was tampered with, or is bad in some respect. Explain that all of the things occurring are normal for this kind of high, then tell them the following: “Nobody has ever, **ever** died or become desperately and irreversibly ill from a good, or bad, batch of weed or hash. What you're feeling now *will* pass, and your mind *will* go back to normal in a little while.”
- Don't make a fuss. The freaked-out person will believe that they're worse than they are if you go off in huddles with others to discuss their condition. Remember that they're highly aware, so *no* meaningful or worried looks to others.
- Don't ridicule them or try to make light of what's happening to them, it never works.
- Put out any incense and remove all heavy perfumes from the room.
- Turn off all loud sounds. The room must be quiet and calm.
- Turn off all bright and/or flashing lights and close the curtains.
- If there's a *very* light programme on TV that the patient normally enjoys, then turn that on. Comedies are best, or something the person has a

lot of interest in. Adventure and horror movies, or anything too exciting, are obviously out. Anything with clever psychological play in the dialogue may be felt by him in strangely disturbing ways. He won't just be bothered by increased responses to things like smells and lights, but also by what people say, how they say it, and his own thoughts too. Everything becomes amplified.

- Being high will usually make you thirsty, but some people react to a strong high by not wanting to drink because they feel their throats are constricted. It never hurts to get a couple of glasses of water down them to allay fears of closing airways, especially if they are complaining of head pains, which are usually due to dehydration. But don't try to force anyone to drink if they feel they can't.
- Don't ever say that you're feeling bad too, even if you're in a level 4 as well - that'll just confirm their fears of a 'bad batch'. Also, if you're also trying to keep a lid on things yourself, the moment you tell people how bad you feel, you'll generally become much worse. Affirming the high as being uncontrollable, or worrying that it may become too deep, will tend to make it so. Words are reality when you're deeply high, you are what you say you are. Feeling positive, knowing that all these effects can happen and are transient - and saying to yourself that you *can* cope – will all help to make it a lot easier to cope with.

New Users

If you're worrying about what might happen when

you're high, what you can do to yourself with your mind because of your fears can be far worse than what the cannabis itself can do to you. As you're coming up to the peak of a high, you might begin to worry about how much further up you're going to go, which will make you even more aware of all the effects the cannabis is having on you. You'll then get a rush of adrenaline and a tight throat, racing heart, cold hands, etc. which will make you feel even worse. Of course, it's a situation that can get overpowering very quickly. Panic - adrenaline; more panic, more adrenaline.

It's really easy to accidentally add a shot of unwanted adrenaline into the high right at the start of your session, just by being excited about doing cannabis. If this rush is noticeably not a pleasant feeling, and it happens a few sessions in a row, it's possible that you're going to start identifying *every* first high with anxiety; which will, in turn, actually create anxiety as a reaction to the high, every time you get high. You expect it to happen, so it happens. Words are reality when you're high. Not just the things you say to other people, but the things you tell yourself about how you feel.

You have to make sure, if you do start becoming paranoid, that you remember what weed is capable of doing to your mind and what it can make you imagine is real. A simple event - like the phone ringing, or suddenly having to talk to someone in authority and seem straight, or a noise outside at night - can cause a powerful adrenaline rush, the effects of which will be hiked up a notch by the high, and which you might then easily go on to think is the beginnings of a heart attack, or a breathing problem.

Remember, no matter how bad or crazy you feel, you **WILL** be fine. Trust me. No matter how far you are in

there, you will always come out in one piece, mentally and physically. Wait it out, laugh it off, and know that it will soon go away.

Confidence

I was happily surfing a peaking level 3 during a good night of eating 'Gold Seal' resin boiled up in milk. Free-forming, I saw an opening that I felt to be a pathway through consciousness of some kind. I had no idea what the pathway was or even whether it was real or not, but there seemed to be something there that I could follow, so I did. It was at this point that a voice said, in cocky, mocking tones, "Do you *really* want to do that? You couldn't cope with what lies in here. You think you're in control but you know nothing. Go on, I dare you..."

I laughed and tried to tell myself that it was just my subconscious talking – and I have little doubt that it was – but at what level, I have no idea. Not sure how real the voice was or what was going on I countered by saying that of course I could, and that I would do whatever I wanted in my own mind. The voice begged to differ and, by various frightening mental hints of what I would find 'within' (that I find impossible to describe here), it succeeded in convincing me in less than ten seconds that I hadn't even begun to know how to cope with these internal realities.

A 'mad toker' story I know, I've heard lots of them too. But that really isn't the point. If I had gone 'in', I probably would have been so keyed up that I would have created hell for myself through expectation and fear. Worrying that you might slip out of this reality into a twisted dimension of madness is the very way to transport yourself there.

Our own hopes and fears will make real what we think we will experience. If your subconscious or an unknown something tells you that what you are doing is unwise, then stop.



4

Free-Forming

Before I move into meditation proper, I'd like to explain a simple but very powerful way to explore a high: that of 'free-forming'. Free-forming means, with closed eyes, allowing the random appearance of images and sounds from your subconscious; literally letting your mind run free and seeing what comes out of it. Think of the average, everyday high as being something that needs input from you for it to really show you what it can do. If you don't give your mind any stimuli for the high to exaggerate, then you won't really feel the full potential of what it can do to your perceptions. So you have two choices: you can either do absolutely nothing and just enjoy the high with a clear mind, and let it totally fill your senses; or you can make the high react in interesting ways so that you can explore and enjoy it. If you can manage it though, alternating between the two during a high brings a very relaxed, flexible mind and body, perfect for both types of exploration. Here, we're just going to allow the high to do whatever it wants with our minds so that we can explore and enjoy the effects it can have.

Bearing in mind cannabis' ability to make our minds rapidly free-form ideas, it would be unwise to continually suppress this effect, and an oversight not to try to make

use of it. The imagery that the brain can come up with when left to its own devices is as vivid and varied as anything you can experience within a dream and, whilst not necessarily having any deep meaning or reality at all outside the context of your own experiences and thoughts, allowing it total freedom can be a pretty interesting way to spend a couple of hours. Again, free-forming benefits from some initial work on meditation or mindfulness, and it can be very hard not to let a session devolve into a long nap - but if you can persevere, the effects can be interesting to say the least.

For the best effects, meditate for about fifteen minutes, then relax and do absolutely nothing (seriously, *nothing*) for ten minutes, then get high. As the high is coming up, try either closed eyes or open eyes to see which one best promotes the effects of the high. Once you've found which it is, sit and do nothing but enjoy the first high as it rises. Once it *has* peaked and levelled out, close your eyes, look at any point you like (though the gaze I offer below should work very well), relax and watch. The key is in keeping your eyes steadily in one place as much as possible, whilst not getting too involved in doing that *or* the actual content of what you see. Your eyes are loosely in a single position, and images just come and go 'around' where you're looking. If you can do this correctly, being calm and still as these perceptions appear, without any analysis, the resulting effect can be a strange mix between a waking dream and an almost trip-like movie. However, although I'm describing what can appear purely in terms of visual experiences, you should think of this as you being open to *all* perceptions of every kind.

It's important to try to maintain a particular kind of mind when you're doing this, where you're not analysing

everything you're seeing and you're not waiting for things to happen, but instead just experiencing the contents of your vision, this moment – now - without any kind of effort that would disturb the motions of consciousness that you're looking at. Don't have the feeling that you're waiting for what's to come, but that you're looking now at exactly what you had hoped to see – i.e. random visual and mental movements. This attitude is important, as it ties you to a close perception of this present moment and increases the kinds of experience you might have. You are where you need to be already, there is no need to alter your mind in any way. Look, don't wait.

Doing It

Free-Forming

1. Relax, get comfortable. Enjoy the high for a while and do nothing at all.
2. Put headphones on and play your chosen music, or sound-loop, preferably quite loudly.
3. A good steady, relaxed eye-position gives the best results. This one is ideal for this kind of work: hold your arm out in front of yourself, with your palm raised as though you were using it to stop someone. Raise your hand until it seems that the tip of your highest finger is in line with a point at the same height as your eyebrows. Look at that point with a nice, relaxed mind until your eyes are steady. Don't think in terms of fixing your mind on it with a lot of effort, this is purely looking in a perfectly normal way. As soon as you think that you

can hold your attention there comfortably, keep looking and close your eyes. A good way to ease yourself into this is to do it a couple of times just for a minute or so each time, relaxing your eyes a lot in between. Once your muscles are used to looking and relaxing in that direction, you should find that it's much easier to hold them steady for quite long periods of time, especially once you get used to doing it. You may find that you get a slight buzz from this, or even a bliss state.

4. Once you feel stable in this eye-position, you should be able to relax any effort you're making, and you should find that your eyes will stay where you leave them without any kind of real control on your part. You might find that when you *do* relax like this, even though your eyes are still pointed towards where they were before, that you have a more panoramic view of the whole of your visual field, not just the focal point itself. This is ideal - but don't worry if this doesn't happen, don't look for it, or think you must have it before you can move on. Leave your eyes where they are and just see, looking at whatever comes up in your visual field without following it or analysing it. (*Note that you're not focussed on trying to stop thinking, you're looking in a dispassionate but normal way, just as you would a TV picture. Don't think that not following these images means that you have to switch off your awareness and just lapse into a daydream. Look forward and just allow yourself to see naturally.*)
5. It will be tempting when the first shapes appear (sometimes geometric lines, colours, lights, or changes in brightness in what you can see) to

identify them and think that they look like this or that. As you're in a state of increasing openness and suggestibility, identifying something as a castle will solidify the random shapes that merely looked similar to a castle into the real thing.

6. Allow yourself to be carried along by the emotion of the music, riding its rises and falls as though you're surfing the sounds.
7. If you want to, you can push what you see in various directions by, say, imagining that you're floating in space and can see stars and planets around yourself, or that you can actually move within your consciousness. Try also imagining that your head is a vast, empty hall with the music filling every corner of it.
- 8. Look at what's happening *now*, it's what you're looking for - don't wait for anything else.** This sums up the whole basis of where your mind should be when you're doing this.

No effort is required at any time, as effort and heavily focussed thought will always stand in your way. Holding your mind 'here' can easily stop you feeling what's going on 'there' in another part of your mind, and you can block out many experiences just by being too controlled. The more you can try to allow yourself a general sense of experiencing the full range of your perceptions, not just your vision, the better.

Although the above will work very well by itself, it'll be much easier to get results once you learn how to point metta at whatever you're looking at or listening to. Metta will help you focus on these images in a more relaxed way and make it easier to sustain attention for long

periods. It also tends to make these experiences much more pleasant, even deeply blissful at times, and can quickly turn free-forming or a simple eye-gaze into something far deeper.

Meaning

Is there any meaning to what you see while doing this? Well, yes and no. Sometimes the things that come up are starkly vivid and have a life of their own in the way that dreams have. Here, of course, you're not asleep, but by holding your mind in the way I suggest your subconscious may believe that you are. This, coupled with the free-forming effect that is inherent in a cannabis high, will bring up images, sounds and emotions in response to whatever ambient sounds you can hear around yourself, or the things that you've been thinking about before you got high. If, for example, you'd spent some time looking at space pictures before closing your eyes, then what you would see would tend to be coloured by this. As a good setting for free-forming, I can't recommend pictures of space enough - they're good for helping create the sense of openness and freedom which you ultimately want to feel when doing this. (Please see the chapter 'The Sphere of Awareness' for more on this subject.)

Suggestion and expectation play a large part here: if you were in this state, and saw something that you briefly thought looked like a car, or a face, then that would help solidify that vague image into a more substantial car or face. This is both good and bad for those of us who are drug users. If we're putting ourselves in an state like this where we're more or less giving ourselves up entirely to the high, then what we

expect is exactly what we get - and if we're a bit apprehensive about what might happen and we worry about, say, meeting demons or spiders, we'll almost certainly self-create them.

If you were expecting to see elves and mantis-like beings, as some people who use DMT are told to do, then you would see them too. This is something you have to be very much aware of when you explore like this, as you can accidentally create every horror or joy that you expect, even if you remain aware of the idea that what you're seeing is just a product of your own imagination.

There have been times, even whilst I was doing other kinds of meditation, where I was fully awake and yet dreaming at the same time - though without realising it at first. In one session I was simply focussing on all of the sounds in the room around me as a form of shamatha, when I found myself looking at a very colourful antique vase on a stand, with a vague idea in the back of my mind that I must move the thing as soon as I'd finished meditating, just in case someone bumped into it and the vase fell off and broke. It was an absolutely vivid image in every respect and it didn't seem unusual for me to see it, even though I should have realised at the time that I had my eyes closed and have never owned, or even seen, a vase like the one in this 'dream'.

If you meditate regularly, this kind of waking dream is common (and something you're usually trying to avoid); but while the contents of these 'dreams' have no meaning and can be either as rational as real life or as surreal as any real dream, it is an interesting feeling to become lucid in these states and to explore a vivid reality in your imagination, whilst knowing it to be illusory. Once you learn to direct these images, which really isn't

that hard, where you go and the environment you create is entirely up to you. My own favourite is to create a space scene and allow images of planets and stars to come up in my mind as though I'm racing through the galaxy past them. There's something about feeling (or imagining) the size and emptiness of space, and it can lead to some remarkable experiences if you're in the right state.

Of the most intense unguided experiences, my oddest at least was suddenly finding myself in a vast cavern filled with yellow light. Not only did I feel that I was actually present in this cave, but I also felt very strongly as though I was not me, but someone far older. It literally felt like being in someone else's mind, with their perceptions and emotions almost swamping my own. I was walking along a path set in the side of the cavern wall and, on turning a corner, I came upon a view overlooking a town of adobe-like houses, which were built up the side of the cavern wall facing me. A feeling of familiarity came over me as I saw them, and then the vivid thought that it'd been over a thousand years since I (whoever 'I' was) last visited this place.

The whole thing can't have lasted much longer than a minute, but it was strikingly vivid, with a complete sense of being this other person and being in the cavern. Real? No, not as far as I'm concerned. But interesting nonetheless, and it's very much the kind of thing that free-forming can bring up. However, that aside - as an exercise, the skills you learn whilst free-forming have real applications in serious meditation too. Keeping your eyes in a steady gaze and your mind alive whilst being dispassionate about what you see is the basis of advanced types of meditation, like the 'Just Sitting' meditation described in a later chapter.

Music

The images and sensations you'll feel while free-forming are mainly in response to recent memories and ambient sounds, so listening to music as you free-form is a good source of visual 'triggers'. The kind of music you're listening to will very much affect what you see and how it makes you feel. Harsh sounds and fast beats bring jagged colours, fast-changing emotions and bright lights. Echoing, soft music with little definable beat will tend to bring experiences of cool, empty space and, through the size the echo implies on this internal world, freedom and free-soaring, happy emotion. If you listen to something dismal or aggressive, or something that makes you emotionally negative in any way, then the high is going to make those feelings much worse.

The types of sounds or music you should choose for this purpose depends on how high you are and what kind of an experience you're looking for. If you use music that you're already familiar with, then what you feel as you free-form will be comfortable and pleasant; but as you already know where the music goes, it'll take more focus to keep your attention on it for any length of time, and it'll also lack the element of surprise and discovery. If instead you use something that you're *not* familiar with, then it becomes an unexplored landscape full of interesting twists and turns, which keeps your attention to it very fresh and effortless. It's far better to have no familiar landmarks and nothing that you can anticipate, as you need to be right in the moment, listening to the sounds unfold as they happen, not thinking about what may be to come.

In this respect, the sounds of a roaring fire, a running stream, or rain falling, are all great for this kind of exploration, as they have a random aspect to them that

won't allow you to guess what happens next. The sound of rain also produces 'white-noise', which has a calming effect on the mind that's very useful in helping you meditate; whilst the sound of an open fire burning creates both white-noise and a low level hum too, which is again very soothing.

The happier you are, the stronger your ability to create a sense of well-being when you're high, and the further you can shape what you experience to your own desire. Think about the idea that you're moving *into* the music and, just as importantly, into the mind as well. See your mind as a landscape that you can fly, float and move within, in any way you choose.

It's best not to distance yourself too much from the emotional content of the music though, as you can 'ride' it to take yourself into some very interesting states. You might listen to a guitarist playing something soaring and spacey and, by allowing yourself to be carried along with the rise and fall of the notes, you may find yourself so immersed in the music that you reach 'absorption', where you and the music are one.

Trip Reports

You'll notice as you read this book that there are no 'trip reports' of any kind, and there's a good reason for this. If I say do 'X' and expect 'Y' effect, then this creates expectations that you'll feel you have to fulfil for any technique to have been successful. In fact, the effects of cannabis are so widely varied that you should try to remain open to all and every kind of sensation that might come along, not just any 'right' states that I might describe. Whatever you try here, it's critical that you do it without looking for effects or analysing what's going

on. If you do, it'll make you anticipate the future rather than being fully aware of the present and what's currently happening to your mind. Just do – and if anything happens, great; if not, you can either try again or move onto something else. Some things will work better for you than others, some will be worse - it depends entirely on your approach to them.

So, what should you do if 'something' does happen? Ideally, nothing at all. Don't try and hold onto the experience in an attempt to sustain it, or try to analyse it in any way, as both of these things will usually stop any effect you've reached fairly quickly. Experience, enjoy, move on.

Bliss States

Bliss states are just how they sound – experiences of anything from mild pleasure to deep rapture - and are usually a sign of mental pliancy rather than being a truly altered and 'spiritual' state. However, this isn't always the case, and there are both mundane and supra-mundane blisses that do have deeper content and are classed by some traditions as being states of 'samadhi' (concentration) that can lead to glimpses of realisation.

Blisses can be raised in a number of different ways: through focussed/non-focussed meditation; through interaction with 'prana' in Tantric methods; through various eye-positions; bodily postures; pressure points (see a later chapter); through the use of metta; and through understanding various aspects of the ultimate nature of reality, such as its unobstructedness or its emptiness (see a later chapter). In Buddhism, bliss states can be the result of reaching various levels of concentration, called the 'Dhyanas' (or 'Jhanas'); whereas

in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition of Vajrayana (tantra), bliss is generated through metta and an understanding of 'emptiness'.

Any bliss you reach may contain a 'non-conceptual' aspect, meaning that it might have a component of *almost* total non-thought within it that you can rest in, once you've identified this quality within the bliss. If you don't try to do anything to sustain the bliss and can remain in its non-conceptual mode without effort, it then becomes a very desirable form of meditation. Although it may be a distant goal for most novice meditators, once a practitioner becomes stable in non-conceptual bliss it becomes a state in which they become much more sensitive to higher knowledge concerning reality, where just thinking about any of reality's ultimate aspects will both deepen and strengthen the bliss even further.

"...In the generation of bliss, even from gross worldly passions, the bliss can be enjoyed as a deity, as an offering to deities, and oneself as a deity and to generate and deepen the sense of emptiness of all phenomena and self. This is the tantric function of blissful states. They are generated and enjoyed purely as means towards enlightenment, as aspects of the path, not as ends in themselves. In themselves they are mere sensations - part of samsara. The generation of bliss can be kept going all the time. It is possible to experience and re-experience joy and feelings of intense elation, controlled ecstasy and serene, tranquil bliss. To begin with, bliss seems to preclude emptiness, but then the two become thoroughly entwined, such that touching one brings out the other..."

"Once our body and senses become the source of continuous and unfading bliss, conjoined with emptiness etc. then we are very close to seeing the

world as mandala and of achieving the truth body, enjoyment body and emanation body of a Buddha..."

"The bliss must be welded with compassion or bodhichitta and tranquillity as this makes it warm, caring and powerful, radiant and supple. If the compassion element is missing then it becomes selfish bliss, indulgent bliss and falls into hedonism. The non-attachment is also important or we become deeply attached to the bliss and the pleasure element. Similar arguments apply to the other required elements..."

<http://homeoint.org/morrell/buddhism/bodhichitta.htm>
Peter Morrell, February 1996

Although it would be nigh on impossible for someone to do this kind of work without a very good understanding of Vajrayana and considerable experience, if you can grasp the meaning of emptiness as I explain it later, and can simply think about it if you should happen to start to reach regular blisses, then it will still be a very formative and useful meditation.



The Three



5

Relaxation

With all the basics of use out of the way, we can now begin to look in more detail at ways to enhance and explore the high state. The following three chapters explain the use of relaxation, metta and mindfulness, and show how together they can be combined to change your mood and awareness, creating an enjoyable, balanced mental state for exploration, the high (and life in general) to happen 'within'.

But before you dash off in search of something that sounds a bit more exciting than whatever being 'balanced' is, consider this; for those in search of enlightenment and for people just wanting to be happy, relaxation, metta and mindfulness are the keys. To the high. To life. To whatever path you may be on. Once you begin to work on these very simple things, you not only get the best out of your highs and from the techniques I describe, but you also have a better chance of experiencing shifts into 'altered states' too.

Note, though, that as these three (relaxation, metta and mindfulness) operate in close conjunction with each other, it's best to try to avoid working on one aspect more than any of the others.

After a little time learning how to get into the right

physical and mental state to take your cannabis in, your brain will begin to associate the drug-taking process more and more strongly with relaxation and a sense of well-being. It's important to keep hold of that association and it will, in NLP (neuro-linguistic programming) terms, 'anchor' a sense of feeling relaxed and happy into the experience of being high. The pleasure then becomes ingrained in the act, the experience of taking cannabis, as much as it does in the power of the drug itself.

So, let's start with what should be an easy one first (though not for everyone): relaxation. Learning how to relax, removing physical and mental tensions, both before and during a cannabis session, will obviously make it a far better experience. But more interestingly, learning to relax properly opens doorways into natural highs and interesting mental states too. Relaxation of body and mind are pretty much a necessity if you're going to explore well, so let's look at the basic ideas behind it.

Energy

It's surprising just how many cultures do have a very similar notion of an impersonal force (not something which could be thought of as 'life-giving' or conscious in itself) which permeates and helps sustain all animate and inanimate matter. Widespread in Polynesian cultures the concept is called 'mana'; in Tibetan Traditions, 'lung', in Inuit 'inua' or 'sila'; in Algonquian 'manitou'; Chinese 'qi', Japanese 'ki', 'kami'; 'maban' in Australian aboriginal lore, etc., etc.

Many of the world's meditation schools will have their students work on some form of 'body energy' and its associated meridians and channels in the body as part of

the path to enlightenment. On the whole, you can split most meditation techniques into three groups: those that use focussing the mind (shamatha, vipassana, mantras, etc.); those that manipulate some kind of 'energy' (Tantra, Vajrayana, Kundalini, etc.); and those that use an understanding the ultimate nature of reality, the 'wisdom teachings' (Mahamudra, Dzogchen, etc.). Although the wisdom teachings could be considered a stand-alone path to realisation in their own right, all forms of meditation will tend to use a combination of wisdom, meditation and energy techniques at some point along the way. This combination makes each branch that much more powerful and, developed together, they'll make it far more likely that you'll have the right kinds of experiences.

It's very easy to think, as I first did, that chakras and 'body energy' are figments of a sadly misled imagination and that their effects are due more to expectation than real experiences. I began these practices in a very cynical and begrudging way, with absolutely zero belief, but still found that it was much easier to relax and meditate after doing them. I also found that I felt somehow better in an overall way too, more 'centred'. Nowadays, I always integrate manipulation of this energy into my day to day meditation, as it's an easy way to create a good blissful state to meditate within.

Whereas the practices used to manipulate 'prana' in Buddhism and Hinduism aren't quite the same, this kind of meditation is called 'Tantra' in both, appearing in Buddhism mainly in the Tibetan Vajrayana tradition.

In the Hindu philosophy of Vedanta, Prana (Sanskrit for 'breath') is a sustaining energy in all living beings, and is a core concept in Ayurvedic medicine and Yoga. Prana is believed to move within a system of subtle

channels within the body called the 'nadis'. Some traditions believe that realisation can take place when Prana is caused to flow from the main channels to the left and right of the spine ('ida' and 'pingala') into the spine itself (the sushumna) and rises up through the chakras. Initial control of Prana is gained through the practice of Pranayama (breath control), leading to increased mental and physical vitality in the meditator.

Although working with chakras by themselves can easily give good effects, think of working with them *by themselves* as being a kind of limbering up process, preparation for other types of meditation methods. The most well-known method of chakra manipulation nowadays is called 'Kundalini', but although people tend to speak of it as a form of meditation in its own right, in fact it too was originally a preparatory form of practice, and just one part of the wide range of Hatha Yoga exercises, designed to ready the mind and body for the strenuous work required by the meditation form of Raja Yoga.

Don't think of Kundalini and chakra work as easy ways in to advanced meditation. In traditional Kundalini (as described in the Hatha Yoga Pradapika) it's not just a matter of focussing on any chakra and trying to open it; use requires quite complex mental and physical demands. Hatha involves things like learning how to swallow, and later regurgitate, a length of cloth (its end still protruding from your mouth) to soak up bile and 'impurities' from your stomach; or gradually cutting the restraining strip of flesh away from beneath your tongue with a razor, so that eventually it can be folded back to block the sinus passageway – a key requirement for use of the brow chakra that some modern forms of Hatha and Kundalini understandably neglect to mention. As you'll

see later, not everything that's taught about meditation nowadays, particularly the chakra system, are anywhere near authentic. If you see a form of Kundalini without the demands of cleansing, like as not it isn't the real thing.

Why relax?

By learning to relax, and by understanding exactly how things make you tense in the first place, you can work wonders. The high gets better, blood pressure goes down, the effectiveness of the auto-immune system goes up, and 'here' is just a nicer place to be. In meditation, or *any* form of mental exploration, things will rarely happen unless we can be completely relaxed, both mentally and physically. Mental stresses make physical tensions, and physical tensions create mental stresses; both of which will impair your ability to perform these techniques.

For most of us, relaxing is a lot harder than it sounds. Simple, repetitive movements and postures at work or in leisure pursuits can create small tensions that, over time, turn into annoying muscle aches and joint stiffness that will get progressively worse and harder to release as you age. If, for example, you use a computer regularly, you might develop 'mouse arm' where one arm is always slightly tense and the shoulder is permanently higher than the other.

Most of us have to do repetitive physical things at some time or another, and they become problematic when we can't let go of the physical stresses they've created. The trouble is that everything we do, and even those things we simply think about doing, will give us some degree of physical tension.

Although you might not be able to feel it right now,

every thought you have creates a minute (and sometimes not so minute) physical stress somewhere in your body. There's a whole system of points on our bodies, areas no more than a couple of inches across at the most, that can tense up and create aches and pains in response to the most innocuous of thoughts. In any task, no matter how simple, you'll find that some of these points will tighten up in the moments *before* you begin to do it. Try standing at a sink before calmly washing a few dishes, and you'll notice that you can't avoid becoming tense behind your knees and at your perineum – and probably your solar plexus too - just because of your acknowledged *intent* to wash up.

To make matters worse, just as you sub-vocalise when you read, when you remember past events or anticipate those in the future, your body and mind react in the same way as they would during the real situation. If, for example, you were vividly imagining yourself talking through a speech you were about to give, to some extent that would create the same movements of your diaphragm and Adam's apple, and even the same emotions and physical tensions, as giving the real speech would. No matter what situation or action you imagine, you can't avoid playing it out on a physical level to some degree. When you watch other people do things - particularly where you have an emotional investment in their actions, such as when watching sports, or a good movie – the tensions these create will be that much greater again. But, if you're thinking about situations with truly negative associations, then the tensions are obviously far deeper and longer lasting. One negative thought or idea can easily create a continuing tension in you that can last hours, *especially* when high. But luckily, anyone can learn to relax it away with practice.

Where to relax

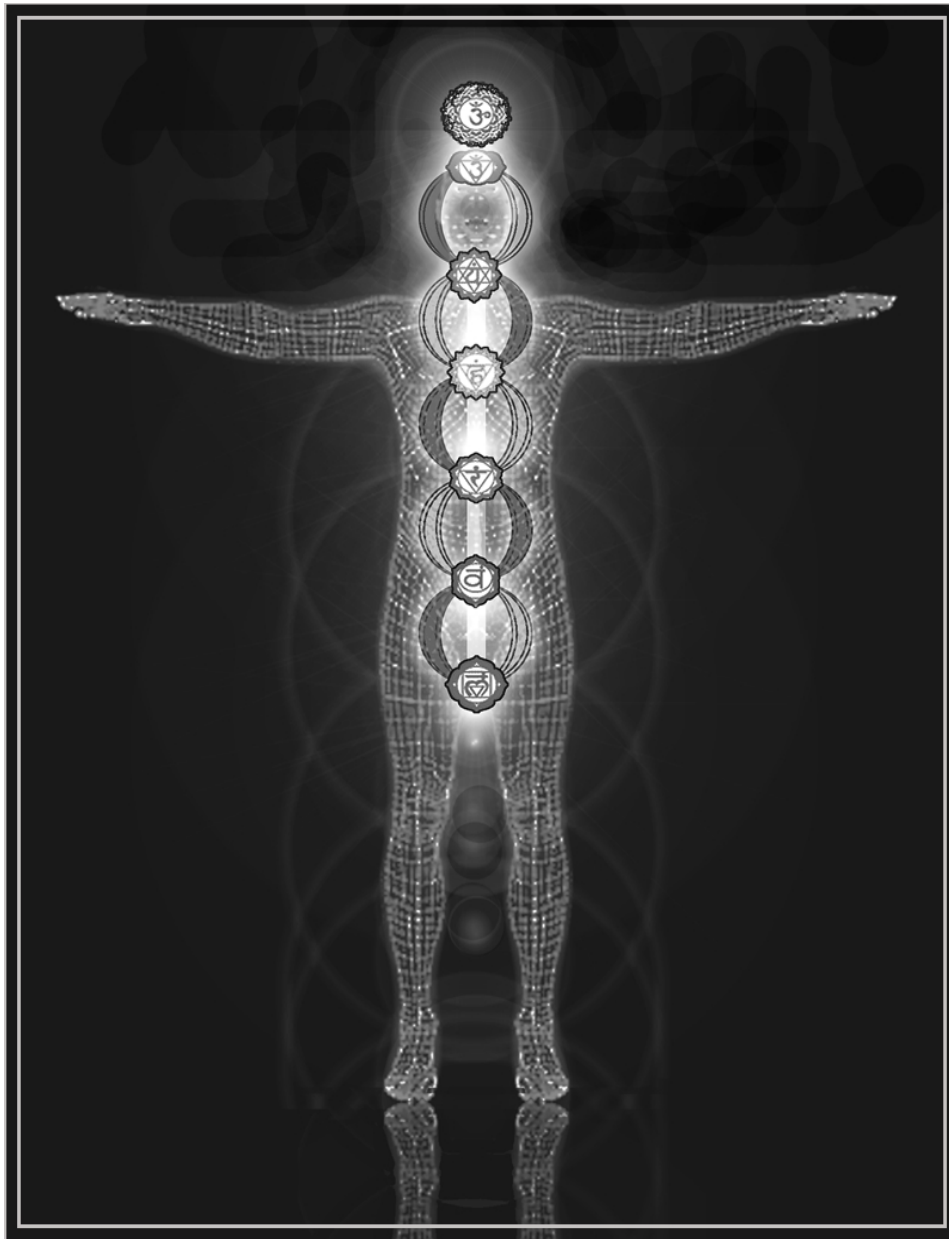


Figure 1 – Chakras

Although some of the primary points of tension illustrated below correspond to what are called 'chakras' (Sanskrit for 'wheels') in Hindu and Buddhist meditation, they won't require your belief in them in their full esoteric sense to appreciate their action. Note that whilst learning to relax the chakras and points will ease stress very quickly, they work ten times more effectively with the addition of 'metta', which we'll deal with shortly.

Starting from the lowest chakra, rising upwards, you

can find the seven key chakras at the places shown above in *Figure 1* and detailed in the list below. Note the ida and pingala nadis coiled around the central sushumna channel.

Main Chakras

- **Root Chakra** – At the perineum.
- **Sacrum Chakra** - On the abdomen, three finger-widths below the navel.
- **Solar Plexus Chakra** - At the solar plexus, in the centre of the upturned 'V' of your ribs. Key in the creation and control of negative emotions and tension.
- **Heart Chakra** - Place your hand flat and horizontally on your chest with the tip of your little finger on your solar plexus point. The tip of your thumb will point directly at your heart chakra in the centre of your chest. When working with this chakra, make certain that you aren't accidentally concentrating on the secondary point between it and your solar plexus. Doing so will create tension and sometimes feelings of anxiety too.
- **Throat Chakra** - At the centre of the throat around the area of the Adam's apple.
- **Brow Chakra** - Between the eyebrows.
- **Crown Chakra** - Four finger-widths forward of the crown of your head.

Secondary Chakras

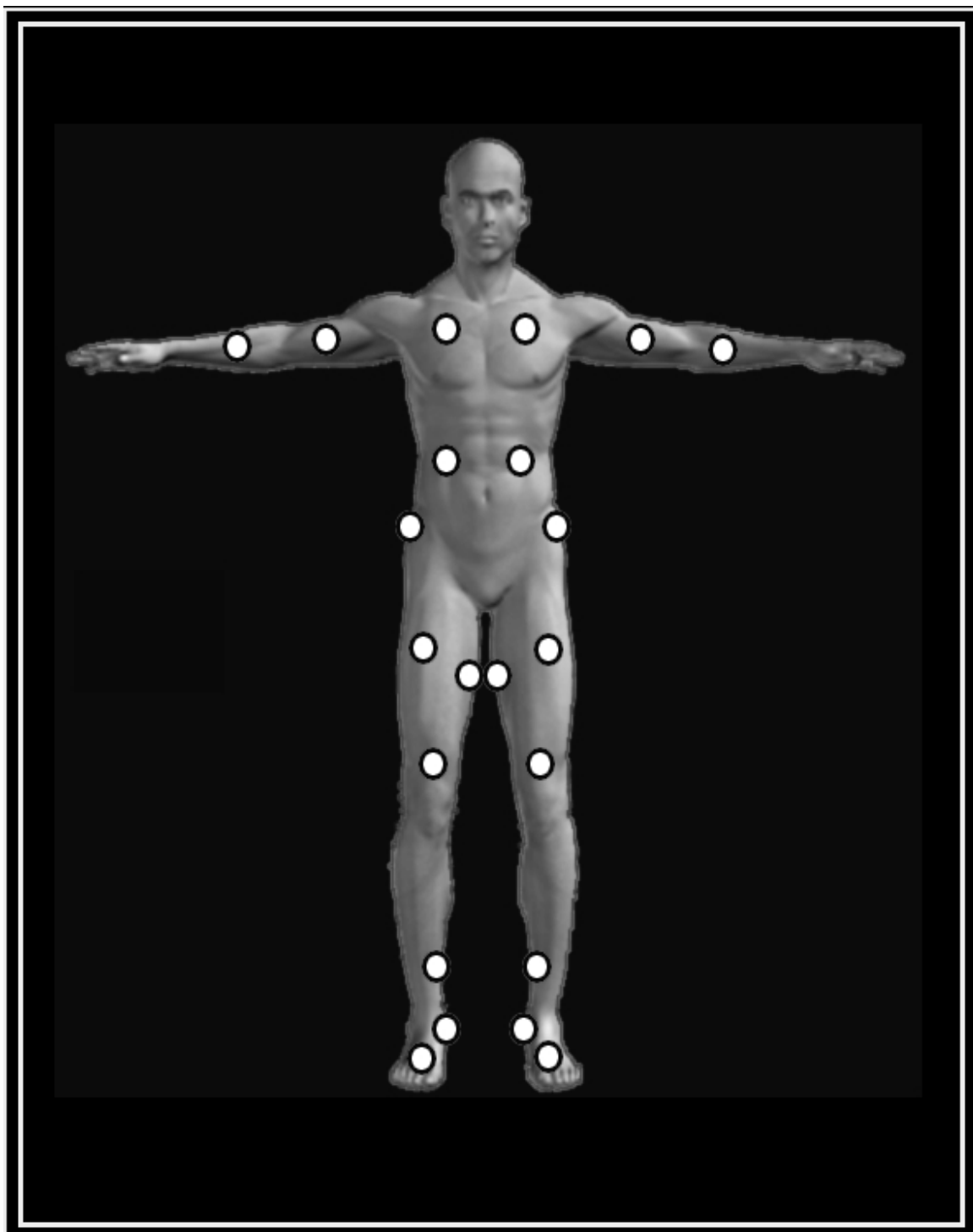


Figure 2 – Secondary Chakras

Secondary Chakras

- On the centre of the sole of each foot, at the same horizontal level as the peak of the arch of your foot.
- At the back/centre of each heel (relax the ankles to help find this one).
- Behind the knees.
- On the inside and outside of each thigh, just above the knees.
- At the front of both hips.
- In the centre of both lower ribs, in an area behind and beneath each of them.
- Between your shoulder-blades, on a level with your solar plexus.
- At the front of each armpit, beneath where your pectorals connect to your chest.
- Two inches above your solar plexus (particularly associated with feeling stressed or negative).
- Below both collar bones, at a point about mid-way along each.
- On the centre of each bicep.
- At the central inside part of each forearm, about four inches up from each wrist.
- Above and slightly forward of each inside ankle bone.

It isn't necessary to include all of the secondary points, listed above, in the later 'ascending relaxation'

routine, other than the first three, unless you're particularly stressed. Although the network of secondary points shown in the diagram is far from exhaustive, those shown are, along with chakras, the most common locations of physical tension.

A good way to ease yourself into a nice state and help stave off cannabis anxiety is to make use of all of the pressure points in your legs, arms and chest by just sitting back in a chair, crossing your arms and legs at the ankles and putting your feet up on something soft that supports your ankles, rather than your heels. This pressure releases endorphins and natural relaxants into your blood stream that, if you're in the right mood, will trigger a relaxation response and a pleasant light dreaminess.

The Ascending Sequence

This is a simple exercise that utilises the chakras to help yourself relax quickly at any time you feel the need to. Note that the more you do this kind of exercise, the easier it'll be to go straight into a relaxed state without having to do anything other than make the decision that you want to. Try to keep your attention solely on what you're doing with each point, rather than letting your mind wander. Maintaining continual attention like this changes it from a useful exercise into a form of meditation in its own right.

Sit up straight, with nothing supporting your back. With eyes open or closed and held looking in a forward, level gaze, start by relaxing your whole body in general. After a couple of minutes of this, move into just relaxing your ankles alone, then begin to go through the particular points and chakras I describe below in

ascending order, relaxing each as you go. Begin with the points on the sole of each foot, then those on each heel, then each knee, then from there on climb through each chakra (perineum, abdomen, solar plexus, upper chest, throat, brow and crown of the head) through to the top of your body.

You're aiming to reach a steady, gentle awareness that you should hold for around a minute per point. Rather than just being vaguely aware of the general area where each point is located, it's best to think of them as though they were at a precise place and about 2 inches (5cm) across. To help you isolate any point more accurately, touch it for a moment and mentally hold on to the sensation of that touch for a while to help you identify just the right place to focus on.

And that's it. No contortions, no mental gymnastics. Once you get used to this simple routine, you can probably run through the whole sequence in a few minutes while sitting on a train and still get benefit from it. Practised a couple of times a day, this exercise can do remarkable things for your body and mind. Although more deep-seated point tensions can take more work to get rid of, on the whole it doesn't take too much practice to remove most of those caused by your usual day-to-day thoughts and actions, once you know how. All you need is the ability to relax the right places on your body and you can quickly learn to reduce, or even remove, the effects of negative emotions and physical stress.

The Benefits

Although you might feel the urge to skip an introductory practice like this, there are good reasons to do this sequence before getting high or before

meditating. It's hard to go straight from normal life into just stopping and doing nothing in meditation, so beginning each session with a set routine like this will eventually become an ingrained signal to your brain that each time you do it you want to settle your mind and take it away from everyday life - giving you at least some initial focus. This is a pleasant, effortless beginning where you're not really trying to achieve anything other than comfort and a natural awareness of the chakras you're working on. It'll also make you more relaxed, and so sustaining focus will be much easier and more enjoyable, making you far more attuned to the kinds of feelings and experiences we're looking for.

Stars

This is a very useful development of the above exercise that might seem a touch on the esoteric side, but there are good reasons for going on to work with the points in the following way. As I explained, you have to be careful not to tense up the very places you're trying to relax as you direct your attention towards them. Worse, once you *have* relaxed a point, you may tense it again as soon as you move onto the next one. To get around both problems, think of each point as being a small, bright star instead, which gives it a more open and expansive feeling and makes it far easier to relax. Secondly, visualising stars in these places has an effect that takes time to fade away when you stop doing it, so even once you do progress to another point the previous one will stay open for a little while afterwards.

Unless stated, each star is brilliant yellow/white in colour. Imagine them to be situated half in and half out of the surface of your skin, with their light shining

inwards and outwards at the same time. When you get to the heart chakra, imagine that the star is deep blue; on the throat chakra, the star is coloured bright red. Gentle awareness is crucial. You can do this with your eyes open or closed, though open seems to work best:

1. Do a pass through all of the points as we did above, relaxing each for a few seconds before moving on to the next.

2. Now repeat it, this time *knowing* that you have a point of light at each location.

For the length of time you're being aware of any of the stars/points, it's useful to imagine that there's someone standing behind or in front of you who can see the stars you're working on. It has quite a pronounced effect, giving your mental image of the stars an extra element of reality that will sometimes trigger blissful states. Some readers will discover that just doing the above gives a wave of pleasure more or less straight away. If it does happen, relax and do nothing but enjoy the ride. No matter how intense these feelings might get, don't get bound up in thinking that you have to have them for the exercise to be successful.

Chakra Work

For those who are comfortable with more esoteric ideas, we can turn this into something that can be a powerful form of meditation: by thinking of the nature of our breathing in the way that many meditation traditions do, and by imagining it to contain something that comes in and out of our bodies with the air we breathe, as a form of energy.

As I hope I'm stressing enough, I practised initially

with no belief in the idea that there really was an energy to be felt - I was giving it the benefit of the doubt. But, as time went on, I could feel how much more relaxed and sensitive to bliss states I became when I used them in this way. Now I use this energy routinely to good effect and think of it very much in the classical way.

Begin by doing one quick pass through the ascending sequence to establish your awareness of the positions of all the main chakras; then do another pass, this time breathing naturally through each as you go. Don't try counting your breaths as a way of giving this a strict form - that will take your mind away from your breathing and the chakra you're working with. Just stay with each one as long as it feels comfortable to you, then move on to the next.

Keep checking that you're staying relaxed and make sure that you don't try to control your breathing at all, to 'standardise' it or to add strength to your inhalations. Your attitude towards the energy (and indirectly towards the chakra too) must always be positive and friendly, which is where the idea of 'metta' will come in very useful. Be receptive to this energy however you think of it, not grasping at it to see what it can do. Be natural at all times.

Once you *can* hold your attention reasonably well on any chakra, adding a feeling to it that you're breathing through the chakra at the same time isn't very hard to do; but note that it's easier to maintain this attention if the bulk of your awareness stays continually on the chakra itself, with only a small part of your attention on breathing through it.

While practising this meditation, you'll quickly find that your levels of attention and relaxation have a strong

impact on your breathing patterns, and there will be times when you don't draw breath for a considerable time, or when your breathing is made up of random gaps and short inhalations. When this does happen, it's tempting to restart your normal breathing so you have something to focus on, but don't. Just stay with being relaxed and gently aware of the chakra, and let your breathing do what it wants to do.

Finally, once you have done this second pass through the sequence, do a third pass - this time including the stars imagery from the previous technique.

Practising the above is something that would take a fair bit of effort if you were to get high and just leap in and try it; and unfortunately this would tend to flatten out the high a lot and you'd lose some of the advantages it gives. Instead, you might want to try doing the first two passes while straight; then get high, and wait out the first peak; then do the third 'stars' stage, as above.

It takes a little practice to feel what this technique can bring, though hopefully much less time if you try it whilst high. I usually find, if I'm straight and depending on what state I'm in, that sensations like blisses begin to happen when you reach the higher end of the sequence, usually around the solar plexus or throat, and that they increase in strength the closer I get to my crown chakra. If you're lucky though, things can get interesting as soon as you begin practising this technique.

As the wonderfully cynical person I once was, it was probably a year between me reading about the ascending sequence and light visualisations and then deciding to allow myself to enter into it wholeheartedly as a practice. But, even in the early stages I would feel small, random tinges of pleasure pointing the way as I practised, and

the feelings I got from the technique slowly grew over two years to a point where just about any work using light now causes a deep bliss to come about. I'm not an exceptional meditator, far from it, but with the help of the high and lots of work straight the world has become a very pleasant place indeed.

I'm going to discuss quite a few meditations based on chakra work in the chapter on techniques, so have a fool around with them now so that you'll have some grounding before we go deeper in with them.

Knowing vs. Imagining

Though this small paragraph is tucked away here at the end of the chapter, in actual fact what I say here is the key to achieving real success with all types of visualisations, such as the forms of light, above.

Whilst imagining the stars has a good effect, at first it takes some mental effort and therefore doesn't allow you to relax completely into the real sensations that this can bring on. Imagining takes work and mental processor time, and distracts you from what the image of the star is doing to your mind. Trying to see an imaginary star clearly in your mind's eye is a bit of a task and not really necessary. Instead, just *know* the stars are there. For the period that you practise the technique, you just accept that the stars are already shining at the points as you bring your mind to bear on them, that they never go away. Your brain will still create images of stars in response to your thinking about them, and that's all that's needed. Try and accept them as a reality. Know that they're there, in the same way that you know you have hair (or not), as just another part of your body.

You can help by imagining spikes of light coming from each star from time to time, or thinking about how the light they emit would shine on the things around you; but there's no need for anything much other than trying to gain a conviction that the stars are already at the points.

Relaxing Your Solar Plexus

Physical and mental stresses tend to manifest mainly at your solar plexus and at a point just a couple of inches above it on your chest. Together, when active, these points create the physical sensations that we call 'anxiety'. If the anxiety is deep, you might also feel the effects at the points at the front of your hips and at your throat too. As these feelings grow and the points tense up (and may even begin to hurt), you focus on them; but because anything but a very gentle awareness of a point will make it tense up further, this causes you to notice the point even more and the feelings you're getting will become increasingly worse. Luckily once you know how, you can learn to get rid of most (if not all) of these sensations using directed relaxation and metta.

As tension at the solar plexus is such a common problem, cannabis-enhanced or otherwise, I'll show you an easy way to alleviate that in particular:

Sit up straight in a chair without resting against the back of it - but try to stay relaxed, don't overdo the straightness. Now imagine that you have a horizontal cut running across your body that passes right through your solar plexus. Imagine that by raising your front up (as though you were going to breathe in) and leaning back the top half of your body just a fraction, you can open this split. Don't lean back too far, this is just a hint of leaning. Relax, raise your upper chest, and imagine that

you can tilt it back no more than a couple of centimetres. Try relaxing and breathing out slowly as you do this exercise, imagining that your solar plexus and the areas above each hip are melting downwards, which will help make you more relaxed. Lean, relax and wait. If you do have tension at your solar plexus, you should feel a very pleasant result from the pressure there being alleviated.

Although the above will help release anxiety a lot, yet again, with the addition of metta - which you would direct gently towards your solar plexus at the same time - it becomes not only a way of relaxing, but a way of *directly creating a positive emotion* in yourself. This, depending on your skills with metta and your level of mindfulness, can range from a generally happy and pleasant sensation right up to strong, extended feelings of bliss.

Until you get used to using metta, counteract your tendency to tense up your solar plexus when you focus on it by being only very gently aware of it.

So, why does the solar plexus seem to play such an important role in our emotions and our ability to relax? In November 2000, scientists in America and Germany issued press releases claiming to have rediscovered a second brain in the human stomach behind the solar plexus that is believed to have a major effect on the way people behave. Made up of a dense knot of around 100 billion nerve cells in the digestive tract (more than are held in the spinal cord), researchers now think that this 'second brain' transmits information on physical reactions to mental states to help influence later decisions. It seems also to play a major role in the creation of emotions too, such as happiness and sadness.

Professor Wolfgang Prinz of the Max Planck Institute

for Psychological Research in Munich said, “The discovery could give a new twist on the term, 'gut reaction'”. He also stated his belief that the stomach network may be the source for unconscious decisions which the main brain later claims as conscious decisions of its own.

After being first documented by 19th century German neurologist, Leopold Auerbach, the second brain was all but forgotten to science until it was rediscovered by Michael Gershon of the University of Colombia in New York. Examining two layers of nerve cells he had found near a piece of intestine he was dissecting, he discovered that they were part of a complex network of two sets of neural connections in the lining of the gastrointestinal tract. The nerves are tightly interconnected and have a direct influence on actions like the speed of digestion, the movement and secretions of the finger-like mucosa that line the intestines, and the contractions of the different kinds of muscle in the gut wall.

Properly called the ‘enteric nervous system’, researchers say that this brain complex sends and receives impulses, records and experiences, and responds to emotions in the same way that the ‘real’ brain does, with its nerve cells influenced by the same neurotransmitters. More recent research has raised the idea that an assortment of reactions may be originating in this area, and that its role in creating our physical sense of emotion is quite profound. It seems that the gut can upset the brain just as the brain can upset the gut.

Eyes

The area all the way around the outside of your eyes is a 'storage place' for your mental state, particularly

stress, so it's important to give attention to relaxing it – and indeed your whole face - as often as you can. Small muscle tensions there reflect not only what you're thinking at any given moment, but also your general emotional state too. People who are tired or stressed tend to squint and frown, and these reactions lead to a continuation of the very emotions that put them there in the first place. Although it might seem that such a simple technique couldn't do much to relieve stress and anxiety, learning to relax around your eyes does help to negate pressures and tensions in both your mind and body and quickly creates a feeling of ease.

As something to practise, it really couldn't be easier. Look slightly upwards and keep your gaze steady. Imagine that you're wearing a pair of goggles with thick rims which cover the area around your eyes and all the way across your eyebrows. Relax this entire area, letting your whole face and jaw sag downwards at the same time. It's easy to just give this practice a cursory once-over and feel that you're relaxing completely, but in fact to do it properly will take two or three sustained attempts before you can fully let go. Once you feel that you *have* relaxed, try to sit in that freedom from tension for a little while, avoiding movement of your eyes. Do this as many times in a day as you can remember to.

Perineum

As a simple and effective relaxation method to use surreptitiously when you're sitting down, imagine that you've got a rope tied between the back of your knees and your perineum. Relax both ends of the rope at once and try to let the middle of it sag. Practising this exercise helps you to relax all of the other lower points to a much

greater extent, and will help a lot if you're feeling worried or are about to do something you don't want to do. Once you do get used to doing this, add in the relaxation of the secondary points in front of each hip at the same time.

The Relaxation Response

Some people, if not all of us, have an innate ability to relax their bodies deeply and completely on cue, eliciting what is called the 'relaxation response'. This is the kind of relaxation sometimes experienced, say, after a good meal, or when you've climbed into a warm bed on a cold night - a kind of deep satisfaction that makes you relax totally, mentally and physically. If you can learn to trigger this state at will, it's an excellent support for working on chakras and so is something that's worth training yourself to do.

Sit somewhere comfortably and relax, breathing low in your abdomen (although there's no need to sit in a proper meditation posture, it will help create a deeper effect, so you might want to check out the Appendix at this point). Close your eyes and relax, one by one:

- The soles of your feet.
- The tops of your calves and behind your knees.
- Your perineum.
- Your solar plexus.
- An area about the size of your fist beneath each shoulder blade.

Once you feel that you're able to first isolate, then adequately relax each of these points, let all of them

relax at once as though you were completely letting go of your connection to your body, or cutting strings that are holding tensions in place. If you've done this correctly, you may find that your body feels heavy, totally relaxed, and that your breathing is deeper, with bigger spaces between inhalations. It's the kind of feeling that, when you do get it, there's little doubt that you're there.

If you *can* create this response, try going into it a couple of times a day so that you can get used to bringing on the sensations automatically, should you feel the need for it. It's a pleasant addition to a high state, and sitting in it as a way of passing twenty minutes or so is very beneficial to both mind and body.

Over the last few years I've seen various methods of reaching this response offered by companies touting a 'new' form of stress relief as a money-spinner. Some reach it by using mantra meditation (a repeated sound, word or phrase) or the 'mindfulness of breathing' exercise I describe later - but meditation may or may not bring it on, and usually only if you're actively seeking the relaxation response rather than clarity of mind. The real, natural relaxation response is something that you can learn to create in a matter of seconds without the need for meditation at all.

Tips

- Points and chakras react quickly to any awareness you have of them. The second you put your mind on one it will tend to tighten up, so focus on them very gently.
- Think of these areas as being like small muscles that can easily be overworked if you exercise them

too hard or too often. An ache (or a worm-like sensation, especially at your brow chakra) at any of these points is usually a symptom of overworking it.

- When you're doing exercises with the points, it's easy to accidentally imagine them in your head or off to one side of yourself, rather than at the actual place on your body where they are. Touching yourself briefly at the place you're developing awareness of helps to stop you making this mistake.



6

Metta

The Pali word 'metta' ('loving kindness') has a broad meaning, indicating for Hindu and Buddhist meditators an attitude of friendliness, benevolence and non-violence towards others.

Here we'll use it in a general sense as a synonym for simply liking, or having a feeling of kindness towards someone or something. It doesn't have to be a big dramatic mental gesture, just how you feel when you meet someone you like - a positive feeling of 'warmth'.

Metta is the way to real relaxation and to gaining more continuity of your mindfulness. Mindful awareness that has metta is soft and natural, not grasping; relaxation that has metta is deeper and easier to sustain. Directing metta towards the points and chakras as you relax them makes the act of relaxing much more pleasant and gives longer lasting results.

Being happy and appreciating things, being 'warm' towards them, is a very good form of meditation in itself. No matter what you point metta at it will make your experience of that object, person, or action a far better one – including of course, being high.

Metta & Emotions

By learning to 'turn on' metta whenever we want to, we can learn to control our moods and, at the very least, get ourselves into a more positive frame of mind when we need to. Whereas relaxation and meditation both serve to 'flatten out' physical tensions and mental stresses, metta can be used to *replace* the negative feelings in the points with a more positive mood, changing your emotions and how you react to them completely. This means that as soon as you have any degree of ability to raise metta, you can use it against depression, anxiety, nervousness, etc. very effectively. Using metta on yourself can literally change how much you're governed by the less positive side of your own character.

For cannabis users, all of the above is excellent news. What we put into the high we get out of it, amplified back at us, so if we can be happy and relaxed every time we're high then that's obviously going to make the high far more pleasant. If we can, on the other hand, learn to create metta and direct it at things over and above our happy, relaxed state, we can increase what comes back at us to a point when the 'returned' feelings are deep and blissful. The ability to produce pleasant feelings like this will probably be something that you can only do at first when you're high, but once you get used to using it that ability will start to show itself when you're straight too.

Don't take this idea too lightly; this is the ability to take a dull high, or one that's a little bit on the jangly side, and turn it into something far brighter and more pleasant, just by directing metta towards those points on your body that are feeling tense or strange. Metta is far from being just a way of learning to be nice to people.

Generating Metta

Generating metta doesn't mean that you need to come up with a deep sense of love; any semblance of pleasure, 'liking' or friendliness you can feel will be enough. If you feel strongly about someone right now, you can probably recreate the sensations we're looking for, just by thinking of them being with you. As these feelings come on, you'll notice that you do a number of things all at once, usually beginning by relaxing completely and putting a very small sigh of pleasure into your solar plexus, radiating 'liking' at the person through it. At the same time, you may also relax your biceps and naturally project metta out of them too. Friendliness is just as much a physical process as a mental one, and if you can learn to recognise and mimic what it does to you then you're no longer stuck with having to feel negative when depression comes along. Whether you bring on these feelings by using the memory of someone or something you like, it really doesn't matter. All that's important is that what you use gives you a small buzz of pleasure that will allow you to observe how liking/metta feels as it rises in your mind and body, so that you can try to recreate it physically.

I'd actually recommend that you take regular baths as a part of this process, as they help relaxation tremendously and give you a chance to examine the way that deep relaxation and contentment combine to create feelings of pleasure. Although in trying to replicate these sensations you might think that a forced friendliness wouldn't have the same depth or effect as real friendliness, as you become more familiar with raising metta it does become far easier to bring about genuinely sincere feelings by doing it.

To replicate some of the sensations of metta, try the

following exercise - but avoid turning it into just a mechanical set of actions. The more it contains an element of real warmth/love/liking (from simply remembering someone you have feelings for), the more chance you have of making it work. Just do it as simply, sincerely and as naturally as possible. Although this technique may seem very long, it's just an extended description of how you already naturally create the feeling of metta. If you're a particularly positive person, then of course you should be able to bring about the feelings we're looking for naturally, just by wanting to do it. For the rest of us (who may be like myself, having spent years actively opposed to the very idea of creating metta, let alone using it), you may find that you do need to practise before you can generate it properly. But let's just back up a sentence or two and think about the repercussions of the above statement:

'If you're a particularly positive person, then of course you should be able to bring about the feelings we're looking for naturally, just by wanting to do it.'

This is such a simple fact, but one that we all tend to overlook. Every one of us can easily turn a slight down feeling into deep depression when the mood takes us - we all know how to do it and tend to be exceptionally good at it. We let go, slouch, sulk, believing for whatever reason that we're entitled to this bout of misery, and we therefore go all out for it. But we never bother to try to turn our emotions the opposite way into 'happiness' instead, even though we're just as able to do that too. Barring those people in dire circumstances where it really isn't an option, if we're of a positive character we can choose to go directly to being happy - *if we want to*.

Metta

- 1) Close your eyes and relax, especially at your solar plexus and forehead. Smile.
- 2) Imagine that you can blow a slow, short, sensual breath very gently into your solar plexus, directing it towards someone or something that you like at the same time. Don't try to stop the breath too abruptly, just let the end of it fade.
- 3) Wait and do nothing. You may find that your breathing stops for a few seconds. Don't try to start breathing again, or make the period of not breathing longer. Just wait without getting caught up in analysing what might or might not happen. Don't repeat this more than three times in a row or you may overwork it.

Or...

There's another, much easier way to metta that I discovered a few years ago. I have no idea why or how it works, or whether it works for everyone - but for me it's a more or less instant way of raising metta and a strangely dreamy set of feelings:

Imagine that there's something soft and warm (or somebody you like) touching your left cheek. Very slowly turn your head to the right, smoothing your cheek gently over whatever you've imagined is touching you. Try to be loving towards it, doing it just like a happy cat would. Repeat this a couple of times, alternating your right and left cheeks. You should begin to feel spontaneous feelings of pleasure and sensuality almost immediately, if

you're sensitive enough and can do this sincerely.

Whatever method you use, once you've got a feeling for creating even a little metta, you can then go on to combine it with relaxation practice and meditation – and literally any technique at all - to great effect. To enhance relaxation, for example: just go through the ascending relaxation sequence from the previous chapter, directing metta towards each point as you rise through them. As I said earlier, although just relaxing the points is very beneficial, using metta to actually change your mood and how each point feels is a far more effective practice for removing anxiety, or for reaching a general sense of happiness as a background for a meditation session.

Simple as relaxing seems, it can lead to very pronounced states, particularly when joined with metta and the star-like points; but don't focus unduly on anything that does happen or give it any special meaning. Just relax and enjoy, without trying to figure out what might or might not come about. There's nothing that will kill such states faster than analytical thought, and you can't truly experience anything fully whilst you're analysing it.



Mindfulness

Your first full cannabis high (which doesn't necessarily mean your first experience of cannabis) was probably quite strong and memorable. More than likely you were very aware as you waited for the effects of it to come on, which made you closely observe everything that was happening to your mind and body, which in turn would have done a lot to enhance the feeling of being high. In meditation terms you were in a more 'mindful' state, more aware of this present moment. Being more aware of anything we experience makes that experience more intense, including the high.

The problem for most people is that the older they get, the more they lose the ability to see and hear in a natural, mindful way. When mindfulness goes, pleasure diminishes. We all tend to be more inclined towards internalisation as we age, thinking about the future or the past instead of what's happening to us in this present moment. We constantly worry, relive arguments and conversations, dwell on old problems – or on the positive side, we play with mental trivia, hope and dream of the future, or happily remember the past; and because of this internal dialogue, we miss out on experiencing the full depth and immediacy of everything else that happens to us and around us.

If we're fully mindful, our experience of reality changes for the better in lots of ways - as being mindful means that we're putting in abeyance the thinking part of our mind that would normally block these kinds of perceptions. Our reaction time increases; we're more outwardly aware; tastes and smells are broader and colours more vivid. We gain far more enjoyment from things when our perceptions aren't filtered by the conceptual mind. You might at some point in mindfulness practice get a sense of how you saw the world when you were very young - and it's a quietly stunning event. Everything is more alive and here when seen through a child's mind of direct awareness, uncluttered by the judgement and disinterest that now encumbers your adult mind. You'll wonder how you could have lost such clear perception of what seems to be a whole other level of reality, but when over your lifetime you've let mindfulness degenerate to the extent it might well have done, clear awareness like this just slips away.

There are times, however, when even the most internalised people will emerge again into the world, albeit temporarily - and the rarer this event is for them, the deeper and more startling it will be. Survivors of car crashes often talk about how things suddenly became unnaturally vivid and how time seemed to slow down for them, all of which are effects of becoming very mindful. In response to the onset of danger our normally chatty, internal voice all but shuts down, allowing us to become fully aware of whatever is happening, and our innate reactions (rather than those slowed by our normal thinking mind) take over, giving us a better chance of surviving. You'll hear people saying time and again when they're talking about a moment when they've instinctively pulled themselves out of a life-threatening situation, "I didn't think, I just did it." Pure, clear

mindfulness.

And for us cannabis users? You'll notice that the time-dilation effects of becoming very mindful that I describe are exactly the same as those you'll often experience when you're deeply high. Cannabis enhances mindfulness to some degree, at least whilst the high is still a novelty to us; but once we start to become more blasé about it through continued use the mindful aspect – and many of the effects of the cannabis too - will fade.

Becoming more mindful is, on the surface, just a matter of learning to pay closer attention to the things around you; but easy as that sounds, this has far reaching consequences. Your level of mindfulness literally changes how you perceive the world - and also governs in a very real way who you are and how you feel from moment to moment. This might seem a bit of an extreme statement, but when I first began to meditate I was very prone to sudden depressions that could last hours or days at a time. Once I found that by using the right techniques I could snap myself out of a negative mood quite quickly, it allowed me to compare my impressions of reality - firstly depressed, then happy - quite easily.

The most obvious thing that changed during depression (or lack of it) was my depth perception; the more down I was, the less I felt *of* the world, not just for it. Depressed, things around me had far less physical presence and were almost like flat images on a TV screen that I felt no real connection with. As I moved back towards a neutral or positive state, things became rounder, more welcoming and more something I could feel an affinity with. I must stress again that I mean this quite literally, and that my depression altered my ability to see the world in a normal way in terms of my

perception of its actual presence and apparent three-dimensional quality. Although this change in feeling towards reality is common to people with depression, I don't think it's accepted as a real symptom, but just assumed to be a negative way of portraying ordinary perceptions.

When I was depressed (and especially when I felt self-conscious), I also had a much smaller sphere of awareness. I could see perfectly well, but it felt like my awareness was confined somehow, and that it could only focus on things immediately around me. Being happy and mindful in comparison is a whole different experience in terms of spatial depth and size of awareness. What kind of mood you're in directly affects how you see and how you feel about what you see. In light of this I've included a technique later ('The Sphere of Awareness') that helps you break free of the limited sense of self and reality that depression can bring on.

Don't think that because you aren't bothered very often by anything you could call 'depression' that your reality is stable from day to day. Just small changes in mood will directly affect how you perceive the world considerably. Feeling just slightly flat or under the weather will change your perception of spatial depth and the 'friendliness' of reality in the same way that deeper depression would.

Beginning Mindfulness

Practising mindfulness (and meditation too) is much easier if you do it outside, especially where there are other people regularly coming and going. The changing scenes will naturally keep your mindful awareness higher, but practising in the outside world also allows a

much greater sense of the movement of reality to latch on to than can be found if working in darkened, quiet rooms. When you are outside try to appreciate how not being surrounded by walls feels, how much less constrained and mentally internal you are. After just a couple of weeks of regular practice, you'll notice that your general awareness has increased considerably and that reality is a more vivid and interesting place.

When beginning any kind of mindfulness practice, it's best to first let your awareness of the present moment grow in your perception by doing nothing at all for a few minutes. Good mindfulness can easily come about in these moments *before* you consciously begin to try to be mindful. If you can be relaxed, effortless and receptive to what comes into your awareness, you'll be surprised how quickly the world comes into sharper focus. To demonstrate how this comes about, and as a test of how mindful you can be, try this:

- Look at any object near you now and try to be as strongly aware of it as you can. You'll find that after a minute or so, the more you try to look at and hold onto the object, the more of a barrier seems to grow between you and it. It becomes hard to keep your eyes steady and your attention constant.

Give yourself a couple of minutes to relax then try this instead:

- Look in an ordinary way at your chosen object, don't try to focus or concentrate on it unduly. Do nothing at all except see what you're looking at, without mentally slipping into the past or future. Relax, be receptive, and don't try to force yourself

to be aware. Simply look, in the same way that you might at the words on this page or your TV. Perfectly naturally and without effort. See how much longer you can stay looking comfortably at your chosen object by just trying to continue your periods of 'wanting to'. You should find that the length of your attention will double or treble, and that it's really a much more enjoyable experience than seeing things through forced awareness.

Working on Mindfulness

There are a lot of good ways of working on mindfulness. Some Buddhist schools recommend that their students observe every movement of their bodies and position of their limbs; or the colours, textures and shapes of everything they see; or the intensity of each sound they hear. They might also use 'moving meditation': walking quietly, trying to be continually and acutely aware of the movements of their limbs and even the rustle of their clothes moving against their skin. But you don't need to go to these lengths to begin to change your general level of mindfulness - for our purposes, it really is just a question of learning to stop allowing yourself to internalise all the time and to be more outwardly aware instead. To be mindful, you just *allow* (not force) the outside world to be the natural focus of your mind, instead of your own thoughts. It doesn't mean that you have to stare at the things around you, you just need to take in more about them than you normally would, in a relaxed and natural way.

Luckily we all have lots of opportunities to develop mindfulness even if we have busy lives. There's a real chance that you spend most mealtimes thinking about

anything but what you're eating as you eat it, so being mindful when you eat is good, surreptitious practice – and very enjoyable too. Even the simplest of foods become richer in flavour as you learn to become more aware of the subtleties of taste that you might normally miss. Try to be aware of the way that your teeth and tongue move as you chew, and even the textures of your food.

Subtleties

Many teaching texts have been written about the subtlety of cultivating mindful awareness, because it's so easy to get the wrong idea about what you're meant to do to be mindful, and what mindfulness is.

Mindfulness isn't about trying to be continually aware of one or all of the stimuli that come into our consciousness, because that would be an unnatural state that we're trying to force onto our minds. If we try to reach mindfulness then, when it appears, hold onto it tightly and try to maintain it, that's an obviously contrived state, and not really mindfulness at all. If we wanted to remain mindful using this method it would mean that we'd need to constantly maintain control of our awareness to keep it mindful, which is really just another form of stress and one of the things that we're trying to avoid. What we want to do instead is to reach mindfulness and simply learn to recognise it, not to hold onto it. It's our ordinary awareness of this present moment, not anticipation of the next moment. When it appears we simply notice it and let it go without doing anything at all to try and hold onto it. In a lot of cases, you should find that not doing anything to the state allows it to continue in a natural way for a few seconds

or more before fading. True, natural mindfulness is that which isn't obscured by mindfulness practice.

The advice usually given to students working with mindfulness is along the lines of 'when eating, just eat; when tying your shoelaces, just tie them' - again, this might give the impression that to be mindful you need to actively concentrate solely on your actions to the exclusion of all else - a route that some forms of vipassana erroneously follow. What it really means is that if you do nothing (i.e. you don't exercise any form of control over your thoughts) and simply carry out actions, then that is mindfulness - our ordinary, natural awareness.

After learning to recognise this state, you begin to notice that you're in it at fairly regular instances throughout your day. Eventually the space between you and your direct perception with basic, mindful awareness disappears, and you settle into a permanent state of just being clearly aware of whatever you point your awareness at, with hardly any internal thoughts disturbing this mindset at all; leading to a mind that's far more sensitive to the changes in awareness that you need to feel as you meditate. To be truly mindful, we're looking instead for natural, unforced awareness that can't be created, only reached. A naturally mindful mind isn't one that's being held under control in any way: it isn't overly internalised or externalised, it's completely relaxed and calm, just the kind of state that meditation helps bring on and sustain.

However, because some of us are internalised and daydream all the time, and others may be tightly focussed on the outside world, we usually need to use meditation to help clear our minds and balance them between internalisation and externalisation to give them

some stability - so that the correct mindful state is easier to recognise. Although most people will go through an initial stage in mindfulness practice where they *do* force themselves to be outwardly aware and mindful, the idea is that once a student realises where the mindful state is and becomes familiar with it, this conscious control of awareness has to be dropped.

The trouble is that mindfulness is such a natural state that we can easily miss it (usually because we're actively looking for it), and we can end up over-practising as we look for some kind of extreme frame of mind that lies beyond it. In fact, real mindfulness is something most people pass through tens of times each day without noticing so, as it *can* be easy to miss, I'll show further ways to become more familiar with it, below.

Tasting Mindfulness

There are mental tricks which can be used to give us a brief taste of mindfulness, which through familiarity we can learn to extend into every aspect of our lives. But be careful - although using the method below will create mindfulness of some level or other, any analysis you make of the state you reach (actively looking for mindfulness within your consciousness) will negate the effects of this exercise:

Imagine that out of the corner of your eye you think you see something unusual, and you quickly turn to look in its direction. As soon as your eyes alight on the object* you immediately enter into a natural state of mindfulness that isn't being contrived by you. Your awareness is fully outward without effort, looking in the direction of whatever has caught your eye. You aren't thinking or trying not to think, you're just looking, without analysing

what you're seeing, and your mind has a kind of deep clarity - almost a suspension of thinking - that waits to assess whether the object you're looking at is of any danger to you. In some respects it's what we might call the 'hunter's mind', the kind of awareness you would have if you were in the woods tracking game. In this situation you don't stare or try harder and harder to be aware of your surroundings, you simply let all your attention point outwards as you search for signs of movement, and internal thinking becomes automatically suspended.

**If you try looking quickly towards something and letting your mind rest on it then, depending on how much practice you've done previously, you may notice that there's a take-up time before your eyes settle accurately on what you're looking at and you start to feel you're being mindful of it. It's like being on a merry-go-round that you have to wait to slow down before you can place your attention fully outwards. With practice of mindfulness though, this space between you and direct perception disappears, sight becomes much more direct, and you eventually settle into a permanent state of being clearly aware of whatever you point your awareness at, pretty much instantly.*

But even if you do have a long take-up time when you try to be aware, you should still find that, if you're suddenly startled into looking at something, your take-up time should be almost non-existent. It's obviously the kind of reaction we need to stay alive, the ability to focus totally and instantly on any danger that might threaten us.

The same mental effect can be created using hearing too. Suppose that you're in dark countryside at night, and suddenly you hear an unnerving rustle in the bushes

to your side. Although you might think that what you'd do in this situation is immediately focus all your attention on the direction the sound came from and try to listen harder for more signs of movement, in fact what you really do is nothing - which again naturally suspends thoughts and allows sounds to be the main stimuli reaching your mind. This simple reflex is important, and it shows that if we want to become more aware of anything, including our focus object during meditation, we just let our minds be aware in the way they naturally are already - we don't try to increase or change anything. We get our normal thinking mind out of the way so that 'bare awareness' can do its job.

Think of the 'basic awareness' part of your mind, which reveals itself in the methods above, as being like a TV camera which sees all, but makes no judgements about what it sees. It's just consciousness, without any kind of evaluation. Your conscious mind, on the other hand, is akin to the camera operator, who chooses which of the things that he wants to zoom in on to look at more closely. Understanding that this concept is in play as you look at the world clearly illustrates an important aspect of the human mind and attention to perception; that you're seeing (hearing/tasting, etc.) that which is *already* being seen by your basic awareness.

Within limits, the more you allow your basic consciousness to be externally aware, the more likely it is that the operator of your TV camera will stop working altogether, leaving just pure awareness behind. When this does happen, the chances of experiencing a shift in awareness, possibly a state of absorption (particularly if you were listening to music at the time) or a bliss, are highly likely.

Balancing Mindfulness

Although the examples I use above can lead to a more intense form of (slightly startled) mindfulness than we need, they're still useful ways of pointing out what the mindful mind feels like. What's more preferable, in terms of building a state of mindfulness that you'd want to stay in permanently, is to reach the same kind of awareness but also to include positive emotional content in it too - literally, simply feeling happy as you're being mindful. This helps fix you more gently into a mindful state, and causes you to relax, which counteracts the tendency for those trying to be mindful to become physically and mentally tense. This colouring of awareness with positive feelings is also very important to those who get high too, as cannabis increases mindfulness (and lowers blood sugar) making the intensity of your awareness feel very much like anxiety.

An ideal way to reach a happy state with which to colour awareness as you're being mindful is simply to enjoy what you're looking at, whatever that might be. We're rarely closer to the moment or more relaxed than when we naturally enjoy a view, or a rose, or the presence of someone we love. Be happy in this moment. Don't sit waiting for mindfulness to appear, don't hold yourself in any special states, just enjoy right here and now, this second, without doing anything other than being aware, and real mindfulness will come about.

I know it's very easy to miss the point of mindfulness – I did myself for many years - so I want to stress again that we aren't trying to become mindful then latching onto it and trying to turn it into an ongoing state using force of will. That has elements of control and anticipation of the future which we're trying to avoid. All we want to do is be aware of right this second, without

trying to extend that into further moments. We look at now, and what comes about into our perceptions is nothing but now. Be happy in *this* moment.

To balance awareness further, and thus increase your chances of glimpses of realisation, doesn't take very much work at all. All you need are ways of stopping yourself getting hung up on developing one aspect of mindfulness at the expense of others.

But...

Be careful when practising mindfulness, as it's easy to get yourself far too tightly aware with just a little too much of the wrong kind of practice. If it seems that it's getting harder and harder for you to reach mindfulness, then back off, stop the practice and take a look at the short section on 'receptivity'; try that for a while instead. Remember that being more mindful will make you more sensitive to all other mental states, including 'flatness' (a complete lack of feeling for reality that many people experience regularly) - so if you are going to practise mindfulness on a regular basis, you'll also need to be able to create metta to balance out your tendency to be over-mindful, or 'grasping'.

Being very mindful, without also 'colouring' it with the sense of well-being that metta (and relaxation) introduces, can be an unpleasant and slightly wired experience. In fact, one reason for some kinds of cannabis anxiety is that as you become higher, and usually therefore more mindful, you also become more sensitive to disturbing sensations at your points and chakras. If you intend to do a lot of work on mindfulness, make sure it's after you've read the chapter on metta, so that you know how to project it into any area of your

body to counteract the tension and flatness which mindfulness can cause.

Being in a balanced, mindful state will usually give sensations at the crown of your head that can feel like a gentle pressure pushing outwards through it, or as though the skin over it were being stretched slightly. But if you begin to develop uncomfortable pains at and around your crown - or you find that any mindfulness work you try to do instantly makes everything hard to focus on, or 'flat' - then it's a distinct possibility, due to your character or what you do for a living, that you're too mindful instead of not mindful enough. If you think this could be you, explore learning to be receptive and relaxed rather than more aware. Those who are over-mindful may suddenly feel a surge of warmth and pleasure as they begin to rebalance their awareness with relaxation and receptivity.

I wasn't helped by my expectations of what I imagined I would find when I 'got there' into full mindfulness, and so tended to over-practise it a lot. I'd built myself an impression that once I was fully mindful, reality would seem suddenly surreal in such a way that it would be immediately obvious. But the changes in perception aren't easily described in the way that normal senses can be. Things *do* become more real, more 'here', when seen through the mindful mind, but explaining the changes fully is very hard unless you've experienced them yourself. It's such a simple state, and probably very familiar to you once you learn to identify it. That it is so simple is what makes it so hard to describe - a 'somewhere' that just happens by itself and disappears when you try to do anything very much about reaching it.

Finally, the order in which you practise mindfulness and metta is crucial for beginners. Always create metta

before mindfulness, as being mindful will lock you out of being able to generate metta (ideally it's relaxation first, metta second, and mindfulness third). When you go into good mindfulness you're binding yourself to only being able to feel whatever you feel when you first go in there. You can't move out of mindfulness to create metta without letting go of the mindfulness first. But if you take metta 'in' with you, it just becomes a component of the mindful state. Once there, it'll take less sustaining and will float along in your mind for much longer, requiring only a small push now and again to revitalise it when it fades.

Stopping Mindfulness Practice

It's very easy to accidentally turn trying to be mindful into an underlying stream in your consciousness as something you're constantly trying to do, even when 'you' aren't consciously trying at all. Learning to stop trying is one of the keys to successful mindfulness practice. There must come a time when you're just *being* mindful, rather than *trying* to be mindful as an exercise. Without stopping at a point when reality seems to be clear and present, and then resting in that experience, how can you ever actually be mindful? A true experience of mindfulness (ordinary, clear awareness) will invariably take place after you've finished striving for it. Continuing to practise mindfulness as an exercise will take you *to* the state of being mindful, but as long as you're sustaining the practice itself, the extra mind stream of 'doing it' means that you can never simply rest in mindfulness itself as an experience.

Out-ing

This is a trick that you can use to quickly clear your mind in preparation for meditation, or to break free from a nagging worry or chain of thought.

As a way of overcoming stress, I can't recommend meditation enough, but when I first began practising it I found that it didn't initially provide a way of turning off my ideas and thoughts about the outside world to let me concentrate on meditation itself. On days off I could meditate well enough, and reach a pleasant state of calm - but on getting home after a busy day, just trying to free myself from the thoughts of work running through my brain took longer than I had spare time to practise in. Ideally, I needed a way of switching off the outside world *before* I began to meditate and hopefully, a quick way to regain mental control too when I needed it.

As a solution to both problems, I eventually found this very simple method that's in some ways related to neuro-linguistic programming's 'anchors'. Although this doesn't quite work on the same emotional level as an anchor would, it's still very useful, even though the relief from thoughts it gives is short-lived. Think of it as a way of interrupting constant mental chatter long enough for you to take back control of your mind so you can begin to meditate properly.

The effect we're looking for can be created by the use of the word 'out' – or, in fact, any word of your choosing. The technique is simple: you make a mental decision that whenever you say 'out!' to yourself, you'll immediately relax as much as possible, stop following whatever you're thinking about and become more clearly aware of the outside world. Nothing harder than that. Although this sounds far too simple to have any real effect, as you'll see later in other techniques, it's very easy to create

powerful word commands in yourself with just a little practice under the right conditions and with regular reaffirmation.

One strength of this technique is that it is, after practice, something that quickly becomes ingrained as a response on a deep subconscious level – but, more importantly, 'where' you go to when you do it is a key to its success. 'Out-ing' makes you more focussed on your external reality and, as the more you are clearly and happily aware of the outside world, the less you're able to be internalised and worrying, it's a very effective way of dealing with stress. The brain can easily multi-task when you're juggling ideas, but if you ask it to be aware of your inside thoughts and external reality at the same time, it has a real problem coping. It has to do either one or the other. Become adept at being more externally aware and your internal voice, with all its problems, quickly shuts down.

Another reason that being externally aware cuts down on thoughts (at least, those actively sought by you) is easy to demonstrate. Relax, with your eyes open and looking straight forward, then try to think back to what you did, say, on your sixteenth birthday. You'll notice that as soon as you do try to remember this, your eyes have to defocus from the present and the scene in front of you to allow you to access your memory. In fact, it's impossible to recall memories, or to think creatively, without allowing your eyes to do this. Therefore, if you can prevent your eyes from defocussing and moving to these positions by keeping looking steadily at reality, then it prevents you from getting involved in daydreams and random trains of thought.

To give yourself the best chance of success with this method, practise it initially at random times when you

aren't under stress and when you aren't struggling, trying to break free from a particularly involving thought process. Once you've reinforced it in this way, with no pressures, it will be far easier to get the desired effect when you are stressed, and you'll find that you have less need to do anything consciously for you to become clearer and less tense, other than to say the chosen word. This command can be strengthened to such an extent that, no matter how unmindful and emotionally wound up you are, you can side step it all and move straight into mindfulness and relaxation by using it.

Some schools of meditation (and some stress counsellors too) tie mindfulness to a word command. After a little experience in recognising mindfulness and relaxation, saying any chosen key word (such as a strong 'Out!') as you immediately relax and bring your mind back to bear on the here and now, creates a subconscious trigger that can be used to break free from mental confusion at any time you might need it. After a while you begin to associate the command with mindfulness so that just saying it takes you immediately to a fully aware condition. This word command can be strengthened to such an extent that eventually it will work no matter how unmindful and emotionally wound up you are, so it's a very useful tool to have in your arsenal.

Simple as this technique is, there's no doubting its power, which will continue to grow the more often you use it. As it's easy to get locked into a single train of thought or worry when you're high, 'out-ing' is a very useful way of breaking free.



8

Anxiety &

Mindfulness

Cannabis anxiety is a very common problem amongst users, and it's not something that I managed to totally escape from myself until I completely understood all of the things that can trigger it.

Your blood sugar level, your level of relaxation (and caffeine use too) - all these go into creating sensations of unease in their own way; but of course your own mental state, literally your own sanity, is a contributing factor too. What goes into the high is what comes out, so how would that make someone with, say, a low-level bipolar disorder feel when they were high? What might it do to their minds?

I'm quite amazed sometimes to read experiences like the following that have been posted on various internet forums. This is a little paraphrased to protect the innocence (and downright daftness) of the original poster, but this is a good example of the kind of thing I mean:

“...I have had problems with depression my whole life. It runs in the family and I've been hospitalized a couple

times because of it and regularly take a few different meds...So all signs point to the pot causing it, but I'm not 100% positive..."

Not the depression or the meds then? This is very much the kind of trouble a number of my friends have with oriental food. They'll consume nine pints of lager, jig about foolishly on a dance floor for hours, then single-handedly eat a hearty curry banquet for four. Then, when they're vomiting at Olympic standard later that evening, it's always the curry they ate that caused it and not the drink. Cannabis will certainly exacerbate any mental problems you have, so it's pretty certain that if you're not stable in your straight life then you're going to make things worse by getting high.

Chakras

But there's another way that cannabis can induce anxiety. A high may cause strong tensions to appear at the points and chakras in random order depending on what you're doing physically and mentally. Whereas normally emotions and thoughts will cause recognisable effects on your body, once you're high the points don't act like they usually do, and they'll become activated in ways that you won't recognise. If you get tensions at your solar plexus and throat, for example, then it'll tend to feel like anxiety; if you get them elsewhere, it may feel like pleasure or excitement, etc. But if a number of points that wouldn't normally work in conjunction with each other 'light up' all at once, then you get the physical and mental experience of an 'emotion' that's completely new to you - a mixture of happy/sad/wired/relaxed that is such an odd range of feelings that it would convince the sanest amongst us that they were ready for plastic pants

and a ward address.

This is a problem for regular users, as cannabis has a cumulative effect that makes the random activation of points much more likely. To make matters worse, cannabis increases your sensitivity to their action too, so small changes in the state of the points will become much more noticeable when you're high.

Just last night I found that lying in a chair in a particular position activated the points on my body at my hips and under my lower ribs, which gave a very oddly manic feeling of both fearful trepidation and hilarity that I'm not sure I could have coped with, had I not known the above. These tensions might feel like pressure, or an ache, or a disturbing excited sensation, and will make you think that all kinds of bad things are happening to your body and mind. If you aren't learning to cope with this as you go along, by learning how to relax and direct metta to stop these feelings, then it will eventually get to a point where you have to stop getting high for a couple of weeks until your sensitivity to their action diminishes.

Self-consciousness

If you're getting high in a place where there are other people who are straight, then your paranoia may be 'real' and caused by acute self-consciousness, which can easily make you painfully aware of yourself and everything you do to an amazing degree. Normal body sensations will feel very strange to you, and your mind will combine every random twinge and feeling of being observed into a very weirded-out state. Obviously, it's not a good idea to get ripped then go outside to a busy mall and put yourself into a position where you need to look straight - but if you *do* have to do it, then you can use mindfulness

as a tool to help keep paranoia at bay. Just upping your level of external awareness will work wonders at removing self-consciousness.

As a good test of the power of mindfulness to help get rid of cannabis paranoia and self-consciousness, try (first straight, then high) going to sit somewhere alone - but somewhere you know you'll be observed by others. Maybe a small park which is closely overlooked by offices or houses where people could watch you without you being able to see them. Don't take a book to read, or anything that you can mentally hide behind - just sit and watch the world go by for twenty minutes or so.

For many people who are slightly introverted, doing something like this - straight - will have them squirming with self-consciousness from the second they sit down. They'll feel awkward and unable to relax, and will begin to think that their every move is being watched and judged by the unseen eyes around them. 'Judgement' is the important key in the creation of self-consciousness. If you care what people think, and lack confidence in the way you look or move, then this will be far worse when you're high.

As anxiety begins creeping in, you'll feel your whole awareness shrink down to just what's immediately around yourself, and the eyes of the unseen observers will be constantly burning into your mind. If this deepens, you might also start to feel physically uncomfortable too, which of course makes you feel far worse. But just by returning to outward awareness and mindfulness, all of those feelings - and even your awareness of those who may be watching you - will quickly (sometimes instantly) disappear. Self-consciousness can't remain as a component of awareness when you're busy seeing and hearing in a mindful way:

there's no room for it, so it just fades away.

However, the point is not just to show that mindfulness is a great tool for getting rid of this kind of anxiety, but also that your mind is very able to take a few simple physical and mental sensations and turn them into what can feel like anything from the early stages of dementia to a heart attack. Suggestion, the fear of fear, plays a very large role in the creation of some forms of cannabis anxiety.



Bringing It Together



Gazes

For those practising meditation, much of the process involves learning where to look for and how to feel the changes in awareness that meditation techniques create.

Just in the same way that it takes some people a few experiences of cannabis before they actually start to get a proper high, the effects of some of these exercises may need time for you to recognise them. A good way to start feeling how these things can affect your awareness is through exploring the different gazes that meditators can use. Luckily, being high will increase your sensitivity to what these eye positions can do quite considerably - so I'd suggest practising a couple of them straight for a little while, a few minutes before you get high, and then again as you're coming down the other side of the first peak of your high so that you can see the difference they make.*

**Even though we want to explore the high we don't want to kill it off in the process by practising endless techniques. As I said at the start: ultimately, doing nothing but experiencing the high in a happy, calm and natural way is the best thing that can be done to increase its depth and your enjoyment of it. Carry out the above and all other explorations as gently as you possibly*

can to avoid ruining the high.

In some forms of meditation, practitioners make a lot of use of gazes to help create 'non-conceptual awareness'. This means getting to a stage where the meditator is fully and normally aware, but neither thinking nor not thinking. His or her mind stops reacting to the contents of awareness (whilst remaining fully conscious of it), thus causing what's seen, heard or felt to be perceived in a 'pure' way, i.e. without all the filters that the normal mind distorts our perceptions with. Reaching a point where you can enter into non-conceptual awareness at will is, of course, an extremely useful skill that can be practised by using, amongst other things, any of these gazes.

The following and all other gazes require gentle, short and regular periods of practice, with a lot of attention given to relaxation. If you rush them and try to steady your eyes by force you'll just make your eye jitters worse. Avoid over-practice or you may start to experience headaches. Do a little at a time, literally a few seconds at first, building up to longer periods over time.

If you work on open-eye gazes, try to avoid letting your eyes defocus or you'll slip into dreaminess. They must remain alive and natural at all times - you're not trying to stare blankly, or to let your mind veg out.

Whatever you try here, it's critical that you do it without looking for effects or analysing what's going on. If you do, it'll make you anticipate the future rather than being fully aware of the present and what's currently happening to your mind. Just do – and if anything happens, great; if not, you can either try again or move onto something else. Some things will work better for you than others, some will be worse - it depends entirely

on your approach to them.

The Ajna Gaze

Along with the downward gaze described in the later chapter on meditation, there's a second eye position which requires you to look up towards your forehead chakra with half-closed eyes. This can be a very powerful technique, especially when combined with other skills, so it's worth persevering with until you can hold it steadily for a few minutes at a time.

To go into this gaze: with open eyes, look upwards at a steep angle without it being too uncomfortable, and try to keep your eyes steadily in position for a minute or so. On your first few attempts you'll probably feel all kinds of twinges in your eye muscles when you do this, so begin gently, and only for a few seconds at a time. Look out for the areas of greatest tension and try to relax them as much as possible as you let your eyes settle.

When you find you can do this comfortably, move the focus of your gaze down so that you're looking up at a more comfortable angle of about sixty degrees. You'll find that by having started with over-extending your gaze that it should now be quite easy to stay like this, and you should get a vague sense that your eyes are resting on your eyebrows, which helps hold your eyes up in place.

Now bring the focus of your eyes in slowly closer towards your forehead and the brow chakra, as though you're trying to focus on it. As you do this you'll find that your eyes will reach a point where you want to close them; then do so, leaving your eyes looking upwards in the rough direction of your Ajna chakra. Don't pull your gaze in too close, don't force anything about this. As soon

as you feel that your eyes want to close, let them, and do nothing more.

The important thing here is not to seek out something internal to focus your eyes on or to look for a position for them where you feel you're actually looking at your Ajna. Leave your eyes where they land when you first pull your focus in, and do your best to do nothing other than relax and get used to this position. Once you become stable, check your neck and shoulders in particular for tension, especially if you're high. Try and sit with this technique for short bursts, a few minutes at a time, until it starts to feel more natural.

Even without using music as I suggest, practising this technique whilst pointing metta towards your Ajna will usually give pleasant effects and good shifts in awareness. Imagine that you can gently blow a short, gentle whisper of breath and sincere metta into the chakra and see what effects that will create. Breathe as though you were trying to blow softly on the last dying embers of fire to make it spring back to life, neither too hard nor too soft. Try this same technique with all the other chakras and see what happens.

The Level Gaze

A third position - that of holding your eyes on a perfectly central level - is also used in some techniques, or again as a stand-alone meditation. With a level gaze, it's usual to focus on the empty space in front of you at particular focal distances, each of which can provide a good buzz when you relax into them whilst straight.

Try doing a bout of 'mindfulness of breathing' (see later), then sitting naturally with your eyes open and

focussed on any one of the distances below. If you have trouble focussing on empty space, you can practise these gazes at first by having objects set at the distances shown here. Once you get used to holding your eyes on these points, try the same thing with your eyes closed, avoiding letting yourself see through the points to whatever is beyond them:

- Five feet (1.5 metres)
- Three feet (0.9 metres)
- One foot (0.3 metres)
- Six inches (0.15 metres)

Try alternating the level gaze between looking off into the far distance for a few minutes and then looking at the six-inch focal distance, and see what happens to your mind. Again, this technique isn't one that you can just do instantly or expect immediate effects from, but as a tool to use in conjunction with other methods, learning to maintain a steady gaze like this is indispensable.

Practice with gazes will increase your sensitivity and have a cumulative effect. You might get your first buzz from a gaze, for example, then maybe another from a visualisation or two - and over time you'll find that the feelings and states of mind you can access are much deeper and occur almost instantly by using any one of a wide range of techniques.

The Ajna Eye Triangle

Whilst I'm talking about the various things that you can do with your eyes to get a buzz or create a mental state, here is a combination of a couple of different

techniques that I've had a lot of success with. It's in two stages, which you should find pretty easy to get along with if you've already done some experimentation with meditation and eye positions:

- 1) Begin by going through a full relaxation sequence, then sit with your eyes open once you're in a comfortable, receptive state. Look up slightly, raise your eyebrows and smile. Imagine/know that you have an eye in your forehead at the Ajna chakra. To increase the effect of this even further, imagine also that you can look from side to side with it, or up and down, feeling it move in the same way as your other eyes. See with it, know that it's there.
- 2) As soon as you have a good connection with this, relax into a steady level gaze. Now imagine that you're seeing with all three eyes (two real, one imaginary) at once, and that they make up the points of an equilateral triangle. Sit with this for as long as you feel comfortable.

Gazes and Attention

Once you get used to examining your mind, you may well notice that every movement of your eyes creates a break in your attention, or that a break in your attention is signified by a movement of your eyes. The reason for this is that some types of thought (such as remembering or imagining) can only usually occur if you look up, down, left or right at the same time. As soon as you look in one of these directions, your mind immediately loses

some contact with the present moment and allows you to become internalised to think more clearly about what it is you're trying to remember or imagine. If you can instead keep your eyes steady, then to some degree you're preventing thoughts from arising in your mind. Maintaining the correct eye position during meditation will also give an added strength to your ability to concentrate and will help you gain continuity of awareness, so I'll be explaining various gazes in more detail in a later chapter.

Although exploring the various gazes might sound very tame, they can cause some very deep and interesting effects in their own right. Meditation and exploration of consciousness are best practised using the simplest of techniques.

All eye positions tend to create a stopping of normal thought processes - *within* your normal thought processes - i.e. the 'stopping' is there if you want to take advantage of it, but you're still able to think if you want to instead. Some positions make you clear and internally focussed, others dreamy or externally focussed, and each may also give a blissful pleasure too. But note that eye positions can be used as a meditation in themselves, simply sitting with one and trying to stay with it without distraction for five or ten minutes. The effects are very subtle at first, but they do grow and it's worth exploring them as a good way to get used to this kind of mental work – and later, a steady eye-position is crucial in some techniques.

The first problem you'll find when you're practising any gaze, though, is that as soon as you try to control your eyes and hold them in one place, the more they seem to move. Your eye jiggles are actually connected to two things: your thoughts; and a feeling that you still

need to blink your eyelids, even if they're closed. Relaxing will dull the blink reflex, and stopping your eye movements will slow the proliferation of your thoughts. Relaxing your eyes and doing nothing will help stop this, whereas trying to control them by force will make them jiggle more. A very simple way of reducing eye jiggles in preparation for meditation is to spend five minutes or so at the start of each session just looking steadily and naturally at any object. Allow yourself to blink whilst you're doing this and try to keep your vision 'alive', still seeing what you're looking at.

In the mindfulness of breathing exercise it's very easy to accidentally allow yourself to become bound up in just trying to stop moving your eyes, forgetting what should be the real focus of your attention - your breathing. Put your eyes in the right position, relax and leave them there.



9

Meditation

Scientifically speaking, the benefits of meditation are impressive. There have been numerous studies that have looked at its physical and neurological effects, which show that meditation can help relieve a variety of conditions - including high blood pressure, respiratory problems, addiction, and chronic pain - whilst at the same time increasing creativity and work output.

Neuroscientist Jon Kabat-Zinn, Ph.D., of the University of Massachusetts Medical School has discovered that meditators move activity in their brains away from the stress-prone, right frontal cortex to the calmer, left frontal cortex. This decreases the negative effects of stress, mild depression and anxiety. There is also less activity in the amygdala, where the brain processes fear. In Kabat-Zinn's study, participants showed a pronounced shift in activity to the left frontal lobe, indicating that they were calmer and happier than before. Not only that, but meditators also found that they held on to the benefits of meditation, even after four months of stopping the practice.

An early study of meditation in 1972 showed that it actually lessens the biochemical by-products of stress, such as lactate, which in turn helps decrease heart rate and blood pressure in meditators.

Meditation also gives:

- Better sleeping patterns.
- Increased concentration and perception.
- Increased reaction time.
- Lower blood pressure and heart rate.
- An increase in the calming hormones, melatonin and serotonin.
- A decrease of the stress hormone, cortisol.

Long-term meditators experience 80 percent less heart disease and 50 percent less cancer than non-meditators.

So, what is it?

A lot of people, myself once included, have a deep scepticism of anything to do with meditation, and equate it with everything from yogic-flying to hours of belly-button staring and mumbling 'Auum!'; but meditation is a simple, logical process and not at all strange. Some people use it as a way to relax and yes, some people do it with the aim of reaching enlightenment and Buddhahood. You use it to suit your own needs and practise accordingly. I'm not trying to say, where it appears, that meditation's spiritual side has no meaning or importance. What I am saying is that meditation can still be of benefit to you in tens of ways, whether you want to follow that 'spiritual' inclination or not. Meditation is a powerful tool, something that anyone can learn and use to reach a calmer, happier mind in a matter of weeks. If meditation is regular (at least once a day) then the state it induces becomes semi-permanent.

But why?

I recently read a comment on a meditation blog, where the respondent said something along the lines of: “Meditators are deluding themselves. No matter how good they get at meditation, no matter how long they sit for, it's not going to make their worries or day-to-day problems go away. It's not much more than a temporary fix and is therefore a pointless waste of time...”

To be honest, nobody learns to meditate to make the real world somehow disappear so that they don't have to cope with it. Meditation changes the way you react to stress and makes life easier to deal with when things go wrong – it isn't meant to put you into a state where you aren't fully aware of your life any more. As for how long its effects last, the benefits of meditation continue over into your daily life too, making the lumps and bumps of work and relationships seem that much smaller and less stressful. Meditation isn't a temporary quick fix, but it is something that can elicit deep and lasting personal change.

If you want to get the best out of your highs and the later techniques, then I really would suggest taking up light, regular meditation; particularly as it draws everything together from the previous three sections, allowing you to practise all the main elements of reaching a good natural state at once.

These are deceptively simple practices, but don't think of them as being without immense potential, especially when you're high. This is where the exploration begins. From the first moment you start to explore your consciousness in the way that you're about to do, you're becoming ever more open to the possibility that things will happen.

What *is* meditation?

A 'correct' meditative state isn't a trance or a deep disconnection from the outside world – rather, it's a state of natural, calm awareness. You're alert and totally relaxed. Your attention might rest on an object or an idea, or just a sense of being here and now - without judgement or analysis.

Meditators aren't trying to stop their thoughts and sit blankly; they simply learn to redirect their attention onto one idea and have it stay there, rather than let it wander in the way that it usually does. Think of it as being like having a conversation with someone in a room where a lot of people are talking at the same time. It's relatively easy for you to tune out the voices you don't want to hear in favour of the one that you do - the other voices are still there, but you've just chosen not to listen to them. Likewise, all we do in the first stage of meditation is to develop the ability to focus our minds on a single idea or object, and just ignore (rather than trying to stop) any other perceptions that may come and go in our minds.

Because of the way that mindfulness works, the more we do naturally focus on a single object, the more that unwanted thoughts and distractions will weaken and eventually disappear by themselves.

Though in some meditation books the word 'concentration' is used to signify what you're doing in meditation, it isn't really an ideal description. Concentration brings to mind images of being tightly aware of something, whereas in meditation you're aware of the object of your meditation in a natural, alert way with no stress or tension whatsoever. Better to think of the awareness you are hoping to create as a simple, natural state of continual, unbroken *enjoyment* of the

focal object.

You can choose anything you like to use as the focus of meditation: walking, a pebble, a stick in the ground, imagined spheres of light, sounds, touch – anything. Here we'll use our breathing in a meditation exercise based on Calming Practice meditation ('shamatha'), which is usually the first stage of practice for meditators in most schools. The purpose of shamatha is to help you learn how to relax, how to be more mindful, and to train your mind so that you can stay calm and clear under just about any circumstances. This doesn't mean turning yourself into an unfeeling robot though; you're not learning how not to have emotions or normal responses. Shamatha is a tool, a way of gaining a quiet mind so that experiences are felt more deeply within it, not as a way of suppressing your character or feelings.

There may well be things here that with the best will in the world you won't get first time. And despite the fact that you're going to think that it's just you who can't do them, it really is exactly the same for every new meditator. Know too that every meditator has his or her off days - and sometimes off weeks and months as well. Usually the bad patch will pass all by itself, and you'll find as everybody does when this happens that suddenly your meditation has become all the better because of it. Remember, no matter how poorly you think you're doing, there are no bad meditation sessions. Every moment that you try to meditate you're helping to slow, stop and then reverse the process of internalisation that we all go through as we age - so it's all worth doing, whether you think you're doing it well or not.

Where We're Headed

The general idea in the following sections is simple; meditate for up to 20 minutes *before* getting high to give yourself a clearer, deeper high with less mind-chatter to interrupt your appreciation of it. Once the high is established and you're at, or over, its first peak (and not before, otherwise you might kill the high), you can then try one or more of the techniques in the later chapters.

Beginning

It's best to begin every meditation session by first going through a process of calming to prepare your mind for actual meditation, although in reality the calming period is just as much a part of the meditation as is what follows. Just sitting calmly is both the introduction to *and the goal of* this kind of meditation: a state of non-doing, where you just sit and be aware of the moment in a purely natural, happy, and unforced way. When you do sit like this, reality is indescribably...*'more'*. High, it's even better.

Don't think about the calming stage as a time when you should be getting ready to meditate, becoming determined and ready for action. Anything you do at this point and any attitudes you take on - determination, strong intent, even piety - are only adding to the thoughts already going on in your mind. This should instead be a stage of pure non-doing to allow thoughts to subside; and you can't reach a state of non-doing by doing. The logic is simple - you can't make muddy water clear by mixing it. Clarity of mind can only come when you leave the mind in its natural state.

Also, avoid thinking of the meditation session as work

or a challenge, and instead equate it with a state of relaxation, rest and escape. Tell yourself at the beginning of each session that the time you sit to meditate is your own, that it's the place where you allow yourself to drop all unwanted thoughts about the world outside. With practice, you can quickly build up a subconscious association that meditation is pleasant, to the point where as soon as you sit or approach the time to meditate you begin to relax and feel happier. You are in complete control of this internal environment and how you choose to think and feel whilst in it. It's just a matter of whether you allow yourself to exercise that control or not.

Most of all, learn to enjoy this period of sitting doing nothing. There is no better way to reach an ideal meditative state than to just feel happy and aware. Meditation at all stages should be a pleasant experience.

Don't worry if it seems to make your thoughts proliferate at first. It's common for novice meditators to become very aware of just how busy their minds really are when they first begin, and things can seem to get worse before they get better. You shouldn't expect to be able to reach a state of 100% total clarity and freedom from distracting thoughts during your early attempts at meditation - aim instead for a mere slowing of the mind and a general movement away from day-to-day worries into an awareness of this moment. If I had to pick one word that would describe the mental state you should be aiming for at this point - and for the entire meditation session - it would be 'chilled'.

Mindfulness of Breathing

During the following shamatha (focussing) exercise

'mindfulness of breathing', you have a choice of meditating with your eyes either half-open or closed. In both cases, allow your eyes to settle on a point looking down past the tip of your nose, about six inches' distance from it.

Although for the best results it would be helpful for you to sit in a proper meditative posture (which I explain in the Appendix), don't worry too much about that for now - just find somewhere quiet where you can sit for a while without anything supporting your back.

Sitting in the right posture for meditation isn't just about finding a way to sit comfortably. Some of the elements of correct body, eye and tongue position can also create 'hits' that you can use to enter into a clear, calm state more quickly. These hits are extremely useful and if you're fairly mindful, you'll feel them coming on the second you get your head and spine into the correct position, altering your mood in a very positive way. Simply holding yourself correctly (as though you were feeling very positive) when you're sitting in front of the TV or walking around outside, for example, can give you strong feelings of confidence and well-being.

If you're prone to depression, just working on posture and mindfulness can help enormously. High, they give a very pleasant buzz that you can sustain for the full length of sitting. No matter which technique you're experimenting with, all of them will benefit from being practised whilst sitting in a proper posture.

The Exercise

- 1) Sit up straight, nice and relaxed. Try to breathe low in your stomach rather than up in your chest; lower breathing is far more beneficial and relaxing.
- 2) Turn your attention towards your breathing, the sensations that every breath creates at the edges of your nostrils. Don't allow your mind to be aware of the rise and fall of your chest or abdomen as part of the breathing process, just stay naturally aware of the rim of each nostril and how it's affected by your breath. Begin very gently, being casually aware of your breathing; then slowly mentally 'approach' where the breath is held as a sensation in your mind until you feel you can be aware of it fairly clearly. Don't try to control your breathing in any way, just be an observer with no involvement in the actual quality of your breathing. Each time a thought comes into your head don't try to stop it, just return your mind to your breathing.

Your tendency at first will be to set up an awareness of your breathing; then, with this awareness still half held, you begin to think about other things at the same time. You can easily fool yourself into thinking that you're still exclusively aware of your breathing if you do this. Remember that you're aiming to be aware just of your breath and perhaps a vague sense of thoughts coming and going in the back of your mind.

- 3) Continue to just 'look' at your breath in an alert, clear and dispassionate way, without trying to

increase or alter the way it already appears to your mind. Doing nothing to it will allow it to grow in your perceptions, making it 'bigger' and easier to hold onto.

- 4) Once you're comfortable with the above and can feel your breathing clearly, try to be aware of each moment-to-moment sensation of it even more closely, but without grasping. Stay as natural as you can, but at the same time clearly focussed on the present moment and your immediate perceptions.
- 5) You may find at first that, although you can focus on your breathing for a few seconds at a time, joining up these short periods of focus into minutes is very hard. But don't worry, it's hard for everyone, even for people who've been meditating a long time. Stick with it and you'll find it really does get easier if you can find the opportunity to practise regularly.

*Watch out for fixing your awareness on just your nose, with only secondary awareness of your actual breath as it passes through your nostrils. Your breathing is an ever-changing thing that you're trying to follow from moment to moment - whereas your awareness of your nostrils is 'fixed'. A fixed object is an easier target for our awareness and is less effective as a focus for meditation as it's much easier to lose, we just drift off with a vague sense of being aware of our nostrils - that's not really meditation at all. **NOTE: the difference between using a fixed focus and a constantly changing one (a candle's flame, sound, breathing, reality itself, etc.) is***

quite marked and leads to two different kinds of states of awareness. Explore both.

- 6) After a few minutes, try to increase the length of the periods that you're fully and continually aware of your breathing. Begin by trying to be aware of one full in-breath and out-breath, without your mind being diverted to other thoughts; then two, and so on. This is much harder than it might seem, especially when you reach the moments between inhalation and exhalation when there is no 'object' for you to focus your attention on. At these times, don't change what you're doing or look for something else to be aware of; just try to stay relaxed and steady until the next breathing stage begins.

Coping with the between-breath stage is of particular importance: after regular practice, you'll often find that the gaps between breaths can become quite lengthy - or even that you reach points where breathing seems to stop altogether for a couple of minutes.

- 7) Once you start to feel relatively settled, try less hard to focus on your breathing. As I explained earlier with mindfulness, trying to concentrate harder and harder on anything won't help you stay focussed on it. Let your grip on your breathing relax – and you should find that it instantly becomes much easier to stay with comfortably.
- 8) Continue in this way for as long as you feel happy to do so without straining your mind, making sure that your awareness of your breathing is neither too loose nor too tight. You're trying to achieve

continuity and 'smoothness' of awareness with this exercise, which will eventually allow you to stay steadily with the focus for up to ten minutes at a time.

Most people will find when they're doing something like this that thoughts still appear in their minds, even when they practise regularly, and they think that they're not meditating properly because of it. But here we're not trying to shut out all other perceptions apart from those of your breathing. For your meditation session to have been successful doesn't mean that you have to have reached and sustained a state where all thinking has stopped. Stray thoughts will always come into your mind with this kind of method as it's an exercise in directing awareness towards a single idea or object, not in suppressing thinking. Non-conceptuality may well come about, but it isn't what you're trying to develop at this point.

Try to avoid measuring the success of any meditation work by the effects you think you've created or by the depth of concentration you've reached. Thinking like this creates goals and expectations which, simply because of the ever-changing nature of the mind, you can never fulfil. If meditation helps you even slightly reverse your growing loss of awareness, or gives you the least escape from stress and worries, then there's no need to look for anything more.

Touch

If you're at a loose end and want to do a quick meditation exercise to help work on your focus and

continuity, your sense of touch is very useful. Simply touch the tip of your thumb to any of your fingertips on the same hand, and try to stay steadily aware of the point where they meet. You could of course just as easily touch a finger to your leg or palm – or even just be aware of any sensations coming and going in any part of your body. Try it both with eyes open for a while, then with your eyes closed, and see if you can feel any differences in the quality of your attention.

However, static foci like touch aren't as effective as a changing focus is. With a static object, it's very easy for you to drift in and out of full attention without realising it, as your mind won't be able to sustain the same freshness towards it as it would if you were using something that changes from moment to moment. A 'moving' object like the breath gives you something to judge every second of awareness against – and its changing nature is more interesting to your mind and thus easier to remain aware of. It will help therefore if you change hands and/or fingers regularly to counteract any lethargy that might arise using touch.

Levels of Awareness

Although those seeking enlightenment tend to practise focussing exercises like mindfulness of breathing until they gain 'single-pointed awareness' (sustained awareness of an object with hardly any effort), you only need to use the technique to create a reasonably steady mental calm. Any deeper and it makes us too fixed in the meditative state of mind, and then we could block out the sensations of the high by not letting them enter our consciousness.

If you're meditating without wanting to get high, then

of course it pays to develop your skills until you can reach one-pointedness. But again, meditation isn't useless if you can't get that far; reaching any calm state is enough for most people and once there, you need do nothing but sit naturally, without meditating, within that calm for as long as you can. Ultimately there is no better meditation than non-meditation.

As just a guideline rather than a goal that you must set yourself to reach, I've listed below a largely Buddhist description of the nine levels of concentration that you might pass through as you meditate over the coming weeks:

- 1) **Mind Placement** - This stage is said to be reached when you can stay with the focus object for about 21 breaths. Your attention is rough, but you can maintain a reasonably steady focus on your object. Your attention still wanders quite dramatically from time to time, and it takes a little while for you to re-establish proper awareness afterwards.
- 2) **Continual Focussing** – Your attention is now steadier, but you still need to apply antidotes regularly to avoid grasping and lethargy. Getting back to the object after your mind wanders is easier and can be done quite quickly, leading to less breaks in concentration.
- 3) **Patch-like Concentration** – Your focus is now quite steady and even, with very few breaks. As soon as thoughts happen you are instantly aware of them, and you allow them to fade spontaneously by not following them.

- 4) **Close Focussing** – Your mind stays on the object almost without effort. At this point all you will tend to be aware of is the object itself – in meditation terms, mind and object have become almost inseparable. Because it is almost effortless, it can be tempting to just let things happen and let yourself drift into daydreams. Avoid this by applying the right antidote, but ONLY when necessary.
- 5) **Taming** – Your focus remains bright and natural, with you applying antidotes at suitable points so that you can get beyond problems of lethargy and dullness.
- 6) **Pacifying** – Any small remaining agitations are dealt with by subtly applying contentment, receptivity and metta.
- 7) **Total Pacification** – Problems with dullness and agitation no longer occur.
- 8) **Single-Pointed Concentration** – The object remains in focus with total clarity for as long as you want.
- 9) **Focussing with Equanimity** - The highest level of concentration, regarded as being the full attainment of calming practice. There is only the focus object, with no evaluation of any kind. Awareness is self-sustaining.

Antidotes

Drowsiness is pretty much your worst enemy in meditation, but luckily there are tools ('antidotes' in Buddhism) available to help you, some of which I explain

below. When you start to feel that you're slipping back from full awareness in meditation, you can apply any of the following techniques to help you back towards a temporarily fuller clarity. Don't overdo them or apply them when you really don't need to though - it's pointless and won't help. Any of the following can be used alone or in conjunction with another antidote:

- Raising your eyebrows slightly introduces an increased awareness that can sometimes be just enough to put your mind back fully on your focus object.
- Widening your eyes slightly helps too. Looking as if you're surprised at something helps you be more aware of it. Your 'surprise' should be slight and only as much as you can balance by being equally receptive and warm towards your meditation focus.
- Look at the room around you as though you've never seen it before. Be taken by that extra level of detail that you'd normally miss, for a minute or so. Remind yourself that the things around you are actually here and now in the same time frame as you are. This IS now. This might seem very strange, but this affirmation isn't something that you would ever normally do. You subconsciously know that you're here yourself, but the outside world is very easy to leave behind. Doing a practice like this can increase the mental connection between you and the outside world, deepening your attention and mindfulness.
- Smile. Smiling adds greater focus, increases relaxation and adds a high to your meditation.

Receptivity & Contentment

If you're in a relatively clear and mindful state, saying (for example) 'patience' or 'contentment' to yourself generates the emotions and some of the physical states associated with patience and contentment. You might think that just saying words to yourself like this can't possibly have any effect at all, but subconsciously every word you use conjures up sets of images, associations and meanings. When you think or speak such words, they can't help but create some semblance in you of the feelings and qualities connected with those words - if you're in a receptive enough state. In every day conversations this effect is hardly noticeable, but if you *are* in a calm enough condition with not too many other thoughts getting in the way, it can be pronounced enough to make a real difference to your frame of mind.

If you say words to yourself that are associated with the state you're trying to reach (calm, relaxation, etc.) within a meditation session, they can make meditation much more settled and lastingly effective. It can help to imagine looking at someone else who is experiencing the quality that you're mentally trying to create. What expression do they have? What posture do they have? Empathise with them, wear their minds as your own. At first you'll feel (maybe as with trying to generate metta) that what you're doing is false and that the pretence itself gets in the way of it being a real emotion. Don't worry, it's like this for everyone at first.

Times

Your first meditation session will preferably take

place early in the morning when the full weight of your responsibilities for that day have not yet become the main focus of your mind. We all have a tendency to wake up fresh and happy (or at least briefly worry-free), and then lay in bed for a while bringing all our problems back to mind. By the time you actually get out of bed you're likely to be so bound up with these thoughts that you're no longer aware of anything except them. Instead, once you get up try to allow yourself some time before you begin to examine the day ahead. Sit and rest for a few minutes, even if you don't have time to meditate.

I've found that there's usually quite a long period some mornings before I get up, when I'm just lying there trying not to go back to sleep. So that I don't use this time to wind myself up about all the things I have to do in the day ahead, I try to focus on my breathing for twenty-one breaths. Though that should be easy enough considering my experience in meditation, it can sometimes take me quite a few attempts to get anywhere past ten breaths. But I've found that any practice at this point, successful or not, really changes how I feel for the next few hours. Try it yourself and see if it helps you start the day with much more clarity.

How regularly you meditate is of course up to you, but it's better to do a short session every day rather than a long one every now and again. Beginners should aim to sit for about ten minutes at a time, extending this as they become more adept to about twenty minutes. One session a day is good, but two will have three times the value, the cumulative effect is that much greater. If you can do twenty minutes in the morning before work and the same in the evening before your evening meal, then your progress will be that much faster.

For people with lots of time to practise, I'd suggest

short sessions of around fifteen minutes each, four or five times a day - but don't try to do too much Shamatha/focussing practice alone, or it'll work against you and make you become emotionally flat and over-grasping. There is a lot to do and remember at first, but after regular practice a lot of the things you have to put into your meditation will only take a moment or two to apply.



10

Just Sitting

'Just sitting' is, in a sense, the culmination of meditation practice. If you didn't take the opportunity to sit in whatever mental stability you'd generated after meditation, you'd be like a sprinter who constantly did stretching and toning exercises but never actually ran.

Meditation, in terms of traditional focussing exercises like mindfulness of breathing, is really just the preliminary to simply sitting quietly in the moment, letting your senses remain natural and your mind be free of thoughts. Of course, trying to sit in 'non-doing' like this can be hard sometimes, but by practising meditation regularly and learning to identify calm, steady awareness, you'll be able to reach it more and more quickly as time goes on. It is after all a natural state that we lapse into when we're waiting in queues or are just sitting on a park bench in the sun. Don't assume that there must be more to it than this very natural condition. Simple as it is, once sitting in non-doing is reached, it can be the point where many people feel their first shifts in awareness, suddenly seeing the present moment clearly for the first time in years. Being high in this condition can be remarkable.

Although sitting 'chilling' is an excellent form of

meditation in itself, I have to stress that by this I don't mean a session of sitting daydreaming, but a period of sitting not doing anything with your mind at all, just letting it rest without altering awareness in ANY way.

One of the main problems with trying to do nothing is that your brain will *always* want to do more. You get into a good stable state of clarity or focus and you start to think, "Okay, I've got that, now what's next?" as you wait for something special to happen. But there is no next. Drop the waiting and the idea that there always has to be more to do. If everything is in place you're doing all you need to be doing. Spontaneous transcendental experiences are far more common than you might think, and will usually happen when someone is in a very natural state, just like this. In a key Dzogchen Buddhist text called 'The Tantra Without Letters', it says that:

"Resting in the ground of immediate perception of sensory appearances is the ground underlying all great visions."

There is an idea that meditators are trying to focus increasingly more deeply, closing themselves off from reality; but although some forms of meditation might do that, it isn't necessary for the methods I explain here. Simplicity, and staying in a natural state, are really all you need as a ground to successfully practise the main techniques I write about later. A *naturally* calm and happy mind is just as good a ground for events as any we can hope to contrive through meditation. The ability to just sit and be in the moment, and feel good about it and yourself is an important natural state to cultivate. It's a place, almost an emotion in its own right, and there's no doubt that it's beneficial in many ways to develop it and learn to stay within it.

The problem is that busy people usually don't notice naturally clear awareness as they pass through it, or don't get a chance to relax into it when they do; and it's a sad case of 'if you don't use it, you lose it'. You stop being able to find your way back to what might even have been your natural way to be when you were younger. Your relaxed and happy dudeness can easily be completely (and sometimes irrevocably) replaced by an over-wound, sleep-deprived bundle of nerves - just because you can't find your way back to the person you once were. You simply forget how it feels to be normal and happy.

Your mind has to be allowed to relax at regular periods during the day, just as much as any other part of your body does. The more often you do it, the more you'll notice how much clearer and more welcoming the world is when you do. As long as you're able to create a small push of metta and direct it at your solar plexus if you start to feel flat, this chilled and relaxed feeling will stay with you - and you can learn to lengthen it, to the extent where it becomes your natural way of being, without being contrived by you.

Some days you might be able to go straight to a calm state and sit within it, without needing to meditate at all - and some days only meditation will get you there. But no matter how busy your mind is when you start to practise, see if you can first move into calmness by just relaxing and doing nothing for a while. If you can, then obviously you can stay with that, simply alternating it with occasional focussing on your breathing (or whatever other object you're using) if your calmness slips into drowsiness or proliferating thoughts.

The Meditation Session

Once you get the hang of all the ideas we've talked about so far, a meditation session will go something like this:

- 1) Sit and get used to being where you are. Relax. Let your mind become open to the outside world and the infinite space around yourself. Don't go inwards and focus solely on what you feel. Expand outwards in a relaxed and natural way, be mindful.
- 2) Begin by going through the ascending relaxation sequence once, then do a second pass - this time imagining that each point contains a star, as I explained earlier.
- 3) If you can generate metta, direct it towards your solar plexus and, if you can, the world around yourself as well. Remember that this isn't just for the sake of you being a nice, caring person but to increase your ability to remain calm and clear.
- 4) Try to stay in this relaxed state for at least five minutes and let your mind calm in preparation for meditation. Do nothing. Don't meditate, control, wonder, wait, think or not think. Be effortless.
- 5) Do the mindfulness of breathing exercise for as long as you feel comfortable – but NOT to excess.
- 6) When you feel that your mind is relatively calm, enter the 'just sitting' phase. Don't meditate, control, wonder, wait, think or not think. Be effortless.
- 7) Should you find that your mind starts to become

too active again in this phase, return to a short session of mindfulness of breathing until it calms down again.

8) Do nothing, but remain aware.

9) Do less, but remain aware.

10) Repeat stages 6, 7, 8 and 9 at will.

However, even this scheme is idealised to some extent. In reality, most meditation sessions will have you moving constantly between generating metta, relaxation and mindfulness, and just sitting - but it's fine to do whatever it takes to keep you in a nice steady state.

Finishing

Whether you choose to just stick with mindfulness of breathing, or to go on to develop it into 'just sitting', it's not really going to help you to prolong the calm you've just created if you finish a session then leap up straight away to face the outside world head-on again. Once you've finished meditating, stay with simple and undemanding tasks for an hour or so afterwards if you can. Try going for a walk rather than reading or watching TV – and avoid creative pursuits like the plague. Unfortunately, being creative is the absolute antithesis of the desired meditative and post-meditative states, as there isn't anything that makes thoughts proliferate more than when you're trying to juggle ideas. If you have to be creative, it's better to do it after your session rather than before. Trying to calm a mind made busy by creativity is very hard and will prevent you from meditating properly; being creative *after* a session will just cut the effects of the meditation short.

Go back gently into the world. Be mindful and warm (generate metta) towards yourself and your surroundings. It will take time for you to reach a point where you can keep this state going for very long once you've stopped meditating, but changes should become apparent in how you feel – and the way you are aware - even after as little as two weeks of regular practice.

Waitaminnit!!!

In essence, what you've just read through is a very condensed introduction to meditation and many of its more complex facets. It's a lot of information to take in at once, so let's step back for a second and consider what you've learned and what the purpose of it all is. Remember that although I stress the benefits of these exercises at different times with reference to, say, how it helps your mind or the high, *all* of these techniques enhance both mind and the high whether that's stipulated or not.

- **Mindfulness** - Practising mindfulness brings your awareness into the present moment so that you can experience perceptions – and in particular for us, the high - far more clearly.
- **Metta** - Being able to direct metta towards any perception makes it more enjoyable, including the high. It also helps you 'lock on' more easily to whatever you're using as a focus for your meditation. Generating metta is also calming, and when directed towards any tension in the chakras or points caused by cannabis anxiety, it will reduce

or even completely remove those tensions.

- **Relaxation** – Helps slow thoughts, is useful for reducing cannabis anxiety and, as is true for all of the above, enhances your general quality of life.
- **Meditation** - Is a way of consolidating and strengthening the effects of the above, leading to a more permanent state of enhanced awareness and receptivity to your highs.

With the above basic skills under your belt you can begin to explore your consciousness a lot more effectively. If you're an explorer of consciousness, of any drug (particularly entheogens), this is the place to start every journey from. Balanced, natural awareness (a 'baseline' state) is like a sheet of glass compared to most of our normal states of mind and just like during a good high, when we're in it our perceptions become greatly enhanced.

Taking A Break From Meditation

All meditators without exception get days, or weeks even, when nothing at all seems to work. Usually it's because they're practising too hard and not giving over enough time to balancing any accidental over-grasping with receptivity and metta. You have a good session, then because of this on the next session your attention is too strong, you grasp too hard at your focal object and it becomes 'slippery' and impossible to hold on to with any degree of stability. Always remember that the more often you practise, the more gentle you have to be when you do.

But sometimes even that isn't enough to get you back on track, and your meditation might seem cold and without any sense of progress or pleasure. It's at times like these that it can be better to stop practising for a while instead of forcing yourself to try and sit. Even when you've been meditating for years you can benefit a lot from having a break from practice for a day or so. I've met quite a few meditators who have become locked into doing months of tight mindfulness and hours of focussing techniques, scared to miss a session in case they take a step backward in ability. Usually meditation isn't going well for them precisely because of this constant practice. Allow yourself regular days off to help avoid getting caught in a rut. Step back and get some perspective on what you're doing; you should find practice much easier afterwards if you do.

If you take too long a break then of course you will begin to lose some of the abilities you've gained, and you might have to go back a step or two to re-learn them. But don't worry, every meditator has to go right back to basics many, many times to sort out problems of technique. I personally have started all over again on at least half a dozen occasions. This is just how it is, so if you have to start at square one again for any reason, don't be too hard on yourself.

If you can practise the things here regularly each day, then that could mean that you'll start to get good changes in your awareness after just the first couple of weeks. It really depends on how much time you put into it all. If you have a full day free, try doing a session for fifteen or twenty minutes, then stop for up to an hour, then do another session. You'll be surprised how much easier things are when you come back for the second session. If you have the time for, say, three sessions in a

day – perhaps twenty minutes to half an hour in the morning, ten to fifteen minutes at lunch time, and fifteen to twenty minutes at night, then you'll progress quite rapidly. And we're still only talking about meditating for less than an hour a day in total.

Summing Up

You might have gathered by now that the real meditative state, and the optimum state of awareness that you should ideally be in as you live your life, is actually very natural. No big techniques, no chanting or staring at things for hours on end. Just your own ordinary awareness, relaxed and happy without any effort or desire to chase thoughts. Your eyes are open, you're seeing and hearing very naturally, but you're not following any ideas or analysing what you're perceiving, it all just happens 'around you'. You don't try to ignore what you see and hear, you do nothing but be aware. There's a phrase that's used in some Tibetan traditions that describes the optimum state of awareness and relaxation as "sitting like an old man basking in the sun." This really does sum it all up. No intent or desire to go anywhere or do anything else other than to just sit and enjoy wherever you are at that precise moment. If you ever consider walking the path to enlightenment, this simple state is one that you'll come back to time and again as the key mental platform for a host of techniques.

The problem is that throughout each day we all constantly move in and out of natural awareness, going between being totally internalised and day-dreamy to being too highly focussed. We also vary tremendously in levels of relaxation and the type of mood we're in from

moment to moment. If you could draw a baseline for all these three elements - awareness, mood and relaxation - a middle point where you were relaxed, happy and aware all at the same time, most people would be lucky for it to happen even once in any average day. There's simply too much going on in our lives for it to occur naturally. But with practice anyone can train themselves to reach the baseline more easily, and to stay there. Those who do are happier, the world around them is far more 'here' and vibrant - and even time seems to pass more slowly for them.

Expect your first few attempts at this to be hard. Unless you're lucky enough to be the sort of person who can do these things naturally, you're fighting an uphill battle against a lifetime of *not* trying to stop your mind doing whatever it wants to do. Some days practice is easy, some days it's impossible - but that's how it is for all of us. Accept that's the way it is, rather than thinking that you've failed in any particular session because you didn't feel that you'd become clearer or that you focussed very well. It's better to have sat and tried than not to have tried at all, and as I said earlier, all practice is beneficial.

And High...

If you want to get high but are feeling a bit wound up, try a session of meditation with all the usual preliminaries - working on relaxation, mindfulness and metta - to help draw yourself closer to a happier, more mindful state beforehand. Even if you feel great already, with the right mental 'ground' in place to get high within, you'll then feel every bit of the rise into it much more clearly. You then just continue to sit and do nothing but

experience being high, or you can try the later exercises to see what states and effects you can create. I don't suggest for one second that we all sit like lemons for hours on end like this, but this simple, natural state is a goldmine for mental exploration.



Techniques



11

The Sphere of Awareness

Meditation can be much easier practised outdoors, as it gives a sense of mental expansiveness which is useful in helping to reach higher states. Getting high outside can also sometimes lead to spontaneous experiences of connectedness and being of infinite size, or just a deeper and less mentally restricted sense of reality.

The idea of generating an open, expansive feeling is extremely important for those who meditate regularly. If you're practising a lot, meditation leads to its own kind of internalisation, where you tend to be solely focussed on yourself and having experiences. This is fine, we want to be aware of what might happen to us as closely as possible - but an important part of meditation, if you want to try for glimpses of enlightenment, is developing a sense of the size of the universe, and allowing yourself to open up to those feelings outside 'me'. It usually needs a little cultivation, as it's not what most people are even thinking to look for, but it can be brought out in every high once you know how it feels.

The following is a good way to combine everything we've touched upon so far, and will help you enter into a

particular frame of mind that's a mixture of meditation and natural sitting which is extremely beneficial.

First, imagine that your awareness, your sense of self, is a sphere; how big is it? Head-sized? Body-sized?

Most people's answer to this question is usually somewhere between the size of an orange and something that extends to about six inches around their heads – though for some lucky people, their sphere is without limits. Why lucky? Because oddly enough, how big this sphere is has a profound effect on how you feel, and how able you are to cope with problems and the outside world in general. This is something you can experiment with for yourself, comparing the size of your sphere when you're either relaxed or stressed.

Small Sphere people:

Feel pressured by the presence of other people, of their movement and noise. They feel like a little ball of energy that is constantly buffeted around by other balls of energy. They feel that things are happening too quickly for them and are more likely to worry, feel self-conscious and under stress.

Large Sphere people:

Have larger personal spaces, so the presence of other people is not an intrusion – other people are actually incorporated into their sphere as a matter of course so can't intrude. They're more fully aware of their immediate environment, they react more quickly, they are more relaxed and much more likely to be happy and well-adjusted.

Everyone's sphere of awareness expands and contracts throughout the day. It can be shrunk in size by stress, illness, fear, a lack of confidence, and even the size of room we're sitting in. Conversely, under the right circumstances, it's expanded by the opposites of those things. In some cases, our shrinking sphere is an obvious mental contraction away from things that may threaten to hurt us or have already hurt us - and of course it's an understandable reaction. But if we don't know a way to get back to normal outward awareness after this contraction, then we're going to stay permanently stuck on feeling pressured by something that may have long since disappeared.

If we make a regular effort to make sure that our sphere is relaxed and at a normal size then we can overcome permanent contraction, and be less likely to respond to stresses by immediately drawing ourselves inwards when we're under threat, trying to make ourselves smaller, mentally and physically.

Learning to expand into natural awareness really isn't just for those people who feel pressured or stressed. Even if you feel incredibly well adjusted and happy, this natural state is an experience of freedom and relaxation that everyone should know how to reach. Happy as they may be, even the spheres of contented individuals can easily be shrunk to minuscule size simply by spending too much time indoors.

Indoors, outdoors - what's the difference? Inside, we feel the presence of the walls around ourselves at a subconscious level, and the state that this induces is far from a natural way of being. We feel the limiting presence of walls and ceilings, and we contract our awareness inwards in response. We've got no need to be mindful and alert if we're in that safe little box we call

our office - what would be the point? No threats, except perhaps via the odd paper cut, so we switch off most of our external awareness, and thus grow more and more deeply internalised. It's a natural enough reaction, but the problem is that any protracted contraction of awareness leads to feelings of negativity and emotional fatigue.

Being in small or constricting offices means feeling small and constricted. After just a few weeks of being in restrictive surroundings, we can totally lose full perceptive contact with reality, mindfulness and metta. Feeling pressured by the limitations of our environment, we can also develop an irrational sense of being imprisoned and mentally stymied, and 'cabin-fever' – the desire to throw that sheaf of papers in the air and run screaming from the building - is all too common in today's office culture.

You might read the above and think that you *do* go outside sufficiently in your average day. You maybe drive to work and back, have lunch outside a local bistro, go shopping, and you even have a nice picture window in your office from where you can watch the ducks on a nearby pond; but are you really *in* and a part of this outside reality when you're doing any of these things?

No. When you're shopping or at the bistro, you're still restricted and limited by your surroundings as the average high street or restaurant will usually surround you with more walls, people and bustle than you'd usually experience than when you were inside. When you're driving too, the box you're sitting in is even smaller than the house or office you've emerged from. At your office's picture window - and in your car - you're looking out at the world through a glass barrier and still being prevented from experiencing reality directly, as a

part of the world that you're looking at. Unless we go regularly to places out of doors where there are no physical restrictions around us and few (or no) other people, our sphere of awareness cannot help but be diminished - and this is very much to our detriment.

About now, somebody at the back will raise a tentative hand and ask, "I walk my dog every evening, and I play golf on Saturdays. Is that enough?" And the answer is that it all depends on what you're thinking at the time and whether you're really here, now, as you're doing these things? If you're playing golf, just enjoying the country air and not thinking at all about work or any other kind of problem, that's great - although the fact that you are playing golf, or have a dog with you, will divert your mind from reality somewhat, making it a slightly lesser experience. But it's certainly better than hardly going outside at all, and will help avoid this problem a lot.

In general, most of us *will* need to practise expanding our spheres of awareness, and to experience first hand what an immense difference there is between being inside and being outside in a wide-open space. Once we have recognised this quality then we can maintain it more easily, and return to it more quickly when we do lose it.

Stepping out the door...

Okay, you step out into the daylight – what do you feel? Depending on how deeply the pressure of being inside is ingrained into you, the outside world might unfold around you slowly, quickly, or not at all. But what do you feel in terms of the differences between being inside and being outside? If you've gone from a quiet

office out into a busy street you might experience more pressure, not less, by suddenly becoming aware of the noise and movement around you. If you've been in a small or busy office though, and are walking out into peace and sunshine, you might feel suddenly spacious, like a weight has been lifted from your head and eyes. Examine your awareness when you're out of doors: do you actually feel the lack of walls around yourself? Do you feel any lighter and less restricted in some hard to describe way?

On this front, you'll quickly find that words are almost entirely redundant and that only your continuing experiences whilst trying to reach and remain in this state will help to further explain it. There are no terms that can describe the range of sensations you may go through as you explore this aspect of your awareness; though bear in mind the sense of increased roundness and presence that reality may gain as you practise mindfulness and metta. Try to see how objects feel to you, how your sight becomes more all-encompassing and how welcoming things around yourself can become.

If you sit in front of a computer screen all day, or work somewhere where your maximum focal distance is no more than ten feet or so, the first thing you might notice on going outside is that although you can see at a distance perfectly well, *what* you see has that 'through a window' unreality about it. It's not quite here, not quite real. This is especially pronounced if you've spent a lot of time being very visually focussed on work, over-attention to which will make you strongly mindful and over-grasping, narrowing your field of normal sight to, say, a few feet around yourself. As I explained earlier in the chapters on mindfulness, the more you focus on one thing, the more of the rest of reality around its periphery

you lose.

If you have practised the above and looked for the differences between inside and outside awareness, I hope that you'll now try the following exercise as a way of helping to make that sense of freedom that you felt a permanent part of your psyche. For those of you for whom the 'inside' has been your world for more years than you care to remember, returning to outer awareness can be hard to reach - I have to be honest. For you to have any success you have to be relaxed, lightly and naturally mindful, happy and free of intent – which is a tall order for most to achieve on their first couple of outings. Getting it might take ten minutes on day one, or two hours on day ten, but trying to get it has to be far, far better for you than not trying at all.

Remember, you're aiming to regain a very natural state, one that the average farmer or market gardener might experience every day of their life to his or her own betterment. It requires no effort, just application and an understanding of what you're trying to achieve.

The Exercise

Ideally, to do the following you should go somewhere well away from buildings and other people, some place that also has a wide view over the surrounding area, as on a seaside cliff-top or a hill in the country. You **MUST** be alone and minus phone and laptop, as the presence of these and other people (and even your own car) will change the experience, even if they're some distance away from you.

The first thing you're going to need to do is to make sure that you're not battling against low blood sugar, as

there's nothing that has a more negative impact on your attempt to regain a full outer awareness. Have a sandwich or an ice-cream as you sit, and do as little as possible for a good ten minutes after you've eaten it. Nothing. No really - not calling anyone and telling them what you're doing, no work, no thinking about things, no effort, as you watch the world going on around yourself.

After about ten minutes of the above, begin to do a little gentle relaxation and generation of metta. For some the ice-cream and a sit will be all they need to help gain the kind of mind we're looking for. They'll sigh, stretch out on the bench and see - really see - the world around themselves fully. For others it'll take a little more work, but although the technique below might sound drawn out and complicated, it's just a set of 'cliff notes' - reminders of things you'll probably already know from what we've talked about earlier - which can be run through very quickly.

Expanding Your Sphere

STAGE ONE:

- 1) Smile, what's not to smile about? Forget whether or not you think you have a reason to do it - just smile, raise your eyebrows a little, and point metta gently at your solar plexus. Make certain that you are actually being aware of your solar plexus and not the point two inches above it, as that will counteract what you're trying to do.
- 2) Make sure too that none of this is disturbing your relaxation - check around your eyes again and maybe even do another quick run through the ascending sequence, just to make sure. Let go of everything, just

like you're flopping down onto a bed. No effort. No preparation for what you're about to do. Don't get ready for this, get *not* ready. It's something you're going to relax into rather than work towards.

3) Now introduce a little more metta to give that relaxation a more pleasant quality. Point the feelings you have for your dog, cat or SO, imagining that whatever you've chosen is actually in your solar plexus for you to feel good towards.

4) Once you feel you're generating even a little bit of metta, start pointing it alternately between yourself for a little while (either towards your whole body or just your solar plexus) and anything you can see around you. If there's a nice tree or a distant cloud, be warm towards it - like it, enjoy it. This will obviously increase the metta coming back in at you and will also make you more outwardly aware too, which will help fix you into natural outward mindfulness and the kind of state you're looking for. Make sure you're still relaxed, raise your eyebrows a little and smile again – and you're there, stage one. You've prepared your body to allow your mind to relax.

STAGE TWO:

5) Now relax your face, particularly around your eyes, and forget the smile for now. Let your jaw sag a little without opening your mouth. Look up at the world and *just* look at it. Relax and let it in, as though it's something projecting towards you. DO NOTHING. Don't try to meditate or control your mind, trying to force it not to think. It has to stay just as natural as if you were idly looking up at a bird in the sky. Forget your awareness and whether you're thinking or not, just be outwardly aware and thoughts will slow by

themselves. Look at things without trying to lock your attention on them - you don't need to do anything except see what you're seeing.

6) As the danger at this point is that by trying to do nothing you might also reduce your natural awareness of the outside world, it's a good idea to give your attention a little push to compensate. To do this, widen your eyes slightly and be a little bit surprised and pleased by what you see around yourself. Very gently. Don't get too involved with the creation of surprise, or striving for a brighter awareness - keep your awareness outwards on that which is the *subject* of your attention, not awareness itself. Bear in mind the idea that reality is a membrane in front of you and that you're trying to balance your awareness so that it neither pushes against nor retracts away from it.

7) Look at distant objects such as clouds, and rather than trying to reach them with awareness or mindful grasping, just relax and let them 'project' themselves at you, allowing them into your mind* as though they were sending metta at you – and then you can help this by becoming relaxed and receptive to it in return.

**Note that this does NOT mean reducing or turning your awareness off in any way. Any instructions here to relax your awareness or to do nothing do not mean that you should try to control your mind or alter your normal outward awareness in any way.*

9) Finally, if all of the above has gone well, imagine that your awareness covers the whole 360 degrees around yourself. Above, below, in front, behind. Relax and allow yourself to merge like water into water, in all directions.

As all of this is quite a lot to remember, if you should get confused or stuck at any point and can't remember what you're meant to be doing, then stop - just do nothing and relax until you stabilise, then start again.

Remember, the mind that you're looking for is a simple, natural one: a state of relaxed, outward attention, the same awareness you'd have if you were chilling on a beach somewhere and were surprised by the appearance of a rainbow; relaxed, appreciative, bright and open/receptive. Getting into this kind of awareness just once or twice and thinking you know where it is and how it feels isn't enough for it to be a useful technique, it can be lost and forgotten very easily after just a week without practice, or a hard couple of days at work. This kind of awareness has to become as effortless and natural to you as possible, which may take a week or a month of regular use.



12

Techniques Using Sound

After gaining some experience with 'mindfulness of breathing', it'll help if you experiment with other types of meditation to broaden your skills and help you find the methods that suit you best.

Though previously we used the breath as a focus object, you can of course use instead anything that your senses are aware of: sensations of touch, vision, smell, anything – and even nothing. Sound is a perfect focus object, as when you listen clearly you stop 'talking' with your internal voice, and this helps to quickly calm your mind. A nice bonus is that it can easily – and preferably – be practised in a soothing warm bath: high, with headphones on and dreamy music played deafeningly loud.

In the technique below, as you're listening with a calm and naturally focussed mind, you should experience periods of 'absorption' in the music from time to time - a state that a lot of you will have tasted already. You're just listening to a good track one day and suddenly it's all there is - just the music and a sense of being carried along with it, with no delineation between you and it. You're aware, listening to the music with little or no

interference from thoughts at all, so everything you experience is enhanced massively. It might last a few seconds or an entire album, but it's a wonderful and totally engulfing experience.

Unfortunately, it's impossible to do anything to sustain a state like this, as the second you try to do so you've of course lost non-conceptuality. You can only set the right conditions in place in the hope of it happening - it's not something you can reach through effort. However, by practising meditation and becoming more familiar with it through a range of different methods, we can learn to *allow* it to come about more easily, especially during free-forming. But even if full absorption never happens, this is a useful exercise. Most songs lose their appeal as time goes by because we listen to them less actively than we did when they were new to us, so our enjoyment lapses with our decreasing attention to them. As here you're learning to listen in a more continuously focussed way, you should find that your overall appreciation of music will become enhanced over time, even when you're not listening to it as part of an exercise.

However, there are dangers with meditating to excess on sound if you try to force your mind into hearing in odd ways. I spent a lot of time involved in practices where instead of just listening naturally to sounds, I was constantly manipulating my perceptions of them as I sought more diverse methods and effects. After just a few months of practice, I found it literally impossible to listen to music normally and would instantly lapse into one of many forced mental listening 'positions' the second I put on a pair of headphones. It took over a year to undo this, during which time I lost many of the techniques I'd developed whilst working with sound as I

tried to readjust my thinking.

Sound 1

The first stage in the process below is to settle into ordinary listening and to stay with that for a while, not practising any techniques at all. This gives you time to acclimatise to using your hearing exclusively, and also allows you to relax more deeply. You then do a period of focussing on the music to concentrate your awareness; then finally, with a mind that will still retain some of the steadiness that you've given it, you stop all techniques and just listen naturally again. This is the same kind of process you'd go through if you were doing mindfulness of breathing with the aim of sitting in non-doing.

After a session of meditation, keep your eyes closed and just relax completely. Listen to your chosen sound (I'll assume that it's music in this case) in a normal way, with no attempt to manipulate it at all. The main idea to keep in mind at this stage of acclimatisation to listening is that you must stay *receptive* to the music rather than trying to be grasping towards it. Receptivity will encourage absorption. Let your mind relax into a normal awareness of the music and let the sounds come to you, just experience them without judging anything as good or bad. Allow the sounds to play 'on' or within your consciousness, without you striving to reach for them. Do this until you feel that you've moved into purely natural, unforced hearing that stays listening steadily to the music without too much direction from you.

After spending some time with this you then make your attention to the sounds more focussed and purposeful for about five minutes. This will stop you lapsing into daydreams once you go back to natural

listening again in the next stage. But again, don't try to grasp too hard at this point - the kind of awareness you're looking for needs to be as light and as natural as you can make it, despite it being focussed concentration.

Note that this phase mustn't last too long, or it'll make your mind too rigid and unresponsive to what can happen in the next stage (although for beginners it's better to stray towards over-practising rather than under).

As soon as you feel that you're staying with the music in a relatively steady way, relax completely and listen naturally again. Look out in particular for any muscle tensions around your neck and shoulders that concentrating may have created, and try to relax them away as quickly as you can to avoid spoiling your calmed state. Let the music play upon your mind as though it's a still surface that the sounds appear within, like ripples on a pond. If the music soars, then soar with it, be carried by its emotion without involvement in it. Relax and do nothing. No grasping towards the sounds or any control, just ordinary awareness.

Incorporate the silence between tracks into this meditation as well, by making sure that your awareness remains exactly the same as it did when there was sound, this time allowing silence to ripple/not ripple your surface. You're just listening, content (use the word command idea for creating contentment that I talk about in the chapter on meditation). Stay with this for as long as you feel comfortable.

Sound 2

Go from mindfulness of breathing with a downward

gaze into the Ajna gaze I explained earlier, and give yourself time to relax into it. You need to get to a point where you're not really thinking about trying to hold your eyes in position, so that you can focus on listening instead.

Turn on your chosen music (loud, and over headphones) and go through the same routine as in the previous exercise ('Sound 1'), but this time regularly directing short feelings of metta towards your overall perception of the sounds. Projecting metta at your sense of hearing will help you connect more closely to the 'object' of sound, with less inclination to be grasping. Also, sending metta into the Ajna now and again will kick the whole technique into another gear.

If you persevere with this exercise you'll find that after a while the music seems to be actually emanating from your Ajna, so putting metta towards either the music or that chakra is one and the same thing.

As a variation, try practising the above using, say, your solar plexus chakra to focus on instead of the Ajna. There's a whole world of techniques that you can create and explore for yourself by changing chakras or by focussing on any two chakras at once as you use sound as a background technique.

Tips

- Don't think anything about the music in terms of its content (what the words mean, etc.); you should just try to remain aware in a normal way. Don't analyse, wait, or expect. Do nothing.

- If your mind starts to wander, there's no reason why you can't go back to another few minutes of mindfulness of breathing and then return to an awareness of sound when your mind has calmed again.
- You should be fluid, happy and receptive to your hearing. If you're in a fixed, grasping state then you won't be able to move beyond this fixation - or be moved by the effects that this practice has.



13

Techniques Using Visualisations

Although each of the techniques below covers no more than a short paragraph or two, in esoteric terms these kinds of practices are far from being just a nice way to sit.

Visualising light radiating from various points on your body is common to both Hindu and Buddhist meditation practice, and it has wide-reaching effects. Despite my once critical stance, I now can't speak highly enough of such visualisations in terms of the experiences they can create and the sensitivity to other techniques that they induce. As they also promote relaxation, mental calm and positivity too, they're good all-round exercises that are well worth including in a daily session.

I continue to use the term 'imagine' below, but as I explained earlier, it's far more effective to 'know' instead. Choose, say, two techniques to do in any one session at the most, preferably following a session of mindfulness of breathing. Until you get used to visualising these lights, your eyes should stay closed throughout, but work towards practising with your eyes open as these methods tend to be more effective that way.

When you think of the key word(s) for each technique I outline below, try to project a sense of metta towards the chakra it's associated with. As before, imagine that each star is half-in and half-out of your body, shining inwards and outwards.

Technique 1

Imagine that you have a star of brilliant white/yellow light about the size of a golf ball at your solar plexus. Think of the words 'calm' and 'kindness' and all of the images/thoughts that you associate with these words. It can be ideas about what the words mean, feelings that you associate with the words, or even images of people displaying these qualities. When you think you have a good sense of the broader meaning of the words, repeat them regularly and project metta into the light at regular intervals.

Technique 2

Imagine that you have a large star of deep blue light at your heart chakra, of a size that encloses your heart. Think of the words 'contentment', 'warmth' and 'surrender'. Give up to the feelings, stop striving, and rest like someone who has finally arrived at his goal after a long journey.

Technique 3

Imagine that you have a star of brilliant red light at your throat. Think of words and images based around the ideas of equanimity, friendliness and stillness. Nothing in you or outside of you gives you

cause for concern, you have no hatred or even dislike for anything or anyone. Direct metta towards everything and everyone in your immediate vicinity; then towards the world in general, then the entire universe and all its animate and inanimate contents.

Technique 4

Imagine that there's a star of brilliant white/yellow light at your brow chakra. Imagine the feelings and images associated with the infinite size, spaciousness and freedom of your consciousness. Mind is completely without identifying traits or limits, and allows everything that you perceive to manifest freely within it like the flow of a river. Think of lightness, openness, receptivity and expansiveness of mind. This works well when combined with the later technique of 'sitting in space'.

Technique 5

Imagine that you have a star of brilliant white light that may remind you of moonlight at your crown chakra. You are receptive and aware, surrendering to the light and allowing yourself to merge with it. If you wish, you can gradually let the light expand until it encloses you within a sphere, then continue with Technique 6, below.

Technique 6

You're sitting *within* a cloud of bright white light. You are stillness. The light is everywhere around you, it is infinite, and you can feel no boundaries between yourself and it. You are the light as much as it is you.

You are content, relaxed and feeling happy. There is nothing to do other than to be this light.

Technique 7

There's a cloud of golden light around your head, extending about six inches from it. Your thoughts, your body and everything you see are manifestations of this light and you feel equanimity and metta towards it.

For those who are already quite sensitive, the visualisations above will have instant results. It took time before I could really do them sincerely and think of the connotations of the words connected with them without feeling a bit self-conscious, but none of the associated feelings that you need to come up with have to be big - just an idea will do, a vestige of the real thing to begin with. What's going to happen is that when you push these emotions into your awareness and the high, they then get amplified and fed back to you - creating a feedback loop which turns your thoughts of, say, contentment into strong feelings of pleasure and calm. But it doesn't stop at just giving you an experience of positive emotions. With practice, some of the above may give you a sense of yourself as boundless space, as pure pleasure or as nothing in particular, just a vague feeling of floating happily within an unidentifiable nothing.

I say once again - what you put into the high you get out of it and bearing this in mind, it's well worth trying your damndest to 'put in' the most positive, sincere feelings you can muster. Forget that as you try these techniques you might feel a bit of a girlie, if you're of the male persuasion like myself. They are well worth exploring and will give you good effects despite how you

might feel. Grunt in a manly way from time to time if it makes you feel better.

I'm very aware of the psychosomatic effects that what I'm showing here can have, but I'd like to stress that what you may feel doing these techniques isn't just as a result of suggestion. The amplification of your emotions that you can feel is a quite real effect, regardless of whether you're high or not - it's just that it's less obvious when you're straight.

Light

As I've mentioned, I've always been interested in unusual states of my mind and it's something that actually goes quite a way back into my childhood. I was noting occasional shifts in my awareness that I found intriguing from around the age of six and through into my adult years. Although I suppose it's easy to think that anybody under the age of ten isn't really going to understand what constitutes an 'unusual' state, being young doesn't mean being unable to judge changes in natural awareness. I'm happy to say that the things I felt then I can now name as periods of clarity, bliss and feelings of 'expansiveness', and that they are the same as I would expect nowadays.

A bliss I experienced at the age of twelve, for example, was triggered simply by a particular quality of light. One winter's night I went upstairs into my bedroom without turning the light on, as it was already well-lit by a bright shaft of moonlight coming in through the window; and there was also a second, more pervasive glow of light that was being reflected into the room by a thick layer of snow on the garden outside. As soon as I became aware of the quality of the reflected light, I felt a

brief but powerful sense of outward absorption, acute mindfulness and strong feelings of overwhelming bliss. Nowadays I use that same quality of light – through photographs or by meditating where the moon is visible - to help create further sensitivity and encourage similar experiences.

Space Pictures

High or straight, sit in a darkened room and put your favourite space scene on-screen on your computer. As for exactly which picture to use for this purpose, go to one of the many good on-line astronomy libraries (such as the Hubble press site, the 'Astronomy Picture of the Day' archive, etc.) and simply go through the pictures until you find something that appeals to you.

About one in ten people will get an instant feeling for the distances involved in these scenes without doing anything at all. If they then go on to get high and look at the same pictures, the feelings they get can be enhanced considerably and they may even reach a bliss using them. If this is you, use space scenes as a way of making your mind expansive and open to the full scope of the universe at least once a day - these are good qualities to train your mind in, especially if you're wanting to reach higher states.

Firstly, sit for a while with your picture and don't do anything but look at it in a natural, clear way for a while. Let your mind settle on it. Once you're relaxed and 'here', start to feel a sense of the vastness of space that the scene is set within - the coldness of the moons and the brilliance of the stars (this particular phrase is important, say it to yourself as

you try this exercise). Feel metta towards it. Breathe in the cool breeze drifting between the planets. Be receptive towards what you see, rather than grasping. Your eyes can move around the picture, but try to let yourself stay on any particular parts of it that seem to catch your attention the most. Look at the various qualities and colours of light and be receptive towards them.

Now try to generate a sense (or if you can, *know*) that what you see is actually inside yourself. You are vast, expansive without effort. Do nothing but know.

Space Animations

Go to one of the astronomy sites and look out for the various high-resolution 'zoom-ins' on galaxies, stars, etc. which run for about a minute each. The quality of light they show is important, but the idea of forward movement in the animation can itself also be used as a state trigger.

Begin in the same way as above (though if you have time, do a period of shamatha meditation first), by thinking about as little as possible and just looking at the first scene of the animation in a natural way - without staring or trying to do anything with your mind. If you think your awareness is a bit lacking or dull, try looking at the picture with slight awe for a time. Don't force this, just direct a bit of metta and wonder towards what you see. Raise your eyebrows for a few seconds, then let the act of creating awe go, but make sure you have an under-glow of metta for the scene still remaining.

Now start the animation and imagine that you're

on a ride out into the universe, keeping your eyes steady and your body fully relaxed. If you're one of the lucky one in ten, this should lead to a very pleasant feeling that I'm not even going to begin to try to describe. If you get just a slight twinge of 'something' rather than any definable sensations, bear with this exercise and try it at different levels of high, or with different animations, and the effects should grow considerably with each session of practice.

'Safe-Place' Visualisations

More familiar forms of meditation visualisations to many will be those that use the creation of an imaginary safe environment to mentally sit in, or explore, such as a garden, or a beach. I was a bit of an elitist (read 'cynic') for years about this kind of practice as I didn't regard it as being real meditation, and so thought that any effects gained from it were lesser in some way. But now after a lot of experimentation, I have to agree that safe-place visualisations work incredibly well, and that obviously it doesn't matter whether this is real meditation or not - all that counts is the beneficial effects it might have and the pleasure that can be enjoyed within them. Creating an internal world like this has a lot of the value that actually being in these places would bring, so again we're talking about methods that will lower blood-pressure and stress levels a lot.

If you are going to try to generate a visualisation like this, it's a good idea to prepare for it in just the same way that you would a period of meditation, with all the same preliminaries of relaxation, metta, and even a session of mindfulness of breathing to make it easier to

hold onto your creation. Give it the best chance of working by preparing the best environment for it to exist within. Once you've got used to entering into this imaginary world in quiet sessions alone, you'll be able to use it just as easily anywhere in the outside world where you get a chance to close your eyes.

As I talked about in the short section 'Knowing vs. Imagining', it's important to understand that if you *do* want to create your own space, you don't spend time continually trying to build detailed and believable mental images of it; instead you imagine that you are actually sitting in the desired location, being aware that if you were to open your eyes you would see, say, a beach, the sea and a blue sky. If you want the smell of the sea, don't try to imagine it, but *expect* to smell it. If you want the sounds of seagulls don't try to create those sounds, but know that you can hear them. This has a remarkably different effect with far less effort.

The more senses that you can involve in your visualisation the better. Be aware of smells, sounds, temperature (if necessary even that you're wearing the right clothing to be comfortable in the environment you've chosen) and a real spatial awareness of the place you're sitting in. Is it raining or sunny? If it's sunny, look up at the sky and see where the sun is and feel it in your eyes. If it's raining, feel the rain on your skin, hear it splashing around you, smell the wet ground. Be there. By building a world that you can feel with all of your senses it will become more vivid, more self-sustaining and easier to return to the more often you do it. Over a very short space of time you can create a very pleasant place to meditate or just sit in, within a few seconds of closing your eyes.

Where's best?

In terms of what location you choose to create, the choice is entirely up to you - but I'd aim for somewhere striking and novel rather than somewhere bland. Creating a world in a more extreme setting can actually be more vivid to the imagination, as the imagery you need to use to create it is more memorable in its own right and therefore is very easy to keep returning to. It also pays to reinforce your world with the use of photographs or films of similar locations; and of course there's nothing to stop you from compiling images from different places to create your own perfect spot. As a choice of extremes, try imagining:

- Sitting on the very pinnacle of a mountain top.
- Floating unsupported in outer space as you orbit the earth.
- Being as large as our galaxy, watching it from the outside, turning majestically in space before us.
- Sitting on the rings of Saturn, looking inwards towards the planet itself.
- Underwater on a pacific reef.
- In a white-out blizzard in the Antarctic.
- Floating high above the Grand Canyon, with eagles soaring around you.

It must seem like a very obvious thing to say, but where you choose to go – even who you are in this world – is entirely your decision. It can be as ludicrous as you like, as long as it does the job of giving you a break from normal reality. Who can see? Who knows or even cares where you go? If you want to go to a fur-lined cell where you are a Maharajah of considerable means, with naked concubines massaging your feet with fragrant oils, so be it. This is your place, and the more it is your ideal

situation to be in, the more helpful it will be to you – and if you are going to do something like this, then you might as well pull the stops out.

The Three Focus Lock

Your natural ability to multi-task and think about many things at once is one of the things that works against you as you try to meditate. As both an illustration of just how many things you can be aware of at once, and as a powerful technique in its own right, try the method below. The idea is that by overwhelming your brain with as many sensory focus points as it can handle, there will be no room at all for normal thoughts to interrupt the flow of meditation. As you'll find, any drifting away from full awareness is immediately obvious and it's only possible to hold onto all the points when your mind is completely still. Relaxation is crucial in this exercise, as you may find that you're so intent on maintaining focus that you tense your whole body.

- 1)** Touch your right thumb tip against your right index finger tip and relax into a steady awareness of the sensations of them touching for a minute or so,
- 2)** Without losing awareness of your finger and thumb touching, gently press your left big toe on the floor and become aware of the sensations that creates too.
- 3)** Finally, add a third point, such as an awareness of the tip of your nose.
- 4)** Hold steadily, with as little jumping from one focus to the other as you can manage.

The technique above is a very fast way of freeing your

mind of stress and insistent chains of thought, and it's something that you can obviously do anywhere without being noticed, so it's an ideal thing to do at work or whilst commuting. Obviously, you can use any points on your body as stimuli to focus on, but you could equally use a sound, a visual object or a physical sensation, in conjunction together in the same way. If you do use touch/awareness of areas of your body, use those that are well separated rather than, say, both hands or feet, or three or four fingertips together. The closer together the points you choose, the easier it is to create an overall sense of awareness of them that isn't as demanding as it could be.

The Circle

Using a similar idea, but also including some of the vital body points and a fixed gaze too, this is a simple and basic technique that should work reasonably well without all the usual elements of meditation having to be in place first.

Sitting upright, preferably with nothing touching your back, begin by lowering your breathing into your abdomen for a few minutes to help slow your thoughts down. Now, with your head facing forward, look upwards at a good sharp angle, and hold your eyes steadily in that position for about a minute. Keep your face and eyes loose, don't strain. Now move onto looking to the left at a tight angle, again for about a minute. Repeat, looking to the right, then downwards for about the same length of time. Until you get used to keeping your eyes steady, this will work better if you do twenty or thirty seconds looking at each place to acclimatise yourself to it, then go for a longer gaze on a second shot. Try to keep your

breathing low down in your body, relaxing your abdomen as much as possible.

Now, looking directly on the level, try to be aware of all four points at the same time as a circle, favouring none in particular, just getting a sense of the position of all points at once. Imagine that the top of the circle crosses your forehead, the bottom your solar plexus, and left and right on the front of each shoulder.

Hold steadily, relaxed, no forcing, for as long as you can. Keep resting regularly and coming back to it - each time you do, you'll feel better able to accomplish the technique. And that's it. Look on this as being both a meditation technique and a good exercise for strengthening your attention.



14

The Tai Chi Mind

Using some simple Tai Chi basics, we can create a way of reaching a good, calm state that some may find much easier than trying to directly work with their minds in shamatha meditation. It's also quite an interesting thing to do when you're high (especially with closed eyes), and it can give very swift results when you get it right.

The ancient tradition of Tai Chi Chuan will be familiar to many as a series of graceful, slow moving stances - but hidden not far below the surface, Tai Chi (translated as 'Supreme Ultimate Fist' in Chinese) is a powerful martial art. Tai Chi is practised daily, in its slower form, by hundreds of thousands of people throughout the world, as a mixture of moving meditation, deep breathing and gentle exercise. Long renowned for its powers, Tai Chi is capable of doing remarkable things to body and mind, including lowering blood pressure and increasing the effectiveness of the auto-immune system. The benefits of regular Tai Chi include:

- Reduced stress
- Increased flexibility and strength
- Greater stamina and agility
- Better balance and co-ordination

- Feelings of well-being
- Improved cardiovascular fitness
- Slowing of osteoporosis
- Better quality sleep
- Increased respiratory function

The moves within this fighting style are, in many instances, based on the defensive and attacking postures of birds and animals, or are taken directly from the earliest martial forms, such as Shaolin Kung Fu. Tai Chi is closely linked to Taoist philosophy, and develops the idea of the opposing, yet co-dependent forces of nature (dark and light, or force and yielding) to maximise the power of its techniques. Despite its apparent softness, its characteristic throws - which catapult attackers backwards and upwards for remarkable distances - are amongst the most powerful within the martial arts.

One of its more esoteric aims is to help generate and circulate a universal energy called 'chi' through the body to help foster health and strength. In its martial form, Chi is focussed into punches and kicks to increase their striking power.

Up until quite recently, the effects of both Tai Chi and acupuncture were thought of in the West as being almost entirely psychosomatic, but as time goes on and more studies are carried out into their benefits, it's becoming quite obvious that, chi aside, both really do have a wide range of positive effects. Used extensively on recuperating patients in hospitals in China for many years, Tai Chi is now being taken up by hospitals both in the UK and America to aid patient recovery and supplement physiotherapy.

I took up Tai Chi over 20 years ago as a quick way of

getting early morning exercise without the need for the exertion and dubious joys of things like jogging and swimming. Thirty minutes' practice in the morning helps you stay fitter and more supple, and calms the mind in preparation for the day ahead. Tai Chi is such a gentle form of exercise that people in China still practise it when well into their nineties.

I was lucky enough to be able to take a vacation in Hong Kong a few years ago, where the public parks are filled every morning with people practising one form of Tai Chi or another. Surrounded by people who'd been doing it for years, I was feeling less than confident as I stretched stiffly against some climbing bars at the edge of Victoria Park in preparation for my own session. As I stood there, a Chinese woman of about 75 – bent and wizened – dropped her shopping bag down beside me and started to stretch too. I could only watch in sad shame as she raised one leg, then the other, effortlessly up into a vertical position against the bars and relaxed herself against it. She contorted, touched her toes nearly with her elbows and did things with her hips that I am sure it is not possible to do; then she gave such an incredibly graceful display of Tai Chi that I felt like giving it up on the spot. I didn't hang around for long.

Whilst learning Tai Chi may not be an option for some readers, you can still take good advantage of at least some of its benefits through the two following exercises, which I've created particularly for those people who are largely desk/car bound or who can only grab a few private minutes at work. Obviously these aren't meant to be a replacement for real Tai Chi, which of course needs full body movement to be fully effective; but as a busy man, or woman's, alternative for use in places like traffic-jams, they're very calming.

Begin each of these exercises by first running through an ascending relaxation sequence for a few minutes to make this more enjoyable. If you're high, do this for a couple of minutes to get yourself used to it, then stop for five or ten minutes and come back and do it again later: you'll find it a lot easier to maintain focus.

Square Chi

Use either your right or left hand to very slowly describe a small square at about chest height in the air in front of yourself. As this movement is going to be linked to your breathing pattern, how big a square and how slowly you move will vary from person to person. As I mentioned in the chapter on relaxation, breathing low in your abdomen rather than up in your chest is much more effective and calming. Sit for a few seconds, letting your abdomen rise and fall as you breathe into it, getting used to not using the upper part of your chest.

To begin, take a slow, gentle inhalation and move your hand in a straight line to describe one side of the imaginary square. When you've reached the top of your in-breath (without trying to breathe in too deeply), turn the corner into the next side of the square and breathe out, again using your hand to mark out its edge. Keep doing this, drawing the square in the air in front of yourself in time to the rhythm of your breathing. Don't put too much effort into slowing your breathing down, it's better to just relax and let it slow by itself as you do this exercise.

Although you're aiming to move increasingly more slowly over days of practice (thus also breathing more slowly and increasing lung-capacity), relaxation of your upper-body is imperative, or you'll find that you become

tense around your neck and shoulders.

Your mental state (the Tai Chi mind) as you do this technique is very important: be effortless, completely relaxed and thinking about nothing other than the hand movements you're making. To make sure that you stay fully aware, try to be continually conscious of the fact that you're touching reality, or simply the air around yourself, with your hand as you go. This will help increase mindfulness and your ability to stay connected to the outside world as you do the technique (instead of internalising), turning it into a truer form of mediation.

Cat Chi

This is a very powerful meditation-cum-metta generation exercise. Prepare as above, then begin to describe a slow circle with your hand, as if on the lower part of the movement you're stroking a cat with your open palm. The kind of mind you need to do this is (as with the previous exercise) very relaxed, gentle and non-threatening, with a real effort to generate metta on the 'stroke' for your imaginary pet. This will be an easy task for existing pet owners, who should find that they go into the right frame of mind naturally as soon as they begin this exercise. If you do have a pet, it'll help if you imagine that it's him/her that you're stroking, which will increase the effectiveness of this technique a lot.

As the actual physical movements in this exercise aren't linked to your breathing, it doesn't matter how slowly you go but still aim for a full circle, taking upwards of thirty seconds to describe. Again, make sure that you're fully relaxed and that your breathing is low in your abdomen. Keep your mind on the movement of your hand as much as possible, and avoid thinking anything

about what you're doing other than the maintenance of a steady movement. Again, the key thing to bear in mind is retaining a sense of continually touching the pet/reality/the air around yourself as you practise.

Oh come ON!

Before you think about writing this off, consider the proven scientific benefits that stroking animals can have, and note that the exercise above comes with all the bonuses that having a real pet brings. Recent studies have shown just how deep the effects of pet-stroking can be, with just a few minutes' petting of them prompting the release of a number of 'feel-good' hormones into the bloodstream, including prolactin, oxytocin and serotonin. The neurotransmitter serotonin in particular increases alertness, makes sleep more effective, and reduces our ability to feel pain. Even more startling, petting reduces levels of the primary stress hormone cortisol, the adrenal chemical responsible for regulating appetite and cravings for carbohydrates. In meditation terms, with practice, this exercise can bring about a deeply calmed state and quite deep rushes of pleasure.

Don't think that because I'm not talking deep and meaningfully about techniques like those above that they have no real place in 'proper' meditation. All of the skills you're learning as you try them out will help you become much more aware of your own mind and its processes, and will help further your control over it.



15

Key Techniques

I'd now like to describe some techniques that are my own favourites. Try these (as with everything else) high or straight, but with a good baseline state going and steady attention in place, which will usually mean a period of shamatha or 'just sitting' for a while first. Although the usual preparations (relaxation, etc.) are required for them to work at their best, that isn't to say they're not worth trying in any 'lesser' condition - just in case you might get some results, especially if you're high.

A good way to practise these exercises is to pick a couple that you feel comfortable with and do them for a few minutes, then stop and just sit for a time - then come back to them again for another few minutes. Although you might get little or no effect from your first attempt, when you come back to the technique a second or third time it will tend to work straight away. Short periods of practice in a day interspersed with good periods of rest will make it much easier to recognise where you're meant to go in each technique. If you sit and try to control your mind instead, forcing it to do what you want over rare but intense sessions, then such control will prevent experiences from happening – and will also prevent good highs from happening too. Think of yourself

as relaxing into these techniques rather than learning over time how to intensify them and make them deeper. Meditation (in the 'just sitting' sense) isn't a tighter and tighter control of awareness, but is more a case of trying to let a natural part of your awareness come to the fore. Meditation should be used to help keep you at a calm, focussed level, not practised to the extent where you're continually exerting control over your mind.

Doing 'Now'

There will come a time, probably within just a few days of beginning these exercises, when you stop doing them 'purely'. There are no proper psychological terms for what I'm going to talk about that I'm aware of, but the process itself is easy to describe:

Supposing you were wanting to hit a ball into a hole. If the first time you did it the ball went into the hole, then the second time you tried to do it, you wouldn't just hit the ball - you would hit it *and* subconsciously or consciously remember how you did it last time to help guide yourself on this present occasion. If you missed the hole the first time around you'll do the same thing, this time trying to remember what you think you did wrong on the last attempt. You'll flick back and forth between doing now and remembering then, and chances are you'll miss the second shot entirely. Doing the same thing with meditation, thinking back to how you've practised any technique in the past, no matter how successful, is going to hamper anything you're trying to do now. Practise every technique as though it were the very first time you've ever done it. When in complete doubt and confusion, stop all techniques and do nothing. There's little that's ultimately any more powerful.

Sitting In Space

Sit in posture, eyes open, fully prepared and relaxed after a session of meditation (visual, audible, tactile, or other). Do a session with space pictures and animations to set the scene for what follows:

Imagine that you're sitting floating in space, feeling content and receptive. Look all around yourself, including down towards the floor, seeing the distant stars and galaxies in every direction. As with the techniques you've used for looking at space pictures, feel expansive without trying to force your mind to be bigger. You just *are* bigger, without boundaries of shape, distance or size.

Now imagine that whatever supports you (your chair or the floor) just disappears from beneath you, leaving you floating in space. Sit with this idea and simply enjoy the experience, even if it's just a vague sense of unsupported freedom.

Sound 3

A very effective variation of the above is to do a short meditation session on a piece of echoing music over headphones then, when you feel relaxed (and with the music still playing), imagine again that you're sitting unsupported in space. This time you use the echoing quality of the music to 'illustrate' your mental images of space, to introduce a sense of size and emptiness into them to create a richer, more accurate sense of actually being there. This is a real favourite of mine, and one that's led at times to tremendous feelings of soaring, absorption and limitlessness. Imagine images that you're probably already familiar with, such as Saturn or the Moon for

instance, to help the feelings along.

Sound 4

Again simple, but very effective if you've calmed your mind sufficiently. With echoing music playing, imagine that the inside of your head is a vast empty hall that the music is playing within. Don't try to purposely manipulate how you hear, just let the music create its own sense of space in your awareness. Again you can add an Ajna gaze and metta for greater stability.

The Arrow

The preparations for this should now be ingrained in your mind: get into a state where you're relaxed, focussed, mindful and happy. Breathe in and hold your breath for a slow count of four; then breathe out with a short, firm push of breath through your nose, launching an imaginary arrow off into the distance. Even if you're sitting inside a room, imagine that you watch the arrow as it flies away and disappears, just letting your breath do what it wants as you do so. If it wants to stop or start again, just let it – look at the arrow disappearing out of sight. Stay. Just sit. If you get an urge to close your eyes during this technique, do so. In some cases, this urge is a signal that a shift is about to come on.

The Green

The following technique works at its best with eyes

open. For those who have an interest in this kind of thing, the 'field' is actually a representation of Prakriti (chi, qi, prana, etc.).

You're sitting within an infinite cloud of bright, emerald green light. It covers you and everything around you, even filling the space between you and other objects. Look around yourself and know that not only is every object covered by it in dome-like shapes, but that the energy permeates everything too, becoming more dense the nearer it is to the centre of any object. Normally energy is thought of as radiating from the body, but in this case it's drawn *into* the body and all other forms of animate and inanimate matter. Think of it as being alive (in a limited sense), but not as the essence of life.

Look at the floor and know that the field rises to a height of about three inches above its surface and continues down towards the centre of the planet, where it grows thicker. Feel it and *know* it's there as you breathe in and out. Try to be sincerely warm and friendly towards it as it passes through your nose. It moves like water in the air, creating whorls and eddies every time you move or simply breathe.

There is no in-breath that doesn't contain it, no out-breath that does not contain it. It encloses the world and fills the universe.

Light 1

Possibly the simplest technique of all. As light is a high enhancer, this works a lot more quickly if you're high; but it will work straight too, if you can stay focussed long enough. Get a strong torch, and sit in posture, relaxed and focussed. Turn the torch on and

hold it under your chin so that its light shines upwards, with the outer edges of it illuminating your face. Do nothing but be aware of the light through your closed eyes. As another variation, hang the torch above your head at a distance of about two feet, with its light shining downwards and illuminating your crown and face. The effect from this exercise can be emphasised a lot by doing it within a completely darkened room.

As different colours and qualities of light do have varying effects, try doing the above with variously coloured light sources. A lot of children's torches on the market today have a choice of red, green, blue or white light from the same unit at very little cost. Make sure, though, that whatever light you use is fairly powerful.

Light 2

Prepare in the same way that you would for the mindfulness of breathing and all similar exercises.

1) Place a lit candle about 3 feet away and about a foot above your eye-line, then look steadily at the flame without staring. Each time your eyes flick away from the flame, just bring them back to it again. Just look in a normal way; relax, and it'll be much easier to keep your attention on it. It doesn't matter whether you blink or not, just try to avoid your eyes defocussing or moving 'inwards'. Stay alert and in the immediate moment, rather than waiting for a future effect from this method. Avoid thinking anything about the qualities of the flame, such as its colour or movement. Maintain relaxation, checking your neck and shoulders from time to time in particular.

2) After a few minutes, close your eyes and look forward at the place the candle was, and you should see a yellow/green after-image of it behind your eyelids. Keep your eyes perfectly still and watch it. Again this isn't something you can do by force, only by relaxing your eyes and not trying to control your eyes in any way. Although the image will tend to move around, try to keep it more or less in the position it was when you had your eyes open. After about five minutes, open your eyes and begin the process again.

3) Repeat this as many times as you feel comfortable, trying to extend the length of time you can maintain a steady after-image without having to open your eyes again.

Though very simple, this type of practice is related to the once very popular Hindu 'Taraka' meditation techniques. It can be a very powerful method of generating and maintaining mindfulness, and is also a good way to learn how to keep your eyes still on an image at any of the key forward focussing positions - but do NOT overdo it. I don't want to hear from people who have permanent green spots in front of their eyes. Regularly vary this meditation with just looking at an object other than light.

The Ajna Eye

Touch a fingernail to a point directly between your eyebrows on the chakra there. With your eyes closed, look upwards at an angle of about forty-five degrees and let your forehead gently 'open' out sideways and upwards from where you touched, like a blossoming

flower. Try to feel that your Ajna chakra is cupping inwards a little way at the same time. Try to *allow* it in, rather than pulling on it. Just let it fall inwards with no effort until you get the sensation that it has become a concave depression. You may be able to cup it in quite easily without having to think in terms of opening it, so try with and without. Keep your eyes still throughout. Once you do get a sensation of this point cupping inwards, think of receptivity, metta and contentment.

Ajna Eye 2

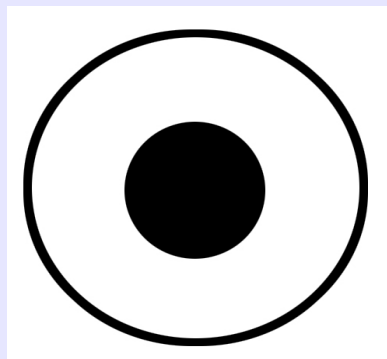


Figure 3 - The Ajna Eye

Another of the many ways of using the Ajna is this simple technique, which will add to and support all of the techniques above. I've had a range of good experiences using this one, usually blisses and shifts into non-conceptuality after just a few minutes of concerted effort.

Note that although this *is* an eye and you are using it at your Ajna, I make no connection at all between modern notions of the 'third eye' and this technique.

Sit with your eyes closed, again after a good relaxation session and preferably one of mindfulness

of breathing as well. Place your closed eyes into a comfortable upward gaze focussed on or looking through your Ajna, then imagine/know that you have the following design – a simplified eye – there. It seems to work best when visualising it to be between about half an inch and an inch (2.5 - 5cm) in radius. Relaxation and development of a steady gaze are the keys to getting the best out of this strangely powerful method.

In Use...

Q: So, what would you actually do in practice, while high, to start exploring anything that we've touched on so far? Which techniques should you try?

A: Beyond settling into a good basic ground to practise in, you can do any one, or all, of them within a single session - whatever works for you on any particular day.

Let's suppose you've got everything in place and you're maybe half an hour away from your first high of the evening. Begin, wherever possible, by doing a session of 'just sitting' and/or mindfulness of breathing (including mindfulness, relaxation and metta practice) as a preliminary. Once you get used to it, you can go through the whole of this process of preparation pretty quickly. No need to rush it though, this is a period of resting and moving your mind away from day-to-day stuff as much as possible.

Once you feel fully settled, take your cannabis as you normally would and go back to doing nothing. Just sit and relax, eyes open, and enjoy being high. Try not to get involved in any particular chains of thought – though the

meditation should have cut the occurrences of those down to a minimum. Once the first high has peaked and is starting to dwindle, you can then begin to explore these techniques. There's no sense in starting before then, breaking out of a high to explore, when being high is what we're here for.

Once the first peak has come and gone, you'll probably need to do another short period of mindfulness of breathing to stop yourself from getting too dreamy and unfocussed. Gently guide your mind back to a calm, clear state; don't do too much of any particular practice or it'll block out the high - this is very much a case of the less you can do, the better.

From here on it's every user for him or herself. Decide on two or three techniques, and give each a reasonable shot and see what they do for you. Some days 'X' will work and 'Y' won't, so try a variety of things each time. Although my own practices now are slightly different from those above, I still enjoy using music and the Ajna gaze very much whilst free-forming. A bath, headphones, loud echoing music and a little patience can take you to some very interesting states.

There are no rules as such, only things to avoid if you don't want to kill the high and the possibilities of exploration:

- **Don't write things down** – you can't practise and take notes at the same time. Note-taking needs the presence of an analytical mind, which will kill the high.
- **Don't remember** – as you get into practising and exploring the high, trying to remember and evaluate everything that happens to you will stop

any effects from taking place.

- **Don't expect** – waiting for things to happen takes you away from sitting in the moment, thus kills mindfulness. Expectation is another form of analysis.

You'll notice that nowhere in any of the above do I say things like, “do this for four minutes and such and such will happen,” as obviously it's not like that. It takes a coming together of things like relaxation, mindfulness, awareness, mood - and of course, patience and staying power too. But remember, everything must stay natural. For any of the previous elements to be 'right' doesn't mean hours of hard work - but effortless, happy, ordinary awareness instead.

As you practise whilst high, it's very easy to forget what you're meant to be doing and you'll have frequent lapses of concentration. When you do drift away and can't remember what you're meant to be doing, go back to the 'just sitting' state of mind for a while to restore your mental balance, then start again.

You *will* slip away, that's the nature of the game, but every now and again you'll pass through qualities of consciousness that are completely new to you. Riding them and the high is a constant balancing of letting the high do as much as it wants to, and you gently keeping it under control via one technique or another.



16

Pressure Points

I'd like to finish this section on meditation techniques by showing how we all already manipulate our perceptions every day by giving ourselves small 'highs' using pressure points on our faces and bodies.

Although systems for working with the body's pressure points are commonly used as a way of healing and relieving pain, I've yet to come across a description of the system of pressure points I explain here - despite all of us making use of at least one of them every day without realising it. It should now go without saying that the effects from working with these points are much enhanced if you do them in a relaxed and mindful condition – and are even better when you're high.

One day I began to wonder why I tended to lay my finger along the side of my nose when I wanted to think. Why did other people do the same, or stroke their chins, or cover their mouths instead, when *they* were concentrating? These seemed such universal gestures that I couldn't believe they were random and without any real purpose. At first I imagined that the warmth of my finger was just giving me a feeling of comfort, but it turned out to be much more than that. I soon discovered

that I was actually pressing a point halfway up my nose, and it was touching this that was the source of the things I was feeling. After some further experimentation I found that what I was doing seemed to quickly put me into a mental 'safe place', a bit to the side of normal awareness, that allowed me to think more deeply and with less apparent interruption from the outside world. Describing the sensations that using these points brings is extremely hard, like trying to talk about how a sneeze feels. Harder too, because each differs slightly in terms of how dreamy or aware they make you, and how long-lasting and pronounced they are.

I began to watch other people to see what parts of their faces they touched, and under which emotional circumstances; and soon an obvious pattern of points emerged that were being subconsciously used for a number of different purposes. Although I saw that there were a variety of ways that they were being used - some manipulated points by lip-biting and squeezing, cheek-rubbing, or leaning heavily on a knuckle, etc. - everyone was pressing the same places when they wanted to think or were stressed.

Horse wranglers, too, are already well aware of the presence of these points on a horse's lip, the use of which (using a 'twitch') is an old method of quietening horses to make them easier to handle. A rope is looped around the horse's top lip and gently twisted, then within seconds the horse will sag and go off into a deep, dreamy state - although the twitch must be moved to different parts of the lip from time to time or the effect is reduced or even lost altogether.



Figure 4 – Pressure Points

Farmers in many countries pierce the flesh between the nostrils of bulls and insert a ring to lead the animal around with for the same purpose. I still have to wonder why nobody has explored the possibility of humans having the same reactions by working on the same points on our bodies, but as far as I can tell there is no research that I can find on them at all, even in esoteric texts on alternative medicines.

If you look at the diagram of facial points above, you'll see that some of them are around your lips (and in *Figure 5*, on the roof of your mouth too), and maybe for good reason. These places are exactly the same points that a breast-feeding baby would stimulate in itself as it suckled. It's no great leap to then suppose that activating these points may bring on a kind of contentment in the child as it feeds - a feeling of warmth, relaxation and

dreaminess – which will make the suckling experience more pleasant and will encourage the baby to keep still at the same time.

It might be assumed that children (and some adults too) who continue to suck their thumbs as they grow older may be getting comfort from the distant memory of being breast-fed in their early years, but it's much more likely that most of their pleasure comes from their thumbs putting pressure on the same points that are touched when suckling. Some thumb-suckers also pull down gently on the end of their noses or an ear lobe at the same time – again, these are reactive points - thus adding a second 'hit' to the one coming from their mouths.

Proof that these pressure points work to give us comfort and relaxation is easy to show. Every time we fold our arms we press the points at our wrists and inside forearms; and when we cross our ankles, we do the same to those in our lower legs. Both sets of these points bring on a nice, warm, comforting feeling that's ideal if you're hoping to take a nap or relax. It's tempting to think that just getting into some of these positions is enough to create the effects you'll feel, but to show how much they really do add, try sitting with arms and legs crossed for a few minutes and note how that makes you feel, then uncross both. You'll find that the level of comfort you're feeling will drop off quite quickly when the pressure points aren't being touched.

Of course our facial expressions, like smiling or frowning, will also cause muscle pressure on the areas shown above too. These points may even contribute to actually forming the physical aspects of our emotions. If you purse your lips in perplexity, for instance, do you do it because you're perplexed - or for the hit that it brings

on, which helps you think more clearly and creatively about the thing that is perplexing you? Are our very facial expressions a means of accessing drug-like sensations which make us feel happy when we smile, or give us escape from stress when we frown?

If we look at the way that we respond to any of the things that make us happy, it's hard to separate our mental pleasure from the physical feelings, or to say that all of the pleasure is created by our minds. In fact, our feelings of pleasure or happiness seem to be separated into two parts: the mental aspect of pleasure, that causes us to smile - and the feelings of pleasure that we get *from* smiling. We can of course be happy without having to move our faces, but without a smile the feelings really aren't as deep as they would be if we were allowed to do so.

Look at how many times in a day you touch your face as you think or talk, how many times you purse or bite your lips. Where are *your* favourite places to touch when you're feeling stressed or are daydreaming? Those of you who are already quite mindful and calm should be able to use any of these points in the way I describe below and get a good sense of how each reacts, though it can take a couple of attempts as the feelings can be quite hard to spot at first. If you're feeling a bit tense or just need to relax more, using these pressure points can really help.

Using Them...

Best high, of course. Without a doubt, you will already have your own methods of manipulating at least one of these points, but the best way to use any of them is to 'milk' them by alternately pressing and releasing them. Be careful of over-use though; too long or too often on

any point will eventually cause you to become desensitised to its effects. Depending on how long you manipulate them for and how hard you press, effects may well come on in the seconds *after* you release the pressure on them. A sure sign that one is working is that once you get onto cycle three, you start to not want to release it - but can't place why.

The Mouth

I'll use one point inside the mouth as another example, but all of the pressure points can be used in just the same way. This one can be hard to find initially (see *Figure 5*), so if you have no luck with the first place you try, wait five minutes, then experiment with your tongue in a lower or higher position.

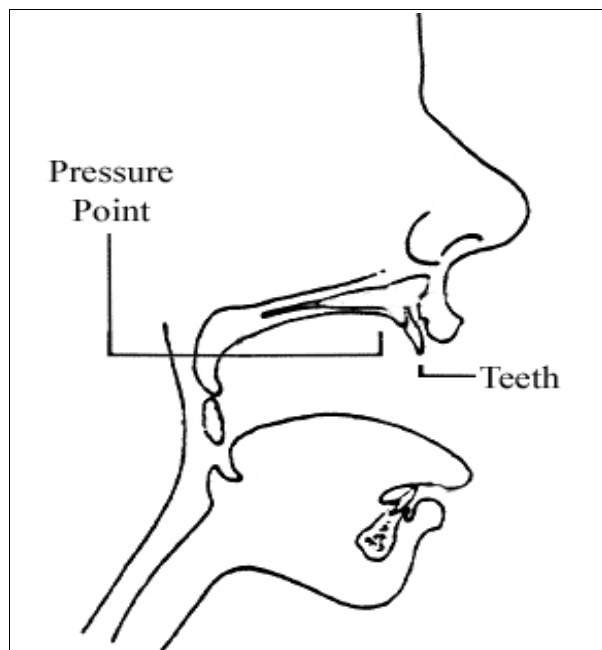


Figure 5 – Cutaway of mouth showing position of pressure point.

- 1) Turn up your tongue as though you were going to say the letter 'L'. Feel for the sharply upwardly curved point about half an inch behind your teeth and touch your tongue firmly against it. Try to keep your attention continually on the place that your tongue is touching.
- 2) Keep your tongue in place for twenty seconds, then release it and do nothing for another thirty seconds, then apply pressure again.
- 3) Do this four times. Things will usually start to happen by the second or third cycle.

Although silently counting time does ensure that you're not overworking the point by staying too long with it, it's best to just guess at the 20 second period so that you don't have to keep one part of your mind active through trying to count. Try not to investigate how you're feeling in the 'off' phase. Keep your mind steady without thinking about anything in particular. Don't look out for effects. Just do.

The Nose Job

For this one you'll need the help of a member of the opposite sex with whom you share a mutual liking. Ask your partner to read this first so that you don't have to keep telling him/her what to do. This is a good technique that can lead to a sudden, almost orgasmic bliss for a lot of people (it seems to work best on those who have had a broken nose), but some don't get anything from it at all.

Lay with your head face upright on your partner's lap. She (for the sake of this description) lays a finger upward

along the length of your nose so that the tip of her finger is touching the bridge 'cup' of your nose. Now she should move her finger down about half an inch and rest on the place where a lot of people have a flare or hump to their noses. Now (reassuring her for the last time that this is not some form of deviant sexual act) ask her to push rhythmically against this point, at a rate of about three pushes every two seconds. Most of the actual pushing is done with the last section and tip of her finger in a rolling motion up towards the top of the nose. It should be done quite firmly, but most of all sensuously, as though she were making love to you. All you have to do is lay quietly and wait. It can take a few minutes for the rush to begin - and it nearly always happens at the time when you've got fed up waiting or your nose is starting to feel uncomfortable. Persevere, it's well worth it.

Lips

Lay your finger horizontally across your lips. Open your mouth slightly and push the side of your finger inwards so that a small part of your bottom lip goes over the top of your bottom front teeth, as in *Figure 6*, below. Apply a steady, gentle pressure, keeping your awareness on where your teeth are touching. As above, do this in 20 second-on, 30 second-off bursts, for about four cycles.



Figure 6 – One way of using the lip pressure points

Chin

The points under your chin are in obvious and common use by everyone, usually in a posture made famous by Rodin's 'The Thinker'. Try resting your chin on your fist in just the same way as the model for this sculpture, again using the alternate pressing and releasing cycles to make the effects more pronounced. At first you may find that you get more effects when you remove your fist from your chin, rather than when you're applying pressure to it.

Try milking other facial points and see what effects you notice.



Experiences



17

Understanding Reality

'Know all things to be like this: A mirage, a cloud castle, a dream, an apparition, without essence, but with qualities that can be seen.

Know all things to be like this: As the moon in a bright sky in some clear lake reflected, though to that lake the moon has never moved.

Know all things to be like this: As an echo that derives from music, sounds, and weeping, yet in that echo is no melody.

Know all things to be like this: As a magician makes illusions of horses, oxen, carts and other things, nothing is as it appears.'

The Buddha - The Samadhi Raja Sutra

It's important to point out that the deep understanding of reality that can be gained in advanced states of meditation isn't just acquired by reading texts and being given teachings, but also through direct experiences of ultimate reality first hand – *as reality*

itself. As far as experiences go, those concerned with the nature of reality are perhaps the most important.

Gaining a correct understanding of various aspects of the true nature of reality, or even simply reading about it, can give way to a variety of experiences if you're in the right state of awareness. A key part of this understanding process is learning about the concept of 'emptiness', which I describe below. For those who do want to go on to explore deeper levels of consciousness, a good grasp of the concept of emptiness (called 'Sunyata' or 'voidness' by some traditions) is crucial to your understanding. Don't be tempted to think of it all as just an intellectual exercise, as working on emptiness can help you break free from some of the illusions that your normal perceptions have led you to believe in and can give you the most profound experiences of all, those of realisation ('enlightenment').

The power of emptiness lies not in simply understanding the concept and committing it to memory as an abstract idea, but actually incorporating it into your view of reality. If you don't apply it like this, your reality will still be defined subconsciously in just the same way as it was before you understood emptiness as a concept.

But before I go on to explain emptiness in more detail, I'd just like to talk about reality and our perceptions of its substantiality in a scientific way, so that you can appreciate that all is not as it seems.

Reality

Reality is not what it first appears to be; it is certainly not what most of us have believed it to be all of our lives,

if we see it as a stable reality where objects exist solidly and separately from each other. Here's a simple demonstration that should give you some doubts about your current ideas concerning the tangibility of the universe:

Slap your hand down on a table. What stops your hand from passing right through it? Atoms? Some kind of solid 'thing' at a sub-atomic level that your hand smacks into? Is this an indication that we are here, real and solid?

No, not at all. In fact, the only thing that stops your hand from passing right through the table is electromagnetism. In the same way that the like ends of a magnet repel each other, the electrical fields bonding the atoms of your hand together meet similar electromagnetic fields in the table, and then they repel each other, stopping your hand from going through the table. Solid matter is just an illusion in many respects. The old idea of atoms being made up of tiny solar systems of 'planets' that give matter a solid presence is now gone. In today's quantum physics our reality is hardly definable, and what appears to us to be a solid reality is now understood as *potential* for existence, rather than solidity and certainty - a flow of possibilities and information that has no separate existence from the basic field it manifests out of. Ultimately, it's a oneness, a non-duality appearing to us to be many things.

Even time is no longer thought of as being a relentless forward flow of events. According to Einstein and his Theory of General Relativity, we exist in what is called the 'block universe', where all future and past instants are laid out on a line in four-dimensional block-like reality, with no flow of time existing. Einstein is famously quoted as saying that any change with passage of time is

"...merely illusion, albeit a persistent one."

In deeper transcendental experiences, too, time is perceived as existing in one 'lump' of past, present and future. If this is accurate, then all time may be accessible from within what we think of as this present moment, making the possibility of precognition that much more feasible.

Strange stuff, and much of it is far stranger than I talk about here. But to my mind, what makes it all the more interesting is that many – if not all – eastern traditions have portrayed reality in exactly the same way as this for well over five thousand years. In Buddhist thought, for example, all that exists of our universe is a timeless non-duality, with our own 'different' reality an illusion of difference within it - in exactly the same way that quantum physics describes.

Although you might find all of this interesting, you could easily feel that these ideas can have no meaningful impact on the reality you believe in. So it's all a bit odd - so what? Because for explorers of consciousness, knowing what reality *really* is can lead to very deep states far more quickly than through traditional meditation.

Emptiness

Once you've had time to think about the idea of emptiness that I describe here, you might well begin to get a vague feeling of uncertainty about existence, an indescribable sense of the fact that everything is in a strange state of being both here and not quite here at the same time.

Take a coin from your pocket and hold it in your hand,

and you'll believe that you're grasping a fixed, solid object; but the action of light, oxygen and the sweat on your hand is causing the coin to continually lose atoms from its surface and to decay and change. The coin is also interacting outwardly too, affecting things in its vicinity, as the atoms and photons it projects into the atmosphere alter other objects they come into contact with in similar ways. Everything around us is equally unstable – and equally connected to, and integral with, the world around itself.

Reality is emptiness itself, a field of interconnected action. Nothing, anywhere, crystallises into being one unchanging thing or stops interacting with its environment, but is instead either increasing, decaying or transforming, without ever having its own real, independent nature. The doctrine of emptiness shows that we can't say indisputably that our reality, or anything in it, either exists or does not exist. In Buddhist terms, emptiness is the absence of 'inherent self-identity' in objects and reality; showing that every action and object is always linked in some way or another to the actions and objects around it.

Think of self-identity as being a definable thing that makes a cup a cup or a tree a tree which, if it were removed, would stop these things from being themselves. No matter what you look at you'll find that nothing has self-identity, and therefore nothing can be thought of as a stand-alone object in its own right. Everything exists in reliance on a chain of co-dependent events which it can never be separated from. Our reality, and what's in it, is in a continual state of change.

Let's use emptiness as a starting point for a deconstruction of reality:

Imagine a table. Say you were to take a few inches

from each of the legs, would the table still be there?

"Of course it would."

Say you then actually removed one of the legs, would the table still be there then?

"Absolutely."

But if I now take away three of the legs completely?

"That's a bit harder to define, but yes, the table is still there."

...And now if I remove some of the planks that form the table top as well?

"With only one leg and not much top left, it's not a pretty sight but yes, the table is uhhh...."

Now I take off the final leg. Where is the table now?

"Well, it's still there - and it isn't. There's part of a table top, but..."

Okay, let me take away a couple more of those planks from the table top, and maybe that bit of beading from around the edge of it too. Is there a table there now?

"No, not really, it was a table..."

So, you're saying that the essence of the table has gone?

"Kind of. You took away most of what made it a table. Like the legs for instance-"

Was the table 'in' the legs we took off?

"No, legs are legs..."

So the table was in the parts of the table top we removed? Those planks of wood contained the essence of the table?

"No. The table hasn't gone anywhere I don't think - but what's left isn't actually it...but neither is it in what you've just taken away."

Where has the thing that makes us call it a table gone? We might decide then that the table's tableness (its inherent 'self-identity') is in a number of elements (called 'aggregates' in Buddhism) put together in a particular way to make something we call a table. But the parts themselves - the legs and the top - also lack self-identity and are also 'aggregates', as they're made up of other things too. The table is 'empty' of inherent self-identity.

Being this way means that in the strictest sense a table neither exists nor does not exist, it's just a name that you give to a collection of other things that together have a certain shape and function at a particular point in time. In a way, the table is defined simply by its name, shape and use, rather than its existence. Instead of us stating that, "There's a heap of things in a particular shape over there...", we use general definitions, like the word 'table', to talk about groupings of objects to make life easier to describe.

So, according to both science and esoteric thought, you could imagine that reality is like a sea with a current of water flowing within it that creates eddies and whorls of movement. If we look closely at the movement we might think that we see shapes and faces, but all that's really there is just the sea alone. Our use of language and ideas has made us describe the current and what it creates as being a separate entity from the water around

it - we're giving name to something that's never truly existed or been anything other than the sea it manifests within.

Of course, when we call waves on the sea 'waves' and not 'sea' we know what we're doing, as we already know that the waves are just an 'expression' of the sea. But it's harder to appreciate that we're also doing the same thing with our perceptions of reality, especially since much of its movement happens at an atomic level. When we call tables tables and trees trees, we're just talking about one thing - a flow of reality - seeming to be many things.

It can be hard to understand all of this at first, as the word 'emptiness' tends to imply a lack of something. But emptiness doesn't have to be expressed as a negative - we can also say that it's a positive too, that emptiness is the basis of what we regard as this reality and the reason for its relative existence. In fact emptiness is a commonality in all things, a point where we really are all one. With nothing to denote what we might call 'other' - separate people, animals and objects to ourselves - there's only a Oneness, or more accurately a 'not-Twoness' here.

It's important to understand that emptiness really does not mean that reality is totally non-existent to Buddhists. Buddhism is often quoted as being nihilistic, and saying that nothing exists. In fact what it says is that reality exists only in a relative way, not in the way that we commonly accept. It is beyond existence, beyond non-existence, and is instead a flux of movement that's hard to pin down as anything fixed.

To better understand this idea, in intermediate Buddhist forms they talk about the two modes of existence (though this view is only provisional, there's

one stage of understanding above this), i.e. that there are 'two truths': relative reality and absolute reality. Relative reality is what we have here, around ourselves. Absolute reality is the standpoint from the whole of reality looking 'inwards' at relative reality.

From a relative standpoint we seem to be here, we seem to exist as separate things that are born and die. From the absolute standpoint though, there is only the absolute, with an almost illusory 'reflection' of relative reality within itself. The reflection has never been anything other than the thing it seems to arise within - absolute reality.

The danger is to think of this absolute reality as being something definable, to give it existence. But it can only be said to exist through what it manifests as - and of course what it manifests as can only ever be it itself. As soon as you say it's this or that, it's no longer the absolute.

A key text for Buddhists is the 'Heart Sutra', a sermon given by the Buddha regarding reality and its non-dual nature:

“...Here, O Sariputra, form is emptiness and the very emptiness is form; emptiness does not differ from form, form does not differ from emptiness, whatever is emptiness, that is form, the same is true of feelings, perceptions, impulses, and consciousness.

Here, O Sariputra, all dharmas are marked with emptiness ; they are not produced or stopped, not defiled or immaculate, not deficient or complete.

Therefore, O Sariputra, in emptiness there is no form nor feeling, nor perception, nor impulse, nor consciousness; No eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind ; No forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touchables or objects

of mind; No sight-organ element, and so forth, until we come to: No mind-consciousness element; There is no ignorance, no extinction of ignorance, and so forth, until we come to : There is no decay and death, no extinction of decay and death. There is no suffering, no origination, no stopping, no path. There is no cognition, no attainment and no non-attainment.

The Buddha – The Heart Sutra

Emptiness and the Self

The deepest change that understanding emptiness can bring about is when you realise that we aren't only talking about external objects as being empty. Just as importantly, our own bodies and minds are all empty, relative, and not much more than the words that describe them. Whereas most people can quickly understand that the physical side of themselves is not the place where 'they' are, they can't let go of the idea that their 'self' is something that exists somewhere in their minds. But your mind, your character and thoughts, your memories, the personal things that you think of as you, are also empty. They're all part of a flow that changes from day to day, from minute to minute - there is no permanent, definable you. Your thoughts are a chain of events, each reliant on the last, vanishing the moment they appear.

As for your physical presence, the carbon in your body was created in our sun as part of a process that began over 15 billion years ago when the universe was formed. You are in a constant state of change and decay, and upon your death the elements that you're created from will return to the earth; where some cataclysm will one day hurl them out into space; where they will become a

constituent of another star, and the cycle will begin again.

Try applying the idea of emptiness to yourself and your consciousness, trying to find the real essence of what makes 'you'. Point now to where 'you' are - the thing that if someone took it away, then you would no longer exist. You might be pointing at your chest or head, but neither of those things is your self-identity, they're just parts of a thing you call yourself. When trying to identify 'self', all you can ever do is point to things that are aggregates of other object, which again have no self-identity.

Your urge may be to see the idea of emptiness as just some kind of mental game that has nothing at all to do with the 'real' world, that all we're doing is playing with words. I thought just that too when I first heard about the idea. I learned about it, found it quite intriguing, but then I let it stay inside myself as just something I knew and understood. But it's no good learning anything about the universe if you don't then let what you know be a real part of the universe you perceive. The power of emptiness to change you and your perceptions lies in the application of it to your reality, not leaving it as something you simply know. Unless you put a lot of time into looking at things and understanding that they are empty, your reality will still be defined subconsciously by you in just the way it was before you understood emptiness as a concept.

Nagarjuna, founder of the Madhyamaka school of Indian Mahayana, showed that the idea of emptiness was essential to our understanding of reality, and wrote a vast amount about it. In his verses below, taken from the 'Sunyatasaptati' ('Seventy Verses on Sunyata') he indicates that, although we have to talk about objects in

a conventional sense as being things with their own nature, in the truest sense they have no essence of their own and are mainly words that don't describe what anything really is. Anyone who grasps this fact and applies it correctly becomes freed from a wrong view of reality and takes a major step towards realisation.

- *[1] Though the Buddhas have spoken of duration, origination, destruction, being, non-being, low, moderate, and excellent by force of worldly convention, [they] have not done [so] in an absolute sense.*
- *[2] Designations are without significance, for self, non-self, and self-non-self do not exist. [For] like nirvana, all expressible things are empty (sunya) of own-being.*
- *[4] Being does not arise, since it exists. Non-being does not arise, since it does not exist. Being and non-being [together] do not arise, due to [their] heterogeneity. Consequently they do not endure or vanish.*
- *[72] One with faith who tries to seek the truth, one who considers this principle logically [and] relies [upon] the Dharma that is lacking all supports leaves behind existence and non-existence [and abides in] peace.*
- *[73] When one understands that "This is a result of that", the nets of bad views all vanish. Undeiled, one abandons desire, delusion, and hatred and gains nirvana.*

Nagarjuna - (c. 150 - 250 AD)

I realise that I've talked quite a lot about emptiness above, but our detour into quantum physics and emptiness should make it far easier for you to understand the experiences I now go on to talk about below.



18

Enlightenment

"It is called Nibbana, in that it is a departure from the craving which is called 'vana', lusting."

The Buddha

Sadly there are quite a few well-known claimants to enlightenment who, it's very obvious from their descriptions of their event, aren't truly enlightened at all. It's an easy claim to make, and a very hard one to refute if you don't know the full meaning of the term; but after reading the following, you should have some idea of how to spot someone who is or isn't enlightened.

I've read accounts of 'enlightenment' that were based on, say, an experience of having one or more bliss states, or periods of non-conceptuality, or even a dream that contains what the person feels is a meaningful esoteric understanding. Whilst wonderful and a hint of things to come, dreams are just dreams and bliss is just bliss (unless it also contains a direct intuition of the true nature of reality). Bliss is more an indicator that you've entered into a state of mental pliancy, rather than a transcendent experience. It can be triggered in countless ways: some mundane, some not, such as when generating metta; or just by becoming fully mindful.

There's a feeling amongst some that there is no

concrete definition of what enlightenment is, that the experience is so ineffable that it can mean many different things, and as such is open to personal interpretation. But enlightenment has the same meaning in every eastern tradition: there are no grey areas, or any other kind of enlightenment we could mistake it for. Do not be misled: enlightenment isn't about blissful experiences and feeling the freedom of non-conceptuality, but is instead about an understanding of reality and experiencing it first hand.

In the West we tend to misunderstand what those who defined the term in the Eastern meditation traditions meant by it. We also confuse it with the Western connotations that have been attributed to the word and now, commonly, it can mean anything from 'quite clever really' to 'spiritually advanced'. But there is only one real enlightenment, and it has been precisely graded into levels (the 'Five Degrees of Tozan' in Zen, for example - or Hinduism's levels of 'Samadhi'), for well over 2,000 years - in part, at least, to avoid erroneous claims such as those now made.

For Buddhists, Sufis and Hindus, the core of the experience, and the things which qualify it as first stage enlightenment, or 'Kensho' (literally, 'seeing into one's own nature') in Zen, is that the state should be based on the direct perception of reality as non-dual emptiness and equality. This is experienced literally from the *point of view of the whole of reality itself*, as what Tibetan traditions sometimes call 'Infinite Awareness', where all matter and even the mind of the meditator himself are discovered to be just facets of this greater consciousness. But be careful, this is not consciousness in the sense of being a mind that might belong to a person or deity, it is just pure, infinite lucidity; and even the term 'awareness'

is a loose conceptualisation of something that's far more than anything we normally regard awareness to be.

(As an aside, it might be worth considering that if our reality really does arise from and is within awareness, then it might well account in part for many paranormal phenomena. Out-of-body experiences (OOBEs), telepathy, psychokinesis and many other similar events would at least have an underlying mechanism for their manifestation, the medium of 'Infinite Awareness'.)

There are three experiences which can seem very similar to the above:

1) Having an experience, or making an intellectual leap, where you understand the self as being a part of a single unity, a non-duality.

2) Having an experience where you feel yourself to be actually integrated in this oneness.

3) Having an experience where you are non-dual awareness in its entirety - the only one of the three which is Kensho.

If you were to want to move from the glimpses of Kensho towards full enlightenment (Satori), most of the work you would do is based upon refining your knowledge of ultimate reality, gaining confidence in the nature you have found, and continually resting in your understanding of it. This resting is exactly the same as our 'just sitting' – though with the applied sub-stratum of the knowledge of reality – and it works as an extremely powerful form of 'non-meditation' that is common to all of the most advanced meditation traditions.

The journey from Kensho to Satori is usually made by entering into Mahamudra or Dzogchen Buddhist practices, to draw together all experiences of Kensho and

understanding, so that the practitioner can remain in permanent awareness of ultimate nature. Dzogchen in particular is termed the 'completion stage' because of this, and although this 'final' stage can take anywhere from months to many years to traverse, many *have* done it successfully over the years.

Reality as Mind

The idea that everything is considered as mind by Eastern traditions may be unusual, but it underpins all thinking, all experience within Buddhism, Hinduism, Sufism, Taoism and many more traditions. Guru Padmasambhava (also known as Guru Rinpoche or Lopon Rinpoche), regarded as the second Buddha by Tibetan Nyingma Buddhists, is said to have brought Tantric Buddhism to Bhutan and Tibet in the 8th century. In his text, 'Self Liberation through Seeing with Naked Awareness', he states:

"...As for this sparkling awareness, which is called 'mind', even though one says that it exists, it does not actually exist. (On the other hand) as a source, it is the origin of the diversity of all the bliss of Nirvana and all of the sorrow of Samsara. And, as for its being something desirable; it is cherished alike in the Eleven Vehicles. With respect to its having a name, the various names that are applied to it are inconceivable (in their numbers)."

"Some call it "the nature of the mind" or "mind itself." Some Tirthikas call it by the name Atman or "the Self." The Sravakas call it the doctrine of Anatman or "the absence of a self. The Chittamatrins call it by the name Chitta or "the Mind." Some call it the Pranaparamita or "the Perfection of Wisdom."

“Some call it the name Tathagata-garbha or “the embryo of Buddhahood.” Some call it by the name Mahamudra or “the Great Symbol.” Some call it by the name “the Unique Sphere.” Some call it by the name Dharmadhatu or “the dimension of Reality.” Some call it by the name Alaya or “the basis of everything.”

“And some simply call it by the name “ordinary awareness.”

Solid matter is an 'expression' of this 'awareness', just as waves are an expression of the sea; neither the same as nor different to each other, just two terms for aspects of the same thing. This doesn't make our reality a dream or thought within awareness, or a complete illusion, but it is something that relies to a great extent for its presence on our perception of it; which again quantum physics echoes in its theories. Consciousness seems to be inseparable from matter and its reality.

This is an excerpt from a Buddhist sutra (something said in the words of the Buddha) on mind as the basis of reality:

“...Then Mahamati the Bodhisattva-Mahasattva spoke to the Blessed One, saying:”

“You speak of the erroneous views of the philosophers, will you please tell us of them, that we may be on our guard against them?”

“The Blessed One replied, saying : Mahamati, the error in these erroneous teachings that are generally held by the philosophers lies in this ; they do not recognise that the objective world rises from the mind itself; they do not understand that the whole mind-system also rises from the mind itself; but depending upon these manifestations of the mind as being real

they go on discriminating them, like the simple-minded ones that they are ; cherishing the dualism of this and that, of being and non-being, ignorant of the fact that there is but one common Essence."

"On the contrary my teaching is based upon the recognition that the objective world, like a vision, is a manifestation of the mind itself; it teaches the cessation of ignorance, desire, deed and causality; it teaches the cessation of suffering that arises from the discrimination of the triple world."

The Buddha – The Lankavatara Sutra.

In the Hindu 'Avadhut Gita' by Dattatreya we read:

"...Know the Self to be infinite consciousness, self-evident, beyond destruction, enlightening all bodies equally, ever shining. In It is neither day nor night."

Hatha Yoga v 57 'Hatha Yoga Pradipika', translation by Pancham Sinh, [1914)

"...The whole of this world and all the schemes of the mind are but the creations of thought. Discarding these thoughts and taking leave of all conjectures, O Râma! obtain peace."

Chinese meditators have an old saying: "A monk goes out into the world seeking a jewel (enlightenment) that is hidden in the hem of his own coat", meaning that many people look for enlightenment in external realities, when in fact there's no need to explore anything other than our own minds to find it. We already have infinite awareness – and holistic cosmic perception - as the basis of our own awareness, and all that obscures it is our own judgemental, conceptual thoughts and a lack of recognition of our real condition.

"The wisdom of Enlightenment is inherent in every

one of us. It is because of the delusion under which our mind works that we fail to realize it ourselves, and that we have to seek the advice and the guidance of Enlightened ones before we can know our own Essence of Mind. You should know that so far as Buddha-nature is concerned there is no difference in an Enlightened person and an ignorant one. What makes the difference is one realises it, while the other is ignorant of it."

The Sixth Patriarch of Zen, Hui-neng (638-713)

After Realisation

The word 'Nirvana' (Nibbana in Pali, the language of the early Buddhist writings) gives us an indication of some of the effects of enlightenment. Nibbana is formed by the joining of the elements 'Ni' and 'Vana'. 'Ni' is a negative particle that means the destruction or negation of; 'vana' means lusting or craving. Therefore, at least in part, nirvana is an experience that results in the complete loss of desire.

This doesn't mean that you become emotionless or that you don't care about the world, just that your new understanding of reality as a non-dual, empty apparition puts the world and your existence into perspective. You no longer need material things, or view your personal existence as any more or less important than anyone else's. Ultimately, and usually after many years of further practice in the post-Kensho phase, you become totally free of craving, suffering, hate and greed and enter into Satori, a fuller and permanent state of realisation.

But to even try to place these experiences within the restrictions of mere words would be very wrong. All of the terms like 'enlightenment' mean far more than I can

even begin to convey here. Think of this explanation as purely for the sake of explanation, and as a shadow of the reality behind it all.

Due to limits of space I don't want to go too deeply here into a full description of what the nature of infinite awareness is or how our reality seems to exist within it, as anything other than a complete explanation would not do it full justice. Worse still, giving you the wrong impression about the true nature of reality is of course just as bad as you having the wrong impression of conventional reality, and would result in limiting the possibility of experiencing it yourself.

The Spontaneous Enlightenment Experience

As I said in the introduction, not all glimpses of enlightenment are the result of meditation; and although those experiencing them might not know what's happened, they're more common than you might think. They usually take place very simply; you could be sitting on a train or waiting for a bus, when suddenly you're enveloped in a bright, golden/white light (though this is not present in all cases). Within seconds you feel incredible surges of pleasure and connectedness with the universe, and you understand things about reality that are beyond your normal comprehension.

In extreme cases you might find yourself outside the confines of our dimension altogether, with our universe just a tiny star within your infinite vastness, your mind unbridled by time or distance. You realise that you are, and always have been, an entity that others would call 'God', though the descriptions you've heard in most religions hardly equates to what you now are.

You remember that your life in this universe is not your life, that you are not the person you had always imagined yourself to be, and that there is nothing other than this ultimate 'you', there is only oneness and unity. You think with a mind that contains and is everything - and so you can know everything by simply turning your attention towards it. You understand life and death, time and space, or the very nature of yourself as this 'entity'.

Smaller events, which aren't quite Kensho, might not contain any particular understandings about reality at all, but will instead contain just small aspects of the larger experience. You might simply get a brief sense of vastness, for example, or a hard-to-explain feeling that reality is exactly how it should be, or you might even get inklings of non-duality – but all of these experiences, big or small, share a strange sense of authority and rightness that's hard for anyone having them to dismiss.

Here's a story by a writer describing a deep event that occurred to her whilst looking casually out of a window:

“...It was as simple as taking a step forward. One second I was me, the next I was everything. But ‘everything’? In reality there was no ‘everything’, there was just a me that was beyond any words. Not that normal reality had somehow disappeared, my eyes were wide open, but I was whatever I saw, and everything I couldn't see too. But talking about me ‘becoming’ anything is wrong, as I know now that I've always been what I found myself to be at that moment.”

“Near the beginning of the experience I had felt myself grow bigger and had seen the Earth, then our galaxy, then the universe itself, shrink within me until

it was just a small yellow star. From this outer viewpoint I felt I could have re-entered our reality at any point in time or space, because neither were barriers to me and had no real meaning."

"I was everything, and as it all I simply had to turn my attention towards ideas like death, reality, or time and I understood them completely. Not just intellectually in words and images, but I felt them in terms of underlying meanings and structures that were already present in my larger consciousness in ways that I can't begin to describe."

"It was what I imagine waking up from amnesia to be like; suddenly coming back to reality and realising that the life you've been living for so long is not your real life, that you are something and someone else. I was not 'me', I was infinite but without dimensions. I was awareness without a mind. There was no time that I could be subject to, although I could feel all time within myself, moving without moving."

"But despite what was happening to me, it wasn't like entering into an unreal, psychedelic world where everything seemed strange. I knew this place well and it all seemed perfectly normal to be there once again. I can't begin to describe the feelings of relief, familiarity and nostalgia I felt to be back where I should be. I was home again..."

"...The strength of what I experienced changed the way I think and act to a major extent and thankfully all for the better. Of course it changed too what I believe about our reality, as I can't help but know that this new perspective is a more accurate understanding of what's really around us. You might think that discovering something like this would make you want

to go and live a monk's life, or become 'religious', or sit in a chair and just wonder at the strangeness of it all. But life still has to be lived. Although I now don't see the world in the way I once did, there's still this illusion of 'I' that needs to eat and live. Nothing has changed except me..."

A simpler but no less interesting experience was had by a scientist working in the Antarctic who, after a long trek, sat down to rest and found:

"...I realized that I had expanded. I was no longer a small discrete consciousness located in my head - I encompassed the whole valley. I was HUGE. I was part of everything - or rather everything was part of me. I was ancient and unbelievably powerful. It was wonderful..."

It's important to point out that having experiences like the one above does not necessarily make anyone enlightened. There may be moments of realisation of our true nature, but unless that realisation is total, fully understood and integrated into day-to-day life so that it replaces the subject's conventional view of reality, it stays pretty much as just an experience (a Nyam) - albeit a very life-changing one. Sadly, these partial experiences become memories and conceptualised abstracts that eventually lose their power. The memory of food will not fill your stomach. True Satori is ongoing and ever-present knowledge, not an event to be recalled.

Enlightenment, Religious Experiences and TLE

If you were to explore the deeper events in any depth, the first thing you'd notice is that it's impossible to lump

religious experiences (such as visions of the Virgin Mary, etc.) and transcendental experiences (experiences of becoming reality itself) together into one basket and to say that they're the same. If we use the case of St Teresa of Avila for example, a noted visionary of the 16th century, whose journals of her visions of God and Jesus make fascinating reading: the key difference between what she was experiencing and transcendental states becomes obvious instantly - all of Theresa's stories involved her being witness to or sensing a divine presence. In meditation's highest experiences there is no sense of other, no Buddhas, no presences. All is just you, as reality itself. In fact, the higher you go the less likely there is to be content of any kind – rather, there is a sense of open reality and equality. Furthermore, transcendental experiences (TEs) don't contain messages of hope, instructions or warnings for the world, as religious events commonly do. This doesn't mean that religious experiences are unreal and that only events in Eastern meditation are valid, just that it's important to bear in mind that the two are considerably different.

Although it's not within the scope of this book to try to prove or disprove the reality of any experience, it'll be useful to detail and refute some of the ideas put forward as explanations for TEs and similar events:

1) How do we know that experiences like this are real?

Obviously it's very hard to prove conclusively, but if transcendental experiences are real, then above all they should be shown to be consistent amongst all those who have an experience of them, which they are. The content, i.e. the understanding gained about the nature of reality, is always the same, whether you're an Aryan tribesman

3,500 years ago or a London businessman today.

2) Isn't it based on what each person believes to be true, their own ideas of the nature of religion and reality?

TEs aren't coloured by your previous cultural background or religious beliefs. You're more likely to discover that what you 'learn' is the antithesis of what you want to believe, or have believed, all your life.

3) Hallucinations then, caused by some of the body's own endorphins?

Although there are repeated types of visual hallucination, like the melting and trailing which recur in an LSD trip, for example, there are no known internal hallucinations caused by drugs or illness where precise content is repeated over and over from person to person. On the whole, the brain works on the premise that what comes out must first have gone in, and without cultural experience or religious belief to account for their content, it's hard to imagine that hallucinations experienced by such a wide range of subjects would be so much the same.

4) Aren't all the people who have them religious fanatics or people desperate for a 'something' in their lives?

Not at all. More people without religious beliefs have spontaneous TEs than those with. Most who have them are happy, intelligent people who are not actively seeking any answers to life's questions.

5) Hasn't science proved that all of these experiences are nothing more than temporal lobe epilepsy?

When I first began to look at transcendental

experiences as someone hoping *not* to find anything real, temporal lobe epilepsy (TLE) as an explanation was my best bet - and indeed it is still the best hope of modern researchers who are trying to pin every odd experience known to man on it. The most common form of epilepsy among adults, TLE is believed to affect 600,000 to 1 million Americans. Some doctors speculate that if TLE were properly diagnosed, it might be found to affect one in one hundred adults - making it an extremely common illness. Like other epilepsies, it is the result of electrical storms in the brain - abnormal, excessive firing of neurons in the central nervous system. Epilepsy can be caused by congenital abnormalities, tumours, viruses, and injuries to the brain, but most cases of epilepsy are idiopathic: their cause is unknown.

Although temporal lobe epilepsy is the most common cause put forward by science for TEs, the symptoms of the two differ greatly. In TLEs, for example, the patient will usually display, both before and after any single event: hypergraphia (the need to constantly write), hyper-religiosity, fear, visual distortions, visions, voices, the sensing of presences, rages, involuntary movements, rapid heartbeat, the sensation of rising and falling, partial amnesia, etc.; whereas transcendental experiences may consist of a single, unique event with none of TLE's expression, before or afterwards.

Most telling of all is the fact that adepts and gifted non-meditators can actually enter into TEs at will - in many cases simply by understanding reality in a particular way, without the need for deep meditation or anything but an ordinary, relaxed mind. I think science would have a hard time coming up with a mechanism that allows subjects to induce TLE episodes in themselves instantly, and with just a thought.



19

Awareness

Up until now we've been looking mainly at techniques that teach you to how to harness the mind in some way; but we can also examine awareness itself to great effect and still keep it in a perfectly natural state. Exploration of awareness is critical if you're serious about moving into deeper forms of meditation, so I'd like to touch on a couple of basic ideas here as preparation.

If you've read through the previous chapters on how the various traditions see reality in its ultimate sense, you'll realise that working on mindfulness and exploring consciousness is also exploring ultimate reality too. In these traditions, the non-conceptual awareness at the base of our thinking minds *is* ultimate reality; and so anything you can do to bring yourself closer to the moment, or to help you recognise the special qualities that awareness has, is just as important – if not more so – as trying to reach a fabricated state of non-thinking in meditation.

It will help your meditation work a lot more if you can begin to appreciate and directly feel the spacious, clear and lucid aspects of your awareness, to help remove the sense of physical limitations that you believe your body

places upon it. Despite what you might think, nobody can claim that their awareness isn't spacious, clear and lucid right now. You may well say that you've got a hangover, or are feeling sad and don't feel lucid or clear at all - but your basic non-conceptual awareness (the core of your mind) is lucid and clear, no matter what you feel. It doesn't change, you do.

Initially what needs to be done by the practitioner in these techniques seems mundane: simply recognising the nature of awareness through frequent and regular investigation, trying to see its nature and watching how thoughts come and go. But slowly you begin to be able to identify non-conceptual awareness *within* your ordinary awareness. You see it as an indescribable, underlying ground for thoughts to arise in, supporting the thinking, feeling part of your awareness that you call 'you'. After a while you begin to associate more with the non-conceptual aspect of awareness than with your normal analytical mind, thus making your overall consciousness that much clearer and thought-free.

In previous methods, any kind of analysis of your mind would lead to you losing contact with the technique - but in the initial stages of looking at awareness, a small amount of analysis won't hamper your exploration at all, if you're careful.

Due to my own words here you might just accept that the mind is already free and beyond limits, but without exploring that freedom of mind yourself you can't truly know the qualities that you're trying to explore and promote. This has to be personal experience, decisions made concerning the nature of awareness based on what you feel, not just on intellectual understanding. Actively look for your freedom of consciousness and its spacious quality, try to experience it in moments of calm or

between thoughts by looking again and again at your mind. Try to avoid grasping at it, let it be what it already is and don't try to control it. Continue to look at your awareness regularly over a period of many sessions, noting that it's without discernible limits, and watching how it responds to as many different situations as possible. You have to recognise and understand what you hope to explore.

As an exercise, get into a relaxed and clear condition, then close your eyes and try to isolate and examine your awareness. Try to see how thoughts come into being. Can you see where in your mind they're formed? What triggers them? As thoughts disappear, what traces do they leave behind? Where do they go? Quietly observe the gap between thoughts too - is there anything concrete you can find, or is there anything to say about this space in thinking? Does your mind become quieter or more active when you look at it? Has it colour or size? Is it limited by spatial boundaries?

Be open and aware beyond the limits of your body. Let your mind relax, and appreciate that it has no perceptible limits or describable nature. Allow your awareness to expand without trying to force it to feel big. Know that it's already limitless, formless and almost completely beyond anything you can say about it.

Combining mindfulness practice with your development of awareness is exceptionally useful, and the following will help prevent your mindfulness work from being too fixed and dull.

Problems

Problems can come about when someone trying to be

mindful in a sustained way focusses on just the visual awareness part of consciousness, how bright their attention is to what they see. By continuing to pay attention to just this one aspect of awareness, you can easily lock yourself out of other experiences and the full reach of what proper mindfulness actually is. Basically, you can't see the sky if you're training yourself to look continually at the flowers.

What can easily happen is that you end up just being brightly, visually aware and little else, living in a slightly staring, fixed state of attention that actually tends to push away the natural, mindful awareness of your surroundings, so that it becomes counter-productive. Becoming mindful is a balancing act where you try to find a middle point between being clearly outwardly aware, and letting what you're being aware of also come in towards you. Try imagining that reality is a membrane hanging in space in front of you, which you neither try to push away with forced attention, nor to move away from by being too loosely aware.

The best way to reach relaxed and rounded mindfulness of the kind we're looking for is to pay attention to developing all the other aspects that consciousness has, not just its visual depth, as can happen so easily. Ideally, you need a set of exercises which help promote awareness in every respect, such as those I explain here. Although the aim of the methods below is to broaden your sense of mindfulness, they will at times give good blisses when high too.

After a short bout of trying to establish yourself in mindfulness in your usual way, go through each of the exercises listed below for a few minutes, and see if you can notice any changes in your perceptions and your sense of mindful awareness. As I've said, this

development of awareness and recognition of its qualities is far more important in terms of enlightenment than you might expect; and in fact, although they may seem exceptionally simple, the ideas behind the exercises here are exactly the same as those at the highest levels of meditation practice. Do not dismiss them or take them lightly, they're something you should practise regularly. Spend at least a few minutes every day giving the following some attention if you do want to try to head towards realisation.

Broadening Mindfulness

1) **Crispness** - Look at the way that objects have crisp, clear edges. See how detailed what you see is, right down to the finest levels. Look at the vivid nature of colours and their range of hues.

2) **Continuity** - See that reality and your perception of it is unchanging and continual. Your conscious awareness (as the operator of the TV camera) of what's being seen might vary from minute to minute, but what the camera (basic awareness) is aware of is always exactly the same in quality. Can you find any errors or glitches in your awareness? Does it ever change?

3) **Depth** - Watch the way that things pass in front of each other to give you a sense of the three-dimensional nature of reality. Note depth and distance.

4) **Welcome** - Imagine that reality has a warmth, a soft, rounded and welcoming nature. Point metta towards reality as a whole as you do this. Although it may be the hardest thing in the world for some, imagine that reality cares about you and points metta

back at you, whether you're trying to be mindful or not.

5) **Spaciousness** – Notice the spacious, unrestricted qualities of your awareness. Can you find any real limits to it? You're able to feel your body and also have a sense of the walls around yourself, which you may feel limit you; but in fact your mind is completely without boundaries. Although you may already understand this, it's still important to include this element in your mindfulness work and to try to feel how totally open your awareness is.

Once through this sequence, just sit and do nothing but let your consciousness be aware in a natural way.

Working with senses other than sight (taste, touch, hearing) will help stop mindfulness practice from making you concentrate unduly on just visual stimuli, which would tend to decrease your overall consciousness of your other forms of awareness. It's useful to develop your appreciation of sound in exactly the same way, so with eyes closed, listen to the ambient sounds around yourself – or with headphones on and listening to music if you would prefer – and investigate:

1) **Crispness** - Listen to the way each sound can still be heard clearly, even against a background of other sounds.

2) **Continuity** - Hearing is continual sameness, it has no flaws or changes. A song you listen to today will sound (barring degradation of the media it's played upon) exactly the same tomorrow and every other day.

3) **Depth** – look for the space between sounds and the way that sounds can contribute to giving you a

sense of the landscape that created them.

4) **Welcome** - Feel metta coming from what you hear towards you.

5) **Spaciousness** – Try to be aware of the unlimited, unrestricted nature of your hearing. It's a massive landscape that's only partially filled with sounds.

Again, any work you do on developing awareness is just as important as traditional meditation.



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Where to Next?

Once you're comfortable with the ideas in the previous chapters, there are a number of directions that you can take your exploration of the high in. After you've got some skill in calming your mind, and especially in being able to direct metta towards things, constructing your own techniques and exploring the methods here will be fairly easy. But if you want to learn more about formal meditation instead, there are tens of books on styles that'll fit in well with what you've already learned and I'd recommend that, to begin with at least, you read as many texts from as many different traditions as you can lay your hands on. I don't want to make it seem as though everything rests entirely on formal meditation, but your exploration of mind would obviously benefit from using techniques that have already been long established in various world traditions. You have no real need to get involved in the more spiritual aspect of any of these traditions if it's not what you're looking for - the methods used within them will still work.

If you do want to find a formal school where you can practise in a more disciplined and structured environment, then there are a staggering number of traditions to choose from, e.g. Buddhism, Taoism, Zen, Sufism, Hinduism – all of them offering powerful

meditation systems in themselves. Some will place great emphasis on a guru, or visualisations of particular objects. Some use mantras (sequences of words accredited with great power when said correctly), whilst others use mandalas (special pictures that are representative of the structure of reality) or even a mixture of the above.

There are over 40 Hindu forms alone to choose from, and any number of other forms that might be suited to the way that you want to practise. And that's the key: it isn't any use trying to make yourself fit into a school where you don't believe in what they do, where you don't like the atmosphere, or where you find that their methods aren't appropriate to your lifestyle. Just as a very small example of the available Hindu traditions:

- **Bhakti yoga - the yoga of love** - Bhakti yoga uses a variety of simple methods, including prayer and calming meditation. They believe that only love and devotion can purify the human consciousness to facilitate realisation.
- **Karma yoga - the yoga of selfless action** - Using right action (generosity, kindness, compassion, selflessness) without desiring or seeking reward. Karma yoga practitioners believe that when we work in harmony with the universe and are not motivated by ego, we no longer maintain desires and apprehension of the future - thus becoming calmer and more fully mindful, and thus more likely to reach a TE.
- **Jnana yoga - The yoga of knowledge** - The way of knowledge. Developing an understanding about

the nature of ultimate reality (what's called 'view' in other traditions) through studying divinity and learning to discriminate between illusion and reality, Jnana yoga emphasises using mind to transcend the mind, believing that "liberation is attained, not by works or ceremony, but by knowledge alone." Knowledge in this context is not gained through faith or intellectual understanding, but through having direct experience of it in a TE.

- **Raja yoga - royal or highest yoga** - The goal of Raja yoga is a complete stilling of the normal conceptual mind, allowing practitioners to perceive the non-conceptual basis of consciousness in terms of its ultimate nature, its true form.
- **Mantra yoga** - Mantra yoga means "union by voice or sound." This form includes the rhythmic repetition of specific sounds, chants or mantras. The practitioner repeats the syllable, word or phrase continually, sometimes for weeks, months or years on end.
- **Tantric yoga/Kundalini** - Not to be confused with Tibetan Tantric practices. Hindu Tantrism is the 'feminine path' that worships the goddess aspect of energy and sees the body as the temple of the divine. This method is quite different from the yoga forms which emphasise renunciation and desirelessness. Its practitioners work with the chakras and a system of channels in and around the spine in an attempt to release the body's latent kundalini/psychic energy and direct it to the crown chakra to help reach experiences of enlightenment.

- **Vedanta (or Advaita Vedanta)** - Largely cross-cultural rather than being an exclusively Hindu form, Vedanta teaches that our real nature is divine, that the real goal of human life is to understand and become aware of this divinity, and that truth is universal. Vedanta accepts members of all religions of the world.

Because nearly all forms of meditation tend to focus initially on issues of morality, it's very easy to believe that learning to become 'moral' is what meditation is all about. In fact, this side of the practice – whilst it does make you a better person – is actually a tool to help you meditate more effectively. If you're in any way negative or have issues of anger or bitterness, then you really will find it hard to meditate properly - so attending a formal class to learn how to examine and control your mind and unwanted emotions can be useful. Even if you feel that you're already pretty well adjusted, I would say that going through the same basics that we've done here in a meditation school (or 'sangha') is something that every meditator should try for a time.

In meditation circles, people will try to avoid making criticisms of traditions and teachers, saying that all ways are the right way and that each method was developed to suit a particular type of character and understanding. I would agree, but whilst there are tens of schools that teach highly respectable forms of meditation, it really doesn't mean that all teachers of these forms are good and sincere people. With book deals, lecture circuits and 'practice fees', there are schools with an eye more on making money and gaining followers than teaching useful methods.

There are many styles of meditation which have

sprung up over the last thirty years in the wake of the New Age explosion that are really and truly of no use whatsoever in terms of gaining realisation - though they may well offer methods for creating mindfulness. If you're looking for a form to practise, make sure you examine those you find very closely before committing yourself to them.

It's commonly the case that people, who through bereavement or personal tragedy are looking for answers to the meaning of their existence, will begin to explore the more spiritual side of meditation by joining one tradition or another. But in truth these are the very people who should avoid it, as they can be in such a vulnerable state that they're easy to manipulate in the wrong hands. The only time to look for a path is when you don't need one, when it's no longer a question of finding something to believe in to save you from your problems.

The practice of meditation really isn't immune to those unscrupulous people who choose to take advantage of those they purport to teach. I hope that won't put you off trying to find one of the many schools that have only the benefit and well-being of their practitioners in mind - of course they're out there too. Just look out for happy, normal students and teachers who display the characteristics that you aspire to.

The Route

Although each school of meditation tends to be thought of as an end in itself, that isn't strictly the case, as some meditators may go on to explore other, more advanced forms of meditation to help quicken their progress towards enlightenment. These higher schools

will usually focus more on gaining an understanding of the nature of reality rather than striving for deeper and deeper concentration. There are no rules, however. Where you begin and whether you decide to move from one tradition to another is purely personal choice.

Most Buddhists who do choose to follow this progression will tend to begin with the school of Buddhism called Mahayana (the 'Middle Way'), where morality and concentrative exercises are prominent. After gaining experience, and experiences, they might then move on to Vajrayana (Tibetan Buddhist tantra), where they learn to gain sensitivity to the same kinds of energies that we've begun to explore here through the use of chakras. They may then later move again into Mahamudra (the 'Great Seal') practices, working primarily on awareness and the understanding of the true nature of reality, before finally entering into one of the Dzogchen traditions to draw all their skills together to prepare for complete realisation and Buddhahood. One prominent aspect in many of these traditions is that of Vipassana meditation.

Vipassana

Meditators who are hoping to reach enlightenment will usually learn Shamatha as preparation for entering into Vipassana meditation. Vipassana means 'seeing things as they really are', perceiving them without all your usual thoughts of liking, disliking, analysis and judgement. This is achieved in part by learning to note everything you're doing, as you're doing it. If you're tying your shoe laces, for example, you note that you're tying your shoe laces. If you're drinking a coffee, you note that you're drinking a coffee, becoming closely aware of all

the sensations and movements that it entails. Through this method your depth of mindfulness is greatly increased and, rather than having a general mindfulness of reality and its contents, you focus more acutely on the individual events that you partake of as they appear in your consciousness. This helps create 'bare awareness', a state where you're so continually outwardly focussed that normal thoughts start to lessen and then disappear, leading to a very mindful non-conceptual awareness.

Mindfulness of breathing is also practised as a component of Vipassana, but with the aim of developing awareness rather than calming mental and physical processes. Once bare awareness is approached or achieved, the practitioner will then turn his or her attention during formal sessions to gaining insights into the true nature of reality. This is tackled by investigating the mind and its actions using both logic and awareness of consciousness itself. In both Mahayana and Theravāda Buddhism, Vipassana is used to gain an intellectual and direct experience of the understanding of the Four Noble Truths which were taught by the Buddha: primarily, that life is transitory, and that all phenomena lack inherent existence and are empty.

Because Vipassana can easily be practised whilst carrying on your normal daily routine, and because it doesn't need the quiet that Shamatha does, it can be a better option for those who have a more hectic lifestyle.

There are three steps prescribed to those who want to undertake training in Vipassana. The first step is to abstain from killing, stealing, sexual activity, speaking falsely, and intoxicants that reduce mindfulness (please see the introduction for my feelings on this) - not as a way of becoming more moral and 'good', but to remove the attendant emotions that would normally agitate the

mind and make self-observation impossible.

The second step is to develop awareness through the kind of continual awareness of actions that I described earlier. At the third stage, 'equanimity' (learning not to react to thoughts and emotions unguardedly) is also practised, with the aim of clearing away the last vestiges of thought that stand between ourselves and pure awareness. Once the meditator's mind is more pliable and focussed, observations of awareness and its actions are much more acute, and deep understandings about both consciousness and reality can sometimes be experienced spontaneously without any intellectual process taking place. To help bolster the states reached with these methods, metta is used to mentally share with all other beings any purity that might have been achieved through meditation.

Whilst aspects of Vipassana techniques vary from school to school, on the whole the aim is the investigation of all the phenomena of life as they appear to the mind. The categories usually used for investigation are: matter/form (*rūpa*); sensation and feelings (*vedanā*); perception (*saññā*); mental formations (*saskāra*); and consciousness (*vijñāna*); which all lead to direct experiential perception, Vipassana.

It's common for many schools to combine Shamatha and Vipassana as soon as students have some control over their mental processes; but Vipassana isn't something that you have to do to make you a 'good' meditator. For we explorers, going into Vipassana in its full sense is not necessary, unless it's something you personally want to explore.

If you can reach a stage where you can 'just sit' reasonably comfortably, that's as much direct control

over your mind as I would recommend for exploring a high at this stage. There comes a point where the complexity or focus of a meditation technique can become so overwhelming that you become too singly focussed on it, rather than being open to the greater flow of experience as you should be, and it 'locks you out' of perception at a higher level. Any control of your mind as you practise these techniques should be just enough and no more, the gentler the better. Give experiences mental space and the opportunity to come about.

Entheogens

Contextually, drugs that are claimed to facilitate a direct and personal understanding of the universe and/or 'spirituality' are called 'entheogens' ("generating the divine within.") Many of those I list below have been used for hundreds, if not thousands, of years by a variety of religious traditions to help ease the spiritual path; others are modern-day psychedelics that allow a deeper exploration of self and consciousness.

But, it may not be useful to divide the two and say that one brings on real experiences and the other doesn't, as each is just as likely to produce a pleasant diversion for an evening as it is a more meaningful insight into reality. The following is far from being an exhaustive list, as new natural and synthetic compounds with similar properties are being discovered almost by the month:

Entheogens

- Cannabis (hashish, marijuana)
- Opium

- Hawaiian baby woodrose
- Morning glory seeds
- Datura
- Nutmeg
- Salvia divinorum
- Calea zacatechichi (Mexican bitter grass)
- Ayahuasca/pharmahuasca
- Psilocybin mushrooms
- Amanita muscaria (Fly Agaric) mushroom
- Peyote/mescaline
- San Pedro cactus
- DMT/5-MeO-DMT
- DPT
- DXM
- LSD
- MDA/MDMA (Ecstasy)
- 2C-B
- Ketamine
- PCP

Of all the current websites dealing with the drug experiences, the 'Halls of Erowid' (www.erowid.org) is the most comprehensive and important, giving explorers such as ourselves a vast library of accurate, unbiased knowledge to draw upon. Their stated mission is to provide:

“...access to reliable, non-judgemental information about psychoactive plants and chemicals and related issues. We work with academic, medical, and experiential experts to develop and publish new resources, as well as to improve and increase access to already existing resources. We also strive to ensure that

these resources are maintained and preserved as a historical record for the future.”

As such, the site is imperative reading.



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Reality & Unreality

One of the reasons that you're now reading a revised edition of 'Cannabis & Meditation' is that the original manuscript for it contained a chapter that talked about the more negative side of spirituality and meditation, which at the time we thought might disturb the tone of the book overall, so we left it out.

Now two years on, with the increasing flow of wrong beliefs about meditation and chakras on the internet, I feel that the things I talk about below now need to be said – not the least to save people spending hours of their lives doing earnest but pointless meditation.

It's unfortunate that the bulk of modern New Age/Western occult books from which anyone might learn about things like chakras are a interdependent mish-mash of long perpetuated half-truths, which can severely deceive anyone who is trying to learn about these subjects honestly. I'm certainly not the first to say this - just about anyone who is involved in serious meditation already knows that it is a problem, but it's nothing that any one of us in isolation can usually do very much about. Luckily for me, I do have a way of doing something about it via this book, and my hope is that if this saves you a few dollars by preventing you

from buying the wrong books, or stops you wasting your time doing the wrong kind of meditation, then I will be more than happy.

At some point reading this book you're almost certainly going to have asked yourself, "So, where's all the stuff about opening up my third eye?!" And unfortunately my reply has to be, "There isn't any, because it doesn't exist." Yes, it's certainly written about, particularly here in the West, but it doesn't have any history at all in Buddhism and Hinduism – the traditions that the idea is meant to have been taken from - and it's actually a Western invention, conceived within the last hundred years.

In traditional texts, chakras aren't associated with the wealth of character information, sounds, emotions, auras, or hardly anything else that New Age literature, now claiming to divulge 'ancient methods', says about them. There are no incenses, emotions, planets, crystals or metals associated with them; there's no 'opening' chakras, and nor is the third eye found in aikido or karate, as is often claimed; and although again the Ajna is sometimes used in Zen, it isn't the 'third eye' or the main focus of practice. In fact, Zen places the 'vital energy centre' (the Hara) in the abdomen, which is considered to be the seat of the heart-body-mind - and in some forms, focussing on this point is a technique used for developing deep states.

In Tibetan Buddhist tantra, there are just four chakras, with the most important situated at the solar plexus, not at the Ajna. In Hindu tantra, there are six chakras, with a seventh (the highest chakra) above and outside the body. The brow chakra *is* 'higher' than the others in tantra, and in a way it is more powerful, but it's just another point on the journey that your 'body energy'

passes through as it travels towards your crown. There are, of course, many meditation methods that do focus on the Ajna, and these work very well, but it's never called the 'third eye', and it's not a requirement that you must open it before you can reach enlightenment.

There's certainly a lot of symbolism regarding this point on the forehead in the East, though none of it relates to a 'third eye'. In Buddhism, some statues of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas from the second and third centuries wear an 'urna', a concave circular dot sometimes shown as a jewel, which is an auspicious mark made by a whorl of white hair on the forehead between the eyebrows of an enlightened being. In Hinduism, the dots (or lines, or a smear of colour) are called either 'bindu' or 'tilak'. The bindu, although it can sometimes indicate marital status, is nothing more than an attractive 'beauty spot' which can vary in size, colour and name depending on the material it's made from, and it's something that's worn by many Indian women who aren't Hindus.

The tilak, on the other hand, does have a variety of religious and ceremonial meanings (it's worn at weddings for example), and it can be placed on any of up to thirty-two places on the body, including the forehead, as an identification of caste. It's worn every day by sadhus, and is also applied by a priest during a visit to the temple as a sign of the deity's blessing. As well as its religious symbolism, the tilak has a cooling effect on the forehead that can help with focus during meditation in hot climates.

The closest we can get to opening anything is in Shivaism, one of the earliest Indian denominations, dating back to the first centuries BC. Ancient as it is, Shivaism is as fine a piece of research into the nature of

mundane and supra-mundane awareness as anything you might read today.

Here at least we find reference to an eye, as the Shivaite term 'Udvamanti' literally means 'opening of the eye', as a name for the emergence of infinite consciousness in a meditator, gained by his or her focus on their inner consciousness, recognising the two to be one and the same. Ash from a sacred fire is placed on the Shivaite's forehead (usually in lines rather than a circle) as a sacrament to Puja and a sacred symbol of purity, although it's the ash itself that counts, not truly where it is placed.

So where did the 'third eye' concept first begin?

It first came about through a simple misunderstanding of the action of the pineal gland, an organ situated low in the centre of the brain (though not quite in line with the supposed position of the 'third eye'). The eighteenth-century philosopher Rene Descartes spent many hours studying the pineal gland, trying to deduce its effects, and he called it 'the seat of the soul', a point of connection between mind and body. His reason for believing this was that he saw it as being unique in the human brain, in that it didn't appear to be duplicated in its right and left sides. However, with the aid of modern microscopes we can see that it *is* in fact divided into two hemispheres.

Probably the first person to use the term 'third eye', and also to use it in reference to the pineal gland, was the scientist Nils Holmgren, in 1918. Holmgren coined the term after examining the pineal glands of frogs and dogfish sharks (but not people) and discovering cells on the tip of the gland that looked like retinal cone cells, which is in no way saying that the organ had any kind of

a spiritual connection.

However, a few years before Holmgren the Victorian 'Theosophical Society' had decided that the pineal gland was not just important, as Descartes had thought, but that it was the key to spiritual awakening. All well and good - but for anyone not familiar with Theosophy, it's worth bearing in mind that its co-founder, H.P. Blavatsky, is the source of many of today's 'occult' myths, such as Ascended Masters, astral travel, the third eye, the Akashic Record, remote viewing, the 'silver cord' in OOBes, Atlantis, Lemuria ('Mu') and a whole host of other things which she claimed to have been told by her very own 'Ascended Masters', via letters that floated down from heaven onto the tables around which she held seances.

Sadly for Blavatsky, an over-eager aide at one such seance opened a secret panel in which the pre-written letters, later to be revealed, were placed, thus giving the game away – and all in the presence of paranormal investigators who were there to scrutinise her dealings. Blavatsky was an opportunistic fraud and not a very good one.

Against a backdrop of a growing spiritual movement in Britain and the USA, the books of Blavatsky and other Theosophical writers came at a time when Victorian England was eager to explore what it could of Eastern esotericism, and they sold in large quantities. Although Theosophy can be shown to have elements of Buddhism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Gnosticism, the Cabala and the works of Plato and Plotinus within it (the best lies are always those that contain an element of truth), it manages to misrepresent and adulterate the basis of these traditions at almost every turn. Blavatsky also plagiarised a good deal from earlier authors, such as the

French occultist Eliphas Levi and a number of Eastern text translations that were available at the time – and additions were also made by the editors of her books, who changed her manuscripts to make them less contradictory and more legible.

Blavatsky developed many of Levi's ideas, including those on the exploration of astral realms - which Levi thought was 'out of body' travel, where the astral body (not the soul or spirit) is able to visit supposed spiritual after-death realms. Here Blavatsky put her own spin on things yet again, and added the idea that people could enter an 'etheric' plane and travel, not just to other dimensions and realms, but also to any location and time in the universe too. She also decided that every person was contained within a series of seven etheric bodies, like layers of an onion skin, each correlating to one of her equally fictitious 'seven planes of reality', one of which she said contained the 'aura' - another of her own inventions that has provided supposed validation for tens of authors on the subject ever since.

Although Blavatsky claimed that her work was, in large part, channelled from great spiritual masters (such as Jesus) in the beyond, it is unfortunate that they didn't seem as interested in peace and tolerance as we would have expected, but instead seemed to support Theosophy's racist ideals: they thought of many ethnic groups as being sub-human. This idea was very popular in Victorian England and India, where the first Theosophical Society was founded by Blavatsky and one Col. H.S. Olcott, and it helped justify British Imperialism for many years to come, and also the rise of the anti-Jewish groups who fuelled the Holocaust just a couple of decades later. Strange when, according to Blavatsky, The Theosophical Society was composed of students, for

whom:

“Their bond of union is not the profession of a common belief, but a common search and aspiration for Truth. They hold that Truth should be sought by study, by reflection, by purity of life, by devotion to high ideals, and they regard Truth as a prize to be striven for, not as dogma to be imposed by authority.”

And yet Blavatsky's book, 'The Secret Doctrine', uses a variety of derogatory terms for Africans and other ethnic groups, such as the “degenerate descendants” of the Atlanteans; saying that the, “yellow, red, brown, and black races are abject and savage”, whereas “the Aryan race” represents “the apex of physical and intellectual evolution.” Other Theosophists who came after Blavatsky were also keen to promote its racist, anti-Semitic thrust, in part to help justify Europe's somewhat brutal colonisation of Africa and the Far East.

Scientifically, there's hardly a word in what Theosophy says about the evolution of man, the cosmos, Eastern thought - or the third eye – that has been shown to be true, but Blavatsky's ideas have been the source of literally hundreds of books since, all quoting her as a genius and visionary.

Theosophy and its beliefs spread quickly, not just amongst the American and English ex-patriots in India, but also to a variety of Indian thinkers; and sadly too, to a variety of charlatan who wanted to get in on the popularity that the Hindu faith and all things Eastern were accruing in the West, where support for Blavatsky was easy to court. With the best will in the world, spirituality in India, as elsewhere, has always been as much a commercial venture as it has a search for the truth. If the West wants the third eye, or anything else,

there is someone in India who will be happy to provide it.

It was good business sense for Theosophical beliefs to be taken on by local teachers - and ancient Hindu knowledge, gained over thousands of years of insight and direct experience, was left behind for much more attractive (and easier to practise) forms of spirituality and meditation; sadly, these were invented by Blavatsky, Olcott and others, mere months before. The respected Swami Sivananda, for instance, read many Theosophical works, and its terminology is found throughout his writings as the alternative translation of Sanskrit words, giving Theosophy a provenance that it does not deserve.

According to Blavatsky, after man developed through a series of 'Root races' over some 3 billion years (including stages where he was variously boneless, four-armed, three-eyed, or even one-eyed) his 'third eye' retreated into the lower centre of his brain, resulting in the loss of his spiritual capabilities.

“...The “deva eye” exists no more for the majority of mankind. The third eye is dead, and acts no longer; but it has left behind a witness to its existence. This witness is now the pineal gland...”

“...The double-faced became the one-faced, and the eye was drawn deep into the head and is now buried under the hair. During the activity of the inner man (during trances and spiritual visions) the eye swells and expands. The Arhat sees and feels it, and regulates his action accordingly. . .”

Trying to sum up Blavatsky's entire, tortuous explanation of the growth and loss of our 'third eye' would take far more room than I'd like to give it here so, for those interested parties, take a look at HPB's 'Secret Doctrine', Volume 2, pages 289 to 298 for more details.

Leadbeater and Chakras

One of Blavatsky's followers, an English clergyman called the Reverend C. W. Leadbeater, is responsible for a good deal of the distorted ideas about chakras that we now have in the West. Leadbeater claimed not only to be able to enter the so-called 'astral plane' at will, but also to have suddenly one day gained the ability to examine every one of a person's 'former incarnations' in detail - without, as he said himself, having any previous experience of doing so before. Leadbeater also claimed that not only was he himself an incarnation of the legendary King Asoka of India (who was responsible for the adoption of Buddhism in India in the second century), but also King Gashtasp of Persia, who "upheld the mission of the Zoroasterian religion."

Remember that the following is entirely of Leadbeater's own invention:

"..The chakras or force-centres are points of connection at which energy flows from one vehicle or body of a man to another. Anyone who possesses a slight degree of clairvoyance may easily see them in the etheric-double, where they show themselves as saucer-like depressions or vortices in its surface...We sometimes speak of them as roughly corresponding to certain physical organs; in reality they show themselves at the surface of the etheric double, which projects slightly beyond the outline of the dense body."

But, surely those academics of the time who were aware of the real chakra systems were up in arms about Leadbeater's invention and were quick to decry it? Absolutely: in his book, 'Kundalini, The Mother of the Universe' (1930), Rishi Singh Gherwal writes:

"...The harm to Yoga philosophy that has been done

by misinformation thru the "Theosophist" Rev. C. W. Leadbeater is indeed very great. Most readers of Theosophical and Occult literature believe Rev. Leadbeater to be a friend to the Hindus, but after reading his books, "The Inner Life" and "The Chakras", I am forced to say by the information he has given, he is the greatest enemy of Yoga philosophy, and has given a bad name to Yoga. This may have been done unconsciously. Nevertheless, it is hard to believe, as in "The Chakras" he in no instance has corrected the misinformation made in "The Inner Life".

Sir John Woodruffe, translator and author of the book 'Serpent Power' (a must for everyone interested in chakra use), writes:

"Though Mr. Leadbeater also refers to the Yoga Shastra, it may perhaps exclude error if we here point out that his account does not profess to be a representation of the teaching of the Indian Yogis (whose competence for their own Yoga the author somewhat disparages), but that it is put forward as the Author's own original explanation (fortified, as he conceives, by certain portions of Indian teaching) of the personal experience which (he writes) he himself has had."

But despite this and other protestations over the last hundred years or so, Leadbeater's system survives and still influences New Age authors the world over today.

One modern writer, Anodea Judith (Judith Anne Mull), perpetuates the myth of Leadbeater's work in her 1987 book 'Wheels of Light', describing him as an expert on the subject of chakras. She says that his book is, "the standard western classic on chakras..." and that, "for a long time...the only western book on the subject." But

neither of these statements is even close to being true, and all she has done is added to our modern-day confusion over chakras and the impression that his work has any real meaning. Judith says of the pineal gland:

“...a chemical produced by this gland is known to produce increased psychic ability, dream recall, visions and other hallucinogenic effects...”

Hallucinogenic effects, certainly - but *known* to increase psychic ability? On page 46 of her book in its introductory conclusions, Judith gives her reasons for not sticking to tried and tested Eastern tantra:

“...It is at this point that some of the theories and biases of this book need to be presented. There is much that corresponds to standard systems (if one can find enough agreement to say what those are), yet many things differ. The theories in the following pages are the result of making connections between the beliefs of the past, present and projected future of researched information on the chakra system, as well as other metaphysical and psychological systems. This is meant to be presented as a theory, not dogma: the presentation of an idea, not a religion.”

It's a shame that 'the beliefs of the past' should not include the original tantric thinking. As we might expect considering her sources, there are definite parallels between Judith's 'connections' and Blavatsky's writings. Judith also alleges that:

“(There are)...7 major and several minor chakras in the subtle body which act as gateways to dimensions spanning from matter to consciousness.”

“In the human being these seven planes correspond to archetypal levels of consciousness as well as various physical attributes.”

“The chakra system describes a pattern of evolution, and the human race is presently going from the third level to the fourth.”

None of the above ideas are present at all in the original tantric systems, but they're certainly to be found in Theosophy.

Lobsang Rampa and the 'Third Eye'

The final 'proof' of the third eye concept was given to us in the 1950s by Lobsang Rampa. Rampa was allegedly a Buddhist monk, whose book 'The Third Eye' gave post-war Europe a whole new interest in the occult and meditation, with his stories of life in a Tibetan monastery. As an interesting illustration of Rampa's story and of human psychology, the book 'Sleight of Mind' by mentalists Harling and Nyrup, shows just why we cling to things that later prove to be untrue.

“The book, ‘The Third Eye’ (1956), is a good example of our refusal to let go of ‘first in’ information. Written by one Tuesday Lobsang Rampa, the author claimed to have been born into a wealthy Tibetan family and to have been a monk, who over many years of tribulations studied - and mastered - Tibetan Buddhism. He then purportedly underwent an operation to open his ‘Third Eye’, which gave him incredible psychic powers which allowed him to sense realms of existence far beyond our own. With its broad and intriguing tales of life and esoteric practises in a Lhasa monastery, the book sold exceptionally well.

Sadly, eventually it was discovered that the author was in fact one Cyril Henry Hoskin, born in Devon, England, the son of a plumber. When confronted with the

truth Hoskin wasn't at all phased, but claimed that although he may have been born Cyril Henry Hoskin, his body had been taken over by Rampa's spirit. So, according to him, all the information he had written was true.

Rather than this making people think they may have been duped by Hoskin, it gave readers a plausible reason to continue to believe in the story as they'd first imagined it. Despite his unveiling as an impostor and the growing realisation that what he wrote bore very little relationship to the real practices of Tibetan Buddhism, it didn't put off the majority of readers.

Though the market for his following titles was smaller, Hoskin went on to write another twelve successful books under the name of Rampa before his death in 1981. There's nothing quite so lasting in our own minds as what we want to believe to be true.

Hoskin's story is far from being an isolated case. Crop circles, channelled spirits, spoon bending and a host of other once supposedly mysterious events which have galvanised thousands of followers have also been shown to be not quite what they first seemed. The point is that we will always tend to cling tenaciously to what we first believe to be the truth about almost anything, even in the face of absolute proof to the contrary.

This is what gives everything from alternate therapies and cults to wacky science and urban myths their power. None of us wants to believe that we've been misled so simply by the assumed authority of the written word, or television, or that man down the street who seems to know a lot about reiki. First in, last out..."

*From 'Sleight of Mind', Ian Harling & Martin Nyrup.
Copyright Spellbound Publishing, Denmark.*

Does any of the above matter? Who gets hurt when writers like Blavatsky invent a host of spiritual ideas and sell them as the truth? To which I'd reply: who does it help? Does it help people who are serious about spiritual matters, or those who want to find enlightenment, to have to wade through hundreds of 'western occult' books which are based on nothing more than musings or 'psychic revelations', in search of truths that aren't present in these writings?

The Bardo and DMT

"...Originally bardo referred only to the period between one life and the next, and this is still its normal meaning when it is mentioned without any qualification. There was considerable dispute over this theory during the early centuries of Buddhism, with one side arguing that rebirth (or conception) follows immediately after death, and the other saying that there must be an interval between the two. With the rise of mahayana, belief in a transitional period prevailed. Later Buddhism expanded the whole concept to distinguish six or more similar states, covering the whole cycle of life, death, and rebirth..."

'The Tibetan Book of the Dead' Fremantle/Trungpa (2001: p.53-54)

Finally, just one more word about the pineal gland in relation to enlightenment and metaphysical exploration. The Tibetan 'bardos', planes of earthly and after-death existence (above), have also sometimes been misunderstood in modern books, leading them to be taken as proof of ideas that aren't really connected to them at all.

One instance I found in 'DMT - The Spirit Molecule', by Doctor Richard Strassman, is a case in point. It's a great book, and full of lively ideas; but right at the start, Strassman's reasoning for the assumption that DMT – an alleged synthetic entheogen – could provide experiences of after-death and enlightenment relies almost entirely on the fact that he believes that Tibetan Buddhism says that the 'soul' reincarnates in a new body after forty-nine days. This, he says, coincides with the "first signs of the pineal gland to appear after conception" and the forty-nine day designation of the embryo as either male or female. I'm not sure why the 'first signs' of the pineal gland should herald anything at all, but he says:

"...What I'm proposing is almost a "doctrine of elapsed time." If Buddhist texts and human embryology reveal that different developments require forty-nine days, the events must relate. This association is perhaps logically shaky, but also intuitively appealing."

But in Tibetan Buddhism, rebirth (not reincarnation, as is usually believed) takes place at any time, from instantly up to a *maximum* of forty-nine days, depending on the circumstances.

Also, as alleged explorers of the after-death bardo, Strassman and his subjects talk in terms of their previous lives, with a soul traversing from one incarnation to another in their experiences; and again, using Buddhist ideas of rebirth as proof that they really are exploring actual memories. But there is no soul in Buddhism, and rebirth is not reincarnation. The only things that are thought to continue are the habitual tendencies that a person has left on ultimate reality, which go on to kick-start a new being. The person him/herself isn't thought of as reborn. Only a very small handful of people, usually lamas, are regarded as having

reincarnated in a fuller sense..

After reading the preceding pages, I'm sure you can understand that I'm a little bit cynical towards many of the claims that are now made by people in today's 'western occult' and New Age movements, who claim to have opened their third eyes and/or who offer courses (for a fee, of course) so that you can learn to do it too. Take a lot that is written with a very large pinch of salt.

So, The Ajna Is Useless?

Not at all, far from it. There are many good experiences to be had from using it, and I hope you'll have some yourself with the techniques I outline here. The Ajna has a great fixing effect on the eyes, aids concentration, comes with a built-in buzz from the eye-position itself, and is on the route up the Sushumna (at either side of the spine) on the way to the crown chakra. Using it, *as with all the other chakras*, can give intense blisses and lead to a range of states, so it is far from useless.

Real usage of the Ajna in early traditions is available in a variety of texts. In the Hindu Bhagavad Gita, verse five, for instance, Krishna talks of a technique where one should be:

"1. Renouncing sense enjoyments; Fixing the eyes and mind at the mid-brows; Equalizing the breath moving through the nostrils.

2. With senses, mind, and intellect under control; Having liberation as the prime goal; Free from lust, anger, and fear; Such a sage is verily liberated."

But this isn't meant to be practised just by staring at the point or trying to 'open' it, but by looking at it whilst

having your mind directed towards knowledge of 'mind' (infinite awareness) as reality itself.

In some forms of Dzogchen too, the form of the great Guru Padmasambhava is visualised at the Ajna as a symbol of purity and infinite nature:

"Guru Padmasambhava is a totally enlightened being, he is the embodiment of all the Buddhas and enlightened beings. He is the Buddha for this generation and this time. In order to practise Guru Yoga, after you do the preliminaries, like the breathing exercise, visualize a lotus. The lotus should be a little above the level of your eyebrows and the leaves should have five different colors with different patterns."

"Picture Guru Padmasambhava sitting on the lotus and above him are the sun and the moon, realize his body is not made out of flesh and bone, his body is a wisdom rainbow body. There is a rainbow over his head with five different colors with all the colors sparking and radiating light in all directions. See him as the embodiment of all the Buddhas. He is smiling and radiating wisdom light to you and in all directions. Then recite the Seven Line Prayer and then the twelve syllable mantra. As you repeat this mantra see a very powerful white light on his forehead, a red light at his speech center and a blue light at his heart center. Each light is in the form of a syllable, the white light is the syllable OM, the red light is AH, and the blue light is HUNG. Then just as you are about to stop chanting visualize a strong white light like a shooting star come from the OM syllable, it enters your forehead and removes all the obscurations of your body, the red light comes like lightning from the syllable AH and enters your speech center and with it all the obscurations of your speech are removed. The third

light is the strong blue light from his heart which enters your heart and your mental obscurations are removed."

"Finally Guru Padmasambhava dissolves into white light and that light comes down through your crown chakra to your heart center and mingles with your awareness. At that moment your body is no longer a solid body, your body has become a transcendental rainbow body, a light body. Then, without any conceptions or distractions, remain in that state, inseparable from Guru Padmasambhava, for as long as you have time. When you finish dedicate the merit of your practice to all sentient beings. This is your basic instruction for your daily practice."

Excerpted from the '**Oasis of Liberation**' ©1999
Ngagyur Rigzöd Editions.

Finally

Over the last twenty years and more I've had a keen interest in meditation and spontaneous experiences. I've regularly noticed whilst talking to people who've had spontaneous TEs that they seem to happen very effortlessly; and it's common for them to happen to those with no meditation experience whatsoever. Most of the time the subject will begin by saying something like, "I wasn't really doing anything, just sitting looking at X and it happened..." It doesn't necessarily take hours of practice to reach very deep states, which must provide some encouragement to those reading this book.

~*~

I hope, as I said at the very start, that you've found the 'Explorer's Guide' not only interesting and useful, but

above all, fun too. You can't be an effective meditator, or be deeply high, without that sense of happy confidence that I hope the exercises above will show you how to create.

Best Wishes,

Simon Jackson.



Appendix

There are four main meditation postures, and the purpose of each is to allow you to sit with your back and head up straight (whilst remaining fully relaxed) without anything touching your spine. Strange as it may sound, if anything *is* touching your spine as you meditate then things really won't happen as quickly as they could, if at all.

Although at first I used a large beanbag or a cushion to meditate upon, I found that anything without a good solid base made me lean in one direction or another, and was uncomfortable in the long term. I also had to try to make sure that how I was sitting and what I was sitting on remained exactly the same from day to day, or I ended up struggling with niggling aches and imbalances every time I tried to meditate. As I'm just not flexible enough to manage a full or half lotus position, a meditation stool (or 'zafu') now works extremely well for me, and allows me to sit for as long as I need to without any pain at all.

Posture 1 - Crossed legs

A good, easy posture for beginners. Just sit on the floor with your legs crossed in a normal way, your hands resting in your lap, with the right uppermost, resting in your left. If you find that you can only sustain this for

short periods, try rolling up a blanket or similar to a thickness of about 6 inches, and try sitting on that to take the pressure off your tailbone.

Posture 2 - Half Lotus

This is slightly more difficult than just sitting with crossed legs, but it does give you a stronger seat. Sit on the floor with your feet straight out in front of yourself. Bend your left leg, grasp your foot with both hands and place it with the sole resting against the inside of your right thigh, with the heel as close to your body as you can manage. Now bend your right leg and take hold of it so that you can place your foot on top of the bend of your left leg. Try to get your right knee as near to the floor as possible by relaxing it and letting your thighs open. Again, if you have problems with sitting, try raising your buttocks from the ground by using a cushion or rolled-up blanket, as above.

Posture 3 - Full Lotus

The same as the half lotus, except that in this case both legs are crossed and your feet are placed on opposite thighs, facing upwards. Sitting on the floor again, stretch your legs straight out before yourself. Bend your right leg, then take hold of your right foot with both hands and place it on top of your left thigh. The right foot should be brought towards you as far as possible, so that eventually your right heel will be touching your groin. Bend your left leg and put your left foot on top of your right thigh, again pulling it in so that your left heel also touches your groin. Both knees should eventually rest on the floor.

This is the classical meditation posture, giving good stability and a straight back – but it's also a bit of a

challenge if you aren't as supple as you once were. As your flexibility increases, try to bring your feet closer to your body.

Posture 4 – On a chair

Sit well forward on a firm-seated chair (no thick cushions) so that you're sitting on the front third of it, with feet flat on the ground. Try to find a chair that allows you to sit with your knees bent in a nice right angle. Don't be tempted to rest against the back of the chair for support, as this will prevent some of the techniques from working fully.

In all of the above sitting positions, your hands can either be cupped, one in the other in front of your groin, or on your knees with the palms facing upwards and your thumb and second finger tips touching.

Tips

- **Head** - Good posture starts with the head. Imagine that you're a flamenco dancer. Hold your head up straight and turn your head towards one shoulder, looking down your nose as though you were watching someone with disdain. You should notice that you get a feeling at the base of your skull as though you're trying to rotate it slightly upwards. Slowly turn back to face the front. Your chin is now drawn in, and your head should feel as though it's being held up by a thread that runs through the centre of your crown. Don't try to rise upwards along the string - this'll make you stick your bottom out. This posture also helps relax and open the throat chakra.

- **Shoulders** - Don't let your shoulders roll forward as you relax. Try to pull them gently back, just a little bit further than you normally would, but not so much that it is uncomfortable. The previous technique will help overcome any tendency you have to hunch your shoulders.
- **Spine** - Make sure that you're sitting up straight without your back touching anything. Getting your spine into the right position can take practice, and it might not really come together completely until you've experimented for a while over many sessions. We all have a tendency to slouch, stick our chins out, or tilt our heads upwards. As we've been doing it for most of our lives, it won't be easy to get rid of. To avoid sticking your chest or stomach out, think in terms of trying to sit with a straight front too.
- **Stomach** – When most people try to sit up straight they usually let their abdomens drop forward and stick their bottoms out, trying to pull themselves upwards. In fact it's better to do the opposite and try to tuck your pelvis 'under'.
- **Hands** - So that the weight of your arms doesn't exert a downward pull on the muscles under your armpits, have your hands in your lap, your right hand resting in your left palm.
- **Tongue** - Put your tongue gently against the back of your top teeth.
- **Smile gently!** - This is very important, as it changes the whole mood of the session and your ability to access deeper levels of concentration.

