

“Awareness cannot be taught, but through discipline and right attitude, it can be attained.”

- Anonymous

APPENDIX III

ANXIETY AND GRATITUDE

This chapter is actually a continuation of the preceding chapter: it contains techniques to retrain the thought stream towards positive, self-controlled thoughts and away from unintentional, habitual negative thinking.

ANXIETY

Anxiety, unlike focused thought, is a pointless whirring of the uneasy mind that keeps the emotions edgy and produces nothing to show for itself.

Anxiety repeats itself and fails to learn the lesson that tracing and retracing the same tired set of thoughts never brings the future any nearer nor changes any outcomes.

Anxiety can worry endlessly about money even though the anxiety will never increase the bank balance. Anxiety can fret about the danger of the highways without taking a step towards improving driving skills or road conditions. It can fret long into the night over which college the young children will someday attend but will not make any improvement in the childrens’ math or spelling skills.

Anxiety is an utter waste of time. It aggravates the blood pressure and prevents the enjoyment of the present. It is one of the most indulged in, most pointless mind games that a person can choose. Many people with Parkinson’s indulge in anxiety to a high degree. The following technique, if practiced, can successfully extinguish specific anxieties, and lead to a state of mental carriage that, eventually, can redirect the mind away from anxiety in general.

Giving away a specific anxiety

A highly effective way for retraining the anxiety-fixated mind is to select an anxiety subject that occurs regularly: one that you want to get rid of. Examples might include repeatedly evaluating how I should handle the retirement plan, what will I do with grandma if she becomes feeble, what car will I get if the Chrysler breaks down, who will be coming for Thanksgiving, what if I don’t get the job/role/political office, what if this hair cut is all wrong for the part.

Next, call to mind someone who can help you with these problems. This someone can be a late aunt or deceased beloved parent.¹ It can be a saint, The Light or Power that runs the universe, God or Pinocchio’s Blue Fairy. This someone must be a powerful

¹ I stress the word “beloved.” I had one patient who decided to ask his late mother, whom he had not liked, to take care of a particular fear. He found that the process was dreadful; every time he thought about his mother, he remembered how much he had feared and hated her, and then he felt worse than before. He had assumed that, since his mother had died, she must have become an angel and, as such, should be the one to whom he could give away his problems.

Don’t give in to this specious thinking. If your mother (or whoever) was unreliable in life, she will be unreliable for you after her death.

entity who is willing and able to deal with these things on your behalf. You must be certain that this someone has the ability to intercede on your behalf with Mother Nature, the Infinite Love, God or Consciousness that governs the universe.¹

Next, *every* time you realize that you are thinking, pointlessly, about the specific anxiety subject that you have decided to be rid of, you must say with great firmness and courage, silently to yourself (or out loud, if no one is around), “I refuse to dwell on this anymore: Saint Teresa (or Blue Fairy, or whoever), I give this problem to You; *You* take care of it.”²

¹ I recall a conversation with a PDer who adamantly insisted that God and religion not be involved in his recovery from Parkinson’s. He said, “I am willing to find joy. I want to find joy; but I refuse to do it via religion. Do you know of any good books I can study on the subject of joy?”

I replied, “Yes, but they are all in the spirituality section of the bookstore.”

“But I want some that aren’t in that section!”

“That may be what you want, but those who have truly found a way to lasting joy have, at some point, realized that what they have found is exactly what all of the great ones from time immemorial have been talking about. They suddenly understand, reading between the lines of all scriptures and “spiritual” instruction, understand that all of the great ones were joy-filled souls who were trying to share with others the truths that have brought them joy.

“Your problem is that you think that spirituality is related to churchianity. In fact, “spiritual” and “joyful” are synonymous. If someone does actually discover a path to joy, it always turns out that the truths and methods that he shares have a spiritual bent. So, by definition, I cannot recommend a book that will lead you to joy that is outside of the spirituality section of the bookstore. Many writers try to disguise their spiritual underpinnings by using words like “the Universal Joy” instead of “God” or by saying “the higher Self” instead of “the Soul,” but these are exercises in semantics. If you are determined to find a way to joy without using the word God, simply exchange the word God with the word Love and select some little-used nouns that work for you to replace words like “soul.” Go ahead: the Love that has set the universe in motion won’t mind a bit.”

² I have heard many times from PDers that they do not wish to give away their problems. Here’s an example: “I love Mother Mary, I don’t want to hurt her by giving her this dreadful problem; it’s better that *I* should suffer than that *she* should feel this pain.” I now consider a martyr-like fear of sharing problems with others to be a not uncommon characteristic of Parkinson’s disease. On behalf of these souls who would rather suffer themselves than let their suffering be shared, I wish to issue a reminder: God does *not* suffer when you turn over to Him your pain-embracing games. God, or the Love in the universe, of which you are a part, suffers for as long as you choose to cling to your pain. By giving your pain over to some aspect of divinity beyond creation, you rid the physical universe of that pain. The Force that set the galaxies in motion can easily absorb your (self-created, if the truth be known) problem and convert that energy back into joy. For those who do not want to “hurt” God, I sometimes suggest they give their pain to Kali.

The ghastly, fearsome image of the Hindu goddess Kali, often misunderstood in the west, represents the awesome power of God that can destroy delusions of material reality, including the delusions of sickness and death, dissolving their energies back into eternal Love from which they sprang. Statues of the red-eyed, black-skinned goddess Kali portray her with garlands of skulls and drops of blood hanging from her lips. She is not a pain-inducing goddess, but rather the destroyer, even “the devourer,” of pain and delusion.

(Although I refer to Kali as a goddess, Christian, Jewish and Islamic monotheists may wish to remember that Hinduism is also a monotheistic religion. The understanding that the infinitude of created things are all God’s handiwork and a manifestation of Him allows the Hindu to refer to the one God by an infinite number of names: to speak of anything is to speak of God. When a Hindu refers to the blooming powers of springtime as one aspect of God and the demolishing forces of winter as another aspect of God, he is not stating that there are two Gods. Although Hindu references to “the God of creation” and “The God of destruction” may create a polytheistic interpretation in the western mind, these inadequate translations into western tongue are, nevertheless, references to *aspects* of the One. The Hindu recognizes that a limited human, with a mental focus on the finite, may nevertheless approach the Infinite through a multitude of

The next time the mind strays back to the unwanted subject, silently, mentally repeat the phrases, “I give this problem to you. I refuse to be haunted by this relentless worry any longer; You take care of it.” Every time that you find yourself wrapping your thoughts pointlessly around this subject, repeat the phrase, “I give this problem to *You*. *You* take care of it.”

Soon, instead of burning ever-deeper habit grooves of negativity and anxiety in your brain cells, you will be building a new circuitry. The new circuitry, when it is finished, will move with lightening speed from the thought of the problem – when the anxious mode about that particular problem arises – straight to the thought of your wonderful someone, your *You*. Eventually, you will have created a new neural shortcut in your brain. The thought process will have formed a direct line from the thought of “Problem X?” to the thought “You, my friend,” or “My beloved!”

You may be astonished to find that when you first try to do this you will need to say “You take care of it!” nearly fifty times an hour or more. When it dawns on you just how much of your conscious thoughts have been taken up with pointless, circular worries, you may start to see why anxiety has been able to reduce you to a shaking hulk.

And, strange to say, this method works. The new habit will start to form; you will be beginning to take charge of your own mind. At some point, the new habit grooves that you are forming in your mind will grow so deep and efficient that, the moment the specific anxiety-producing thought appears, the brain will immediately think of the one to whom you have assigned the problem. Instead of becoming enmeshed in pointless, spiraling worry, your mind will immediately jump to the thought of one whom you admire and trust. A nice trade off!

Be warned, it can sometimes take several weeks before the mind starts to solidify the new neural pathways and break down the old ones.

After this particular anxiety no longer plagues you, select another pointless anxiety – some anxiety about which worrying does you no good – and repeat the Give-It-Away treatment until it, too, is conquered.

finite facets. An anecdote may make the point: during the British occupation of India, a British vicar asked a young Indian lad if he wanted to come to church, in order to “see where God lives.” The Hindu lad replied, “Can you show me a place where He is not?” This speaks to a profoundly monotheistic understanding of God, despite the Hindu references to His various aspects as Gods and Goddesses.)

I often suggest that a PDer who does not want to hurt the gentle mother of Jesus, Mother Nature, or the loving Quan Yin (the Asian Mother Divine) by giving her his dreadful problems can, instead, give his debris away to the hideous Kali and visualize her swallowing it up. This suggestion is nearly always met with approbation and relief.

It is sometimes difficult for our finite mortal minds to understand that the one, unified Force encompasses *all* our needs, including our need for an emotional wastebasket. Putting appropriate faces on the various aspects of the infinite can sometimes be a helpful tool; no one in my experience has minded turning his emotional “junk” over to Kali, the forgiveness aspect of God, that ultimately takes up the thought waves of pain and suffering – once a person has decided to be done with such thoughts – thus removing them from the system. Although Kali looks fearsome, she can also be understood as the ultimate forgiveness.

Great souls, at some point, come to realize that forgiveness is the answer to the problem of the ego. If ego is what some Christians refer to as “original sin,” then forgiveness of the ego is the ever-present, ever-available cure.

As an aside within an aside, some pundits even hypothesize that the “Dark Lady” of Shakespeare’s sonnets is the black-skinned Kali, the loving, forgiving, illusion-destroying aspect of Mother Nature. Try reading Shakespeare’s sonnets with this in mind; their baffling allusions are suddenly made clear.

This method can slowly, over months and years, transform the mind. At first, only the problem in question will be affected. Eventually, however, the mind can begin to recognize all anxiety-related mental habits as such, and will rapidly and, eventually, effortlessly perform the new skill of giving the problem away.

You may also notice that this process of giving the problem away to a specific someone causes the mind to be focused on You, whomever that may be, and away from I-me-mine. As noted in the last chapter, this process of directing the thoughts towards others instead of using them to dote on the ego is the key to balanced mental control.

Unexpected benefits

This technique can sometimes, if practiced with conviction, lead to almost miraculous results; the problem about which one was anxious may even be “taken care of” by an unexpected, impossible-to-explain solution, a remedy that beats all the odds or seems to come out of left field. When such a solution to the problem does occur, the PDer must note whether he responds to this blessing by saying “that was just a random chance – it can’t happen again” or if he responds by stepping up his comfort level with “giving away” his problems. The response may be very telling about the underlying attitude the PDer has about his real desire or lack thereof for recovering from fear-based, negative thinking.

Denial of anxiety

Although most PDers have learned to recognize the relationship between their anxiety levels and the severity of their symptoms, it is not unheard of for a person with anxiety-related symptoms to tell me, with complete confidence, that he has no anxiety whatsoever. The following case study will demonstrate.

Abner had a fairly constant tremor, though it worsened dramatically when he used the computer and stopped altogether when he was relaxed or meditating. He insisted that he maintained a very positive attitude, that he had no anxieties and that his tremor was not related to his mental state. He felt that the reason the tremor worsened during computer use was the steady, inevitable worsening of his Parkinson’s.

One day in my office, his wife, contradicting him, pointed out to him that most of his PD symptoms were improving and that even their friends were impressed with his improved posture and facial expression; her feeling was that his biggest worry was fear of not being able to work. (He used the computer for his work.)

Whenever Abner used the computer, he was increasingly unable to function due to computer-induced increase in tremor. His wife felt that he was getting better in all the arenas for which he had no worries, but activities about which he was worried were ones in which his motor function was steadily declining. She felt there might be something psychosomatic going on, but he was adamant that he had a positive attitude and that negative thinking/anxiety had nothing to do with his computer-related symptoms.

Abner’s little test

Therefore, I spent an hour doing an experiment with him to show the relationship between anxiety and his tremor. I held various spots on his head and neck, pretending to be doing some sort of mild cranial treatment, while saying alternately positive and negative statements.

I started out by saying something positive: “Oh good, your second cervical vertebra has stayed in place since our last session.” His mild tremor completely stopped. I said, “Your tremor stopped!” and Abner said, “Yes.”

I waited one minute and then said an “uh oh” phrase: “Uh oh...it seems to me that the bone might not be really holding the position perfectly. I wonder if it’s going to slide back out of place at some point.” His tremor started up. I said, “Your tremor’s going.” He answered, “Yes.”

I waited a minute and then said, “Wow. This second cervical really does feel great. Real solid. I’m certain it won’t slip out. And the fourth cervical is positioned exactly right!” His tremor immediately slowed, and stopped completely within seconds. I pointed out that it had stopped and he agreed. A minute later, holding lower down his neck, I said, “Uh oh, what’s *this* I’m feeling?” The tremor started up, a little larger than before. We both duly noted the tremor. I waited a minute and said, “Oh, it’s nothing. The energy is moving beautifully through here.” His tremor stopped completely. We both agreed that it had stopped. It stayed stopped until my next statement: one that started with an “Uh oh...”

The reader will want to know that there was nothing in particular about his neck that we had been working on. After about half a dozen starts and stops, his wife starting chuckling. She could see that I was turning his tremor on and off every minute, like clockwork, by saying something negative or positive. I tried all sorts of statements: “Uh oh, it’s raining. Sure hope you don’t have car trouble on the way home...” (tremor started up). Ah, you’ve got that great car; you won’t have any trouble at all...” (tremor stopped.)

I did this, alternating positives and negatives every few minutes, for over an hour. The tremor turned on or off in perfect response to my alternating positive and negative statements. His wife, watching and nodding her head in silent agreement with the point that I thought I was making, thought that it was a powerful object lesson. Abner didn’t say anything about what was making the tremor start or stop, but I assumed (incorrectly) that he must have been aware of what I was doing.

I did not, at any point, tell Abner that I was intentionally making alternating positive and negative statements. However, I assumed that this extremely intelligent and savvy PDer would eventually make the connection between my statements and our mutual confirmation of the tremor’s starting and stopping. Even after the session ended, I didn’t say anything about the stopping and starting of the tremor in response to positive or negative thoughts; I assumed that he would go home and give some deep thinking to this start-and-stop experience.

Since he had been so certain that he was not susceptible to anxiety, I looked forward to our next session to learn what he had done with this straightforward lesson in anxiety-related tremor. I was completely stunned at Abner’s next session when, in response to my question, “What did you think about that last treatment,” he replied, “It was the strangest session we’ve ever had. *I couldn’t remember any of it.* When we left your office last week, I turned to my wife and said, ‘I feel as if I’ve been in a trance. I have no idea what Janice did or what she said during the session. All I remember is that the tremor seemed to stop completely and then start up again, quite a few times.’”

His wife, astonished, did not tell him what I had been saying and its relationship with the tremor, because she wanted him to figure it out on his own or else hear it from me.

So, when I then told him what I'd been doing, he told me that he'd had no recall of any of it, and repeated, "I felt kind of dazed, like I didn't know what had happened during the session." He had a very hard time believing me when I told him what we'd done during the session. Even with his wife backing me up, he had a difficult time believing that his tremor had been turned on and off every few minutes for a solid hour simply in response to my positive or negative statements on random subjects, including the subject of his ability to heal.

This recalled to my mind the powerful mental disassociations that so many PDer have about their body. I had to wonder if his mind, subconsciously recognizing what I was doing, disassociated itself from the treatment rather than acknowledge information to which it was emotionally opposed: he didn't want to know that his tremor was anxiety-related or that he was subject to anxiety. Therefore, he possibly had disassociated himself from the experience.

Another possibility that we discussed was that, by shifting his mind so regularly back and forth between fear and safety, he may have become a little bit emotionally "dizzy." The unaccustomed frequency of dipping into positive thinking may have been unsettling to the point that his brain could literally not make sense of the session.

In either case, he was stunned to learn that the starting and stopping of his tremor, which he did remember, had been in response to my spoken words. He protested mildly, with statements such as "I always try to find a bright side to bad things," and "when bad things happen I just say that it's a swing of the pendulum and that good things must inevitably follow."

His wife countered by saying, "All the PD symptoms you never worried about, the ones that don't have an effect on your computer abilities, are getting better. The symptoms that you *are* worried about, the ones that you fear are going to keep you from using your computer, are the only symptoms that you still have – and they show up at their most dramatic when you start using your computer. What's that all about?"

At this point, I shared with him several case studies of attitude-induced parkinsonism.

Abner responded with unusual vigor that he was doing the best he could to always be positive – in light of the way his father had treated him. This led us into an important talk about the power of the mind in deciding whether or not to be a victim of childhood's lessons. (This highly significant subject will be discussed in detail in appendix xxx.)

We left it with him agreeing that he had much to think about. Curiously, at our next session, three weeks later, he announced that he was starting to feel so much better that, for example, he was catching himself dancing in the kitchen for no apparent reason. He wasn't sure what he had done to make this shift, but he also didn't say anything at this session about how his symptoms were getting worse when he used the computer. He was rather marveling at how cheerful he'd become, as if something inside was different.

Changing from specific anxieties to awareness of anxiety in general: progress

One PDer, when I first met him, always shared his current batch of anxieties with me during each weekly treatment session. I made weekly suggestions that he might consider giving away his anxieties, but he vigorously defended his anxiety-ridden thought process; "Better to be prepared for the worst than to have the worst take you by surprise" was his motto.

After many months of gently pointing out that he was worse when he was anxious, he walked in for his weekly session and announced “I asked my wife if I was a negative person. She said ‘No more than lots of people.’ So I think you can stop badgering me on the subject.”) I decided that he and I were making no progress in this area, so I dropped the subject of anxiety.

However, I noticed that, after nearly a year, his behavior around anxieties had imperceptibly shifted. He was no longer sharing specific anxieties; instead, he was rather dismissive of the particulars. Instead, he was now keenly aware of how much time he was spending with his mind trapped in anxious-mode, and asked me frequently what he should do about his pernicious habit.

When we first started working together, his various mini-crises were, to his way of thinking, the Source of the Problems, and he argued strenuously that getting rid of his anxieties would be simply “hiding from the facts.”

But, through the months of slow, steady improvements in his balance, movement, and facial expression, offset with increased tightening in his right leg and right arm whenever he was anxious, he came to realize on his own that, in fact, his propensity towards anxiety was his worst problem. When he was finally able to admit that anxiety in general worsened his PD symptoms at any given time, and was no longer dwelling on the specific problems that he fixated on, he was also able to *consider* doing techniques to teach himself how to change his thinking habits.

However, curiously, his preferred solution to treating the anxiety was not mind-controlling techniques, but a new tendency to blame anyone and everyone in his life – past and present – for having created the various situations which had given him the “anxiety habit.”

This new style of “dealing” with anxiety – blaming others for making him anxious – does not seem to be helping him to have less anxiety. Even so, I consider it progress. At least he does now recognize when his thoughts are looping about in an anxious manner. This is important. And, inasmuch as he now recognizes that the mental pattern, and not the specific issues about which he is anxious, is the problem, I have strong hopes that, at some point, the anxiety and the physiological pains that he has, from habit, “chosen” to manifest during his anxiety bouts will become such an obvious and odious problem that he will take his first tentative steps in regulating his own thought patterns.

What happens when a person successfully “gives away” a particular anxiety? Some people find that simply getting rid of one anxiety makes it easier and easier to get rid of other anxiety patterns as well, and, eventually, the exercise in self-control opens the mind up to incoming streams of positive thinking.

Others, however, find that the mind, if left to its old habits, will simply fill in the space provided with some new anxiety. Therefore, the other part of this technique, if needed, involves finding a new thought-stream to take the place of the anxious one that was given away. If new anxieties stream in to take the place of the old ones, this new replacement stream of thought can be inserted every time the old anxiety is handed over. The name of the new stream is “gratitude.”

GRATITUDE

Filling in the blanks

It is only a very spiritually accomplished person who can constantly hold the mind empty of thoughts and enjoy the blissful experience of pure feeling, pure heart awareness, unmarred by intruding, word-based thoughts. A person who is accustomed to filling his mind with anxious thoughts may need some sort of replacement thoughts.

The beginner to the process of mental self-control should use the mental space that has been vacated during the anti-anxiety exercise above by consciously refilling it with gratitude.

The gratitude exercise

When I have proposed a gratitude exercise to my PD patients, an alarmingly high percent of them, people of high intellect, financial security, stable family life and otherwise good health, have asked me, in all sincerity, what they could possibly have to be grateful for. They seem to think that their trembling or their physical impairment is the final stamp on a life utterly empty of blessings. Bizarre, but there you have it.

Others, happily, have just the opposite approach; throughout their lifetime they have always tried to console themselves with some form of gratitude-based thinking. You will be correct if you've guessed that the ungrateful ones are the ones who tend to get stuck in mental whorls of negativity. Those who have trained themselves to be steadily and truly grateful – despite setbacks and difficulties – have had, in our limited experience, a powerful advantage in recovering from Parkinson's.

One gratitude-oriented person who recovered very quickly from her other PD symptoms once her foot was healed once told me that her insistence on gratitude bordered on the illogical, but that she had always stuck to it. Lynne's policy was to find some way to be grateful for all things, whether or not they appeared, on the surface, to be blessings. One of her many ideas was that, if a "bad" event occurred, she could congratulate herself on having successfully worked past that much negative karma.

Sometimes, when something dreadful or painful occurred to her, she would create a mental story in which, in a past lifetime, she had saved a loved one from having the very same problem by having prayed that the problem be conveyed to herself.

For example, when she was diagnosed with Parkinson's, she immediately wondered if, in some past life, she had prayed that a loved one with Parkinson's might be saved: that the illness be given to her, instead. In that life, the person she'd prayed for had recovered, but she herself had not developed the illness at that time. The appearance of the illness in this lifetime, complete with requisite foot injury, was simply the necessary completion of a prayer that had already been answered in the hidden past.

Her motto was "If life or some person treats you in a way that you cannot understand, assume the kindest possible motive."¹ This may sound completely crazy to a dyed-in-the-wool cynic, but Lynne was deeply satisfied in life and highly successful in the eyes of the world.

¹ Lynne credits her younger sister for this quoted bit of wisdom. In addition to working at gratitude, Lynne is always very quick to attribute all her learning and gifts to the generosity and wisdom of others.

As another example of Lynne's insistence on gratitude, when her California home was destroyed in an earthquake, she was, at first, emotionally devastated, but then she found a positive spin to put on the problem: God had, by destroying her home, reminded her to never put her faith in material things. She was grateful for this reminder. Then, she was grateful that her house, and not her family, had been hurt.

She tried to see each day, not as a birthright, but as grace – an undeserved blessing. When she struggled with the exhaustion of raising her colicky first child, she constantly gave thanks to God that at least she hadn't borne twins. This may seem completely twisted to those who are always analyzing how unfair life is (or those who have twins and are grateful for them), but the point here is that this woman refused to wallow in self-pity, she clutched at any positive thought when she was having troubles, *and* she recovered very easily from Parkinson's disease.

She shared with me that once, years earlier at her workplace, a particularly sour co-worker had demanded of her, "You always act so happy. Why?"

Without even thinking, Lynne replied without missing a beat, "I'm just so grateful that I no longer live at my mother's house. Everything else is so good in comparison." Lynne was slightly embarrassed at having blurted out these words, revealing so much about her past to someone she barely knew, but then she started to think about the truth of her statement. She realized that, for the preceding fifteen years, when anything terrible happened, her automatic, silent internal response had been "It could be worse... I might still be living with my mother."

This "could have been worse" ploy would immediately lift her spirits and inspire her to give thanks to the universe, no matter how difficult or painful the ongoing circumstance.

Shifting the neurotransmitter balance

Some of the things that Lynne invented to be grateful for might seem to the reader to border on the ridiculous, but the truth is that she had stumbled onto a very effective formula for fighting despair and fear. When the brain is engaged in the gratitude sector, it cannot access the fear sector. By forcing herself to invent any possible reason to be grateful, she was shifting the neurotransmitter balance in her brain over to the side of joy.

And we all have reason to be grateful: there is no man or woman alive who has not had some of his or her prayers granted. Remember those, if you can, and be grateful.

The exercise of simple gratitude has been so important to those who have recovered easily that we have suggested, to those not inclined to gratitude, that, just maybe, they should give it a try. For those who have told us that they have nothing to be grateful for, we invented the following exercise:

Lie down and try to relax. Next, imagine something mildly yucky that did *not* happen to you, recently or in the past. Now, think of another unpleasant thing that did *not* happen to you. Keep this up for ten minutes. That's the entire exercise. It can be very powerful.

Because the above may seem obscure to a person who thinks he has very little to be grateful for, I will write up an example of what happened to a PDer with a relentless tremor.

Travis's tremor and the gratitude exercise

Travis's tremor never stopped except when he slept. If he was awake, he tremored. Even though he meditated twice a day, and had done so for over twenty years, his tremor no longer stopped, *even during his "peaceful" meditations*. When I asked Travis to do this gratitude exercise for ten minutes, he told me he couldn't think of anything to be grateful for, at least not anything that would take up ten minutes.

So I asked him if his second grade teacher had ever bitten him. He said no. I said that this was the first thing he should be grateful for. Before Travis had a chance to tell me that he knew of *no one* who had been bitten by their second grade teacher, I asked him whether or not his father owned a grist mill, and did he have to perform the job of donkey in turning the heavy millstone. Travis replied indignantly, "Of course not!"

"Good." I replied in turn. "Then that's the second thing you have to be grateful for."

Next I asked him if he'd ever lost a leg during the war. Since he had never served in a war, his answer was no. I pointed out that this counted as two things: he hadn't served in a war *and* he hadn't lost his leg. Travis protested that the things I was coming up with were completely random and stupid. "'No more random and stupid,'" I replied, "than the negative worries about things that *might happen* with which you fill your mind from sunrise to sunset."

He granted that I might be right about that, and asked if he should be grateful for not being blind? In the past, he had always felt bitter about his need for reading glasses. I thought that being grateful for vision, even poor vision, was a good start, and that he should also be grateful that no one had ever poked his eyes out with a stick or burning coals. And what about eating vomit? Couldn't he be grateful that he had never been forced to eat his own vomit?¹

Then I got silly. "Is Travis a nickname and did your parents actually name you Gengulphus?" I asked.

"No!" he snorted. "Of course not."

"Then be grateful," I commanded with mock severity. "And when it rains during the winter, do you have to sleep outside in the mud?"

"Now you *are* being ridiculous," he protested. I agreed with him, but continued in this vein for several minutes, until I decided that he could branch off from my ideas and think of some of his own.

I told him to think of each one of these things that had not happened to him and then pause after each one and give thanks that he had been spared that particular trouble. After having given thanks, he should choose another unlikely thing to be grateful for, and give thanks for that. He should keep it up for ten minutes. If he thought of any more realistic things, he could of course use those as well as, or instead of, the silly ones.

He then asked me to whom should he express these thanks. I said that it didn't matter; he could give thanks to God, to the universe, to Fate, or to whatever force it was

¹ This example may seem pointlessly vile to the reader who has never studied the methods by which young women in certain cultures are force-fed in order to fatten up so as to obtain good marriage prospects. Sometimes, when these young women throw up the contents of their painfully bloated stomachs, they are "taught a lesson" by being forced to eat their vomit. I am including this information in this footnote in case the reader imagines that he has nothing for which he can be grateful.

that he spoke to when he, like all of us, found himself talking inwardly to “someone who isn’t tangibly there.”

Talking to the universe

All of us have, at one time or another, spoken, silently or aloud, some thought or wish. To whom were we speaking at this time? When you, as a child, silently pledged, “Please, don’t let my mom find out about the tadpole incident, and I promise never to tease little Robin ever again,” you were pleading with *someone*. When your heart implored silently, on your child’s first day of kindergarten: “Please, please protect my baby,” you were talking to Someone, Something.

You can call that “someone” the voice of conscience, the Infinite Love, God, or the higher Self. It doesn’t matter what you call that someone. If you have spiritual resources that allow you to give your thanks to Divine Mother, Jehovah or Allah, that is wonderful – do so. But even if you have no mental image or name of some aspect of divinity, you can offer your gratitude to that unknown someone to whom you have often spoken in the past, even though you didn’t know to whom you were speaking.

The inner monologue of fear or anxiety is usually addressed to the fear-ridden ego. By changing the very direction of the inner voice, moving away from talking to the ego and speaking instead to the love or the divinity that resides both within us and everywhere, we can shift the brain away from the “me” to the “you,” from the fear sector and into the joy sector.¹

Travis stops trembling

I left Travis, whole body trembling violently, as usual, to do the gratitude exercise as he lay on the treatment table while I took care of some paperwork at my desk across the room. I noticed that within less than thirty *seconds* of his starting the gratitude exercise, Travis had stopped trembling. His eyes were closed but he was obviously awake and alert, and I could tell by the look on his face that he was concentrating deeply. His years of meditation had trained him well in the art of concentration, although he had evidently forgotten the component of meditation training that includes gratitude.

Travis’s tremor had never stopped during the time I had known him. He tremored while I held his foot. He tremored when he was relaxed and he tremored when he was

¹ There is growing scientific evidence that these shifts in the brain can be measured. Richard Davidson, the director of the laboratory for affective neuroscience at the University of Wisconsin, has found that, in people who are stressed, anxious or depressed, most of the frontal cortex activity is occurring on the right side of the cortex. People who are calm or happy have more activity in the left side of the frontal cortex. Davidson says, “Each person tends to have a natural ‘set point,’ a base-line frontal cortex activity level that is characteristically tipped left or right and around which daily fluctuations of mood swirl.” In *Time* magazine, July 27, 2003, Richard Davidson explained that people who meditate shift their frontal cortex’s left-right activity ratio over to the left. Also, the more and “better” they meditate, the more the ratio shifts. Since prayer, gratitude and surrendering one’s worries to the higher Self (as in the anxiety technique explained in this chapter) are common components of meditation, as is mind control, it begins to appear that using heart- and mind-calming techniques, and techniques such as gratitude exercises and giving away anxieties – even though some might dismiss them as mere foolishness – in order to retrain the mind towards joy, has a strong scientific basis.

I like to wonder if someday, scientists will find that those dour logicians who insist that they are being “practical” when in fact they are being negative may be found to have more *right* frontal cortex activity – thus proving that their brain imbalance, not their vaunted logic, is the source of their skepticism.

active. His tremor, once a resting tremor, had become a relentless, disabling tremor of high intensity.

During the entire ten minutes that Travis did the gratitude exercise, he did not tremor. Travis took himself, his purpose in life, and life itself very, very seriously. He was very much spiritually inclined. He had devoted his life to self-improvement and the education and spiritual improvement of others. But from the chuckles he emitted during the first few minutes of the gratitude exercise, I suspected that he was following my lead in being grateful for silly things.

Then, his countenance became more thoughtful. He never tremored, though. With his mind full of grateful thoughts, his subconscious mind was not able to access the usual stream of anxiety-inducing thoughts with which he usually filled his day.

When ten tremor-free minutes had passed, I gently shook his shoulder and said that he could stop for a bit.

He opened his eyes and looked around. His tremor started up, but it was extremely small. I asked him if he had noticed that his tremor had stopped while his mind was occupied with gratitude. His reply was disheartening. (Though I paraphrase the following, it is as close to accurate as I can recall.)

“Travis! Your tremor stopped while you were practicing gratitude!”

“So?” (Honestly, this was his response.)

“But it stopped! Wasn’t that great?”

“Yes, I noticed that it stopped for a while, but so what? It came back when I stopped doing that dumb assignment.”

“Tell me, Travis, does your tremor ever stop?”

“No. It never stops.” (The tremor, as if to back him up, suddenly resumed its habitual violence.)

“But it stopped while you were being grateful.”

“So? What’s your point?”

“Don’t you think it’s interesting that, when your mind was occupied with being grateful, instead of with your relentless worries, your tremor stopped?”

“No. I was thinking about stupid things, and it was just a game. It wasn’t real. As soon as I got back to reality, the tremor came right back.”

“Do you think it might be helpful for you to practice being grateful once in a while, maybe a few minutes every day, just to give yourself a break from the tremor?”

“No. It’s not real. I have more important things to do.”

The most important thing that Travis had to do was finish his doctoral dissertation. He had been working on it, a paper on a certain spiritual interpretation of a particular bit of ancient scripture, for years and, to him, it was the most important document in the world. With the hope of shaking him up a bit, I cruelly suggested that whether he finished it or not, the world would probably never take much note. I also said that, if God really wanted a particular wisdom to make its way into print, He could do it, with or without Travis’s help.

Travis was furious. How could I mock him and his self-sacrificing life’s work?

I countered that, from what I could tell, Travis’s anxiety and fear was as much a drag on the world – and therefore on me, a fellow traveler in this world – as his thesis might be a benefit. Since, if all the saints and sages spoke truth, we are indeed all one, and each man is my brother, the suffering of each man is suffering to me. If by learning

to practice gratitude, silly types of gratitude at first, and sincere gratitude eventually, he could overcome his preoccupation with anxiety, he would be doing more good to mankind than a dozen inspirational theses about joy written by a man who was actually full of fear and out of touch with his own heart.

Travis disagreed. He said, in so many words, that he felt that his suffering was his due karma, and that he didn't really mind it. The impression I got was that by martyring himself (not his words) and focusing on his work instead of his troubles, he felt he was performing a virtuous, spiritual sacrifice. I had to ask him why he had even bothered to come to me if he didn't intend to get better.

His reply was that he was willing to see whether or not I could fix him, but if I couldn't, he was willing to accept that.

I pointed out, according to the precepts of his own Vedic-based faith, illness is always the result of one's own wrong thinking.¹ The Vedic scriptures that he studied proclaim that he has an obligation to try and correct his deluded thinking. His body could, if he corrected his erroneous thoughts, manifest the glory of his soul instead of manifesting his paranoias.

He agreed, and said that this was one of the subjects that he might someday write about. When I implored him to consider that he could institute these truths in his life instead of just writing about them, he drew the line. No, he felt the highest good was to be found in writing about these truths for others, not indulging himself in actual manifestation of them.

In other words, when all the fancy words and high-toned ideals were done with, he didn't want to change his habits. However, I shall never forget the instantaneous manner in which he was able to throw the anxieties out of his mind and the tremor out of his body by practicing even the most foolish and playful thoughts of gratitude.

Awareness

For those who want to try something different from gratitude, another, more difficult path is available. Sometimes, in the peace that follows from meditation, prayer, stillness, or gratitude, a person is able to simply appreciate what is happening around him. This use of the mind is called "being in the now," and it is very difficult for most PDers.²

Because of the difficulty most PDers have in living in the "now," I usually don't even recommend that they try practicing stilling the thoughts and focusing the mind on the various incoming neural sensations and their corresponding heart responses. I find that the gratitude exercise, practiced at least once a day for ten minutes, and practiced briefly every time an anxiety is banished, is easier for the beginner. Of course, if one can be perpetually grateful, he will be way ahead of the game, but this mind-shift may take some time, and one should not be discouraged if the change is slow. Be focused on the

¹ The Vedas, as mentioned in an earlier footnote, are the scriptures of Hinduism. The Vedas point out that events that have happened in the distant, unremembered past can be potential forces in the game of cause and effect. Past-life actions can set in motion present-life tendencies – either problems or blessings or both.

² This is similar to the mindset that one has while dreamily forming shapes from shifting clouds, or while creatively daydreaming.

process of changing, and not on the speed of the results, and you will have more fun – and therefore be ultimately more effective at changing.

As you will see in the upcoming chapters on recovery symptoms, many recovering PDers (those who are not locked into intentional negativity) do find themselves spontaneously enjoying themselves in the “now,” as their bodies resume the ability to release dopamine in association with positive thoughts. The experience is usually so novel that they even wonder: “What’s happening to me?! Who am I?” Often, their loved ones are stunned by the sudden, spontaneous change in personality when the PDer starts behaving as if he is at peace. I will share one quick example, one of my favorite recovery stories, before getting back to the business of this chapter.

However, this chapter is written for the many recovering PDers who, despite recovering from injury, choose, consciously or unconsciously, to maintain their habit of anxiety or even become increasingly anxious.

CAUTERIZING BRAIN CELLS OF WRONG HABITS

This is one of the most powerful techniques I have ever encountered. But first let me share with you the way that I “discovered” this technique.

I was trying to find some method of self-change that PDers might use that would allow them to use will power via peaceful thoughts instead of their usual grim, stern, determined version of will power. The problem with most of the exercises in self-change that I was finding in my studies was that they all relied on “will power.”

Well, the minute you say “will power” to a PDer, he immediately slips into the mode of thinking wherein he girds himself with adrenaline and prepares to fight. This is the very mode of behavior that they are trying to put behind them. While it may be true that much of the world needs to learn to buckle down and use some will power once in a while, PDers are past masters of will power. They brush their teeth with adrenaline and will power. They tie their shoes with adrenaline, fear, and will power. The last thing that PDers need is some sort of exercise that tells them to focus on their dreams and “make it happen using Will Power!” The average PDer, in response to this kind of encouragement, charges forward with adrenaline and a Do or Die! attitude. As far as this type of inspirational stuff goes, most PDers could teach the course. They don’t need more lessons of this nature.

So, one evening, after weeks of laboring over this dilemma of how to teach people to use their wills in a *gentle* manner so as to change the mindset to one of hope from one of cynicism, I suddenly realized that I was going to be late for the evening’s midweek inspirational service at the local chapel. I was supposed to be the reader that week, and I had failed to pick out some piece of inspirational literature to read to the group. I dashed upstairs, grabbed a magazine from deep in the tall stack of uplifting reading selections, and tore out the door.

Imagine my feelings when I started to read out loud to the congregation the following technique for overcoming bad mental habits. My prayer, my search for a really

good anti-negativity technique for PDers that could somehow use gentle will power but must not use sternly determined will power, was answered.¹

Here is the technique.

Getting rid of bad habits

Sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Select the troublesome behavior habit or thought habit that you want to get rid of. Then, repeat silently the phrase “I and my Father are one.” You can choose another phrase, if you prefer. I had one patient who refused to do the exercise because she didn’t like her father. If you don’t like this scriptural phrase, a phrase by which Jesus indicated his recognition that his soul was in communion with the whole of creation and the eternal infinite beyond creation, choose something else. You can say that “I and Love are one” or “I and all creation are one.”

Continue repeating this phrase until you feel a peace spreading through your chest. This may take some time. If you are particularly cynical, it may take an hour or so. Many people feel a peace coming over them within a few minutes.

(Now, here comes the next part of the technique, the part that, when I unexpectedly read it out loud during the inspirational service, nearly brought me to tears.)

After you feel peace filling your chest, keep saying your chosen phrase. Continue saying “I and my Father are one” (or whatever you have chosen) while enjoying the feeling of peace. Continue saying it until you sense the peace in your chest being replaced by a feeling of joy.

After you can feel joy spreading through your chest, realize that this joy is a manifestation of the divinity (or whatever sublime word you want to use) within you.

Next, speaking to this joyful aspect of divinity, say, “I command the God within me to cauterize the brain cells of this wrong habit.”²

Bear in mind that this is no vengeful or angry soul aspect that you are commanding. You are firmly commanding the pure joy of your own soul to do your rightful bidding. As you can imagine, this method, rare even for Yogananda, of first contacting the joy within *before* using the will power, and thus using joy, not backbone, as the driver of the will, was recognized by me as the answer to my prayers.

Resistance to this technique

Habits are formed through repetition. The brain makes certain shortcuts and pattern grooves when a certain behavior or thought is used repeatedly. In order to get rid of a habit, one can try to hide the old habit under the cover of new habits. However, it can take a long time for the brain cells associated with the old habit to actually break down or redirect their neural connections. To truly get rid of bad habits, one can selectively destroy the brain cells associated with the bad habits. Please, gentle reader, do not worry about running out of brain cells; the brain, once thought to be incapable of repair and regrowth, is now recognized as capable of enormous plasticity and repair.

¹ “What is Fate?” (excerpted from a lecture given Nov. 16, 1939 by Paramahansa Yogananda) Self-Realization, Fall, 1979, p. 6.

² “Cauterize” is a medical term. Cauterization is the extremely precise burning up of a tiny spot of troublesome tissue. The use of the word “cauterization” in this exercise is therefore a perfect word choice, connoting healing, precision, and careful, unemotional destruction of something bad.

Even so, when I have proposed the preceding exercise to some PDers, I have been shocked at how many have replied that they do not want to destroy any of their precious brain cells, even those built up to service bad habits of wrong behavior or thought patterns. I am always a bit surprised by this. When I ask these people, “If this was a cancerous cell, would you want it to die?” they invariably answer, “Yes! Of course!”

So I now advise that people consider a brain cell that was created and connected for the sole purpose of developing or perpetuating a wrong habit is no more worth keeping than a brain cell that is cancerous. For some reason, this line of thinking makes the following exercise more palatable. Still, I do find it curious just how many people are emotionally attached to their wrong habits. I have even been asked, “Can’t I just tell my wrong thought patterns to be inactive? Maybe put them in a special part of my brain where I can still have them, but they just won’t be so active? I hate to part with them, they are a part of what makes me *me*.”

If you look closely at this type of thinking, you will see the workings of the ego, or worse. What sort of person would say “I don’t want to *hurt* the cancer cells, I just want to move them to a part of the brain where they won’t grow so quickly...”?

I can comfort these people, somewhat, by pointing out that, even if you get rid of noxious brain cells, you will not lose the memory of how you used to be, or how you used to feel. Your memory cells are not being banished. You are only going to get rid of the cells that subconsciously work to compel you to perform unwanted behaviors or thought habits against your conscious will.

Checking it out

Before asking my PD patients to do this exercise, I tried it out on myself. Since experiencing a ruptured eardrum on a plane trip many years earlier, I had been plagued by a vicious, burning itching inside my ears whenever I ate most foods and, more recently, whenever I was feeling hurried or pressed for time. The problem was spreading; for the last two years, the burning and itching had spread so far that the roof of my mouth was engaged in this noxious behavior as well.

I decided that this allergic-type response, like all pain responses, must have at least some input from some signal in my brain. On some subconscious level, obviously, my body thought that I wanted to be having this painful, burning allergic response.

Therefore, I applied this technique. I silently chanted until I felt myself filling with joy and then commanded the joyful presence of divinity within me to cauterize the brain cells associated with this wrong habit.

After having repeated “I and my Father are one” for quite a while, I was, in addition to feeling joyful, in a deeply silent and still frame of mind by the time I got around to issuing this command.

The next day, it seemed to me that the burning pain was less hot. I practiced the cauterization technique again. Over a period of three weeks, during which I daily cauterized the brain cells of this wrong habit, the pain and itching completely disappeared.

Well, the whole thing might have been ready to heal by itself anyway. I selected another habit (my tendency to want to doze off during meditation). I applied this technique and the result came more quickly. My lifelong tendency towards feeling drowsy while meditating ceased after one practice of this technique and never returned.

I shared the technique with a friend. He tried it, and his asthma went away.

The great power of this technique is that it goes right down to the location of the problem and pulls it up by the roots. Replacing a bad habit with a good one can take a long time, and the bad one is still there, biding its time. This mental cauterization process, by which you calmly, joyfully tell your own brain that you have decided to make a change, leaves no room in the subconscious for doubt: you are in charge, and you are making changes.

The severe emotional resistance that I have sometimes encountered when I propose this technique to others is both an indication of its power and of the mixed feelings most people have towards actually making an improving change in themselves.

Therefore, I propose that, if this technique seems too powerful to you, you might want to sit down with your thoughts and carefully examine your reasons for not wanting to cauterize those brain cells that are impeding your conscious determination to make a change in yourself for the better.

PDers often cannot do the above technique

Now that I have explained this technique in great detail, I must add that PDers very often cannot perform this technique. I have taught this technique to my non-PD patients with great success. They can feel the changes taking place in their brain, and they observe with each passing day and repetition of the technique that the negative habit/thought pattern is melting away.

In the years before discovering the heart blockage in PDer, I now and again asked PD patients to do this technique. Invariably, insisted that they got no result. Because my non-PD patients invariably got good results from this method of self-change, I puzzled over this for several years, while intermittently asking PDers to please, give this technique a try.

Not until we discovered the heart blockage aspect of Parkinson's disease did we begin to understand why PDers cannot easily do this technique: by intentional design, they have forbidden themselves to perform the first step of the method: surrender the heart over to feelings of peace and joy.

Now, we suggest that PDers, before attempting this technique, first learn how, using the techniques in the Mind-Heart chapters of this book, to open their hearts. After they have learned to open their hearts to the extent that they feel peace, or at least calm, they will be able to start attempting to do this exercise correctly, and receive the benefits.

PDers should not be discouraged if it difficult to feel, in the beginning, calmness and peace in the breast. After all, they may have been working for decades to attain the exact opposite: feelings of nothing and wariness of mind. But no matter how many years a PDer has spend imposing on himself emptiness and despair, these conditions are reversible. Man's true nature, his soul nature, is joy. Any other emotions or denials are merely superimposed over his true nature.

I have worked with PDers who daily struggled with themselves in the battle of opening the heart for more than *half a year* who, in the end, won through. They were then able to surrender, at will, to the feelings of peace that are always present in the breast. After thus setting themselves up correctly to begin this technique, they can feel the subtle changes occurring in the brain while doing this exercise.

After they are able to perform this technique and get results, they can focus on various negative habits, such as “the physical and mental habits that keep my tremor going.” Other habits that a PDer can work on are the habits of specific dystonias (muscle spasms), habits of negative thinking and dopamine suppression, and habits of self-pity. Some people aren’t sure what habits are the “best” ones to get rid of. They imagine that they need to find some formal format of “wrong habit” in order to get results. This is the exact same mentality that they have cultivated for decades.

Do not worry about whether or not the correct habit is being focused on. Be childlike instead of analytical and judgmental: notice some small thing about yourself that might benefit from change, and focus on that one thing. Do not worry about whether or not you are selecting the “correct” or “most efficient” problem. And do not worry too much about the language in which you couch your bad habit of choice. You know in your heart what the specific problem is that you are trying to get rid of. Just describe that problem to yourself a few times, then refer to the problem as “the habit,” and then do the above technique while saying “I command the divinity within me to cauterize the brain cells of this wrong habit.”

DEPRESSION

One of my patients came up with a novel way for combating depression.

He had suffered from depression for years prior to his diagnosis with Parkinson’s. He mentioned “My Depression” at every session. He lingered over the subject, wanted to discuss it. He was certain that it had become a permanent part of his sensitive personality.

Even after his foot injury resolved and he began experiencing recovery symptoms, he insisted that his long-term depression was just a fact of life; I insisted that, since his Qi was now running correctly, he could physiologically produce dopamine if he could only bring himself to have an expectation of feeling joy. He countered, facetiously, that I made it sound as easy as flipping a switch. I replied that, yes, that’s how easy it could be. The next time I saw him, he proudly shared with me his new invention: the dopamine switch.

The dopamine switch

“I decided to create an image in my brain of a large switch, the kind you would use to pull several electrical breakers. What I do is sit down and close my eyes. Then I picture this big switch inside my head. Then, I get ready, and then I pull the switch. I know this will sound silly, but when I pull the switch, I actually do feel better.

“I’ve been doing it every day; I feel happy after I pull the switch.”

All the pretty colors

The next time I saw him, I asked him how his Happy Switch was working. He brushed that line of talk aside and told me about his new system.

“I think that merely pulling the switch didn’t give my brain enough time to really get poised for dopamine release. I’ve invented a new image.

“Now, when I recognize that I’m getting depressed, I image three spigots in my head. One is for serotonin, the second is norepinephrine, and the third is dopamine. These spigots control the flow from the three tanks of liquid neurotransmitter. Each

neurotransmitter is a different color: one is green, one is pink, and one is blue. They're all sparkly and fizzy.

"First, I get this image fixed clearly in my head. Then, I imagine that I'm opening all three spigots all the way. They gush into a holding tank, and they're fizzing and bubbling and they're just beautiful. Then, when the holding tank is full to the top, I shut the spigots.

"The holding tank is controlled by the switch that I invented last time, the Happy Switch. When the tank is full of neurotransmitters, with the colors all running together, I pull the switch. The result is *so* much better than before. I think that because this new process takes more time, I have more time to develop the expectation of joy. I can really feel the change flooding through my brain, and I feel so great."

Three weeks later, at our next session, I asked him, as usual, how his depression was going. He blinked at me quizzically. "Depression?"

"Um, yes, you used to tell me at every session that you were suffering from depression."

He clucked his tongue as if I'd recommended the Charleston as the newest dance craze. "Depression? Bah. I don't have that anymore."

It has now been four months. His depression has not returned.

So, whether you change your mind using bubbly juice or change your mind by commanding it – joyfully – to change, it does seem that, sometimes, to change the mind, the fastest way to do it is to address the mind directly and make it change.

CHANGE IS POSSIBLE

The reader needs to know that many people *have* succeeded in changing their attitudes. Many ex-PDer who have recovered easily have, prior even to being diagnosed with PD, spent time working on their attitude – forcing it to be positive even when it was difficult to produce the physiological (neurotransmitter) support. Others, sadly, have used their waning ability to access positive-mood neurotransmitters as proof that they are justified in their self-pity, resentment, blame, and other forms of unhappiness.

How long will this take?

A sweetly sincere PDer with whom I work every week is adamant that nothing can truly bring him joy, nothing shall ever be able to touch his hopelessly hardened heart. I loaned him the book *A Christmas Carol*, by Charles Dickens, because this book touches my heart every time I read it, and, surprisingly enough, he had never heard the story.

A Christmas Carol is a story of a miserable, miserly man who, in the course of a magical night, is blessed by observing his own past, present, and future as if seen through the eyes of an outsider. Alarmed and then transformed by what he learns, he emerges into the morning a changed, more compassionate man.

My patient returned the book the next week and said, "This book did nothing for me. It had an unlikely conclusion; I do not believe it is possible for a person to change overnight."

I asked him how long it should take. He replied, “A very long time. A lifetime. I am certain of it.”¹

Since then, primarily through the cutting-off-the-arms-and-torso game, he has experienced a very rapid change in his attitude. He detects a slightly improved ability to experience joy. These changes puzzle him. He distrusts their permanence.

The crying monk

When the previously mentioned Paramahansa Yogananda, a great yogi (1893-1952), was lecturing throughout Europe, he stayed one night at a Catholic monastery. After giving a stirring inspirational speech about finding a personal relationship with God, he was shown to his quarters by a monk. Just before the yogi stepped into his room, the monk asked him, “Please, sir, tell me, how long will it be before I am able to perceive Jesus Christ in vision or in the flesh?”

The great yogi said simply, “You could see Him tonight if you really wanted,” and went into his room.

The monk burst into tears.

For those who are uncertain as to the relevancy of the story, it must be understood that the monk had, of course, been imploring for years and years in the course of his daily prayers that the Lord might appear to him. And the truth of the yogi’s statement was not that this night in question was a special night, but that, on any night, if the monk’s desire had been untainted with doubts, fears, self-pity, self-hate, guilt, and a thousand other inventions of the ego, the ever-present Jesus would have been visible to him right along. But the monk’s preference for his ego-based fascination with himself and his own shortcomings and his own imagined sufferings were always greater than his desire for peace or joy. Therefore, Jesus, though ever-present, had not yet been visible to this monk’s preoccupied vision.

The monk, already knowing this at some deep level, and also realizing that, despite his begging prayers, he did *prefer* his self-fascination, also had to admit that,

¹ In a wonderfully ironic moment, during the very next session, I was putting his socks back on at the end of his FSR foot treatment; I pulled the socks all the way up to the calf.

He protested, “Don’t pull the socks all the way up. I always let them slouch down a little.” He chuckled and continued, “When I was dating my wife, years ago, she told me not to pull my socks up so tight; she said I should let my socks slouch down. She told me, ‘Only nerds pull their socks up tight.’”

“Ever since that day, I have never once pulled my socks all the way up.”

Recalling our past week’s discussion about whether or not a person could change quickly, I fixed him with a glittering eye. “For how many years did you pull your socks up tight? Thirty years? Your parents always pulled their socks up tight, right? Everyone in your family pulled their socks up tight! It was a deeply cultural habit. I have to wonder how many *thousands* of times you had pulled your socks up tight before you were unexpectedly told not to do it.

“And yet, you assert that, from the moment your date told you never to pull your socks up tight, you never did it again? It seems to me that, when you are motivated, you can change, in the merest blink of an eye, the habit of a lifetime. Hah! So tell me, why are you so sure you can’t change certain negative thought patterns? Is it possible that you are so emotionally attached to your negative, ego-caressing thoughts that you don’t really *want* to let go of them? Certainly, you were willing to change your sock-sense in a heartbeat rather than be thought of as a nerd. What would it take for you to decide to change your sense of looming negativity?”

He laughed, but was not convinced that his instant change regarding sock-habits had any message for him about his “unchangeable” negative attitude.

given his precious thought habits, the Lord was not likely to appear to him in the flesh for a long, long time to come. And yet, he realized at the same time, that it was this ego-drenched *certainty* that he could not overcome his doubts that formed his greatest impediment to success. After all, it *was* possible – the great yogi had just told him that it was possible to see him tonight. But it was up to him. Therein was the problem.

The monk's conviction that, despite the yogi's words, he *would* not see Him tonight was, obviously, a problem of his own making. His inability to see the Lord was not based on some universal law, but was based on his own disinterest in overcoming his own negative attitude. And so he cried.

“You could see Him tonight if you really wanted to” might also be expressed as “You could change your negative attitude today if you really wanted to.” This is the answer to “how long will this take?”

The struggle

We frequently get queries from PDers asking something to the effect of “How long will I need to struggle with this before I see signs of improved movement and a decrease in my weakness.” Another popular one is, “I am being *so* diligent; I am working *so* hard, why am I not getting better. The answer is, of course, that “surrendering to goodness,” “surrendering to love” means *stop* struggling. *Stop* working so darned hard. To let your inherent understanding, wisdom, patience, compassion and gentleness shine through, you must relax your grip on your heart.

Do not imagine for a moment that by ceasing to struggle you will therefore become lazy. People who tune out their fears and, instead, listen to their hearts and are led by their hearts are the busiest, most productive people on the planet. Certainly, they are more productive than people who can no longer even move because they are so busy being “analytical and productive” in their ego-driven minds even while their hearts are shut down and their bodies are a burden to themselves and to others. If you are wondering how long you will need to struggle with this self-change work, the answer is, “forever: or until you decide to stop struggling and let your inherent perfection and joy in living manifest themselves.”

Crying

Crying can be pivotal in recovering from Parkinson's. Cry with tears, cry out loud, cry with self-pity for your self, for all the times you've been hurt, disappointed, mistreated or misunderstood. This is not the beginning of selfishness, it is the end of dishonesty. Stifling your feelings is not the same thing as not having them. If you think you can't cry, imitate the sounds and motions of a person who is crying.

Cry. And if you feel rage welling up in you alongside the tears, give expression to your rage (with words directed at the walls of a silent room, or by pounding a pillow). If you are spiritually inclined, you can even let God know how you feel about having been hurt (resentful, angry, bitter). Berate him as a two year old berates his good mother or good father. Don't worry about offending God; He/She/Love will be pleased that you're communicating honestly for a change.

A DIFFERENT TYPE OF MEDITATION

A PDer sent the following meditation to me via email. She referred to it as “Tonglen Meditation” and said that it was a powerful technique.

The first step of this “meditation” is to say to oneself, “Other people feel this.” This stage of courage, admitting that one is not unique in his pain or discomfort or fear, is the starting place. Any time that thoughts of isolation, desperation, or personal burden well up, repeat this phrase until the full meaning of it is felt. “Other people feel this.”

The next stage of courage for this particular meditation is to mentally say, “May we all be free of this (type of pain or suffering).”

The third stage of this meditation is to think to oneself, “Since I’m feeling this anyway, may I be feeling it so all others can be free of it.”

I am a bit ashamed of my immediate response to the PDer. I dashed off a quick email reply to her that said, “I’m a little surprised. I thought that we all learned this concept as young children. Isn’t this how most people get through pain and problems? Seriously, is this concept new to anyone?”

She wrote back to me, “To be honest, I sadly did not learn that as a child. I did learn to reason my way out of problems which I now realize just furthered the disconnect. I didn’t learn to trust.”

I wrote back to thank her for her sincere response, and apologized for my arrogance. If this type of meditation resonates with you, please practice it.

For myself, I prefer the following affirmation:

“The laws of cause and effect permeate all the universe, right down to the perfect balance between the number of protons and the number of electrons. Even our very thought waves can act as a force for good or evil, and according to the laws of equal and opposite reactions, if I perpetrate negative thoughts, the results of those negative thoughts will someday come home to roost in my consciousness.

“All illness, pain or suffering is the result of transgressions against natural law, whether initiated in this life *or in some other*. If I am in pain, it was myself that set the transgression and its subsequent pain in motion. I can learn about myself, and learn how to change myself, by studying carefully the suffering that I am feeling. I should never forget that others have the same suffering; this will help me to remember that my transgressions are not special or unique. Even in my transgressions against natural law, I must humbly say that I have not been especially original. Therefore, let me learn from my mistakes and be grateful, celebrate, because the pain I am now feeling, the price I must pay for my ego-based blunders, is even now being worked off. The sooner I have worked off my errors, the sooner I will be free of them, the sooner I will be closer to Wisdom and Peace.

“And if, in the past, or in past lives, I have ever prayed sincerely that the illness or suffering of another might be transferred to me so that I might share or shoulder the burden, I must consider that my present suffering may be the answer to that long-forgotten prayer. In which case, my pain or suffering is the greatest possible honor – it is the answer to my heartfelt prayer. If this is then proof that my heartfelt prayers are heard and answered, then may I remember to always be sending positive thoughts, for every thought is a form of prayer.”

SLOW AND STEADY WINS THE RACE

Despite the fact that overnight change is possible, for some people, it isn't practical to assume that everyone will change overnight.

Therefore, start off small, but steady, with these techniques for shifting the mind. Do not be worried about your progress; the type of thinking that measures, compares and contrasts resides mostly in the fear part of the mind. Spend a little time each day breathing slowly, closing yourself off to the relentless yammering of the world. Re-tune your heart radio, just in case it is misaligned.

Tune in to a simple "you" based chant; banish the chorus of "I, Me, Mine."

Admit cheerfully that you are imperfect: demonstrate your harmless imperfections and maybe even with fearless, even humorous honesty, point them out to others.

At the same time, stop judging others: if you cannot understand someone's actions or the source of some troubling event, assume the kindest possible motive.

Track your thoughts lovingly and, like a gentle shepherd, correct them when they head towards the quicksand of negativity. Cull the toxic weeds of anxiety which might poison your flock of thoughts and give them away to the universal incinerator.

Spend a little time each day immersed in timeless eternity: let some golden moments slip by without counting the minutes.

Did I mention dancing in the silent kitchen while waiting for the water to boil? Imagine the flowing movements of the dance and let your body follow the thoughts of the dance. Don't force your body to obey mental commands of movement: have some fun.

Joyfully command your mind to be the mind you want it to be: burn up the brain cells that are misbehaving – you can always grow new ones.

Invent some amusing image that directs your brain to the kind of mood you want to manifest.

Cry.

Rage.

Be peaceful.

Be grateful.

Be.

