

# Zarah & Pharez

## Part Nine

### Questions & Answers

*\* Does sonship promote the practices of meditation or visualization in its pursuit of God?*

In order to answer that, we would need to be more specific about what we mean. The Bible does speak of meditation, and it is usually in a positive vein. In the narrow sense in which it uses it, we would definitely affirm that sonship promotes meditation as a valid and beneficial means of seeking God. However, many of the types of meditation commonly practiced today would fall under an entirely different category.

Meditation can be defined in a number of different ways, and, depending on the person with whom we are speaking, can be understood to suggest a variety of different practices. The general meaning, according to Webster, is that it is "an act of spiritual contemplation." However, this description might not be acceptable to those who deny the existence of a spiritual element in life (the difference, in our opinion, would be merely semantic). Therefore, in order to satisfy everyone's understanding, we could simply say that meditation speaks of an act involving self-experience, self-realization, and, in some religious traditions, a specific practice designed to achieve the discovery of ultimate truth. This would embody most beliefs.

From a purely clinical standpoint, psychologists have described meditation as "the intentional self-regulation of attention, in the service of self inquiry in the here and now." The basic components which they have determined to accompany meditation are: 1) relaxation, 2) concentration, 3) an altered state of awareness, 4) the suspension of logical thought processes, and 5) the maintenance of a self-observing attitude.

Speaking for the mystical community, the late Edgar Cayce once defined meditation as "an emptying of all that hinders the creative forces, rising along the natural channels of the physical man to be disseminated through those centers and sources that create the activities of the physical, the mental, the spiritual man." (Note: Mr. Cayce's definition was obviously influenced by the ancient Eastern idea that the human body possesses *chakras*, or energy centers, which store energy obtained from the universal life force. The seven "wheels of energy", as they are sometimes called, are believed to be positioned

along the spine in ascending order, and must be awakened in order to release their power.)

While there is quite a variety of meditational techniques performed around the world, most of them would fall into one of three main categories. For the sake of those who might not be familiar with them, these categories could be listed as:

- \* those which focus on the field or background perception and experience, called *mindfulness meditation*;
- \* those which focus on a specific object, or *concentrative meditation*; and
- \* those which shift between the field and the object, combining elements from both of the above mentioned categories.

In order for one to practice what is known as mindfulness meditation, the subject generally sits in a comfortable position (some disciplines insist on the lotus position, but not all do), as still as possible, all the while silently centering his attention on a particular object or process. For instance, he may focus his attention on his breathing, on his heartbeat, or upon a sound, such as that which is produced by the ringing of a gong. The same result may be reached by repeating a mantra, by dwelling on a mental image which one has visualized, or by the contemplating of a *koan*, that is, an illogical question or riddle (such as, *what is the sound of one hand clapping?*). The intention behind this is to disengage the analytical mind. Once the person is satisfied with the state at which he has arrived, he is then encouraged to observe the collection of his thoughts, freely moving about them from one perception to another. While the individual is not to put forth any kind of deliberate effort in the production of his thinking, every thought, image or sensation that does come to him is to be considered in the analysis. The incoming impressions may arise from the past or the future, but the one doing the meditating is urged to remain in the here and now.

Because of the popularity of Eastern disciplines such as Yoga and T'ai Chi, it is a well-known fact that meditation can also be practiced while walking or performing some simple exercises. Just as it is with those involving stillness, the primary emphasis in these forms of meditation is likewise placed on the process itself, rather than on its purpose or final outcome. The main objective of each is to disconnect from conventional mental categories in the mind, in order to return to the primal nature of perceptions and events. In certain Chinese meditations, for instance, the way in which this objective is sought is by concentrating on the life force of the body, referred to as Prana, Ch'i, Ki or Qi. The one performing the meditation usually begins by envisioning this energy just below his navel (in his lower abdomen), and then, by means of mental manipulation, attempts to raise it to different points, from whence it can be dispersed throughout his entire body. Another variation of this recommends concentrating on the mystical "Third Eye", which is supposedly located in the lower part of the forehead. This chakra point is believed to coincide with the pineal gland, a gland which has been assumed by some to possess the

power of transformation. In either case, the general belief is that he or she can manipulate this energy at will, thus causing it to bring about changes in mind, body and spirit.

According to those who advocate these, and other kinds of practices, meditation enables individuals to gain control over their lives by means of this inner awareness. They come to understand the power they wield as the governors of internal affairs, and as masters of their own destiny. Because meditation allows people to move "outside of the box" of automatic logical-verbal constructions of the mind, they believe that they can free themselves from the boundaries established by the faculties of conscience and reason. Once they experience this liberation, they are then able to choose perceptions of reality at their own discretion, without any impedance whatsoever. The idea is that, whenever an individual has taken the first step of laying down his or her instinctive reasoning defenses, the consciousness is allowed to move in new directions. This is thought to release the one doing the meditating from bodily and cognitive tensions, thereby giving him the confidence and courage needed to cross over into concepts which had been previously "off-limits" to him.

While the primary emphasis may be placed on the process, rather than on the goal, the fact remains that the effects resulting from the process are nevertheless factored into the motivation. Besides being a stress-reliever, and a means of getting back control of one's life, meditation has been described as being the road to Nirvana, to samadhi, to the ultimate state of bliss and enlightenment. From the Eastern perspective, it is an indispensable tool in the apprehending of perfection. Those who claim to have achieved this state speak of the experience as one where the conflicts of dualism disappear, where the individual loses his sense of separateness, individuality and self-consciousness, and where he takes on a God-consciousness. He sees himself (as well as all of creation), not as simply being one *with* God (for that would still suggest a duality), but as actually being one *in the composition of* God, having been dissolved into "the vast ocean of undifferentiated divine mass" which he believes that God is.

As we said, most meditational practices would fall into one of these categories...but not Biblical meditation. There is a marked difference between them. When the Bible mentions meditation, it carries an entirely different meaning than that which is often assigned to it.

The words meditate and meditation are translated from nine different Hebrew words in the Old Testament. These words carry a variety of meanings, and apply to a number of different activities (such as speaking, studying, mourning, even complaining). However, the primary root of the most commonly used word implies a process of slowly masticating God's truths, and very thoughtfully digesting these truths within one's heart and mind. This involves deep contemplation on the part of the one who is meditating, and requires the making of a deliberate effort to ponder those things which the Lord has said or done, or revealed about Himself.

As a rule (and we know of no exceptions to it), biblical meditation always has as its object one of four things:

**1) the works of God---** *"I will meditate on all Thy work..."* Psa. 77:12; *"I remember the days of old; I meditate on all Thy works; I muse on the work of Thy hands."* Psa. 143:5

**2) the Word of God---** *"Thy word have I hid in my heart..."* Psa. 119:11; *"This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein..."* Josh. 1:8; *"But his (the righteous man's) delight is in the law of the Lord; and in His law doth he meditate day and night..."* Psa. 1:2; *"I will meditate in Thy precepts, and have respect unto Thy ways..."* Psa. 119:15; *"O how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day"* Psa. 119:97; *"Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in Thy word"* Psa. 119:148; *"My hands also will I lift up unto Thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in Thy statutes"* Psa. 119:48;

**3) the Person of God---** *"I meditate on Thee in the night watches..."*, Psa. 63:6; *"My meditation of Him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the Lord"* Psa. 104:34; or

**4) the instructions and responsibilities of the believer---** *"Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine: continue in them; for in doing this, thou shalt save thyself, and them that hear thee"* (See I Tim. 4:12-16 for context).

Notice that, in every one of these verses, conscious thought and the rational mind are always involved in the process. Not once is it suggested that there should be an emptying of the mind, or a suspension of its faculties. To the contrary, there is to be a *renewing* of the mind, in order that transformation might occur (Rom. 12:2).

In Psalm 49:3, David declared, *"My mouth will speak wisdom; and the meditation of my heart will be understanding."* In other words, the utterance of wisdom and an understanding by the heart will always accompany biblical meditation. While there may be changes made to one's consciousness in the course of his meditation, and a quickening of the mind to God's way of understanding, understanding will always be associated with it. We could say, therefore, that one of the purposes of true biblical meditation is to replace old thought patterns with the thoughts of God.

Recognizing this distinction is extremely important. Rather than despising it, or seeing it as something which needs to be suppressed, David placed great value on his thought life in prayer. He realized that, by meditating on the multitude of thoughts which were given to him from the Lord, he could not only abide, but remain in God's presence. *"How precious also are Thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with Thee."* (Psa. 139:17-18)

Not only that, but he also understood that God provides comfort for the soul in the arena of conscious thought. *"In the multitude of my thoughts within me Thy comforts delight my soul."* (Psa. 94:19). Therefore, man's consciousness should be seen as a venue to which God speaks, rather than something which needs to be silenced.

There is a marked difference between an altered state of consciousness and this renewal of the mind. An altered state of consciousness comes as a result of circumventing the intellect's logical reasoning processes, and transcending the dimension of reality. A renewal of the mind comes by stirring up our pure minds by way of remembrance (II Peter 3:1). Altering the consciousness comes as a result of slowing mental operations, or "dumbing down" the mind, we might say, in order to take the psychic consciousness to a different level of perception. Renewing the mind actually sharpens the intellect, providing the individual with a clearer understanding of the ways and workings of God. It takes our minds off of the problems and distractions of this world, and places them on the Answer.

Regardless of whether one is seeking to alter his state of consciousness, or whether he is desirous of receiving a renewed mind, detachment plays a major role in the accomplishment thereof. In either of these ambitions, the realization exists that there are things from which we must be detached. However, from the Eastern point of view, detachment is about as far as one may go, as that there is nothing beyond the individual to which he may become attached. Take, for instance, Buddhism. According to this philosophy, there is no personal God at the end of the process. There is only one's higher self to be discovered. Therefore, one of the central themes in Buddhism is the release from the miserable wheel of Samsara, the karmic cycle of reincarnation. Another philosophy stemming from the tenants of Buddhism, Zen, also views detachment as an end in itself. The same is true of Yoga. It is based on a similar principle of freeing one's self physically, emotionally and spiritually from entanglement in the world.

As we say, detachment is equally important for those pursuing sonship. We are told to come out from among the world, and to be separate (II Cor. 6:17). Also, we are admonished not to become entangled in the affairs of this life, that we might please Him who has called us (II Tim. 2:4). To be sure, this detachment is not limited to external involvements alone, but is to occur in the deepest point wherein the contact is made. This requires that we make a break in our innermost being, even the severance of our spirits from the imposing influences of the world, the flesh, and the devil. But detachment is not to be seen as an end in itself. Instead, the aim is freedom from the grip of this world's spirit, in order that we might attain to greater degrees of attachment to God. This, in turn, enables us to be of greater service to mankind in general, and to our brethren who are in the world.

This point in particular begs elaboration. The general disposition behind most Eastern or New Age philosophies seems to be, "Stop the world, I want to get off!" ...and meditation is viewed as their jumping-off point. Regardless of whether this is something which is prominently expressed by their promoters, or whether it is hidden among flowery sentiments of humanitarian concern, one gets the distinct impression that these philosophies are driven by a selfish desire, the desire to end all personal pain and suffering associated with human existence by way of escapism. Meditation is simply offered as the "magic carpet ride" away from it all, and as a way of saving one's self. (The appeal is very much akin to that of the rapture doctrine). On the other hand, the impassioned attitude of a son of God is, "If I ascend to new heights in the Spirit—it is

only that I might turn around, and condescend to men of low estate. I will not rest, nor *could* I rest in my spirit, unless and until I have helped to deliver a fallen creation from the ravages of death." No doubt, this was the heart that burned within the apostle Paul, when he said that he could wish himself accursed from Christ, willing even to trade places with his brethren after the flesh, if such an action would result in their reconciliation (Rom. 9:1-3). Like his Master, there was no sacrifice too great. He was willing to lay down his life for his brethren. Therefore, we would declare that the true quest of sonship is driven by a selfless desire... *not* the desire to experience something for one's self, and *not* the desire to simply escape from the problems of this life, while leaving others to cope "as best they can"...but the desire to help a hurting humanity, and to assist in the restitution of all things.

In defense of their cause, however, there are those who would contend that Christianity has its own history of tradition regarding meditational practices, and its own examples of individuals and groups who have adopted some rather unorthodox procedures into their prayer lives. For example, it has been pointed out that Ignatius recommended the practice of rhythmical breathing while saying either the Lord's prayer or the Hail Mary. According to him, this practice was most effective when used in conjunction with the rosary. Also, during the thirteenth century, a collection of ascetical writings known as *the Philokalia* (Greek for "the love of the beautiful") was composed by the Fathers of the Eastern Orthodox church, which greatly encouraged the use of repetitive, mantra-like prayer. It provided a number of suggestions for the aspiring adherent, which were all directed at achieving a state of inner stillness and silence.

In the fourteenth century two monks produced a set of instructions entitled *Directions to Hesychasts* (this word, Hesychast, is simply a form of the Greek word for quiet). As with the Philokalia, the gist of its directions had to do with rhythmical breathing exercises, an imageless sense of God's presence, and the repetitious invocation of the prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." (Since the time of its writing, all such forms of this meditation generally come under the heading of Hesychasm, or Hesychastic prayer.) This, too, had its share of influence among believers, and drew followers after it.

Hesychastic prayer spread to the West primarily through the English translation of a small Russian book entitled, *The Way of a Pilgrim*. No one knows the name of its author, but the manuscript was first discovered by an abbot on Mt. Athos in 1884. Whether its story was true or fictitious remains to be proven. But it told of an anonymous pilgrim who was taught to use the Jesus prayer as described in the Philokalia. According to the account, he repeated this prayer over and over within himself as he journeyed across the countryside, eventually learning to keep cadence with the rhythm of his heart. The result was that he recited it literally tens of thousands of times each day. (The book was translated into English in 1930.)

Various members of the mystic community were known for their peculiar prayer techniques and emphases. St. John of the Cross and St. Theresa of Avila are usually among the first to come to mind. But others also stand out among the ranks, and for

understandable reasons. For instance, the German cobbler from Golitz, Jacob Boehme, professed to have come into his revelation of the "Ungrund" (the idea that God emerges from Nothingness, or what he referred to as the Un-ground) while staring at the reflection of a flame in a pewter dish. Likewise, Meister Eckhart taught what has been referred to as "deep contemplation", wherein God as God—that is, as a conceptual designation for Being or Consciousness apart from us—ceases to exist. According to his teachings, we must be "quit of God" and enter into what precedes and transcends the division between God and creatures, if we are to find that for which our hearts long. In the deep contemplative state, he says, there is no one to ask or hear a question. There is only an oblivion and "unknowing." When once we arrive at this meditational place (which he referred to as "the ground and wellspring of Godhead"), we find that "all creatures speak God." (Eckhart's teachings on deep contemplation are often used by Buddhist teachers to support their teachings on deep and dynamic samadhi). Also, during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Miquel de Molinos and his followers were labeled "Quietists", because of his insistence on the silencing of all mental activity during times of spiritual contemplation. He taught that individuals should cease to reason or to reflect either upon themselves or upon God, and seek to attain a posture of complete and utter passivity, if they expected to be "absorbed into Deity." Madame Jeanne Guyon and Francois Fenelon have usually been named among that number, although neither of them were as radical in their teachings as was Molinos (this has prompted a number of theologians to refer to them as Semi-Quietists). Among the Protestants, George Fox and his Society of Friends (more commonly known as the "Quakers") are perhaps the most widely recognized group to have carried over the traditions of the Quietists into the present day. That they were greatly influenced by Boehme, Meister Eckhart, John Pordage and others is well documented in their own writings.

Since the early part of the 1960's, many have pointed to the teachings of the "Inner Healing" Movement as their source of justification. Launched mainly by the ministry of the late Agnes Sanford, the leaders of this movement very aggressively promoted "the visualization prayer" as a means of healing the negative experiences and traumas of the past. It was (and continues to be) taught that by using psychologist Carl Jung's principle of "active imagination", Christians are able to deal with their "hangups", and can become free to move into a greater place of intimacy and maturity in Christ. (In a nutshell, Jung's belief was that there is a deeper level of unconscious material residing beneath that of the personal unconscious—something which he labeled "the collective unconscious" or the "deep mind" of man. Within this collective unconscious lie the memories of the human race—all that has gone into its cultural, spiritual and mythological development throughout man's history. These memories are mutually shared by all people, of every generation, and is the inherited possession of every man. Embedded among these memories are what Jung called archetypes, that is, mythological motifs, thought forms, and primordial images which abide in latent form, until such a time that they are in some way activated. This is where active imagination comes in. The archetypes have the potential of bringing transformation to an individual. But they must arise in one's being, in order for that transformation to take place.) Now, working off of the ideological principles of Jung, Inner Healing advocates believe that we can likewise bring forth a manifestation of Jesus at will, from the innermost part of our beings, whenever His

presence is needed. According to them, the process through which this is done is simple. When once an individual has "centered" his thoughts, he is encouraged to envision a scene from the Gospels, preferably one in which a healing or miracle occurs. As the scenario unfolds, and the figure of Jesus is brought into the picture, the individual is then directed to insert himself into the story. Through the deliberate use of his imagination, he is to visualize Jesus coming to him, speaking directly and personally to him, and ministering to his particular need. Because it is claimed that the reality of the experience is not found in the image, but in the archetype that is behind the image, it does not matter how one's image of Jesus may appear. He may be envisioned any way one chooses. In fact, there is nothing that says that the image even has to be that of Jesus. The same results can be expected from Catholic practitioners who prefer to visualize the virgin Mary, or any one of the patron saints. You see, according to the teachers of Inner Healing, the important thing to remember is that it is the technique, and not the particular image one envisions, that actually accomplishes the work. Therefore, because of this movement, because of some of the highly respected ministers who have given their consent to the movement, and because of the seemingly positive results which are often attributed to it, a good number of people have conceded that there must be truth to it.

We freely acknowledge that there have been those within the Christian community who have incorporated some highly unusual practices into their prayer lives. Being borne out in history, these facts cannot be denied. While the defense could be made for some that they simply failed to express themselves sufficiently, and thereby became the victims of misunderstanding, with others, there can be no doubt as to their meaning. Their words and intentions were indisputable. However, this does nothing to prove that Eastern meditational practices are either sanctioned by, or based upon the sound and scriptural teachings of Jesus.

The simple fact is, Jesus never authorized Eastern techniques, either directly or indirectly, in word or in deed. It stands to reason that if He would have seen these as legitimate ways of entering into the Kingdom, or if He would have felt that they would have benefitted His followers in any way in their spiritual advancement, He would have definitely given instructions regarding them. To the contrary, He advised *against* the use of vain repetitions, in the way in which the heathen used them (Matt. 6:7). He also warned of the demonic invitation that is extended whenever a mental and spiritual void is created (Lk. 11:25). This clearly shows that He disapproved of the practices implemented by idolatrous religions, and considered them to be vain, unprofitable, and worthless.

Even though Jesus was so explicit in what He said, this has not discouraged those who continually attempt to explain Christian meditation in broader terms than those for which the Scriptures have allowed. One of those individuals is Dr. Morton Kelsey, Professor of Theology at Notre Dame University. Dr. Kelsey has written a book entitled *The Other Side of Silence; a Guide to Christian Meditation*. In it, he seeks to describe Christian meditation, and to point out some of the things which sets it apart from other forms of meditation. Much of what he says in his introductory chapters seems reasonable and worthy of consideration (if you didn't already know where he was coming from). However, he takes the pragmatic approach, and allows for just about any technique one

chooses, as long as it produces the desired results. For instance, he writes, "The way that you pray, the form and direction your meditations take, depends largely upon the way you view the world in which you find yourself. If you think that you are a part of a purely physical universe, you may understand meditation as a method of controlling the brain waves in order to improve your physiological and emotional condition... Or, if you really envision all life ultimately merging into the effortless, suspended bliss of Nirvana, then you will try to make your meditation another step toward release from the illusion and burdens and pains of this life... Christian meditation in its most developed form is quite different from either of these. It is based on the view of the world that finds each individual important, both in the material realm and in the non-material or spiritual realm. In this practice of meditation one expects to meet someone, and the encounter is usually experienced as a relationship with a person." This would certainly qualify as a legitimate distinction. When a Christian meditates, he does so with the earnest expectation that he will come face to face with his Lord. However, Kelsey goes on to say, "Outer aids and actions may also help to bring one to the encounter, and of course *there is no reason why Christians should not use the techniques of Zen or TM or Yoga. These are valuable so long as one is aware that there is another element in Christian meditation, an addition that makes it quite another practice.*" (Italics ours, Pp. 57).

Taking his proposal into consideration, therefore, the question demands to be asked: are all forms of meditation equally valid in the eyes of God? And is the validity of a particular discipline to be based upon whether or not it "works" for you? The psalmist David prayed, "*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.*" (Psa. 19:14) This naturally leads us to believe that there must be certain types of meditation which are NOT acceptable in God's sight.

The question could rightfully be asked: why would we consider it wrong to employ any of the various Eastern ideas of meditation?

1) It is impossible to separate Eastern meditational techniques from their religious and philosophical roots and connotations. Despite how some have chosen to portray it, they are inseparably linked one to another.

Maharishi Mehesh Yogi first introduced Transcendental Meditation (TM) to the West as a purely secular exercise. His claim was that it required no religious beliefs whatsoever in order to reap the benefits from it. However, what Maharishi failed to mention is the fact that during the initiation ceremony (commonly referred to as the *Puja*), the names of various Hindu deities are incorporated into the chant. Of course, those who participate in the *Puja* are usually oblivious to this, because the invocation is spoken in Sanskrit. But if the truth were known, the ceremony is actually meant to be part worship ritual and part dedication service. It is the committal of the participants to the lordship of these gods. Beyond that, it takes but little effort to show that Maharishi's entire cosmology, with its various levels of consciousness and its theistic summit, finds its origin in Hindu and Vedantic tradition. Taking that into account, then, who could honestly say that TM is a non-religious exercise?

We have brought up a number of these concepts in previous writings, but we'll cite them again for the sake of association. Some of the more general ideas Eastern forms of meditation build upon, and incorporate into their teachings would be pantheistic monism, holism, dialecticism, docetism, moral relativity, and the yin/yang principle. Oftentimes, these ideas are so subtly interwoven into the program, the participating individual is not even aware that he has been influenced by them until they have already become a part of his belief system.

2) Eastern forms of meditation tend to reduce God to an impersonal force, rather than to recognize Him as the personal Entity which He is.

This is another thing that we have talked about before. Whenever the indwelling Christ is viewed as "energy", and regarded in concert with the Eastern ideas of Ch'i, Qi or Prana, it is that He may be made into a manageable "thing". He becomes, in the mind of the practitioner, a controlled substance, rather than the God who controls us. As one might imagine, this can lead to a whole string of problems.

If God is but an impersonal force like electricity, and we are the cosmic "electricians" who direct the "current" according to our wills, then He would not be in a position to speak to our hearts on ethical issues, or issues of morality. We ask you...when was the last time the wiring in a home told the homeowner how he should live? And when was the last time you heard electricity telling the electrician how to run his business, or to treat his employees? Because electricity is impersonal, it is incapable of making moral distinctions of right and wrong. And it is completely impartial. It works the same for a dishonest electrician as it does for an honest one. The same would be true of God, were He to lose the quality of personality. He would be subject to the will of the creature, rather than the other way around.

Because God is personal, we can expect to experience an intimate relationship with Him. But the more an individual views Him as being merely an indwelling life force, a substance which courses through our beings like the blood in our veins, the more he will experience a loss of that intimacy, and a growing sense of loneliness within.

3) The practice of visualization tends to blur the line between fact and fiction, and works off of the idea that reality is a construct of the imagination. As such, it would be subject to modification based on one's perception of it.

If everyone is encouraged to freely employ his or her imagination, then these questions must be asked: who or what will govern the images that are produced by it? And who will decide what is valid and what is not? Are the gospel stories subject to re-invention? And are we at liberty to change them around to suit us personally? Also, the following hypotheses must be considered: what if two people visualize two entirely contradictory situations? Can both be right, or does it even matter that there is a contradiction? And what if the same person chooses to visualize two discordant scenes at different times? Must a collision occur between competing conceptions of the mind, or is it possible for them to coexist together?

We can say this without fear of contradiction. Jesus is not some inner spirit guide, who can be conjured up at will. Furthermore, He is not a servant to our psyches, or controlled by our thoughts. If that were the case, then we would be Lord, and not He. As we have so often stated through the course of this series, sonship declares that Jesus Christ is Lord! Since that is the truth, we must say quite emphatically that the message of sonship could never include the teaching of visualization.

(It should also be noted here that there is a difference between having a vision, as depicted in Scripture, and practicing visualization. Having a vision is the result of the Holy Spirit. It comes entirely by spiritual initiation, and is under divine direction from beginning to end. There is nothing that can be done to bring on a true vision from God. It can only be given place to when it comes. Furthermore, a true vision will invariably be rooted in reality, will never conflict with other divine visions, and will always find its fit within the larger picture of God's eternal purposes. On the other hand, the experience of visualization originates in the mind, and is the result of human initiative. It is produced by the will of flesh and of man, and does not necessarily have to correspond with reality. This brings to mind Paul's question in Galatians 3:3, "Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect [or mature] by the flesh?" The answer, of course, is NO. According to the words of Jesus, it is the Spirit that quickens us; the flesh profits nothing. Therefore, in light of these things, we can say that while God-given visions have the ability of assisting in the perfection of the saints, the fleshly contrived practice of visualization offers nothing of spiritual value.)

4) The peaceful sensation one might experience can be very misleading.

Peace is a wonderful thing, whenever it comes as a result of being in the presence of the Prince of Peace. For sure, He can provide us with a peace that passes all understanding; that is, a peace which exceeds our ability to comprehend it by human standards. He can lift us above our dilemmas, our trials and our circumstances, and into a secure place in Him, even when we cannot begin to fathom how such a thing could be possible. But we should realize that there is a false peace that can be manufactured by attempting to escape from reality, and by refusing to deal with disturbing or unpleasant issues of life. One way we can know whether the peace that we experience is from God or not is by examining the effect that it has on our lives. Someone has wisely said, "The question is not how peaceful one feels, but whether that composure leads to a constructive action." To this we would wholeheartedly agree. Does the peace that we experience come from a resolve to confront issues in life, and a willingness to obey whatever the Lord should tell us to do, or does it come simply from the avoidance of those issues altogether? This is something each of us must ask ourselves.

Since we are talking about peace, perhaps we should also say a word about that which is commonly associated with it, silence. Some think that once an individual has entered into a state of silence, he has invariably had an encounter with God. This is because silence has often been confused with being the very essence of God's own Being. For example, New Age philosopher Alan Watts speaks of God as "the Silence out of which all sounds come". However, *silence should be acknowledged as being a state of absence, rather*

*than a state of presence.* Silence is simply the absence of sound, whether internal or external. It is not a Person. It may be described as a state wherein one may be more susceptible to God's presence. And it certainly could be considered to be a place wherein distractions are brought to a minimum. But it is not to be confused with presence itself. The truth is, *silence is emptiness...emptiness which requires the filling with presence.* However, we must not just blindly assume that the presence which comes to us in silence will always be that of God's. This is an area where discernment is needed.

5) Eastern practices take an unbiblical approach to the treatment of sin.

In the first place, because Eastern beliefs generally regard sin as being *maya*, that is, an illusion of the mind, no opportunity exists for the conviction of sin in the life of the individual. In fact, it is conviction itself, and not the sin, that is seen as the primary obstacle between God and man. Remove the sin *consciousness*, they say, and the guilt that accompanies it, and man can be united with his divine self.

However, in order to appeal to those who have not yet embraced the Eastern paradigm, promoters of the Eastern way will sometimes use words which *seem* to correspond with traditional terms with which we are accustomed, but which carry entirely different meanings for them. For instance, the Maharishi once claimed that one of the results of meditating is that "very easily a sinner comes out of the field of sin and becomes a virtuous man." This he said, in spite of the fact that virtue, for the morally relativistic minded Easterner, is an undeterminable thing. Since we know that he irrefutably rejected the Christian concept of sin, what, one might ask, did he mean when he spoke of a "sinner"? And what did he mean by "a virtuous man"? We can assure you that, if he had been pinned down, his definitions would certainly have differed from those held by the majority of Christians. His only reason for employing such terms was for the purpose of deception. Therefore, we can conclude that whereas biblical meditation causes a person to mature in character as a result of a direct confrontation with the Truth, Eastern meditation tries to promote perfection without repentance, or without any reference to an objective moral standard.

6) Eastern meditational practices can have undesirable side effects on one's mental and physical health.

Studies have shown that performing prolonged, intense meditation disciplines over an extended period of time can have a bimodal biological impact, and can even result in varying levels of psychosis. While the benefits of relaxation and tranquility may be initially experienced in the early stages, and while certain destructive addictions may even be subdued as a result of meditation, one study found that 63% of the subjects who had practiced it 16 months or longer reported adverse effects, such as mood swings; anxiety and panic attacks; sudden and inexplicable increases in tension; a decrease of motivation in life; boredom; a shortening of the attention span; mild dissociation; periodic bouts with confusion and disorientation; a "spaced out" feeling; depression; negativity; a critical spirit; and ironically, feeling addicted to meditation itself. Some of those queried even reported having suicidal tendencies.

However, even without these types of studies, it should not be difficult for anyone to see that desensitizing one's self psychologically, and/or inducing a trance-like state upon one's mind, could make a person incapable of coping with the ordinary roles and responsibilities in life.

7) Last, but not least, meditational practices, because of their close association with Eastern belief systems, can bring one into contact with evil spirits.

We should not fool ourselves into believing that religious ideas are disassociated from their sources of inspiration. Eastern religious beliefs are not benign or harmless little ideas. They are doctrines of devils, deliberately sown into the minds of men in order to blind them to the Truth. It stands to reason, then, that wherever these doctrines are found, their demonic influences will not be far behind. Some may poo-poo at the idea of evil spirits, and pretend that they don't exist, but if they were to ask someone who had actually encountered one during a meditative session (and there are many who have testified to such experiences), they might have a different opinion about it. Besides, if we accept the testimony of Scripture, we have to take the reality of demonic powers seriously.

In conclusion, allow us to say that sonship is not opposed to transcending the voice of the natural mind. Neither is it afraid of silencing the many clamoring voices of the mind in prayer. Anyone who has ever spent time in prayer understands the importance of this. As the apostle Paul wrote, the natural man cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God, because it is foolishness to him (I Cor. 2:14). It takes the mind of the Spirit to understand the things of the Spirit. Therefore, an ascension above the natural mind, or the mind of the flesh, is one of the chief goals of those pursuing sonship, and necessary for true communion with the Father. However, the primary way in which we accomplish this is by *praying in the Spirit*. This, and only this, constitutes lawful entry into the heavenlies. Paul's letter to the church in Rome does much to explain this. Sometimes, we don't know how to pray as we ought. We exhaust our prayer vocabulary, searching diligently for the right words to adequately express our hearts. And sometimes we find that even this fails to suffice. We still sense a lack, or an inability to satisfactorily enunciate our needs before the Lord. When this is the case, we simply yield to the indwelling Spirit. The Spirit itself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered in articulate speech. While we may not be able to understand the language with our natural minds, our hearts are able to commune with God in a very worthwhile and edifying exchange. However, it is important to understand that while a believer's spirit is busy offering prayer, his mind is not idle, or devoid of content, but is focused upon God in a worshipful manner. You see, the possibility exists that the Spirit will speak a word to his understanding, so his mind must be poised and ready, open (but not empty) to receive all that the Spirit might say to his consciousness.

Jesus never taught us to focus our attention on mandalas, or koans, or our breathing, or our navels, or anything else, for that matter, in order for us to have a spiritual encounter with Him. These techniques merely produce a hypnotic effect on our minds, open us up to deception (by way of false expectations), and actually cause us to become *more* self-

centered, rather than less so. Instead, we are instructed to look away from every distraction, *including* our so-called "higher selves", and unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:2). He must become our entire focus, our center, and the prime Object of our affection. When this takes place, He will naturally change us evermore into His likeness, and bring about the necessary corrections in the way that we think.

To be continued...

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