

## ASIAN CONTEMPLATIVE DISCIPLINES: COMMON PRACTICES, CLINICAL APPLICATIONS, AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

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The second half of the 20th Century witnessed a dramatic influx of Asian disciplines, such as meditation and yoga, into the West. In a matter of decades they went from little known and much misunderstood esoterica to disciplines that are studied and practiced by millions of people in the United States alone.

In the process they have had significant cultural, religious, contemplative, and intellectual effects. Culturally they are contributing to the dramatic globalization that is a mark of our times. In the religious arena they have spurred both inter-religious dialogue and competition. Contemplatively, they have fostered a resurgence of Western meditative disciplines such as Christian contemplation, Jewish Kaballah, and Islamic Sufism. Intellectually they have led to new interest in Asian psychologies and philosophies. This, in turn, has led to the foundation of disciplines such as transpersonal psychology, sociology and anthropology that strive to integrate Asian and Western Thought.

### PARTIAL PRACTICES

Yet practice and understanding of Asian disciplines are often partial. Frequently people take up a single technique largely divorced from the comprehensive practices and disciplines in which it was traditionally embedded. For example, many people now practice Buddhist vipassana [insight] meditation independent of the eight-fold path, while others practice Taoist and Hindu breathing exercises and postures divorced from the full yogas.

To some extent this kind of divorce is probably expedient and even strategic. Indeed, there is considerable evidence that these techniques can be beneficial in and of themselves. For example, several hundred studies demonstrate the psychological and psychosomatic benefits of meditation (Murphy & Donovan, 1997; Shapiro &

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Walsh, 1984; West, 1987). Still the crucial question remains "Is there something lost in this piecemeal approach of using only a single technique or practice?" The interdependence of virtues suggests that there may be.

### *The Interdependence of Virtues*

The idea that psychological and spiritual virtues are interdependent is an ancient idea that echoes through the wisdom literature of both East and West. The central idea is, as Michael Murphy (1992, p 558) summarized it, that "every virtue requires other virtues to complete it." In ancient Greece, Plato and Aristotle argued for this idea although the Stoics were the first to formalize the concept; they named it *antakolouthia*. The Christian Eastern Orthodox contemplative text, the *Philokalia*, asks "which virtue is the most important? The answer to this is that the virtues are linked one to another, and follow as it were a sacred sequence, one depending on the other. . ." (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1993, p. 160). In the East, Confucius warned that "Possessed of courage but devoid of morality, a gentleman will make trouble while a small man will be a brigand" (17:23, Lau, 1979, p. 148). Likewise, Buddhist psychology describes in very precise terms how certain positive mental qualities tend to strengthen one another and how others, such as effort and calm, need to be balanced (Nyanaponika, 1976).

There actually seem to be two distinct concepts contained in the idea of the interdependence of virtues. The first is that virtues require and complement one another. The second is that the cultivation of one virtue facilitates the cultivation of others. The early Greek philosophers seem to have focused more on the first concept, but both concepts are often detectable in other sources.

### *Authentic Traditions Offer Multifaceted Disciplines*

Given the interdependence of virtues it is not surprising that authentic spiritual disciplines offer multiple techniques and practices. As such, they offer a relatively rounded psychological and spiritual training: for example, the yogas of Taoism and Hinduism, the eight-fold path of Buddhism, and certain Western contemplative traditions. Michael Murphy's (1992) book *The Future of the Body* offers an excellent discussion of the completeness and deficits of various traditions.

The idea of the necessity of multifaceted disciplines is supported by recent psychological thinking on development. It is now apparent that development proceeds, not in some monolithic manner in which all psychological capacities and qualities grow together, but rather in a loosely correlated way. Ken Wilber (1997, 1998) has used the idea of developmental lines to point out that development of one capacity, such as cognitive ability, can outstrip others, such as moral or emotional development. The result is lopsided or uneven development with consequent problems for the individual and sometimes for society. For example, cognitive development seems to be necessary, but not sufficient, for moral development and so it is possible for highly intelligent people to act in highly unethical ways and to thereby have horrible effects on societies and even the entire planet, e.g., the Nazis. This idea represents a contemporary rediscovery—now couched in terms of developmental psychology—of the interdependence of virtues.

### *The Authenticity and Effective Authenticity of Contemplative Disciplines*

Early researchers comparing different contemplative disciplines often assumed that they resulted in what systems theorists call "equifinality." That is, they assumed that all disciplines produce the same common final experience and developmental stage. However, it is now increasingly clear that while some disciplines may converge and, perhaps, even display a so called "transcendent unity of religions," (Schuon, 1975), disciplines may also induce quite different experiences and aim for different developmental levels (Walsh, 1990; Wilber 1997).

Ken Wilber (1983) has made a crucial distinction between two vital religious dimensions: legitimacy and authenticity. What defines the legitimacy of a tradition is the extent to which it satisfies the psychological needs of a population at their current developmental level. Authenticity, on the other hand, is defined in terms of the developmental level for which a tradition aims. That is, a tradition is said to be authentic to the extent to which it aims to foster development to higher transpersonal stages. Walsh (1992) complemented this with the concept of "effective authenticity," which is a measure of the extent to which a discipline is effective in moving practitioners to higher stages.

At this time we probably need a more nuanced view of both authenticity and effective authenticity. Given that there are multiple developmental lines, we can now no longer speak with complete precision of a single level of development. Certainly we can recognize a center of gravity or central tendency of development in any individual. However, we also need to recognize that a person may have reached quite distinct levels on different developmental lines.

Likewise, it seems highly likely that different disciplines will have distinct effects on different lines. That is, one discipline might be far more effective in fostering concentration and emotional maturation than in fostering cognitive development. For example, classical Confucianism was probably reasonably high on authenticity and effective authenticity for moral development and probably lower for concentration and emotional development.

Of course traditions are not static entities; They evolve and grow or devolve and decay over time, becoming more or less authentic in the process. For example, Confucianism arose largely in response to the social turmoil and suffering of ancient China and, therefore, was particularly oriented towards the cultivation of qualities such as compassion and service. It was not yet a full contemplative discipline because it lacked essential practices such as concentration. However, later when it merged with Taoism and Buddhism in the grand synthesis that created NeoConfucianism, it incorporated the missing elements and became a more authentic contemplative discipline (Koller, 1985).

On the other hand, traditions may degenerate so that effective transformative practices are lost and replaced with ineffective, nontransformative rituals. For example, in modern Japan the trance-inducing practices essential for the core shamanic technique—the shamanic journey—have been largely replaced

with rituals that do not induce altered states but merely act out the classic journey (Blacker, 1986).

This ritualization of religion is a potentially lethal problem for every tradition. Not one of the great religions has escaped it. The result is a process that Peter Russell calls "truth decay," in which effective spiritual practices give way to ineffective rituals. The result is an archaic collection of mindless, deadening rules and rituals that neither enliven nor enlighten. As the *Tao Te Ching* points out "Ritual is the husk of true faith" (Mitchell, 1992, p. 38). How to replace mere ritual activities with truly transformative practices is one of the greatest challenges that every religion repeatedly must face (Walsh, 1999).

This discussion of practices and authenticity leads to what we might call "the authenticity and practice hypothesis" which states:

The degree of authenticity and effective authenticity of a discipline will vary with the extent to which participants actually engage in the seven central practices.

#### *Essential Practices*

Ours is a unique time in human history, the first in which all the world's religious and spiritual traditions are available to us. Times and places where one could study, let alone practice, multiple disciplines without ending up on a funeral pyre or a crucifix have been rare. Perhaps not since Alexandria in ancient Egypt has there been such a rich meeting and mixing of traditions and disciplines as we are now experiencing.

Like a growing number of people, I have spent two decades exploring a variety of contemplative disciplines. In doing so I have come to recognize a certain commonality of practices underlying the diverse terms and techniques of different disciplines. In particular, there seems to be a common core of practices that advanced contemplatives from each of the great religions tend to regard as crucial.

At this time, I would suggest that there may be seven practices that are central and essential for effective transpersonal development. These are: redirecting motivation, transforming emotions, living ethically, developing concentration, refining awareness, cultivating wisdom, and practicing service and generosity (Walsh, 1999).

In suggesting this, I am distinguishing between practices on one hand and techniques and exercises on the other. I am using the term "practice" to refer to a discipline of cultivating a crucial capacity (or virtue) of mind, such as wisdom or concentration. Practices are rehearsals of desired qualities that over time may become spontaneous ways of being.

On the other hand, I use the words "technique" and "exercise" to indicate certain methods used in a practice. For example, the three techniques of spending time in nature, with wise people, and in reflections on the nature of life and death are widely recommended techniques for the practice of cultivating wisdom (Walsh, 1999).

*The Perennial Philosophy and the Perennial Wisdom*

It seems that there may be a common core of both wisdom and practice at the contemplative heart of the great religious traditions. The idea of a common understanding, wisdom or philosophy is a venerable one. The idea of a perennial philosophy underlying the great traditions can be traced back to the German philosopher, Leibniz, and it was popularized by Aldous Huxley (1944).

I hypothesize that there may also be a common core of perennial practices. These perennial practices may be crucial for fostering development to and through transpersonal stages and especially to higher transpersonal stages. As such these practices constitute a technology of transcendence.

Moreover, the perennial practices may have played a crucial role in the development of the perennial philosophy. Through refining qualities such as concentration, awareness, and wisdom they may have opened what St. Bonaventure and Ken Wilber (1993, 1996) call the "eye of contemplation" and thereby facilitated deep insights into, and understandings of, the nature of self, mind, and reality. It is the summation of these insights and understandings, accumulated by sages of diverse cultures and centuries, that constitutes the perennial philosophy or "great tradition" (Avabhasa, 1991).

In other words, religious practices and philosophies may be intimately linked. Indeed the perennial practices may have been central and essential for the development of the perennial philosophy. They may also be central and essential for anyone who would truly understand this philosophy, for the reasons that follow.

The perennial philosophy represents the insights and reflections of people who matured to, and drew their insights from, experiences of both personal and transpersonal states and stages. As such, it is a multistate and multistage philosophy. This means that our ability to understand it will depend on the extent to which we ourselves have directly experienced these transpersonal states and stages. Without such transpersonal experiences our capacity to comprehend the deeper meaning—what philosophers call the "higher grades of significance"—will be limited (Walsh, 1993).

These limitations on understanding can be conceived of in several ways. They can be considered in terms of states of consciousness as the limits of state-specific knowledge (Tart, 1972; Walsh, 1992), in linguistic terms as the impossibility of understanding a signifier (word, term) without experiencing the transcendental signified (transpersonal experience) (Wilber, 1995), in epistemological terms as the necessity of opening the eye of contemplation (Wilber, 1993, 1996), and in cognitive terms as the necessity of developing *adequatio*, the requisite capacity for understanding. E.F. Schumacher (1977, p. 61), an economist much influenced by Buddhist thought, wrote that

If we do not have the requisite organ or instrument, or fail to use it, we are not adequate to this particular part of facet of the world with the result, as far as we are concerned, it simply does not exist.

As Aldous Huxley (1944, p. vii) put it:

Knowledge is a function of being. When there is a change in the being of the knower, there is a corresponding change in the nature and amount of knowing.

In short, both the creation and understanding of the perennial philosophy may depend on maturing to transpersonal stages. This maturation in turn may depend on doing the perennial practices.

### *The Goals Of This Paper*

Having provided this philosophical context, I would now like to describe the seven central practices as they are understood and practiced in Asia, drawing primarily on four traditions: Buddhism and Hinduism of India, and Taoism and NeoConfucianism of China. This paper will offer practical exercises which give an introduction to each of the seven practices. Next, possible mechanisms by which contemplative disciplines may work their transformative effects are discussed. The paper then turns to the central Asian techniques of meditation and yoga and summarizes the now considerable research on meditation's psychological and psychosomatic effects.

### THE SEVEN CENTRAL PRACTICES

The following is a synoptic introduction to the seven practices in Asian traditions. A fuller discussion of these practices in both East and West can be found in Walsh (1999).

#### *1. Ethics*

Regard your neighbor's gain as your gain,  
and your neighbour's loss as your own loss.  
Tai Shang Kon Ying P'ien (Taoist) (Penner, 1993, p. 43)

With rare exceptions, such as Mowrer's Integrity Groups and Ethical Therapy, Western therapists have shied away from introducing ethical issues because of understandable concerns about moralizing and giving advice. Asian traditions, however, regard ethics as an essential foundation for transpersonal development. However, *their understanding of ethics is very different from conventional views and is far more psychologically astute.* "Rare are those who understand ethics" sighed Confucius (Lau, 1979, p. 132).

Asian traditions view ethics, not in terms of conventional morality, but rather as an *essential discipline for training the mind.* Contemplative introspection renders it painfully apparent that unethical behavior—behavior that aims at inflicting harm—both stems from and strengthens unhealthy destructive motives and emotions such as greed, anger and jealousy. In Western psychological terms, unethical behavior reinforces or conditions these destructive factors; in Asian terms, it deepens their "karmic imprint" on the mind, karma being the psychological residue left by past behavior. Conversely, ethical behavior—behavior which intends to enhance the

well-being of others—undermines destructive motives and emotions, and cultivates healthy qualities such as kindness, compassion and calm, while inhibiting unhealthy qualities through a process of reciprocal inhibition. From an Asian perspective, ethics is not something imposed from without, but rather something sought from within; not a sacrifice, but a service to both others and oneself because, as the Buddha pointed out, “Whatever you do, you do to yourself” (Byrom, 1976, p. 118).

At first ethical behavior involves a struggle to reverse old habits. However, with practice, it becomes increasingly effortless and spontaneous until “whatever is...thought to be necessary for sentient beings happens all the time of its own accord” (Gampopa, 1971, p. 271). Confucius described this stage as one in which “I could follow the dictates of my own heart: for what I desired no longer overstepped the boundaries of right” (Waley, 1989, 11:4). This kind of universal spontaneous ethicality corresponds to the higher stages of moral development suggested by the Harvard researcher Lawrence Kohlberg (1981). Interestingly Kohlberg (1990, p. 206) concluded that

...the only ethical-ontological orientation that appears capable of generating a fully adequate resolution to ultimate moral questions “Why be moral?” “Why be just in a world that is seemingly unjust?” is a cosmic perspective.... This orientation appears also to rely upon some type of transcendental or mystical experience—experience of a level at which self and the universe seem unified.

## 2. Emotional Transformation

Everything from ruler, minister, husband, wife and friends to mountains, rivers, spiritual beings, birds, animals, and plants should be truly loved in order to realize my humanity that forms one body with them, and then my clear character will be completely manifested, and I will really form one body with Heaven, Earth and the myriad things.

Wang Yang Ming (neoConfucian sage) (Chan, 1963, p. 661)

There seem to be three components to emotional transformation. These are reducing problematic emotions such as fear, anger and jealousy; cultivating positive emotions such as love, joy, and compassion; and developing equanimity.

While Western therapies have many techniques for reducing negative emotions, they have virtually none for directly enhancing the positive. In contrast, Asian therapies contain a wealth of practices for cultivating these beneficial emotions to a remarkable intensity. For example, the Buddhist's compassion and the yogi's *bhakti* reach their full flowering only when they unconditionally and unwaveringly encompass all creatures (Kongtrul, 1987).

This is facilitated by the third component of emotional transformation: the cultivation of equanimity. Equanimity is an imperturbability that maintains mental equilibrium and helps emotions such as love and compassion remain unwavering under duress. This is the Buddhist's *upekkha*, the Hindu's *samatva* which leads to a “vision of sameness,” and the Taoist's principle of “the equality of things,” which leads beyond “the trouble of preferring one thing to another.” Emotional transformation presumably fosters “emotional intelligence” which research suggests is associated with exceptional personal, interpersonal, and professional success (Goleman, 1995).

### 3. Redirecting Motivation

All you want is to be happy. All your desires, whatever they may be, are of longing for happiness. Basically, you wish yourself well....Desire by itself is not wrong. It is life itself, the urge to grow in knowledge and experience. It is the choices you make that are wrong. To imagine that some little thing—food, sex, power, fame—will make you happy is to deceive oneself. Only something as vast and deep as your real self can make you truly and lastingly happy.

Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj (20th-century Hindu sage) (1973)

Traditionally, working with motivation has two major components. The first is to reduce the compulsive power of craving and the second is to change the objects of desire.

The Asian view of the importance of reducing craving is most succinctly summarized in the Buddha's second and third Noble Truths. The second truth states that the cause of suffering is craving, and the third claims that freedom from craving brings freedom from suffering. The neoConfucian philosopher-sage Wang Yang Ming went so far as to claim that

The learning of the great person consists entirely in getting rid of the obscuration of self-ish desires [attachments]...so as to restore the condition of forming one body with Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things.

(Chan, 1963, p 660)

Traditionally, it is said that motivation become less scattered and more focused; the things desired become more subtle and more internal. There is less concern with material acquisition and more concern with metamotives, especially self-transcendence and selfless service. Traditionally this motivational shift was seen as "purification"; in Western psychological terms it seems analogous to movement up Maslow's (1971) hierarchy of needs and, in social terms, to historian Arnold Toynbee's idea of cultural "etherealization" (Elgin, 1998). Contemporary research supports the idea that psychological maturity is associated with greater concern for others (Walsh & Shapiro, 1983).

### 4. Training Attention

Control the mind.  
Attain one-pointedness.  
Then the harmony of heaven.  
Will come down and dwell in you.  
You will be radiant with life.  
You will rest in Tao.

Chuang Tzu (xxii:3), Taoist sage (Merton, 1965, p. 121)

Asian traditions regard attentional training and the cultivation of concentration as essential for psychological well-being and transpersonal development (Goleman, 1988). By contrast, attentional training is much misunderstood in the West and in fact "No topic occupies a more central place in all traditional teaching; and no subject suffers more neglect, misunderstanding, and distortion in the thinking of the modern world" (Schumacher, 1973).

For a century Western psychology has made the tragic error of implicitly accepting William James' conclusion that "Attention cannot be continuously sustained" (James, 1899/1962). Yet James went further to suggest that:

The faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention over and over again is the very root of judgement, character and will. No one is *compos sui* if he have it not. An education which would improve this faculty would be the education par excellence....It is easier to define this ideal than to give practical direction for bringing it about.

(James, 1910/1950)

Here is a stark contrast between traditional Western psychology, which says attention *cannot* be sustained, and Asian disciplines, which say that attention *can* and *must* be sustained, if we are to mature to our true potentials.

Controlling attentional wanderlust is so important because the mind tends to take on qualities of the objects to which it attends and according to yoga "Whatever we contemplate or place our attention on, that we become" (Feuerstein, 1996, p. 71). For example, thinking of an angry person tends to produce anger while thinking of a loving person can elicit feelings of love. The person who can control attention, therefore, can control and cultivate specific emotions and motives and eventually bring the mind to such calm and stillness that it no longer clouds awareness and hides our true nature. The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali claim:

Our essential nature is usually overshadowed  
By the activity of the mind....  
When the mind has settled,  
we are established in our essential nature  
which is unbounded consciousness.

(Shearer, 1989, p. 49, 1:4 and 1:3)

The Bhagavad Gita describes the result of mental stillness as follows:

When, through the practice of yoga,  
the mind ceases its restless movements,  
and becomes still, one realizes the Atman [Self],  
It satisfies one entirely.  
Then one knows that infinite happiness  
which can be realized by the purified heart  
but is beyond the grasp of the senses.

(Prahavananda & Isherwood, 1972, p. 66)

Chuang Tzu gave an equally beautiful description:

When water is still it is like a mirror...  
And if water thus derives lucidity from stillness,  
how much more the faculties of mind?  
The mind of the sage being in repose  
becomes the mirror of the universe.

(Giles, 1926/1969)

## 5. Refining Awareness

The true person sees what the eyes sees,  
and does not add to it  
something that is not there.

Chuang Tzu\* (Merton, 1985, p. 149)

The fifth practice aims to refine awareness by making perception more sensitive, more accurate, and more appreciative of the freshness and novelty of each moment of experience. This kind of refinement is necessary because, according to Asian psychologies, our awareness is usually insensitive and impaired: fragmented by attentional instability, colored by clouding emotions, and distorted by scattered desires. Similar ideas echo through Western thought and we are said to mistake shadows for reality (Plato), because we see through "narrow chinks" (William Blake), or a "reducing valve" (Aldous Huxley), or "through a glass darkly" (St. Paul).

Meditators report that perception becomes more sensitive, colors seem brighter, and the inner world becomes more available. Confirmatory research indicates that meditators' perceptual processing can become more sensitive and rapid, empathy more accurate, and introspection and intuition more refined (Murphy & Donovan, 1997; Shapiro & Walsh, 1984; Vaughan, 1979; West, 1987; Wilber et al., 1986). Maslow observed a freshness of perception among self-actualizers, and studies of Zen meditators found a physiological basis for it. When these meditators were exposed to a repetitive sound, their brain waves showed minimal habituation of the orienting response, although not all studies have replicated this finding (Murphy & Donovan, 1997). Asian disciplines claim that clear awareness can be healing and transformative, and the Buddha declared that "mindfulness...is helpful everywhere." (Nyanaponika, 1962, p. 150). They would agree with Fritz Perls (1969, p. 16), the founder of Gestalt therapy, that "Awareness per se—by and of itself—can be curative."

At advanced stages of practice, awareness can become so powerful that it continues unbroken through both day and night, through dream and nondream sleep. According to the 20th-century Hindu sage Aurobindo (1970):

It is even possible to become wholly conscious in sleep and follow throughout from beginning to end or over large stretches the stages of our dream-experience; it is found that then we are aware of ourselves passing from state after state of consciousness to a brief state of luminous and peaceful dreamless rest, which is the true restorer of the energies of the waking nature, and then returning by the same way to the waking consciousness....A coherent knowledge of sleep-life, though difficult to achieve or keep established, is possible.

At this stage it becomes possible to do spiritual practice in one's sleep and this is the basis of Tibetan dream yoga (Norbu, 1992).

## 6. Wisdom

Knowledge studies others,  
Wisdom is self-known.

Lao Tzu (Bynner, 1980, p. 46)

Wisdom is deep understanding of, and practical skill in responding to, the central issues of life, especially existential issues. These issues are crucial and universal concerns that all of us face simply because we are human. They include finding meaning and purpose in our lives, *managing relationships and aloneness*, acknowledging our limits and smallness in a universe vast beyond comprehension, living in inevitable uncertainty and mystery, and dealing with sickness, suffering, and death. A person who has developed deep insights into these issues, and skills for dealing with them, is wise indeed.

Wisdom is more than knowledge and Taoism is very clear that "He who is learned is not wise" (Perry, 1981, p 739). Whereas knowledge simply acquires information, wisdom requires *understanding it; knowledge informs us whereas wisdom transforms us; knowledge is something we have; wisdom, something we must become.*

Asian disciplines regard the cultivation of wisdom as a central goal of life. While they offer a wide variety of strategies they particularly *recommend the following*: They advise us to seek wisdom from the company of the wise, from the study of their writings, from reflecting on the nature of life and death, in nature, in silence and solitude, and within ourselves. Meditation is the introspective tool par excellence, and active *exploration of one's mind and experience is crucial*. Neo-Confucian wisdom promises that "If one plumbs, investigates into, sharpens, and refines oneself, a morning will come when one will gain self-enlightenment" (Creel, 1953, p. 213).

### 7. Altruism and Service

All that one gives one gives to oneself.  
If this truth is understood,  
who will not give to others?  
(Ramana Maharshi, 1988, p. 8)

Asian disciplines regard altruistic service as both a means to, and expression of, transpersonal development. "Make it your guiding principle to do your best for others" urged Confucius, and "put service before the reward you get for it" (Lau, 1979, p. 116). Likewise the Buddha claimed that if we really understood the transformative power of generosity we would not want to eat a meal without sharing it.

Generosity can transform the mind. Giving is said to inhibit qualities such as attachment, jealousy and fear of loss, and to *strengthen positive emotions such as love and happiness.*

In addition, what we ourselves experience reflects what we want others to experience. If we *plot revenge and plan pain for others we tend to reinforce emotions such as anger and hatred*. Yet when we desire happiness for others we tend to feel it ourselves, an experience that Buddhists call "sympathetic joy." This is why some Asian practices designed to cultivate benevolent feelings, such as love, compassion and *sympathetic joy*, can produce remarkably ecstatic states, for example, the blissful *brahama viharas* (divine abodes) of Buddhism.

Western psychologists are reaching similar conclusions. Generous people tend to be happier and psychologically healthier and experience a "helper's high" (Walsh & Shapiro, 1983; Myers, 1992). As people age they increasingly find it is their legacy—their contributions to the world and future generations—that gives meaning and satisfaction to their lives (Levinson, 1978). The so-called "paradox of pleasure" is that taking time to make others happy makes us happier than devoting all our efforts to our own pleasures (Myers, 1992). Some therapists have used this principle; one example is Alfred Adler, who sometimes advised clients to do something for another person each day. Abraham Maslow (1970 p. xii) summarized the Asian understanding well by saying "the best way to become a better helper is to become a better person. But one necessary aspect of becoming a better person is via helping other people."

#### EXERCISES AND EXAMPLES OF THE SEVEN PRACTICES

As Asian therapies have evolved across centuries and in many countries, they have devised literally thousands of techniques and exercises. These range across somatic, psychological and spiritual domains and include everything from dietary and breathing disciplines through ethical and emotional exercises to visualizations and meditations (Feuerstein, 1996). The following are simple introductory exercises and meditations—one from each of the seven practices common to Asian therapies—that readers can try for themselves. Further descriptions and exercises are available in Walsh (1999).

#### *Ethical Behavior: Say Only What is True and Helpful*

See yourself in others.  
Then whom can you hurt?  
What harm can you do?  
The Buddha (Byrom, 1976, p. 49)

Mark Twain is credited with the line "Truth is so very precious, man is naturally economical in its use," but Asian therapies take a different approach. Any meditator soon recognizes that lying stems from motives such as greed, fear, and anger, reinforces them, and creates suffering for oneself and others. Consequently, truth telling is regarded as an essential exercise.

Truth telling does not imply saying everything that comes to mind or being insensitive to people's feelings. Rather it means bringing careful awareness to each situation to find what we can say that is true to our experience and, wherever possible, helpful to others. When we don't know what is truthful or helpful, it is appropriate to either say we don't know or to remain silent. An excellent way to begin this practice is to commit to doing it for a day, while carefully recording any lies, or even any temptations to lie, and identifying their underlying motives and emotions.

#### *Transforming Emotions: Using Wise Attention To Cultivate Beneficial Emotions*

The supreme purpose and goal for human life...is to cultivate love.  
Ramakrishna (Hixon, 1992, p. 175)

Meditation enhances concentration and allows one to practice what Buddhists call "wise attention," which involves directing attention to people and situations that foster desired qualities. The underlying principle is that what we put into our minds is just as important as what we put into our mouths. For example, several dozen studies show that watching violence on television can foster aggression. On the other hand, Asian therapies claim that attending to people who are kind and generous cultivates these same qualities in us (Kornfield, 1993).

For this exercise, first relax or meditate and be aware of how you feel. Notice the emotions you are experiencing. Next, think of or visualize someone you like who is particularly kind and generous. Notice any emotions that arise. Now, think of or visualize someone who tends to be angry and stingy and watch the corresponding play of emotions.

According to Chinese wisdom, transforming emotions eventually allows one to become a "superior person (who) has emotions but no ensnarement" (Yu-Lan, 1948, p. 248).\*

*Transforming Motivation: Examine the Experience of Attachment*

How is heaven attained?

The attainment of heaven is freedom from cravings.

Shankara (Prabhavananda & Isherwood, 1978, p. 134)

Bringing clear awareness to experience and behavior is crucial to transforming them. Yet usually when caught in attachment we focus on what we are trying to get rather than on the actual experience of craving. For this exercise take the opportunity to explore attachment minutely. When you become aware of an attachment, stop whatever you are doing and try to identify the underlying emotions, body sensations, thoughts, feelings and tensions. Bringing careful awareness to the experience of craving, rather than mindlessly acting it out, gives insight into it and, even more importantly, can reduce it. In fact Asian therapies suggest that weak attachments "can be removed by introspection and meditation" (Nisagadatta, 1973, p. 112).

*Developing Concentration. Do One Thing At A Time*

To know Tao, meditate and still the mind.

Loy ching Yuen (Harvey, 1996, p. 32).

In our overly busy lives, we often do several things simultaneously (the hallmark of a type A personality). We prepare a meal while planning our day, eat the meal while reading the paper, and drive to work while listening to the radio. Our distracted minds reflect our distracted lives. Yet Asian disciplines point out that we can live our lives in ways that foster concentration and calm rather than frenzy and fragmentation.

To begin, commit a specific time—a day might be good to begin with—to doing only one thing at a time. For this day focus your attention on each individual activity and give it your full awareness. This very simple exercise can have dramatic effects.

### *Cultivating Awareness: Mindful Eating*

Mindfulness...is helpful everywhere.

The Buddha (Nyonaonika, 1962, p. 150)

The Jungian psychiatrist, Edward Whitmont (1969, p 293) observed that "Therapeutic progress depends upon awareness; in fact, the attempt to become more conscious is the therapy." Asian therapies agree. However, they may go further to suggest that awareness can and should be cultivated during every waking experience. The goal is to become what Carl Rogers called "fully functioning people [who] are able to experience all their feelings, afraid of none of them, allowing awareness to flow freely in and through their experiences" (Raskin & Rogers, 1995 p. 141). The primary method is awareness meditation coupled with exercises such as the following.

More than 2,000 years ago Confucius' grandson observed that "Amongst people there are none who do not eat and drink but there are few who really appreciate the taste" (Yu-Lan, 1948 p. 175). Apparently, things have not changed much. We sit down to a meal and carry on a conversation, watch television or read the newspaper. The next thing we know is that our plate is empty. No wonder we tend to overeat. By contrast, the exercise of eating mindfully involves paying close attention to each sensation and experience, an exercise that has been found useful for weight control.

Choose a time when you can eat without distraction and begin by enjoying the sight and smell of the food. Observe the sensations as you reach for it, the feelings of anticipation, and the touch as it enters the mouth. Then note experiences such as the dominant flavor and subtle background flavors, the temperature and texture of the food, and the feelings of pleasure. Continue to eat each mouthful carefully, consciously, and as enjoyably as you can. Periodically you will realize that you have been lost in thoughts or fantasies and were quite unaware of the last few mouthfuls. That is how we usually eat and live our lives: in unconscious distraction. Simply return attention to the experience of eating again and try to maintain unbroken awareness.

### *Developing Wisdom: Reflecting On Our Mortality*

Nothing indeed in this world purifies like wisdom.

The Bhagavad Gita (Prabhavananda & Isherwood, 1972)

Careful reflection on our life and inevitable death is a powerful means for developing wisdom. Without recognizing our mortality, we tend to squander our lives in inauthentic petty pursuits, to tranquilize ourselves with trivia, and to forget what really matters in life. Asian disciplines, therefore, encourage us to recall that, as Taoists point out, our lives last "but a moment," and that, in Shankara's words "Youth, wealth, and the years of a [person's] life....roll quickly away like drops of water from a lotus leaf" (Prabhavananda & Isherwood, 1978).\*

When we remember that we don't know how long we have, we are inspired to live more fully, more boldly and more impeccably. Asian therapies, therefore, encourage us to reflect on questions such as "If you were to die tomorrow, what would you

regret not having done? What relationships remain unhealed in your life? Knowing we will all die, what is truly important in life?" These reflections can motivate us to reorder priorities, heal relationships, and live more authentically (Kornfield, 1993).

### *Generosity and Service: Transforming Pain Into Compassion*

Put service before the reward you get for it.  
Confucius 12:21 (Lau, 1979, p. 116)

Research shows that "downward comparison," comparing oneself with others who are worse off, is an effective strategy for combating sadness and grief (Goleman, 1995; Myers, 1992). Asian therapies suggest it can also be an effective strategy for cultivating compassion. Traditionally, this exercise, like so many Asian exercises, would be done after a period of meditation when the mind is calm and concentrated and the effects of any thoughts or images are thereby potentiated. Therefore, if you know how to meditate begin by doing so.

Think of some difficulty you are having, either physical or psychological. Next, think of people who are suffering even more from related difficulties. If you know specific individuals who are suffering in this way, bring them to mind. Think of the pain your difficulty has brought you and of all the suffering others must be experiencing. Open yourself to the experience of their suffering. Recognize that, just as you want to be free of pain, so too do they. Let compassion arise as you wish them to be free of pain.

#### DIFFICULTIES DURING PRACTICE

No discussion of contemplative practices would be complete without acknowledging that difficult experiences are almost inevitable at times. The following brief description points to some major types of difficulties and ways of responding to them. For further accounts see Murphy & Donovan (1997), Vaughan (1995a,b), Walsh & Vaughan (1993) and Wilber et al. (1986).  
emotional lability with bursts of anxiety, sadness and anger, or perceptual changes in sense of self and reality.

Most difficulties are short-lived and remit spontaneously. In many cases, such difficulties represent the emergence of previously repressed or incompletely experienced psychological memories and conflicts. The initial discomfort of experiencing them, therefore, may be a necessary price for processing and discharging them, a process that Indian traditions see as karmic release. Transcendental Meditation (TM) describes it as unstressing, and psychologists call it catharsis.

As with any uncovering therapy, meditation and yoga can unveil underlying pathology. Although they are very rare, psychotic reactions can occur, usually in individuals with prior psychotic breaks, who are not taking medication, and who do intensive, unsupervised practice (Walsh & Rauche, 1979).

Therapists familiar with both Asian and Western disciplines can be especially helpful. They can recognize and treat both the minor difficulties that commonly

occur during meditative-yogic practice, as well as the less common, but more severe, underlying pathologies that may occasionally surface. Useful strategies for treating common difficulties include reassurance and normalization (advising that these are normal and common challenges), reframing or reattribution (reframing the experience as potential opportunities for learning and growth), exploring their psychodynamic and existential significance, helping to release them with Western therapeutic techniques, and applying specific antidotes suggested by Asian disciplines.

#### METAPHORS AND MECHANISMS OF TRANSFORMATION

Explanations of how Asian disciplines work fall into two main categories: metaphorical and mechanistic. Asian traditions use both while Western researchers focus more on mechanistic ideas. Both are valuable because many processes are involved and each one illuminates a facet of the rich growth process that contemplative practices catalyze.

Common metaphors of the contemplative process include awakening from our collective trance, freeing us from illusions and conditioning, purifying the mind of toxic qualities, unfolding our potentials, uncovering our true identity, journeying to a goal, enlightening us about our true identity and potentials, and dying and being reborn. Ralph Metzner (1998) has provided an excellent account of this and other metaphors of transformation.

#### *Mechanisms Suggested by Asian Philosophies*

*Calming the Mind.* The untrained mind is highly agitated and distracted, leaping from past to future, from thought to fantasy. Contemplative practices are effective techniques for concentrating and calming the mind and this process of calming and stilling is the basis for the Western suggestion that meditation works by producing a "relaxation response."

*Disidentification.* Meditation and yoga refine awareness of, and disidentification from, mental contents and processes. Clear awareness allows the practitioner to better observe, and not become entrapped in, thoughts, emotions, images and fantasies.

For example, if a thought such as "I'm scared" arises, but is not carefully observed and noted to be just a thought, then it is unconsciously accepted as reality. One identifies with the thought which is no longer something that is seen; rather it is that through which and from which everything else is seen and interpreted. What was an object has become the subject. The self is now identified, fused with, or embedded in, this thought. One's experiential reality is now "I'm scared" and this identification sets in train corresponding psychological and physiological fear responses that appear to validate the reality of the fear.

However, if the meditator is sufficiently alert, when the thought "I'm scared" arises, then it can be recognized as merely a thought. It is not mistaken for reality and, as such, has little effect on mind or body. Awareness has disidentified from it and remains

free of its entrapping effects. This can be considered a form of self-dehypnosis. Of course, the meditator can still act on the thought, if necessary, but the action is now a conscious choice rather than an unconscious automaticity.

Western researchers have recognized similar processes. Robert Kegan of Harvard, for example, claims that psychological growth "always involves a process of differentiation, of emergence from embeddedness, making what was subject into object so that we can "have" it rather than "be had" by it--this is the most powerful way I know to conceptualize the growth of the mind....[and] is as faithful to the self-psychology of the West as to the "wisdom literature" of the East (Kegan, 1982, p 33-34). Similarly cognitive therapy speaks of "distancing," Jean Piaget of "decentration," Ken Wilber of "differentiation" and "transcendence," and others of dehypnosis (Wilber, 1997). Cognitive therapists offer an illuminating definition of "distancing" as "the ability to review one's own thoughts (or beliefs) as constructions of reality rather than as reality itself" (Alfred & Beck, 1997, p. 142).

#### *Rebalancing Mental Elements.*

Asian psychologies commonly divide mental contents into healthy and unhealthy categories. A major goal is to increase healthy factors and decrease unhealthy ones, a process that can be seen metaphorically as purification and mechanistically as "rebalancing mental elements."

Buddhist psychology, the *abhidharma*, offers a particularly sophisticated map of mental elements and emphasizes the "seven factors of enlightenment." These are seven qualities of mind that, when cultivated and balanced one with another, are said to optimize awareness and growth (Goldstein, 1983). The first factor is *mindfulness*, a precise conscious awareness of each stimulus that can be regarded as a refinement of the psychoanalytic observing ego. The remaining six mental factors are divided into two groups of three arousing and three calming qualities. The three arousing factors are *effort*, *investigation* [active exploration of experience], and *rapture* (ecstasy that results from clear, concentrated awareness). The three calming factors are *concentration*, *calm*, and *equanimity*.

Jack Kornfield points out that this model of mental health allows interesting comparisons between Eastern and Western therapies (Walsh & Vaughan, 1993). Western therapists recognize that the arousing factors of effort and investigation are essential. However, they have not yet appreciated that their effects are potentiated by simultaneously developing the calming factors. When the mind is concentrated, calm and equanimous then insight and understanding deepen while growth quickens. Buddhist psychology claims that cultivating and balancing all seven factors is optimal for growth.

#### *Mechanisms Suggested by Western Psychologists*

Western researchers have suggested several psychological and physiological mechanisms that may underlie the effects of Asian disciplines. Psychological possibilities include general relaxation, as well as habituation and desensitization to formerly

stressful stimuli. Automatic habits may undergo "deautomatization," becoming less automatic and under greater voluntary control. Additional psychological mechanisms include learning, insight, self-control, counterconditioning, and catharsis. At the physiological level, suggested mechanisms include reduced metabolism and arousal, hemispheric lateralization (a shift in relative activity of the cerebral hemispheres), and a rebalancing of the autonomic nervous system (Murphy & Donovan, 1997; Shapiro, 1980; Shapiro & Walsh, 1984; West, 1987).

Probably the most encompassing mechanism is development. Both Eastern and Western psychologists suggest that Asian therapies work many of their effects by restarting and catalyzing development. Several Asian psychologies describe meditative and yogic effects in developmental terms, and studies of TM suggest that it fosters ego, cognitive and moral development as well as self-actualization (Alexander, Rainforth & Gelderloos, 1991). Ken Wilber (1981, 1995) has provided particularly sophisticated models of contemplative development.

#### USING MEDITATION FOR THERAPEUTIC BENEFITS

Asian disciplines were traditionally used for religious purposes. However, Western therapists and researchers have been interested in their usefulness for clinical disorders. Most research has focussed on the effects of meditation and so we will survey these studies here.

The range of clinical application is wide and can be divided into the categories of psychological or psychosomatic, and alleviating pathology or enhancing well-being. We will first discuss the general principles of therapeutic application and then examine the evidence of effectiveness for specific disorders. The main contraindication is severe psychopathology, such as psychosis.

#### *Alleviating Pathology*

Many psychological and psychosomatic disorders are helped by meditation, and anxiety and stress disorders are particularly responsive. Several special populations benefit. For example, meditation practice is associated with reduced use of both legal and illegal drugs, reduced aggression and recidivism in prisoners, less anxiety in the dying and their caregivers, and there is preliminary evidence for fewer binges in binge-eating disorder (Kristeller & Hallett, 1999; Shapiro & Walsh, 1984.)

Physical disorders with a psychosomatic component can benefit. For the cardiovascular system these include high blood pressure, cholesterol, and coronary artery disease. Other partially responsive disorders include asthma, psoriasis, diabetes, Crohn's disease, fibromyalgia, premenstrual syndrome, migraine, and chronic pain (Murphy & Donovan, 1997).

Many therapists have commented on the mutually beneficial interaction between Eastern and Western therapies. Conventional Western therapies can help deal with painful memories and conflicts that emerge during meditation and yoga and can resolve

blocks inhibiting progress. On the other hand, meditation and yoga can facilitate conventional psychotherapy by cultivating requisite skills such as calm and introspection and by allowing clients to work on issues outside the therapeutic hour.

#### *Benefits For Normal Populations*

In addition to reducing pathology, meditation and yoga also enhance psychological wellbeing on a number of measures. For example, they increase perceptual sensitivity and empathy, improve academic performance, and accelerate psychological development and self-actualization (Alexander et al., 1991). On the physical side, regular meditation is associated with reduced use of medical and psychiatric services, and geriatric populations score better on measures of psychological wellbeing and live longer (Alexander et al., 1989).

#### *Benefits for Therapists*

Therapists also benefit from meditation. Subjective reports and three experiments suggest that meditation can enhance empathic sensitivity and accuracy (Shapiro, Schwartz & Bowner, 1999; Shapiro & Walsh, 1984). This is a particularly important finding because empathy is an essential skill for therapists (Raskin & Rogers, 1995), but may be reduced by doctoral training programs (Shapiro & Walsh, 1984).

As yet, little research has been done on acceptance and compassion. However, therapists who practice meditation or yoga report that they achieve deep insights into the workings of their own minds and that these practices provide also foster insight into, acceptance of, and compassion toward, their clients' painful patterns (Murphy & Donovan, 1997). Therapists also report greater sensitivity to their own reactions to clients. Many therapists feel their skills have been enhanced by these practices and recommend them as part of psychotherapists' training (Shapiro & Astin, 1998).

#### *Specific Techniques and Skills*

The above procedures are common to most meditation and yoga practices. In addition, there are literally hundreds of specific meditative and yogic techniques designed to elicit specific capacities and skills. The following two very brief descriptions of skills (which until recently were considered impossible by Western psychologists) merely hint at the remarkable range of practices and powers of mind that Asians have discovered in their 3,000-year exploration of our inner universe.

Consider, for example, the cultivation of love. In the West, love is usually viewed as largely a passive response to specific people rather than as a mental capacity that can be cultivated. By contrast, Asian disciplines view the cultivation of love as an essential skill.

For example, one technique begins by calming the mind, then focussing attention unwaveringly on an image of a loved one. In this calm, concentrated state, feelings of love arise very intensely. When they do, gradually and successively substitute an

image of a friend, a stranger, and groups of people, and condition the feelings to them, until eventually you visualize all people while embracing them in feelings of love. When practiced intensely, the results are dramatic. Experienced meditators describe these as among the most ecstatic experiences of their lives (Kornfield, 1993). Long-term effects are said to include the reduction of anger, fear, and defensiveness, and, of course, an increase in feelings of affection and love. Similar practices cultivate related emotions such as sympathetic joy (happiness at the happiness of others and a superb antidote to jealousy) and compassion (the basis for altruism). Western psychologists have recently found evidence for altruism's existence as an independent drive, but lament that they are largely unable to cultivate it (Batson, 1991). In contrast, Asian therapies contain literally dozens of exercises for fostering it.

Dream yoga is a 2,000-year-old technique for developing lucid dreaming: the ability to know one is dreaming while still asleep. Adepts are able to observe and modify their dreams so as to continue their meditation and mental explorations during sleep (Norbu, 1992). The most advanced practitioners maintain unbroken awareness throughout the night during both dream and nondream sleep, thereby combining the benefits of clear awareness and the extreme peace of conscious sleep (e.g., Aurobindo, 1970). This claim for continuous lucidity has recently received support from electroencephalographic studies of sleeping brain wave activity in advanced TM practitioners (Mason et al., 1997).

However, in the West, lucid dreaming was dismissed as impossible until recently. Now both classic instructions and Stephen LaBerge's induction techniques are freely available so that anyone can enjoy this ancient yogic skill and investigate the mind while in the comfort of his or her bed (LaBerge, 1985; Walsh & Vaughan, 1993).

#### RESEARCH FINDINGS

The classic approach to evaluating contemplative disciplines is via personal experience. For thousands of years the answer to the question "Do these techniques work?" has been "Try them for yourself." However, now several hundred laboratory and clinical studies have demonstrated a wide array of effects including psychological changes in perception, personality and performance, physiological changes in both the body and brain, and biochemical shifts in chemicals and hormones. What follows are some of the most intriguing of the psychologically and clinically relevant findings.

#### *Clinical Research*

In the clinical psychology arena, the effects of meditation and yoga on stress-related disorders have been most frequently studied. Many studies report reductions in anxiety, either from nonspecific anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder, or for specific phobias. Responsive phobias include fears of closed spaces, examinations, being alone, or of a heart attack. Muscle spasms and insomnia also respond, and meditators seem to recover from acute stress more quickly than do controls. Corresponding changes in brain electrical activity and stress related chemicals such as blood lactate, cortisol and epinephrine have also been observed (Shapiro, 1980; Shapiro & Walsh, 1984). The fact that stress disorders respond to Asian therapies and that practitioners are more calm is

consistent with the fact that relaxation and calm are central to many of these practices and that "relaxation is the alpha and omega of yoga" (Feuerstein, 1996, p. 51).

Several studies have demonstrated reduced drug use in meditators. This reduction holds for alcohol and nicotine as well as illegal drugs and for use at recreational or abuse levels. These findings are particularly relevant for the huge drug-related prison population, since meditation and yoga also reduce prisoners' anxiety, aggression and recidivism (Murphy & Donovan, 1997; Shapiro & Walsh, 1984). However, many of the drug studies have surveyed practitioners of TM and the initial training for this practice requires that participants have been drug free for a week. Consequently, this practice might best benefit people who find relinquishing drugs relatively easy.

Meditation induces a wide array of psychosomatic benefits. In the cardiovascular system, high blood pressure and cholesterol are reduced (Murphy & Donovan, 1997). However, benefits dissipate if the practice is discontinued. Coronary artery disease, a major cause of death and disability, was long thought to be irreversible and to require major surgery or cholesterol lowering drugs. However, Dean Ornish (1990) has demonstrated that far less dangerous lifestyle changes, including a low fat diet, exercise, interpersonal openness, and meditation and yoga, can actually reverse this disorder.

A crucial question for all therapies and therapists is "what type of client is likely to succeed?" TM studies suggest that successful practitioners are likely to be interested in internal experiences, open to unusual ones, willing to recognize unfavorable personal characteristics, and to have a good sense of self-control. They may also have good concentration and be less emotionally labile and psychologically disturbed (Alexander et al., 1991; Murphy & Donovan, 1997).

Meditation can potentiate some Western psychological and somatic therapies. We have already discussed the benefits of combining Asian and Western therapies. In the somatic arena, meditation can reduce the amount of medication required to control high blood pressure and chronic pain, enhance the effectiveness of diet and exercise in reversing coronary artery disease (Ornish, 1990), and speed the response of psoriasis to phototherapy (Kabat-Zinn et al., 1998).

Meditation may also enhance general psychological and physical health. TM practitioners use less than normal amounts of psychiatric and medical care, and meditators in their mid-fifties scored 12 years younger on physical age measures than controls (Alexander et al., 1989). However, how much of this superior general health is actually due to meditation and how much is due to associated factors such as prior good health and a healthy lifestyle remains unclear.

One well-controlled, prospective, random assignment study demonstrated dramatic effects on the elderly. Nursing home residents whose average age was 81 and who learned TM performed better on measures of learning and mental health than did residents taught relaxation, given other mental training, or left untreated. However, most striking was the finding that three years later, all the meditators were alive, compared

to only 63% of the untreated residents were (Alexander et al., 1989). For thousands of years yogis have claimed that contemplative practices increase longevity and this claim now has initial experimental support.

Considerable evidence suggests that meditation can enhance general psychological well-being and growth. Intriguing psychological findings include evidence for enhanced creativity, perceptual sensitivity, intelligence, academic achievement and a positive sense of self-control. Relationship skills also seem to be enhanced as measured by empathy and marital satisfaction. Studies of TM suggest that it may foster maturation as measured by scales of ego, moral and cognitive development, and self-actualization (Alexander et al., 1991; Murphy & Donovan, 1997).

In summary, experimental evidence clearly demonstrates that Asian therapies can ameliorate a broad range of psychological and psychosomatic difficulties, can potentiate certain Western therapies, and enhance psychological growth and well-being. However, some studies have been flawed by methodological problems and it is not always clear to what extent Asian therapies are more effective in treating clinical disorders than are other self-regulation strategies such as relaxation training, biofeedback and self-hypnosis (Shapiro, 1980). It is also unclear whether specific types of meditation and yoga are more effective than others for treating specific disorders, although TM researchers claim on the basis of meta-analyses that TM fosters relaxation and self-actualization more rapidly than do other forms of meditation (Alexander et al., 1991).

In some cases it is unclear how much of observed effects are actually due to a single technique, usually meditation, and how much may reflect associated techniques, practices, and lifestyle changes. For example, meditators taught in traditional settings may be encouraged to change their lifestyles and to adopt practices such as ethics. As usual, further research is needed.

#### CONCLUSION

The world's contemplative disciplines contain a wealth of exercises, techniques and practices for fostering well-being and development. Among their many methods, seven practices, in particular, seem to be widely regarded as central. For the sake of brevity, this paper has focused on the Asian disciplines of Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism but similar principles and the same seven central practices are found in Western disciplines also (Walsh, 1999).

The contemplative traditions of both East and West represent a millennia old treasure-house of transformational practices and corresponding psychologies and philosophies that contemporary Westerners are only beginning to research, understand, and practice. The transpersonal vision of melding the best of contemplative wisdom and practice with the best of Western thinking and therapy remains a vital goal.

#### NOTE

\* Quotations marked with an asterisk have been modified to employ gender neutral terms.

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