When studying clinical psychology at the University of Chicago in the 1960s, I found myself drawn to the question: "What is the change that makes a real difference for people in psychotherapy, and how does that change come about?" At that time, I was involved with my teacher Eugene Gendlin in his early attempts to develop the Focusing method. A term that Gendlin (1981, 1996) used to describe therapeutic change was felt shift—that moment when an experiential alteration could be concretely felt in the body, bringing with it a sense of new significance and direction. In this critical moment of the experiential process unfolding—empirically correlated with various physiological and cognitive changes—an old fixation gives way, like a flower opening, allowing clients a new experience of themselves and their situation. When I first learned about this, and experienced it, it seemed quite mysterious and profound, almost like a mini-mystical experience.

At the same time I was delving into Zen, and had become interested in the relationship between the felt shift and satori. I wondered how these two experiences might be related, or whether they at least belonged to the same family. I was particularly intrigued by the Zen stories where just by listening to the song of a bird, sweeping the floor, or being slapped by one's teacher, the disciple suddenly woke up and saw reality in an entirely new way. Satori seemed like an immense, cosmic felt shift, where one's whole life suddenly changed, and one walked away a new being. Were the felt shift and the satori experience two versions of the same thing, or were they something altogether different?

As a budding student of both Buddhism and psychotherapy, this was not just an academic question, but one that had important personal and professional implications. If the felt shift was like a mini-satori, or even a move in that direction, then perhaps Western psychological self-inquiry could provide a new way to approach the kind of realizations that had previously been the sole province of mystics and monastics.
Later, when I began my practice as a psychotherapist, this question took a somewhat different turn. By then I had done both psychological and meditative inner work, and had experienced powerful impacts from both. Yet I remained uncertain about the relative efficacy of, as well as the relation between, these two different ways of relating to one's experience.

On the one hand, the therapeutic process involved reflecting on one's experience, often through locating feelings in the body and then stepping back to inquire into them in a dialogical manner. In the course of dialogical inquiry, the experience in question would open up, hidden felt meanings would unfold, and feelings would shift, leading to important cognitive, affective, and behavioral changes (Gendlin, 1964; Welwood, 1982).

At the same time, I was also studying a very different approach—the Mahamudra Dzogchen meditative tradition of Tibetan Buddhism— which involved directly opening to whatever experience was at hand, rather than stepping back from it, engaging in a dialogical inquiry, or unfolding felt meanings from it. Working with experience in this way could lead to more sudden, on-the-spot kinds of revelation, described variously in terms of transmutation, self-liberation, or instant presence (Trungpa, 1973; Welwood, 1979; Norbu, 1982). In this approach, one directly recognizes and meets one's experience as it is, without concern for what it means, where it comes from, or where it leads. There is no reinforcement of an observing self trying to grasp, understand, or come to terms with some observed content of consciousness. The early stages of Dzogchen Mahamudra meditation emphasize letting go of fixation on whatever arises in the mind, and this eventually develops the capacity to relax and abide wakefully within whatever experience is arising. When there is no identification either with the observer or what is observed, awareness remains undisturbed by any divisions and a new freedom, freshness, clarity, and compassion become available.

While psychotherapy and meditation both led to a freeing of fixated mind and feeling-states, the meditative approach struck me as the more compelling of the two, because it was more direct, more radical, more faithful to the essential nature of awareness as an open presence intrinsically free of grasping, strategizing, and the subject-object split altogether. At the same time, the reflective dialogical process of psychotherapy provided a more effective and accessible way to work on the issues, concerns, and problems of personal and worldly life—which many meditators tended to avoid dealing with. Yet I had doubts about the ultimate merits of an approach that did not address and was not designed to overcome, the subject-object struggle that lay at the root of most human alienation and suffering.

Two of the therapeutic devices I found most useful in my early years as a therapist were a particular focus of these doubts. Long before "inner child" work became popularized by John Bradshaw, I discovered that many people who could not relate to their feelings of hurt, fear, helplessness, anger, or sorrow in a helpful, compassionate way could do so when they saw these feelings as belonging to the child still alive.
within them. Since I had stumbled on this device on my own, rather than adopting it from a pre-established theoretical model that framed experience in this way, it seemed all the more impressive to me. Yet I also remained aware of its shortcoming: it left a person inwardly split between an observing "adult" and an observed "child;' with most of the feeling-energy seeming to belong to the child.

"Finding the right distance from a feeling" was another useful device, and a central feature of the Focusing method I had taught for many years. Many clients who get too close to threatening feelings become lost in them or else shut themselves down, sealing off the feelings in order to defend themselves from their intensity. If there is not enough reflective distance from a feeling, it is often difficult to relate to, just as one would have a hard time relating to someone who was screaming in one's ear. Finding the right distance involves situating one's attention "next to" the feeling, on the edge of it, close enough to be in contact with it, yet far enough away to feel comfortable. This stepped-back position is a useful therapeutic device that makes an interactive dialogue with feelings possible that might not otherwise be possible. However, it can also maintain and reinforce an inner division-between the observing ego and the observed flow of experience-s—that can eventually become a limitation in its own right.

The further I went with meditation, the less satisfied I was only drawing on reflective methods that maintained this inner division. From the perspective of contemplative practice, the root source of human suffering is this very split between "me" and "my experience." Suffering is nothing more than the observer judging, resisting, struggling with, and attempting to control experiences that are painful, scary, or threatening to it. Without that struggle, difficult experiences would be perceived more precisely as just what they are, instead of dire threats to the survival and integrity of "me." Conventional psychotherapy teaches clients to understand, manage, and reduce the suffering that arises out of identification with a separate ego-self, but rarely questions the fundamental inner setup that gives rise to it.

DIVIDED AND UNDIVIDED CONSCIOUSNESS

Although reflective methods are certainly essential for therapeutic work, my experience with DzogchenMahamudra meditation let me see how they were still an expression, in Eastern terms, of divided consciousness. The Sanskrit term for the ordinary, mundane state of consciousness is vijnana. Vi means divided and jnana means knowing. Divided here refers to the subject/object split, in which the divide between observer and observed, perceiver and perceived is a primary determinant of how and what we perceive. All conventional knowledge, including what we discover in psychotherapy, happens within the framework of divided consciousness, as phenomenologist Peter Koestenbaum asserts:

All knowledge of this dual sort, and psychotherapeutic intervention is no exception... Psychotherapy like all other forms of knowledge is reflection on self; it is self-knowledge and self-consciousness(1978, pp, 35, 70).
When we reflect on self, self becomes divided-into an object of reflection and an observing subject. This is viśīnāna at work. Dividing the field of experience into two poles is a useful device for most purposes, and yields relative self-knowledge. We learn about our conditioning, our character structure, our particular ways of thinking, feeling, acting, and perceiving. While these discoveries can be relatively liberating, who we are can never be identical with the mind/body patterns we discern through reflexive discernment. Nor are we identical with the perceiver that stands back from those patterns and reflects on them. Both these poles are creations of conceptual mind, which operates by dividing the experiential field in two, and then utilizing concepts based on this division to interpret reality.

Precise attention to the nature of experiencing reveals that most of our perception and cognition is conditioned by this conceptual divide. For example, we generally do not see a tree in its unique and vivid immediacy-in its suchness. Instead our experience of the tree is shaped by ideas and beliefs about a category of objects called “tree.” Krishnamurti, by contrast, describes what it could be like to see a tree in a more direct, unalienated way:

You look at this magnificent tree and you wonder who is watching whom and presently there is no watcher at all. Everything is so intensely alive and there is only life, and the watcher is as dead as that leaf. ... Utterly still, ... listening without a moment of reaction, without recording, without experiencing, only seeing and listening .... Really the outside is the inside and the inside is the outside, and it is difficult, almost impossible to separate them (1976, p. 214).

Just as “the news” pretends to be an accurate and neutral presentation of world events, while concealing its hidden biases, so we imagine that conventional divided consciousness gives us an accurate portrayal of what is actually there before us, while failing to see how our conceptual assumptions usually produce an alienated sense of reality. In this way, we do not experience “things as they are”-in their rich and vivid experiential immediacy. As the great Dzogchen yogi Mipham put it: “Whatever one imagines, it is never exactly like that” (Kunsang, 1993, p. 114).

This habitually distorted perception—where we unconsciously mistake our cognitive schema for reality—is, in Buddhist terms, samsara, “delusive appearance.” The basis of samsara is the ongoing habit of dividing the field of experience in two and imagining that the observing self is something set apart from the rest of the field. Meditative experience reveals a different kind of knowing, a direct recognition of “thatness” or “suchness”-the vivid, ineffable ownness of reality, as disclosed in the clarity of pure awareness, free from the constraints of conceptual or dualistic fixation. When this kind of knowing is directed toward oneself, it becomes what is called in Zen “directly seeing into one’s own nature.” In this case, “one’s own nature” is not an object of thought, observation, or reflection. Mind in its objectifying mode cannot grasp the immediate beingness of anything, least of all its own nature.

We can only perceive the suchness of things through an awareness that opens to them nonconceptually and unconditionally, allowing them to reveal themselves in their as-it-is-ness, as the poet Basho suggests in these lines:
From the pine tree
learn of the pine tree.
And from the bamboo
of the bamboo.

Commenting on these lines, the Japanese philosopher Nishitani explains that Basho does not mean

that we should "observe the pine tree carefully." Still less does he mean for us to "study the pine tree scientifically." He means for us to enter the mode of being where the pine tree is the pine tree itself, and the bamboo is the bamboo itself, and from there to look at the pine tree and the bamboo. He calls on us to betake ourselves to the dimension where things become manifest in their suchness (1982, p. 128).

Extending Basho’s lines into the arena of self-knowledge, we might say, "If you want to find out who you are, open directly to yourself right now, enter into the mode of being where you are what you are, and settle into your own nature. Just as a snapshot of the bamboo is not the bamboo itself, how can the mental snapshots you have of yourself—the ideas and conclusions about yourself you have come to through reflexive observation—be an accurate rendering of who you really are?" Divided consciousness-vi-jnana—can never yield jnana-direct, unmediated knowing, undivided consciousness, self-illuminating awareness, self-existing wisdom. Jnana is a different type of self-knowing, primarily discovered through contemplative discipline, where freedom from the subject-object setup allows direct "seeing into one's own nature."

Stretched between the disciplines of psychotherapy and meditation, I found myself continually revisiting these questions: How might psychological reflection serve as a stepping-stone on the path of awakening? Or since psychological reflection by its very nature was a form of divided consciousness, did it subtly perpetuate a permanent state of inner division in the name of healing? I knew certain spiritual teachers and practitioners who advanced a critique of therapy to this effect. They argued that psychotherapy was just a palliative, a way of making the prison of ego more comfortable, because it did not address, but instead reinforced, the error at the root of all suffering: identification with a separate self that was always trying to control or alter its experience. At the other extreme, many therapists I knew regarded spiritual practice as an avoidance of dealing with the personal and interpersonal knots that interfered with living a full, rich, engaged life.

While psychological and spiritual work could certainly have these pitfalls, I could not side with either of these extreme views. I respected psychotherapy as a domain in its own right, using methods and perspectives that were valid in their own right, and that did not necessarily have to conform to the highest standards of nondual realization. And I also felt that it was possible to build a bridge between psychological reflection, which yields valid relative self-knowledge, even though mediated by divided consciousness, and the deeper, undivided awareness and wordless knowing discovered in meditation. I wanted to see how these two kinds of self-knowledge might work together as part of a larger dialectic of awakening that could include and bring...
together the two poles of human experience—conditioned and unconditioned, relative and absolute, psychological and spiritual, personal and universal,

It was through pursuing these questions that my therapeutic approach evolved in the direction of what I now call "psychological work in a spiritual context" or "presence-centered psychotherapy." By providing an intermediate step between conventional psychological reflection and the deeper process of meditation, this way of working has proved to be more congruent with my meditative experience than the way I first practiced therapy. In the remainder of this paper, I will situate this intermediate step within a larger dialectic of self-knowledge as it unfolds through psychological reflection and spiritual presence.

THE BASIC PROBLEM: PREREFLECTIVE IDENTIFICATION

What makes our ordinary state of consciousness problematic, according to both psychological and spiritual traditions, is unconscious identification. As children, our awareness is essentially open and receptive, yet the capacity to reflect on our own experience does not fully develop until the early teenage years, during the stage that Piaget termed "formal operations." Until then, our self-structure is under the sway of a more primitive capacity—identification.

Because we lack self-reflective awareness in childhood, we are totally dependent on others to help us see and know ourselves—to do our reflecting for us. And we inevitably start to internalize their reflections—how they see and respond to us—coming to regard ourselves in terms of how we appear to others. In this way we develop an ego identity, a stable self-image composed of self-representations, which are part of larger object relations—self/other schemas formed in our early transactions with our parents. To form an identity means taking ourselves to be something, based on how the world responds to us.

Identification is like a glue by which consciousness attaches itself to contents of consciousness—thoughts, feelings, images, beliefs, memories—and assumes with each of them, "That's me," or "That represents me." Identity is a way in which consciousness objectifies itself, in which we see ourselves as something. It is like looking in a mirror and taking ourselves to be the visual image reflected back to us, instead of our more immediate, lived experience of embodied being. Identification is a primitive form of self-knowledge—the best we could do as a child, given our limited cognitive capacities.

By the time our capacities for reflective self-knowledge develop, all our identities—both conscious and unconscious—have already fully formed. Thus the self-knowledge we start life with is always indirect, always mediated by images, memories of interactions with others, and beliefs about ourselves fanned out of these images and memories. Knowing ourselves through self-images, we become an object in our own eyes, never seeing the way in which we are the total field of awareness and presence in which these thought-forms are arising. We have become prisoners of our own mind and the ways it has construed reality.
The first step in freeing ourselves from the prison of unconscious identification is to make it conscious, that is, to reflect on it. We cannot move from prereflective identification directly into nondualistic awareness. But we can use divided consciousness to reflect on divided consciousness. The Buddha likened this to using a thorn to remove a thorn from one's flesh. All reflection involves stepping back from one's experience in order to examine and explore its patterns, its feeling textures, its meanings, its logos, as well as the basic assumptions, beliefs, and ways of conceiving reality that shape our experience. Compared to identification, this kind of self-reflection represents a giant step forward in the direction of greater self-understanding and freedom. In Gabriel Marcel's words, "reflection... is one of life's ways of rising from one level to another" (1950, p. 101).

There are different ways of reflecting on one's experience. Some are cruder, others subtler, depending on the rigidity of the dualism and the size of gap they maintain between observer and observed. We could distinguish three levels of reflective method:

1) Conceptual Reflection: Cognitive and Behavioral Analysis

The first way most of us start to reflect on our experience is by thinking about it, using theories and concepts to explain or analyze what is happening. Concepts allow us to step out of prereflective immersion in experience, so that we can see it in a new light or from a new angle. Most psychological and spiritual traditions draw on conceptual reflection at first, introducing basic ideas that help people understand what they are experiencing. Buddha's four noble truths, for example, are a way of helping people step back from their unconscious suffering in order to consider its nature and cause, as well as antidotes for it. In Western psychology, developmental theories, maps of consciousness, and character typologies serve a similar purpose, providing frameworks that help people analyze, organize, and understand their experience in more coherent ways.

Therapies that are based primarily on conceptual reflection try to explain or change the problematic contents of a client's experience, rather than working with the client's overall process of experiencing. This is a relatively crude approach, in that there is no direct encounter with lived experiencing as it immediately presents itself. Instead, the relation to experience is always mediated by theoretical constructs. The therapist draws on some theory of human development or behavior to interpret the client's experience, while the client's main modality is thinking and talking about his or her experience, at one remove from the experience itself. The therapist might also draw on preformulated techniques to operate on the client's behavior, applying certain cognitive (e.g., reframing; positive affirmations) or behavioral (e.g., desensitization; emotional catharsis) strategies to alter the undesirable contents of experience. This type of approach is often most useful with clients who lack the ego strength or the motivation to encounter their experience in a more direct, immediate way.
Spiritual traditions often formulate the contemplative realizations of great adepts of the past into a "view" that is transmitted to new students in order to help them discover the essence of spiritual realization for themselves. In the Mahamudra tradition, for example, the view of our essential nature as intrinsically open and boundless helps point students in that direction, so that they can discover and orient their life toward this vastness. In the words of Lodro Thaye, a great Mahamudra master of the eighteenth century:

> When one meditates with this view  
> It is like a garuda soaring through space  
> Untroubled by fear or doubt.  
> One who meditates without this view  
> Is like a blind man wandering the plains.

Yet such a view has little transformative effect if it remains only conceptual. Therefore Lodro Thaye adds:

> One who holds this view but does not meditate  
> Is like a rich man tethered by stinginess  
> Who cannot bring fruition to himself or others.  
> Joining the view and meditation is the holy tradition (Nalanda, 1980, p. 84).

The danger of any view is that we could start to substitute the theory for the reality that it merely points to. Therefore, in MahamudralDzogchen the presentation of the view also includes what are called "pointing-out instructions"—where the master also transmits or experientially reveals to the student the actual state that the view describes. Then the view becomes the ground of a contemplative path whose goal is to realize the view in a more complete experiential way.

2) Phenomenological Reflection: Meeting Experience Directly

Conceptual reflection that provides a map of where we are or a strategy for how to proceed gives a general orientation, but has limited value in helping us relate to where we are right now, in a more immediate sense. Conceptual mapping and analysis—thinking and talking about experience—must eventually give way to an approach that helps us work more directly with experience.

Phenomenological reflection is a more refined approach because it does not impose preconceived concepts or strategies on experience; instead, it puts aside or at least questions habitual conceptual assumptions in order to explore experience in a fresher, looser way. The concepts it uses are "experience-near," in that they grow out of, describe, and point back to what is directly felt and perceived. In this way phenomenology narrows the gap between observer and observed.

In psychotherapy practiced phenomenologically, experiencing is related to as a living process, which does not come packaged in units that can be neatly analyzed and operated upon. The observing consciousness pays close attention to felt experience, inquiring into it gently, and waiting patiently for responses and insights to come

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directly from there, rather than from some cognitive schema. Experiencing itself becomes the guide, revealing directions for change that unfold in the course of exploring it.

For example, a tension in the chest might first reveal itself as anxiety, then upon further reflection, as a sense of helplessness, then as an uncertainty that you are worthy of love. Perhaps you began by being judgmental toward the anxiety, or threatened by it, but as it further reveals itself as a not-knowing whether you are lovable, a sweet sadness about what you are feeling might arise. And this new way of experiencing what you are going through may allow it to unfold further: perhaps the anxiety relaxes and you become more compassionate toward yourself. In this kind of reflection, observer and observed become two poles of a mutual dance. This stepping-back from habitual reactions and assumptions in order to come into fresh relationship with lived experience is the essence of what is called, in philosophical terms, “the phenomenological reduction.”

3) Reflective Witnessing: Bare, Mindful Attention

An even subtler kind of reflection happens in the early stages of mindfulness meditation, where one is simply attentive to the ongoing flux of experiencing or “the mindstream,” as it is called in Buddhism, without concern about particular contents of experience that arise. In this approach the gap between observer and observed narrows further, in that there is no interest in operating on the mindstream in any way-through understanding, unfolding, articulation, or moving toward any release or resolution. In the context of meditation, any of these aims would indicate the operation of some mental set or attitude, and thus an interference with the process of freeing oneself from identification with all mind-states. While phenomenological reflection is an attempt to find new meaning, new understanding, new directions, meditation is a more radical path of undoing-relaxing any tendency to become caught up in feelings, thoughts, and identifications. Yet mindfulness practice is not yet the totally relaxed nondoing of Dzogchen, for it still requires some effort of stepping back from identification and witnessing.

Mindfulness practice provides a transitional step between reflection and presence, incorporating elements of both. As thinking itself becomes an object of mindful attention, we can begin to notice the experiential difference between thought and awareness—the contents of consciousness, which are like clouds passing through the sky, and pure consciousness, which is like the wide open sky itself. Letting go of habitual identifications allows us to discover this pure awareness, intrinsically free of the compulsions of thought and emotion. This is an important step in starting to free ourselves from the prison of dualistic mind. In the Dzogchen tradition, this is spoken of as distinguishing the mind caught in dualism (Tibetan: sens) from pure nondual awareness (rigpa). As the Tibetan teacher ChokyiNyima describes this distinction:

Basically there are two states of mind. Sens refers to the state of conceptual thinking, involving fixation on some “thing.” ... Rigpa means free from fixation. It refers to a state of natural wakefulness that is without dualistic clinging. It is extremely important to be clear about the difference between these two states of mind (1991, p. 129).
Before becoming self-reflective, we are identified with the thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and memories arising in consciousness, and this keeps us imprisoned in conditioned mind. With reflection, we can start to free ourselves from these unconscious identifications by stepping back and observing them. Yet as long as we are stepping back, we remain in a state of divided consciousness. A further step would be to go beyond reflection and, without falling back into prereflective identification, become at-one with our experiencing-through overcoming all struggle with it, through discovering and abiding in the deep, silent source from which all experience arises. This third level of the dialectic, which takes us beyond most Western psychological models and philosophical frameworks, is postreflective-in that it usually follows from a groundwork of reflective work-and trans-reflective-in that it discloses a way of being that lies beyond divided consciousness.

Even phenomenology, which, in emphasizing subject-object interrelatedness, is one of the most refined, least dualistic Western ways of exploring human experience, usually fails to go this further step. Peter Koestenbaum, for example, whose work *The New Image of the Person* is a fine attempt to develop a phenomenological clinical philosophy, and who is generally sympathetic to meditation and transpersonal experience, describes meditation only in terms of stepping back. He considers meditative presence-s-what he calls the Eternal Now-to be the ultimate phenomenological reduction:

> There is no end to the regressive process of reflection because the field of consciousness is experienced to be infinite. Specifically, *there is infinity in stepping back.* . . . The Eternal Now is an experience in which we are no longer inside space and inside time but *have become an observer of space and time* In meditation, *the individual takes a spectatorial attitude towards all experiences* The meditator follows the flow of the body, of a feeling, or of the environment. . . . In this way individuals can train themselves to become observers rather than participants in life (1978, p. 73, 82, 100, 101, my italics).

Koestenbaum’s words are accurate up through the early stages of reflective witnessing in mindfulness practice. However, meditation that only goes this far does not lead beyond divided consciousness. The ultimate purpose of meditation goes far beyond training us to be “observers, rather than participants,” as Koestenbaum claims. Its aim is full participation in life, but *conscious participation,* rather than the unconscious participation of prereflective identification. What finally replaces divided consciousness is pure presence.

Of all the phenomenologists, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty have perhaps gone the farthest in recognizing a mode of awareness beyond subject and object, as well as its sacred import. Borrowing a term from Meister Eckhart, Heidegger speaks of *Gelassenheit,* letting-be, using language reminiscent of Buddhist references to suchness:

> To *let-be-that* is, to let beings be as the beings which they are-means to engage oneself with the open region and its openness into which every being comes to stand, bringing that openness, as it were, along with itself (1977, p. 127).
Merleau-Ponty suggests the need to develop what he calls sur-reflection-which might be translated as "higher reflection"-

that would take itself and the changes it introduces into the spectacle into account. It must plunge into the world instead of surveying it. It must descend toward it such as it is, so that the seer and the visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and which is seen (1968, pp. 38-39, 139).

These attempts by two great philosophers to point the way beyond traditional Western dualistic thought are admirable. Yet even at its best, phenomenology can point to, but does not provide a true upaya, or path, for fully realizing nondual presence.

In the practice of Mahamudra/Dzogchen, meditators discover nondual awareness, at first in glimpses, as the focus on objects of consciousness gradually drops away and they learn to rest in open presence, in what Franklin Merrill-Wolff (1994) called "consciousness-without-an-object." This nondual presence could be described in terms of qualities such as depth, luminosity, or spaciousness, yet in its immediacy there is no self-conscious reflection on any such attributes. Instead, one simply rests in the clarity of wide open, wakeful awareness, without any attempt to alter or fabricate one's experience. Here there is direct self-knowing, direct recognition of one's own nature as pure being, without self-reflection. When attention is turned outward, perception is clear and sharp, since it is not clothed in concepts. The world is not seen as something separate from awareness, nor is it any less vivid and immediate than awareness itself. Nor is awareness seen as something subjective, "in here," separate from appearances. Awareness and what appears in awareness mutually coemerge as one unified field of presence.

In this unified field of presence, neither perceptions nor awareness can be objectified as anything the mind could grasp. This ungraspable quality of experience is the basic meaning of the Buddhist term emptiness: The Mahamudra tradition speaks of the inseparability of emptiness and awareness, emptiness and clarity, emptiness and appearance, emptiness and energy. We could also speak of the inseparability of emptiness and being. Pure presence is the realization of being-as-emptiness: being without being something. Being is empty, not because it lacks anything, but because it cannot be comprehended in terms of any reference point outside itself. Being is precisely that which can never be grasped or contained in any physical boundary or conceptual designation. In Nishitani's words, "being is only being if it is one with emptiness... In that sense, emptiness might be called the field of 'be-ification'" (1982, p. 124).

Emptiness in this sense is not some "attribute" belonging to awareness, appearance, or being, but their utter transparency when apprehended in pure presence, outside of the subject-object framework. This realization is called by many different names, such as self-illuminating awareness, jnana, buddha-nature, wisdom mind, great bliss, great perfection. As self-illuminating awareness that simultaneously illumines the whole field of experience, pure presence is intimate engagement, rather than a stepped-back detachment. In contrast to reflection, it does not involve any "doing" at all, as the great Dzogchen master Longchenpa indicates when he says: "Instead of seeking mind by mind, let be" (Guenther, 1977, p. 244).
Once awareness extricates itself from the fetters of conceptual mind, through reflection and mindfulness, it can self-realize its intrinsic nature as pure freedom, relaxation, openness, luminosity, and presence. This happens, in Mahamudra terms, through "settling itself in its own nature." Since this resting in presence goes beyond effort, one-pointedness, and witnessing, it is called nonmeditation. Although analogies can suggest what this is like, no word or image can describe its radiant immediacy, as Lodro Thaye points out:

It is space, ungraspable as a thing.
It is a flawless precious clear crystal.
It is the lamp-like radiance of your own self-luminous mind.
It is inexpressible, like the experience of a mute.
It is unobscured, transparent wisdom.
The luminous Dharma-nature, Primordially pure and spontaneous.
It cannot be demonstrated through analogy,
And cannot be expressed in words.
It is the space of Dharma, Forever overwhelming mind's inspection (Nalanda, 1980, p. 84).

In the state of nonmeditation it is no longer necessary to make a distinction between conceptual mind and pure awareness, in that all mind-states are recognized as forms of awareness and presence. It is more a question of being fully awake within thought, feeling, perception when they arise, no longer maintaining a hair's breadth of separation from whatever arises.

This quality of pure presence often opens spontaneous clearings in the experiential stream, without any strategy or intention to create change. There are two closely related ways in which these changes may occur:

A) Spontaneous Transmutation The Tantric tradition of Vajrayana Buddhism is known as the path of transformation, in which "impure" experiences - marked by ignorance, dualism, aggression, grasping - is transmuted into "pure" experience - illumined by awareness, openness, nongrasping, and direct appreciation. The basic Vajrayana methods of visualization, mantra, mudra, and symbolic ritual eventually lead to the more advanced, utterly direct approach of Mahamudra/Dzogchen, where the practitioner finally cuts through the separation between pure and impure by completely meeting and opening to the raw immediacy of experience on the spot.

In this direct encounter, the thick, heavy, fixated quality of experience falls away, revealing a deeper, living intelligence contained within it. As Chogyam Trungpa describes this kind of realization:

At this point whatever is experienced in everyday life through sense perception is a naked experience, because it is direct. There is no veil between [you] and "that." ... Tantra teaches not to suppress or destroy energy but to transmute it; in other words, go with the pattern of energy When [you] go with the pattern of energy, then experience becomes very creative You realize that you no longer have to abandon anything. You begin to see the underlying qualities of wisdom in your life-situation... If you are highly involved in one emotion such as anger, then by having a sudden glimpse of
openness... you begin to see that you do not have to suppress your energy... but you can transform your aggression into dynamic energy.... If one actually feels the living quality, the texture of the emotions as they are in their naked state, then this experience also contains ultimate truth.... We would discover that emotion actually does not exist as it appears, but it contains much wisdom and open space.... Then the process of transmuting the emotions into wisdom takes place automatically (1973, pp. 218-19, 221, 222, 234, 235-36).

Here there is no deliberate effort to transmute the emotions; rather, transmutation happens spontaneously through fully opening to them:

You experience emotional upheaval as it is but... become one with it. Let yourself be in the emotion, go through it, give in to it, experience it. You begin to go toward the emotion rather than just experiencing the emotion coming toward you.... There is a fear that emotion might become too much... Transmutation involves going through such fear.... Then the most powerful energies become absolutely workable... Whatever occurs in the samsaric mind is regarded as the path; everything is workable. It is a fearless proclamation—the lion's roar (Trungpa, 1976, pp. 70-71).

As a student in this tradition, with a few budding glimpses of what the above words might actually refer to, I began to feel that even Focusing—which was the simplest, most penetrating, experience-near therapeutic method I knew—still did not go far enough.

The essence of Focusing involves attending to an unclear bodily-felt sense, while remaining extremely respectful, gentle, and attentive toward every nuance of experience that arises from it. Seeing how concrete steps of experiential change can emerge from attending to a felt sense is an important discovery—something that people who use meditation to avoid their feelings and personal experience would do well to learn. Yet as Focusing is commonly practiced, there is often a bias toward unfolding, toward resolution, toward looking for a felt shift. In this way, it can become a form of "undoing" that maintains a subtle I-It stance toward one's experience. The bias here can be very subtle. Wanting our experience to change usually contains a subtle resistance to what is, to nowness, to what I call unconditional presence—the capacity to meet experience fully and directly, without filtering it through any conceptual or strategic agenda (Welwood, 1992).

The subtle spiritual pitfall of psychological work is that it can reinforce the inherent tendency of the conditioned personality to react and contract against what is, and to continually look for "something better." Although psychological reflection certainly can help people move forward in important ways, at some point even the slightest desire for change or improvement can interfere with the deeper letting go and relaxation that are necessary for moving from the realm of personality into the realm of being, which is only discoverable in and through nowness—in moments when all pushing and striving cease.

When we allow experience to be as it is, instead of seeking to alter it in any way, the focus of inner work shifts in an important and powerful way. No longer is our experience something apart from us that we need to change or resolve; instead, the focus shifts to the larger field: how-we-are-with-our-experience. And when we relate
to our experience in a more spacious, allowing way, it automatically becomes less problematic, because we no longer exist in an I-It, subject-object tension with it.

Of course, the primary aim of all therapeutic approaches is to reduce psychological distress and increase self-understanding, not to overcome divided consciousness. Yet I began to feel a need to practice therapy in a way that was more congruent with the nondoing quality of meditative presence. I was also inspired in this vision by moments in my own personal work when opening to my experience just as it was had brought me into a deeper sense of presence—a kind of "being-without-agenda," which opened up access to a powerful sense of stillness, acceptance, and aliveness. Such moments afforded a glimpse of what lay on the other side of divided consciousness: being at-one with myself in a new and deeper way.

Obviously, there is a time for actively trying to penetrate experiential obstacles, and a time for allowing one's experience to be as it is. If we are unable or unwilling to actively engage with our personal life issues, then letting-be could become a stance of avoidance, and a dead-end. Yet if we are unable to let our experience be, or to open to it just as it is, then our psychological work may reinforce the habitual contraction of the conditioned personality. While Focusing showed me a way out of the first pitfall, meditation—which taught me about the wisdom of nondoing—showed me a way beyond the second pitfall.

In training professionals, I also found that the investment in change can introduce a subtle bias into therapists' responses, thereby communicating to their clients: "You're not all right the way you are." And this can reinforce the alienated attitude most people already suffer from: "I should be having a different experience from the one I am having—what's wrong with me?" When clients pick up this bias from their therapists, it can create a fundamental obstacle in the flow of the therapeutic process and relationship. Clients either try to go along with the therapist's agenda, which can disconnect them from their own being, or else they resist the therapist's agenda, which keeps them stuck.

The more I trained therapists, the clearer it became that the most important quality in a therapist was the capacity for unconditional presence—which, oddly enough, is rarely mentioned or taught in graduate school. When therapists are present with a client's experience in this way, something inside the client can begin to relax and open up in a much deeper way. What I have found, again and again, is that unconditional presence is the most powerful transmuting force there is—precisely because it is a willingness to be there with ourselves in our experience, without dividing ourselves in two by trying to "manage" what we are feeling.

This kind of unbiased presence does not mean passively submitting to, or indulging in, feelings. Nor am I suggesting that therapists should go along with their clients in a totally laissez-faire manner. There are, of course, many times when it is appropriate for a therapist to interrupt a train of thought, an emotional reaction, or a habitual behavior, and to set limits, confront clients, focus on what is problematic, and initiate reflective dialogue. Unconditional presence operates most powerfully at the micro-level of therapy in those key moments when clients come into direct, intimate
contact with their felt experience. Its quality of nondoing is not an inactivity; rather, it is a nonreactive, noncontrolling, yet active engagement with what is happening at each moment.

In teaching unconditional presence, I have found it useful to delineate different stages of this coming-into-contact. First of all, there needs to be a willingness to inquire, to face directly into our felt experience and see what is there. Then we can begin to acknowledge what is happening inside us: "Yes, this is what I'm experiencing right now. I'm feeling threatened ... hurt ... angry ... defensive." Acknowledging involves recognizing and naming what is going on, seeing how it feels in the body, and inviting it more fully into awareness. The power of bare acknowledgment should never be underestimated. To help clients linger here and not rush on toward some hoped-for resolution, I often say something like, "Notice what it's like right now just to acknowledge what you're feeling." Attending to the felt quality of this recognition cuts through the impulse to react to the content, allowing the client to stay more present with it.

Once we acknowledge what is there, it becomes possible to meet it more fully by allowing it to be there as it is. Allowing does not mean wallowing in feelings or acting them out. Instead, it means giving our experience space and actively letting it be there, putting aside any urge to manage or judge it. Often what interferes with this is either identifying with the feeling ("this anger is me") or resisting it ("this anger is not me"). It often requires some time and concentration before we can let our experience be there in this more allowing way.

Having allowed our experience to be there, we can then let ourselves open to it more fully, no longer maintaining any distance between it and ourselves as observer, judge, or manager. This is the main point where unconditional presence diverges from Focusing and other reflective methods. There is a complete opening to, and becoming one with the felt experience, without any attempt to do anything with it, to it, or about it. What is most important here is not so much what we are feeling, but the act of opening to it.

For example, a client is feeling a fear that he is nothing-s-that if he really looks inside, he won't find anything there. Although I first ask him to pay attention to this "fear of being nothing" in his body and we discuss how it relates to situations from his past (this is still reflective inquiry), eventually I invite him to open himself directly to the feeling of being nothing-to go fully into it and let himself be nothing. (Here reflection gives way to presence.) After a while he says, "It feels empty, but there's also a peacefulness and fullness." He feels full because he is now present, rather than separate from his experience. It is his being that feels peaceful and full. Of course, feelings don't always transmute this easily. It depends entirely on the client and our relationship. Yet for clients who have experienced this a number of times, it can happen more and more readily.

Feelings in themselves don't necessarily lead to wisdom, but the process of opening fully to them can. When we no longer maintain any distance from a feeling, it cannot persist in its old form, which crystallized through the subject-object split. In the above
example, the client's fear of being nothing only persisted as long as he tried to get away from that experience. But when he opened unconditionally to being nothing, this inner division ceased, at least for a while, as he stepped out of the fixed stance/attitudes/associations he held toward "being nothing," with their long history dating back to childhood. He became present, and therefore experienced his being, rather than his nothingness. And so "being nothing" transmuted into the emptiness/fullness of being—where the fear of being nothing no longer had a hold on him.

When the focus of awareness shifts from a feeling—as an object of pleasure or pain, like or dislike, acceptance or rejection—to our state of presence with it, we start to discover inner resources and wisdom hidden within it as we move from the realm of personality into the larger space of being. Out of presence with anger, strength often emerges; out of presence with sorrow, compassion; out of presence with fear, courage and groundedness; out of presence with emptiness, expansive spaciousness and peace. Strength, compassion, courage, spaciousness, peace are differentiated qualities of being—different ways in which presence manifests.

In this way, being fully present with ourselves overcomes the inner war, at least for a moment, between self and Other, between "me" and "my experience." And from there, everything looks and feels different. A felt shift happens, but this is more than the "content mutation" that Gendlin (1964) describes as a result of reflective unfolding. An example of "content mutation" would be anger unfolding to fear, which in turn might unfold further, revealing itself as a desire to be loved, and then a strong sense of relief at realizing that one's anger was pushing away the love one wanted. I call these "horizontal" felt shifts, because even though deeper feelings and realizations may unfold, the process remains on the level of personality. But the transmutation that often occurs through unconditional presence is a "vertical" shift, where one moves from personality into a deeper quality of being, as a fixed constellation of observer/observed dissolves, along with all reactivity, contraction, or striving.

I don't wish to imply that this kind of deepening always happens quickly or easily, or that by itself it can effect lasting transformations. Often a long sequence of horizontal unfolding must occur before a vertical shift happens, and a long period of integration is necessary before it can lead to concrete differences in the way one lives. Nor am I suggesting that Focusing and other reflective methods do not also lead to vertical shifts. But vertical shifts can often be very subtle and their larger import can easily be missed by therapists without a contemplative background. A contemplative approach to therapy differs from conventional psychological work in that it is more concerned with presence of being—revealed through opening directly to experience—than with problem-resolution. The problem-solving mentality maintains the inner split and keeps attention confined within the boundaries of conventional conceptual mind. But the vertical shift that often follows from unconditional presence is a change of context that alters the way a problem is held. And this often gives rise to creative new ways of relating to the problematic situation at hand.

I make a point of helping clients recognize the nature and significance of this shift when it spontaneously occurs, I encourage them to rest there, appreciate the new quality of being that has become available, and let it move freely in their body,
without having to go on to another problem or anything else. The quality might deepen and new aspects or implications might be revealed. Or perhaps the client starts to block, resist, or dissociate from this state of presence. In that case, we might move back into reflective inquiry, to see what is going on—what old beliefs, object relations, or identities may be interfering. We might then explore these obstacles reflectively until at some point, I again invite the client to be present with some aspect of their experience in the way described above. In this way, the capacity for presence expands, while obstacles standing in its way are also worked with.

Unconditional presence is more radical than psychological reflection in that it involves giving in to our experience (as in Trungpa’s statement, “Let yourself be in the emotion, go through it, give in to it. ...”), while learning to ride the energy mindfully, without becoming overwhelmed by it. "The usual problem," as Trungpa (1976) put it, "is that, when emotions arise, we feel that we are being challenged by them, that they will overwhelm [us].... We are afraid that aggression or depression will become so overwhelming that we will lose our ability to function normally" (p. 70). This approach is clearly not for clients who lack ego strength, who are unable to step back and reflect on their feelings, or whose primary task is to establish a stable, cohesive self-structure. Focusing, by contrast, helps strengthen the observing ego by helping clients find the right distance from their emotional upheaval. But here one simply dives in, radically erasing any separation from one’s experience.

Transmutation through unconditional presence happens somewhat differently in psychological and in meditative practice. In therapy, it is always part of a dialogical process, and therefore always develops out of and returns to a reflective interchange. Reflecting on the vertical shifts is also helpful in integrating them more fully into daily functioning. In meditative practice, by contrast, mind-states can transmute in a more immediate, spontaneous way, without reference to a prior or subsequent reflective process. By not engaging in reflective articulation, the meditator can often move beyond divided consciousness in a deeper, more sustained way. The challenge here, however, lies in integrating this deeper awareness into daily life and functioning.

B) Ongoing Self-Liberation Transmutation, as described above, still involves a slight sense of duality, at least initially, in that one makes some effort to go toward experience, go into it, open oneself to it. Beyond transmutation lie still subtler possibilities of nondual presence, usually only realized through advanced meditative practice. In Mahamudra/Dzogchen, this is the way of self-liberation. Here one learns to remain continually present within the movement of experience—whether thought, perception, feeling, or sensation. In the words of a great Dzogchen master, Patrul Rinpoche, "It is sufficient to simply let your mind rest in the state of whatever takes place, in whatever happens" (Kunsang, 1993, p. 120). This kind of naked awareness—where there is no mental or emotional reaction to whatever arises—allows each experience to be just what it is, free of dualistic grasping and fixation, and totally transparent. Pure presence makes possible the self-liberation of the mindstream. This is Mahamudra—the supreme mudra, the ultimate seeing that "lets beings be as the beings which they are:"

What is this supreme mudra? In the words of Tilopa, one of the grandfathers of Mahamudra, "When mind is free of reference points, that is Mahamudra." Not to rely
on reference points—attitudes, beliefs, intentions, aversions, self-concepts, object relations—to interpret our experience or evaluate who we are in relation to it is to rest in the "core" of being, "at the still point of the turning world, neither from nor towards." This sense of "resting in the middle of one's experience" is not a "position" in any determinate "place." This use of the term middle is taken from Nishitani, who describes it as the mode of being of things as they are in themselves—namely, the mode of being wherein things rest in the complete uniqueness of what they themselves are. It is immediately present and immediately realized as such—at the point that we ourselves actually are. It is "at hand" and "underfoot." All actions imply an absolute immediacy. And it is there that what we are calling the "middle" appears (1982, pp. 165-6).

Resting in the middle of being means standing in pure presence.

Normal divided consciousness places us on the perimeter of the field of experience, stepped back from whatever we are observing. When resting in the middle, by contrast, "the standpoint of the subject that knows things objectively, and likewise knows itself objectively as a thing called the self, is broken down" (Nishitani, 1982, p. 154). The self-knowledge that arises here is immediate and nonobjectifying.

It is not a "knowing" that consists in the self turning to itself and refracting into itself. It is not a "reflective" knowing.... This self-awareness ... is a knowing that comes about not as a refraction of the self bent into the self but only on a position that is, as it were, absolutely straightforward.... This is because it is a knowing that originates in the "middle." It is an absolutely nonobjective knowing of the absolutely nonobjective self in itself; it is a completely nonreflective knowing.... On all other fields the self is at all times reflective, and caught in its own grasp in the act of grasping itself, and caught in the grasp of things in its attempt to grasp them.... It can never be the "straight heart" of which the ancients speak (pp. 154-55).

The ultimate practice here is learning to remain fully present and awake in the middle of whatever thoughts, feelings, perceptions, or sensations are occurring and to recognize them, in Mahanmnudra/Dzogchen terms, as Dharmakaya—as an ornamental display of the empty, luminous essence of awareness. Like waves on the ocean, thoughts are not separate from awareness. They are the radiant clarity of awareness in motion. In remaining awake in the middle of thoughts—and recognizing them as the luminous energy of awareness—the practitioner maintains presence and can rest within their movement. As Namkhai Norbu suggests:

The essential principle is to ... maintain presence in the state of the moving wave of thought itself.... If one considers the calm state as something positive to be attained, and the wave of thought as something negative to be abandoned, and one remains caught up in the duality of grasping and rejecting, there is no way of overcoming the ordinary state of the mind (1986, p. 144).

It is the dualistic fixation—the tension between self and Other, "me" and "my thoughts"—that makes them problematic, tormenting, "sticky," like the tarbaby to which Brer Rabbit becomes affixed by trying to push it away. Thoughts become thick, solid, and heavy only when we react to them. Each reaction triggers further thought,
so that the thoughts become chained together in what appears to be a continuous
mind-state. These thought chains are like a relay race, where each new thought picks
up the baton from the previous thought and runs with it for a moment, passing it on
again to a subsequent thought. But if the meditator can maintain presence in the
middle of a thought, free of grasping or rejecting, then the thought has nothing to pass
the baton on to, and naturally subsides. Although this sounds simple, it is advanced
practice, usually requiring much preliminary training and commitment.

When one can rest in presence even in the midst of thoughts, perceptions, or intense
emotions, these become an ongoing part of one's contemplative practice, as opportu-
nities to discover a pervasive quality of open awareness in all one's activities. As
Tarthang Tulku describes this:

It's possible to make thought itself meditation... How do we go into that state? The
moment you try to separate yourself from thought, you are dealing with a duality, a subject-
object relationship. You lose the state of awareness because you reject your experience
and become separate from it. ... But if our awareness is in the center of thought, the thought
itself dissolves...

At the very beginning... stay in the thoughts. Just be there... You become the center of
the thought. But there is not really any center—the center becomes balance. There's no
"being," no "subject-object relationships"; none of these categories exist. Yet at the same
time, there is... complete openness,... So we kind of crack each thought, like cracking
nuts. If we can do this, any thought becomes meditation...

Any moment, wherever you are, driving a car, sitting around, working, talking, any
activities you have—even if you are very disturbed emotionally, very passionate, or even if
your mind has become very strong, raging, overcome with the worst possible things and
you cannot control yourself, or you feel depressed... if you really go into it, there's
nothing there. Whatever comes up becomes your meditation. Even if you become extrem­
ely tense, if you go into your thought and your awareness comes alive, that moment
can be more powerful than working along time in meditation practice(1974, pp. 9-10,18).

Here no antidote need be applied: no conceptual understanding, no reflection, no
stepping back, no detachment, no witnessing. When one is totally present in the
thought, in the emotion, in the disturbance, it relaxes by itself, becoming open and
transparent to the larger ground of awareness. The wave subsides back into the ocean,
The cloud dissolves into the sky. The snake naturally uncoils. These are all metaphors
that say: It self-liberates.

Although self-liberation is not a dialogical process, but a "straight heart" realization
of being-emptiness, it does allow for an intimate knowing of reality, as Nishitani
suggests when he writes that "things reveal themselves to us only when we leap from
the circumference to the center, into their very [suchness]" (1982, p. 130). This
"knowing of not-knowing" is a complete openness and attunement to the self-
revealing qualities of self, world, and other beings. For one who can remain fully
present even in the middle of deluded thoughts and emotions, the distinction between
samsara and nirvana, conventional and awakened consciousness, duality and
nonduality is no longer of great concern. Nor is the relative duality of self and other in
daily life a problem when one is not trapped in divided consciousness. One can adopt
the conventional perspective of duality when appropriate, and drop it when it is not necessary. Then the interplay of self and other becomes a humorous dance, an energetic exchange, an ornament rather than a hindrance.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Most of us live caught up in prereflective identification most of the time, imagining that our thoughts, feelings, attitudes and viewpoints accurately portray reality. But when awareness is clouded by prereflective identification, we do not yet fully have our experience. Rather, it has us; we are swept along by cross-currents of thought and feeling in which we are unconsciously immersed. Driven along by these unconscious identifications—self-images, conflicting emotions, superego commands, object relations, recurring thought-patterns—we remain asleep to the deeper import of our experience. We are often angry without even knowing we are angry, anxious without understanding why we are anxious, or hungry without realizing what we are truly hungry for. This is the condition that Gurdjieff called "the machine."

Reflective attention helps us take a major step forward from there. Conceptual reflection allows cognitive analysis and understanding of what is going on and why. Beyond that, subtler, more direct kinds of phenomenological reflection can help us finally start to have our experience. In psychotherapy, it is a major advance when clients can, for example, move from just being angry to having their anger. When they have their anger, this means that their awareness is holding the anger and reflecting on it, instead of being clouded or overwhelmed by it. Beyond that, mindful witnessing allows us to step back from our experience and let it be, without reaction or identification.

A further step on the path of self-knowledge involves learning to be with our experience in an even more direct and penetrating way, which I call unconditional presence. Here the focus is not so much on what we are experiencing as on how we are with it. Being fully present with our experience facilitates a vertical shift from personality to being. Being-with anger, for instance, involves opening to its energy directly, which often effects a spontaneous transmutation. The anger reveals deeper qualities of being hidden within it, such as strength, confidence, or radiant clarity, and this brings us into deeper connection with being itself. From this sense of inner connectedness, the original situation that gave rise to the anger often looks quite different.

Beyond transmutation there lies the still subtler potential to self-liberate experience through naked awareness. Instead of going into the anger, this would mean simply resting in presence as the anger arises and moves, while recognizing it as a transparent, energetic display of being-awareness-emptiness. This possibility is discovered not through a dialogical process like psychotherapy, but through contemplative practice.

To summarize the progression described here: It is a movement from unconscious, prereflective immersion in our experience (identification), to thinking and talking about experience (conceptual reflection), to having our experience directly (phenom-
enological reflection), to non-identified witnessing (mindfulness), to being-pre sent-with experience (unconditional presence, leading to transmutation), to a trans-reflec tive resting in open presence within whatever experience arises, which is no other than pure being/emptiness (self-liberation). If we use the analogy of awareness as a mirror, prereflective identification is like being captivated by and lost in the reflections appearing in the mirror. Reflection involves stepping back from these appearances, studying them, and developing a new relationship with them. And transreflective presence is like being the mirror itself—that vast, illuminating openness and clarity that allows reality to be seen as what it is. In pure presence, awareness is self-illuminating, or aware of itself without objectification. The mirror simply abides in its own nature, without either separating from its reflections or confusing itself with them. Negative reflections do not stain the mirror, positive reflections do not improve on it. They are all the mirror’s self-illuminating display.

Psychotherapy as a dialogical process is essentially reflective, although when practiced by a therapist with a contemplative background, it can also include moments of nonreflective presence that facilitate a shift into a deeper dimension of being. In the spiritual traditions, disciplined reflection also serves as a stepping-stone on the way toward greater presence. In Gurdjieff’s teaching, for instance, focused self-observa tion is what allows people to step out of “the machine” and become available to the more pointed presence that he tenus “self-remembering.” While psychotherapy and spiritual practice may both incorporate reflection and presence, the home base of therapy is reflection and the home base of spirituality is presence.

I would like to close with a few final considerations for Western students and researchers of the further reaches of contemplative awareness. From anecdotal evidence, the stabilization of the pure presence of *rigpa* in an ongoing realization of self-liberation appears to be quite rare, even among dedicated students of Dzogchen Mahamudra. This tradition flowered in Tibet, a far simpler and more grounded culture than ours, which also provided a social mandala, or cohesive cultural context, that supported thousands of monasteries and hermitages where meditation practice and realization could flourish. Yet even there, years of preliminary practice and solitary retreat were usually recommended as the groundwork for full nondual realization, which was often described as the golden roof that crowns the entire spiritual enterprises.

The question for modern Westerners, who lack the cultural supports found in traditional Asia and who often find it hard to spend years in retreat or ever to complete the traditional Tibetan preliminary practices, is how to establish a strong enough base on which this golden roof can rest. What kind of preliminary practices or inner work are most relevant and useful for modern people as a groundwork for nondual realization? What special conditions may be necessary to nurture and sustain nondual presence outside of retreat situations? And how can this spacious, relaxed quality of presence be integrated into everyday functioning in a speedy, complex technological society like ours, which requires such high levels of mental activity and mental abstraction?

On the individual level, unresolved psychological issues and developmental deficiencies often seem to be the main obstacles to integrating deeper contemplative awareness into daily life (Welwood, 1984, 1996; Almaas, 1988). If this is so, then it would
seem that spiritual aspirants in the West would also need to engage in some degree of psychological work, as a useful adjunct to their spiritual work, and perhaps as a preliminary practice in its own right. Perhaps for Westerners genuine non-doing and letting-be can only be fully embodied in a healthy, integrated way once one has learned to attend to bodily feelings and grapple with one's personal experience in a Focusing-style reflective manner. That is why it is important to understand the uses and limitations of psychological reflection, and to study its role as a stepping-stone both toward and "back" from nondual presence as a bridge, in other words, that can begin to unlock deeper qualities of being and help to integrate them more fully into everyday life.

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