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Abstract

In this paper, I look at the dialogue between some relational and intra-psychic models of psychoanalysis, regarding the autonomy of the self. I also describe how certain types of meditation, in particular, Realization Process, can facilitate both the experience of internal cohesion, the sense of oneself as a separate being, and the experience of participating in a fluidly reciprocal self/world matrix. I discuss how the experience of interiority that can be cultivated through meditation leads to the emergence of a subtle, qualitative sense of self and other, enables creativity, and increases one's openness to other people.

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Introduction

In this paper, I look at the dialogue between some relational and intra-psychic models of psychoanalysis, regarding the experience of autonomy. I also show how certain types of meditation, in particular, Realization Process¹, can facilitate both the experience of internal cohesion, the sense of oneself as a separate being, and the experience of participating in a fluidly reciprocal self/world matrix. I discuss how the experience of interiority that can be cultivated through meditation leads to the emergence of a subtle, qualitative sense of self and other. I make three main points throughout the paper: 1) the current psychoanalytic literature, with its specific interest in the relational dyad, sometimes ignores or de-emphasizes the sense of existing as a separate being; 2) the capacity for fluid, flexible participation in relationships can be enhanced through cultivating the sense of separateness or aloneness; and 3) meditation practices can contribute to both the theoretical understanding and experience of how a developed sense of one's own being facilitates one's openness to other people.

I know that using the phrases “one's own being” or “inward contact with oneself” as I do in this paper, may put me on shaky ground with some readers. In this context the

¹ Realization Process is a series of meditative exercises, developed by the author, for realizing nondual consciousness through internal contact with the body, and for applying nondual consciousness to psychological healing. This work has been shown to reduce symptoms of PTSD in a pilot study at NYU Medical School (The Child Study Center). For more information on this method, see *The Empathic Ground* (Blackstone, 2007).

terms “being” and “self” refer to the organismic individual associated with the body, similar to what Damasio (1999) terms the “core self.” Damasio writes:

One key to understanding living organisms, from those that are made up of one cell to those that are made up of billions of cells, is the definition of their boundary, the separation between what is in and what is out. The structure of the organism is inside the boundary and the life of the organism is defined by the maintenance of internal states within the boundary. Singular individuality depends on the boundary. (p. 135-136)

Thus terms like “inward” and “interiority” are not metaphors here, but refer to the spatial direction of one’s awareness, or self-contact. Damasio says that we are aware of the core self whenever the underlying unconscious “proto self” is modified (p. 174)

However, in meditation practice, we can develop a stable quality-rich consciousness of the internal space of the whole body. As contemporary philosopher Yuasa (1987) writes, “The ‘mind’ here is not surface consciousness, but is the ‘mind’ that penetrates into the body and deeply subjectivizes it” (p. 105). As I will explain, this body-subjectivity is both coherent within itself and entirely permeable and open to its surroundings. Because of this dual property of self-cohesion and connectedness, I believe that meditation experience has a place in our contemporary exploration of the complex relationship between subjectivity and intersubjectivity.

As we will see in the following section, many contemporary analytic writers advocate a post-modern philosophy that attempts to eradicate the Cartesian notion of a reified, ontologically separate, self and other. Yet, as clinicians we know that the

everyday problems of self and other often involve the experience of being either too separate or not separate enough from other people. In order to address these clinical issues within a relational model, contemporary theorists have produced a rich body of writing on how relationships can facilitate a healthy sense of self, and also how a healthy sense of self affects relationships. In the last section of the paper, I describe how meditation can contribute to our understanding and facilitating the lived experience of this equation. Specifically, I look at how meditation practice can give us a way to understand autonomy, without leaving a relational or systems model, and without recourse to abstractions such as psychological structure.

I want to make clear from the outset that I do not mean that meditation can or should replace analysis, or that the subtle dimensions of experience that are gained through meditation are in some way superior to the outcomes achieved through analysis. Increasingly, as meditation makes its way into the analytic arena (Epstein, 1995, 1998; Rubin, 1996; Safran, 2003, Suler, (1993), among others), and especially as psychoanalysis expands its focus to include relational abilities such as openness, flexibility, empathic resonance, and spontaneity, the goals of meditation and analysis are seen to be compatible, and in some ways, identical. I also believe that the methods of meditation and analysis are synergistic; both modalities may be more effective when practiced in concert. Thus, meditation is presented in this paper as a potentially useful supplement to the analytic process.

The Analytic Literature

In contemporary theories of psychoanalysis, the notion of the self has come under increasingly skeptical scrutiny. Kohut stated clearly that by self, he did not mean an objective entity. He wrote that the self was only knowable through sense data and introspection, not in its essence (1977, p. 311). Stolorow and Atwood specifically criticize the idea of the self as an independent entity. They write, “This we contrast with the *experience* of psychological distinctness, a structuralization of self-awareness that is wholly embedded in formative and sustaining intersubjective contexts” (1992, p. 10). In response to this new understanding of individual subjectivity as relatively fluid and context-dependent, many clinicians have shifted their focus from the patient’s intrapsychic life to the therapeutic relationship itself.

The view that the patient-therapist relationship is the curative factor in psychoanalysis has led, in turn, to a new conception of psychological health. Although Stolorow and his collaborators describe psychological healing as an emergent, open-ended outcome of the analytic process, their emphasis is on the patient’s achievement of new relational patterns through their relationship with the analyst (1992, p. 25). They argue that concern with such facets of intrapsychic health as autonomy and individuation are a throwback to the illusion of the separate, “Cartesian” self and what they call the “idolatry of the autonomous mind” (1992, p.13). They criticize Kohut for his notion of psychological health as the realization of a pre-existing potential inherent in the individual. They write, “Such an idea contrasts sharply with our view that the trajectory of self-experience is shaped at every point in development by the intersubjective system in which it crystallizes” (pp. 17-18). But Kohut also believed that the “child’s innate

potentialities are selectively nourished and thwarted...by the deeply anchored responsiveness of the self-objects, which, in the last analysis, is a function of the self-objects' own nuclear selves" (1977, p. 100).

Aron (1996) points out that the relational turn in psychoanalysis occurred as a reaction to the ignorance of traditional psychoanalysis with regard to both the co-construction of the psychoanalytic process, and the ongoing formative power of relationships in the patient's life. Aron (1996) writes, "I prefer a model of mind that is less individualistic, more relational, and in which mind exists only in relation to others, always dependent to a degree and never fully autonomous" (p. 227).

However, in emphasizing the interdependence of self and other, relational writers sometimes seem to minimize those aspects of self-experience that occur in and even require solitude, such as creativity. They also tend to minimize the self-organizing capacity of the individual (see Shore, 2003), and the potential of the individual to deepen, with health and maturity, in the qualitative experience of his or her own being. Beebe and Lachmann (2003) make the point that "too great a tilt toward an interactive view of the organization of experience neglects the development of a sense of individuality, agency, and one's own self, as distinct from the dyad; too great a tilt toward an intrapsychic view of the organization of experience under-estimates the contributions of the partner and the environment..." (p. 380).

To redress imbalance in either direction, many clinicians attempt to integrate an intrapsychic approach with interpersonal analysis. This has spawned discussions about the integration of "one-person" and "two-person" psychologies. In response to these

discussions, Mitchell (2000) writes, “ The argument for a hybrid model that combines one- and two-person perspectives represents a confusion of conceptual levels. It empties out the individual persons from the two-person model and then claims that we need a one-person-two-person hybrid to bring them back. But the individuals were accounted for in the two-person model all along—how could they not be? What would it mean to have a two-person model without individual persons?—a model describing the events between people but not the people themselves?” (pp. 1-7-108). Stolorow, Atwood and Orange (2002) write, “The very phrase two-person psychology continues to embody an atomistic, isolated-mind philosophy in that two separated mental entities, two thinking things, are seen to bump into each other. We ought to speak instead of a contextual psychology, in which experiential worlds and intersubjective fields are seen as equiprimordial, mutually constituting one another in circular fashion” (pp. 95-96). How could there be intersubjective fields without individual persons, just as how could there be individual persons without intersubjective fields?

Stolorow and his collaborators speak eloquently of how the “loss of affirming, validating connections to others” results in “undermining one’s sense of existing and of being real in its most basic aspects, including the experience of oneself as an active agent and subject, as possessing an identity that is coherent and felt as authentically one’s own, as having a boundary delineating and delimiting I and not-I, and as being continuous in time and over history” (pp. 149-150). In this quote, “intersubjective contexts” appear to sustain an ongoing and relatively autonomous, or at least delineated experience of one’s own individual existence. It seems clear that we do grow in the context of relationships,

and certainly, that mal-attuned or destructive relationships, both in childhood and in therapy, produce rigid, defensive or otherwise limiting organizations of experience. But does that mean that we are entirely “constituted” by our relationships?

Many writers have approached this problem. Beebe and Lachmann (2003), for example, write, “If we do not privilege inner or relational, and instead emphasize their reciprocal co-construction, psychoanalysts will be in a stronger position to examine how dyadic process may (re-) organize both inner and relational process, and reciprocally, how changes in self-regulation in either partner may alter the interactive process (Beebe & Lachmann, 1998)” (p. 380).

Nonlinear dynamic systems theory has also given analytic writers a way to conceptualize the interplay between individual identity and interaction, describing the individual as a “system within a larger system” (Sander, quoted in Seligman, 2002, p. 5). In his discussion of Sander’s application of systems theory to analysis, Seligman writes, “Sander thus construes psychic structure as a matter of the individual organism’s capacity to coordinate its needs and interests with the environment’s responses, all taking on particular rhythms in time and space, full of affect and growing layers of meaning” (p. 4).

Aron (1996) qualifies his relational emphasis, saying that “relationships determine individuals and that individuals determine relationships” (p. 158). Discussing the work of Evelyn Fox Keller, Aron writes, “Keller (1985) introduced the notion of “dynamic autonomy” (p. 95) as a way of dealing with the problem that autonomy so often connotes a radical separation and independence from others. By contrast, dynamic autonomy is seen as a product of relatedness with others as well as of separation from them...The

notion of dynamic autonomy is an attempt to deconstruct the misleading opposition between autonomy and connection to others that so pervades our culture” (p. 151).

Here we see that relational psychoanalysis actually sharpens our focus on the problem of the self; it calls us to account for that particular “structuralization of awareness” that is experienced as the separate self, even though it is embedded in its relationships and environment. For we do seem to have the experience of self, and, as intersubjective systems theory implies, the more “healthy” we are, or the less rigid our subjective organizations of experience, the more access we have to something that feels like our own private existence.

As I wrote this paper, my desk was full of the books of other writers, just as my mind was full of the education that I have gained from them. But, although these writers have often persuaded me, some of what they say seems true or important to me, and some does not. I am motivated to write by the prodding of my own response, by ideas or insights that have somehow formed within the privacy of my own subjectivity. It is my own response that stimulates me until I finally articulate it. But in order to articulate it, I must empty my mind, I must “clear the boards,” so to speak, and be alone with myself, and wait for my own understanding to come clearly into view so that I can put it into words.

From an aerial view, my writing in response to these other writers can be seen as the circular constituting event described by Stolorow et al. But this is not my personal experience. My experience is that my response to these other writers emerges from the

depths of my individual being. I experience this as a self-organizing creative process, requiring internal, silent contact with myself.

The point I want to make with this illustration is two-fold: one, that the ability to play my part in the circular dance requires that I possess a degree of autonomy, or inward contact with myself (the ability to hear my own thoughts) and two, that my part in the dance has not been entirely produced by the other, but also by a function of my own being, a function that needs to be nurtured and developed.

The reason this seems important to me as a clinician, is that years ago I was less capable than I am now of experiencing my own responses. I remember sitting at my typewriter, and, just as many of my patients describe, not being able to experience the flow of creativity. I was unable to extricate myself not only from non-affirming relationships, but also from the benevolent influence of other writers. I could not be alone with myself, to find the silence out of which my own voice might emerge.

The Boston Change Process Study Group (2002) writes, “The integrity of the self as a unit, its self-organising imperative, requires continual action/reaction/interaction” (Nahum et al, p. 1054). I would only argue with the word “continual.” I suggest that the integrity and self-organizing capacity of the self, or self-experience, also requires the pulling back from interaction, periods of silence and aloneness, of relationship with oneself.

Periods of solitude can cultivate an ongoing experience of self-contact (even when in relationship with others) that clarifies our awareness of our thoughts, emotions, sensations and perceptions. The postmodern perspective that underlies intersubjective

systems theory emphasizes just this personal, individual nature of experience. If we each regard a room full of people, for example, we will each see something slightly different, something unique. I am using the term autonomy in this paper to denote the ability to experience and enjoy one's unique perspective. It means that we can receive and respond to the world with relatively less unconscious influence from the values, beliefs and images of our family and culture: we can think our own thoughts, see with our own eyes. This allows us to see the world anew, to be inspired. For most of us, this ability must be cultivated, or at least resuscitated; I believe that it is one marker of psychological health or maturity. In the Asian spiritual literature, the process of achieving more direct access to our perceptions and freeing one's own responses from the thrall of "group think" is likened to awakening from a dream.

What does it mean to be alone with oneself, to experience oneself as distinct from any dyad? Many analytic writers address the psychological aloneness of the individual, but they often describe aloneness as a state of being closed off from, or unconscious of the environment. For example, Aron (1996) writes, "There seem to be natural pulls in both directions, toward and away from others" (p. 234). But he suggests that the pull away from people is defensive, describing it as "the wish to hide, to protect oneself by not being revealed to the other" (p. 234). Ogden (1994) posits an "autistic-contiguous" position, as an addition to Klein's paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions. He sees this position not as isolation, but as a primitive type of object-relatedness "in which the object is a sensation experience (particularly at the skin surface)" (p. 174). Ogden claims that the autistic-contiguous position is part of psychological health throughout one's life;

that this sensory experience “creates a palpable sensory edge” that helps provide a sense of “boundedness of self” (p. 175). But he also describes this position as a “state in which the individual feels fully engrossed” and “in which one can immerse oneself” (p. 175). He writes, “I am proposing that from the beginning of psychological life (and continuing throughout life), there exists a form of experience in which the mother as psychological matrix is replaced by an autonomous sensory matrix. In replacing the environmental mother with an autonomous sensation matrix, the infant creates an essential respite from the strain (and intermittent terror) inherent in the process of coming to life in the realm of living human beings” (p. 177).

Here Ogden says that aloneness is part of healthy life, and yet he also describes it as a defensive reaction to the “terror” of the human environment. Furthermore, he does not describe the individual as alone with his or her thoughts or feelings, but only with sensations. This aloneness is, in Ogden’s words, an “auto-sensuous sanctuary” and “a realm of impenetrable, uninterrupted non-being” (p. 180).

Winnicott (1958) expressed what seems a more positive view of aloneness. He believed that the adult’s capacity to be alone was “one of the most important signs of maturity in emotional development” (p. 416). He wrote, “The pathological alternative is a false life built on reactions to external stimuli” (p. 418). He thought that the capacity to be alone was based on an infantile state of “unintegration” or at-one-ness with the mother/environment. Interestingly, he also believed that this capacity to be alone developed within, and in a sense, because of, the reliable presence of the mother. He writes, “The individual who has developed the capacity to be alone is constantly able to

rediscover the personal impulse, and the personal impulse is not wasted because the state of being alone is something which (though paradoxically) always implies that someone else is there” (p. 419).

Although this capacity for aloneness develops in the presence of the reliable mother—in other words, within a nurturing intersubjective context—Winnicott wrote of the personal self as something discovered rather than created. He posited an “innate primary creativity” (1947, In Winnicott, 1957) and wrote, “It is in playing and only in playing that the child or adult is able to be creative and use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self” (1968, In Winnicott, 1971, p. 54). Wallbridge & Davis write that he “regarded ‘the Real’ as emanating primarily from the inner reality, fantasy being ‘more primary’ than shared reality” (p. 55). In Winnicott’s (1958) view, the solitary self can be full of life, while the capacity to be alone while in relation to others is necessary for “ego relatedness.”

Winnicott’s perspective is particularly interesting to me in light of the meditation experience that I will describe shortly. The aloneness of the self—that is, the experience of separateness—is necessary for genuine connection with other people. Many writers have presented some version of this idea. For example, Aron (1996) writes that “intimacy requires both autonomy and connection” (p. 232). Kohut (1984) maintained that self-love develops concurrently with the capacity for object love. He wrote, “This means that narcissism, like object love, evolves from archaic to mature forms...the formulation that narcissism is replaced by object love—that narcissism is archaic and object love mature—is in error (see Kohut 1978b, 2:757—70)” (p. 185).

Stolorow et al. (2002) particularly emphasize the interdependence of the experience of oneself and experience of the other, even though they sometimes appear to minimize the direction of growth towards autonomy. They write, “Experiences of selfhood and worldhood are inextricably bound up with one another, in that any dramatic change in the one necessarily entails corresponding changes in the other....The dissolution of one’s selfhood thus produces an inevitable disintegrating effect on the person’s experience in general and results ultimately in the loss of coherence of the world itself. Likewise, the breakup of the unity of the world means the loss of a stable reality in relation to which the sense of self is defined and sustained, and an experience of self-fragmentation inevitably follows in its wake” (p. 145).

Meditation

As I said at the beginning of the paper, meditation practices can facilitate our ability both to be alone, and to be intimate with others. It can therefore be used as an effective auxiliary to our work with clients as they negotiate these inextricably inter-related domains of human experience. There are many different types of meditation practice, producing somewhat different effects. I am concerned here with practices, such as Realization Process, mentioned earlier, that help us attune or open to a subtle, unified dimension of consciousness. This is an experience of vibrant spaciousness pervading both the internal space of one’s body and one’s environment at the same time. Because we experience this expanse of subtle consciousness pervading our body, it feels as if we

are inside, inhabiting, our whole body at once. Because we experience it pervading our body and environment at the same time, it provides an experience of self/other oneness.

There are many references to this pervasive, unified (or nondual) consciousness, particularly in the spiritual literature of India and Tibet. For example, a Tibetan Buddhist text says, “This vast expanse, unwavering, indescribable, and equal to space, is timelessly and innately present in all beings” (Rabjam, 2001, p. 83).

A scholar of the Kashmir Shaivism (Hindu) philosophy, Muller-Ortega (1989), writes, “No longer do finite objects appear as separate and limited structures; rather, the silent and translucent consciousness out of which all things are composed surfaces and becomes visible as the true reality of perceived objects” (p. 182).

Some Buddhist traditions (Dzog-chen and Mahamudra) call this subtle, pervasive consciousness “self-knowing” or self-reflecting” (see Traleg, 1999, Rabjam, 1998). It experiences itself as the unchanging, unified ground of our being, within which our specific thoughts, emotions, sensations and perceptions occur. The more access we have to this subtle ground-consciousness, the more we can let go of repetitive organizations of experience that obstruct the fluidly and spontaneity of our thoughts, emotions, sensations and perceptions. It is this fluidity and spontaneity of responsiveness that gives rise to the experience of “nowness” that has been popularized by contemporary spiritual teachers such as Eckhart Tolle (1999).

Whereas up to now in this paper, I have presented views from the psychoanalytic literature that offer both experiential and theoretical or explanatory modes of discourse, I wish to alert the reader that in my discussion of meditation and its clinical applications, I

will be speaking entirely from the standpoint of experience. However, my claims are based on two decades of clinical experience in which I have used Realization Process to help people inhabit their bodies, attune to the qualities of their being, and experience (or uncover) a unified field of subtle consciousness pervading their bodies and their surroundings. This work includes exercises that two people can practice together to experience the simultaneity of internal cohesion and self/other oneness (see Blackstone, 2007).

Meditation cultivates an experience of self, or subjectivity, that is not narrative or representational. It is the experienced quality of one's existence, rather than one's beliefs or behaviors, or one's reflective self-consciousness in reaction to objects. Twentieth century Japanese philosopher Nishitani (1982) writes, "...we stand more to the near side of ourselves in emptiness than we do in self-consciousness" (p. 98). This may be what Winnicott meant by the experience of "being." Winnicott (1970) wrote, "After being, doing and being done to. But first, being" (In 1971, p. 86). This is a nearness to ourselves that is more subtle than verbal constructions.

It may also be akin to Damasio's (1999) "core consciousness" which he describes as the "mysterious source of our mental first-person perspective" (p. 312). He writes, "...a theory of consciousness should account for the simpler, foundational kind of the phenomenon which occurs close to the nonconscious representation of the organism for whose sake the entire show is put together and which can support the later developments of identity and person" (p. 18). Interestingly, Damasio is concerned with the "feeling" of consciousness. He writes, "consciousness *feels* like a feeling" (p. 312).

Damasio describes consciousness as a “feeling of knowing” (p. 313), but the subtle consciousness cultivated through meditation is made up of many different qualities. For example, love has a quality to it, power has a quality to it, gender and sexuality are qualitative experiences, not just abstract self-representations or behaviors. Our intelligence also has a quality to it; it is not just a function. As Damasio seems to suggest, we can feel the quality of our intelligence. If the reader would like to test this, you can remember a time when you were writing something and paused to think of the right word to convey your idea. The memory of waiting for the word to emerge may give you a “felt sense” of your intelligence.

Kohut (1984) suggested the potential to experience one’s own being when he referred to, “such *introspectively accessible* features of self experience as the self’s cohesion, firmness, vigor, vitality, and harmoniousness” (p. 65, italics mine). Meditation practices, particularly those mentioned above, can facilitate the experience of oneself as cohesive and harmonious. Many analytic writers today maintain that we have “multiple selves” (Bromberg, 1998; Mitchell, 1993), meaning that we constantly reconfigure ourselves in relation to our changing circumstances. Although I believe that this is true, meditation practice helps reveal an underlying, ongoing experience of cohesion, or wholeness. This may be the “sense of self” that Lichtenberg, Lachmann and Fosshage (2002) refer to when they write, “we have supported Kohut’s claim for the essential sameness in most instances of a sense of self (not a ‘structure’ of self)” (p. 184). (See Rubin, 1996, for a discussion of Buddhist and psychoanalytic conceptions of self).

Meditation helps us experience wholeness and cohesion in several ways. One is by cultivating access to the vertical core of one's body. Asian traditions (see Motoyama, 1981) describe a subtle energy channel that runs through the vertical core of the body from the base of the spine to the center of the top of the head. They teach that there are points (*chakras*) along this channel associated with particular qualities and capacities of our being, such as intelligence, love, power and sexuality. As we contact the vertical core of ourselves, we are able to experience the various aspects of our being simultaneously. This means, for example, that we can think, feel and sense at the same time. We can experience love and power, at the same time. We experience our being as an integrated whole.

Through this same inward self-contact, meditation practices also cultivate mind/body integration. This means that we do not experience ourselves as having a mind and a body, or a self and a body, but rather that our mind is in our whole body. We inhabit our whole body all at once. Shunryu Suzuki, a 20th century Zen master, wrote, "To stop your mind does not mean to stop the activities of mind. It means your mind pervades your whole body" (Suzuki, 1980, p. 41). Through meditation, we can experience this subtle, pervasive ground of our being pervading the changing occurrences of our various configurations. Yuasa (1987) writes, "...the oneness of the body-mind is an ideal for inward meditation as well as for outward activities" (p. 24).

Winnicott described an aspect of development called "personalization." Davis & Wallbridge (1981) write, "A particularly important aspect of integration was referred to by Winnicott as 'personalization,' by which he meant the acquisition of a personal body

scheme with the ‘psyche indwelling in the soma.’...Personalization means not only that the psyche is placed in the body, but also that eventually, as cortical control extends, the whole of the body becomes the dwelling place of the self’ (pp. 37-38). Winnicott felt that this occurred sometime in infancy. However, our repetitive subjective organizations and abstract self-representations obstruct our inward contact with ourselves and fragment our mind/body integration. For this reason, for the whole of the body to be experienced as the dwelling place of the self is considered by some spiritual traditions to be an ideal that can be approached through meditation.

Meditation practice also cultivates a sense of the substantiality of one’s individual being. The qualitative experience of being is not abstract; it is palpable. As we inhabit the internal space of our body, we experience ourselves as taking up space. We have internal depth and volume. This in-depth contact with the internal space of our body can provide a sense of being alone within our own skin, of being immersed in our own being.

Inward contact, or immersion in our own body and being, is also the basis of openness and fluidity. Wherever we inhabit our own body, we are open to the environment. If we inhabit the internal space of our chest, for example, we will experience the quality of love within our chest, as the quality and substance of our own being. But we will also respond to the environment from that depth of ourselves. The more deeply we inhabit our chest, the more deeply we will experience emotional responsiveness towards the world around us. And if someone puts a hand on our chest, we will be able to feel the warmth and the quality of that person’s touch all the way through the internal depth of our chest.

Here is an example of the use of Realization Process from a recent session with Sam, a warm, empathic man in his late forties. Sam came to work with me when his twenty-five year marriage ended. He had suddenly recognized that he had been living vicariously through his wife instead of forming his own friendships and interests. In our interactions, I often felt a lively emotional engagement with him, and an ongoing sense of emotional contact or resonance between us. Because of this emotional connection, I enjoyed his company and I was often caught by surprise when he complained of social inadequacy and an internal feeling of deadness. After several months, it became clear that these feelings were based on his doubts about his intelligence. He described his father as “brilliant” but his mother, with whom he had been much closer, was a “simple, generous woman.” He felt that his wife had been more like his father in this regard; she worked as a freelance magazine writer and had a wealth of knowledge and strong opinions on a wide variety of subjects. Sam said that he felt “constantly entertained” by her, and without her, he felt dull and boring.

He had a way of ducking his head when he talked about these things and I recognized this gesture as larger version of a very subtle movement he made whenever I offered my point of view on whatever we were discussing. In addition to exploring this aspect of our relationship, and how it related to his previous relationships, I taught him the following exercise from Realization Process. First he inhabited his own brain (not just the frontal lobes, but his whole brain). This is an experience of actually being inside the internal space of one’s head. It is not just awareness *of* the internal space of the head, but a sense that one actually *is* that internal space. I have found that everyone can do this,

to some extent. If someone has difficulty with this, they can put a hand lightly on either side of their head and feel that they inhabit the space between their hands.

He then attuned to the quality of his understanding (I suggest attuning to the quality of understanding rather than intelligence because I have found that people will inhabit more of their head in this attunement; the cue to attune to the quality of intelligence generally evokes engagement of just the forehead). Sam was surprised but very pleased that he could actually experience the quality of his understanding. He said it was the first time that he was aware of “life in his head.”

We then both attuned to the quality of understanding within our own brain while, at the same time, we attuned to the quality of understanding within each other’s brain. Although many people are puzzled when they first hear this instruction, everyone I have worked with has found that they are capable of this attunement to self and other. The qualitative level of our being has the capacity to experience the qualitative level of other people.

This exercise evoked an experience of resonance between us—not a merging of our understanding, for we were each still inhabiting our own head, but a vivid sense of connection across the distance between us. Sam was delighted at this “meeting of minds.” He felt an actual sense of equality with me, a sense that there was room for his own mind, and that his experience of his own mind enriched our connection with each other.

There is recognition in the analytic literature of the subtler ranges of the concurrence of self-connection and connection with others. Coburn (2001) writes, “it is

paradoxically exactly our embeddedness in our subjectivity that, far from acting as an encumbrance, enables and facilitates the reciprocal and mutual processes of emotional attunement” (p. 304). Self-contact is very different than isolation or estrangement, in which our troubled relations with others cause us to wall ourselves off from the world. Self-contact is permeability, a transparency to our surroundings, in which we gain an increasingly full awareness of and participation in the larger system of which we are a part.

As our attunement to the subtle, unified consciousness pervading our own body progresses, we can also experience this subtle consciousness pervading everything around us. Yuasa (1987) writes, “Every being is changed to a perfectly coherent radiance, made transparent through the illumination of the transcendent” (p. 156). As we cultivate, or uncover, the subtle ground of our being, we experience this subtle dimension of consciousness pervading our own body and everything around us at the same time. This is experienced as a mutual permeability or mutual transparency of self and other. It is the basis of a sense of oneness with our surroundings. It is also the basis of an experience of sameness between ourselves and others. Coburn (2001) writes, “it is our human sameness and its high degree of specificity that allow us the potential for resonating with the unique, affective experiences of another” (306). The cultivation of our subtle, pervasive consciousness can facilitate what Coburn calls “affective resonance,” as well as resonance in all other qualitative aspects of our being.

Some Asian spiritual teachings do suggest that we lose complete sense of our individual being as we identify ourselves with the nondual dimension of consciousness. I

believe this view may have originally been meant as pedagogy, a means of helping people relinquish the rigid self-representations that obscure the qualitative dimension. In any case, it disregards the changes that occur in the qualitative experience of our own being—the aliveness within our skin—that occurs as we become open to the field of self-other oneness. Nishitani (1982) writes, “It is the field in which each and every thing—as an absolute center, possessed of an absolutely unique individuality—becomes manifest as it is in itself” (p. 164).

We discover the qualitative experience of being as we make inward contact with ourselves. The Asian literature calls it “self-arising;” it is not something that we have to construct or hold. All meditation practices help us let go of our grip on ourselves. Whatever their method, they are all about letting go, so that we can discover this integrated, qualitative, open dimension of ourselves. As we let go of our protective grip on ourselves, the resulting experience of internal cohesion strengthens our sense of self-possession. But it also enables us to respond more spontaneously. It allows us to be more deeply moved and transformed by life, to surrender ourselves, with less fear of annihilation, to the moment-by-moment flow of circumstances, and the mutual impact of relationships.

Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to show how some meditation techniques can contribute, both theoretically and clinically, to a subject that is at the forefront of analytic discourse: the relationship of individual self-experience to self-other interdependence. I have discussed how meditation, in particular, Realization Process, can uncover a qualitative

level of experience, and facilitate both deepened self-contact and openness to others. The more inward contact we have with our separate form, the more the experienced boundary between our own form and our environment dissolves. I have also suggested that if the focus of analytic practice shifts too exclusively towards its relational aspect, we risk minimizing our understanding and nurturance of the inward direction of human development, with its creative and qualitative potentials.

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