

Contemplative Exercises for Enhancing Experiential Self-Understanding

Opinion

"No man can reveal to you aught but that which already lives half asleep in the dawning of your knowledge. The teacher who walks in the shadow of the temple, among his followers, gives not of his wisdom, but rather of his faith and his lovingness. If he is indeed wise, he does not bid you enter the house of his (underlining ours) wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind." (underlining ours).

(Khalil Gibran, *The Prophet*. NY: A. Knopf, 1923, p. 56)

Gibran's statement above, which prefaces these exercises, suggests that the kind of self-knowledge and self-understanding that is necessary to produce growth and mental health in you comes only through your own direct self-observation and experiential self-discovery. No teacher, counselor, psychotherapist, analyst, or Guru (i.e., spiritual advisor and guide of whatever religion or philosophy) can ever know the truth of you as well as you can know it. The experiential truth of you has no predetermined, controlled, route to it. It is abiding within you from moment to moment, and no one else's mind but yours has direct, unmediated access to that moment to moment experiential truth of yourself. To discover the real truth of yourself, you must not rely on guidance from others, that is, you must not be taught to hold any predetermined, exclusive, viewpoint, although other individuals who are in empathic communion with you can sometimes alert you to aspects of yourself that you have not previously noticed. The process of direct self-observation or looking at the experiential truth of yourself is your own inner "guru." The experiential insight that leads to appropriate action is not something that can be coaxed out of you as you sit across from some kind of counselor whose only claim to wisdom hangs framed as a diploma or license of certification on his/her office wall. Likewise, it does not come from sensitivity training sessions in which some individuals engage in evasive, insincere psychological "games," camouflaging the experiential truth of themselves by superimposing predetermined psychosocial "masks," seeking to be viewed by others and by oneself in particular ways.

Instead, genuine experiential self-understanding comes only when the mind is totally alone with itself, without any predetermined goals or preselected self-interpretations. Genuine self-understanding arises only when the mind is open and receptive, not going anywhere, without distractions of any kind, so that it can clearly and directly observe and understand the experiential truth of self. This process, in essence, is what contemplation or meditation is all about. It is an attempt to help you to get to contact and understand yourself better, to be in better (unmediated, undistorted) contact with the reality of the experiential truth of yourself. Being sensitively or keenly open to the experiential truth of yourself, so that you can be real, or genuine, is the essential basis of psychological health and wellbeing. When one is psychologically healthy and capable of being aware of all aspects of oneself, as well as being sensitively aware of what is actually arising in one's encounters with other individuals and phenomena around oneself, then one is in a

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position of appreciating life most creatively and to its fullest.

Probably the most difficult kind of sensitivity for one to develop is toward oneself. You tend to avoid the experiential truth of yourself because it is so often in conflict with your idealized image of what you think that you should be. You may presume that psychological growth involves progression toward the goal of becoming that idealized image, but "growth" toward some ideal is no growth at all; it is really only the construction, development, and elaboration of an artificially constructed, presumptive self-interpretation or psychosocial mask that conceals and distorts what you really are. It's all imaginary and artificial because you never stop being what you naturally and actually are by turning your back on what you are, and pursuing an image of what you presume that you ought to be. When you reject, deny, and avoid awareness of what you are actually being and experiencing, it continues to cling to you, like a heavy psychological burden to carry, like a monkey on your back. As you reject more and more of the actual experiential truth of yourself, in your attempt to validate and achieve your idealized self-image, the psychological burden becomes heavier and weighs you down more and more, until you break down and collapse under the strain, at which time symptoms of emotional disturbance become manifest.

What also draws you away from the experiential truth of yourself is your unconscious commitment to yourself to run from psychological or mental/emotional pain. This commitment stems from your deep inner conviction that the pain is absolutely intolerable to bear, and if you do not run from it, it will overwhelm you. The origin of this fear and conviction goes back to the time of early infancy, when you felt extreme pain from the tension of hunger, and because your reasoning apparatus was not very much developed, you reacted physiologically to this pain, and felt that this pain was going to annihilate you, psychologically and physically. You were helpless in your own efforts to reduce the pain, and you had no means of understanding that the reduction of this pain was dependent upon someone else coming with milk. So, if your mother was not immediate in coming when you screamed, you reacted physiologically as though you were helpless to eliminate the pain you were under, and that it likely would never cease, and, therefore, it threatened you with annihilation. That is why,

even today, when you are more mature, it still frightens you to feel helpless and vulnerable, and it explains why, at the first sign of tension and pain, either physical or mental, you immediately try to reduce it. That is also why most people are more frightened of being abandoned and helpless in the face of unalterable pain than they are even of death.

Psychological or mental/emotional pain from which you run is usually in the form of an uncomfortable thought, feeling, or impulse, such as, some kind of fear, anger, guilt, sexual impulse, or a loss. The loss may either be in the form of a loved person, either through death, abandonment, or rejection or the loss may be the result of a diminishing of self-esteem. Loss of self-esteem usually takes the form of a failure to fulfill an esteemed goal or an esteemed image of yourself. For example, you have an image of yourself as being a very intelligent person, which becomes severely threatened when you receive a very low grade on an examination; or to take another example, you may have an image of yourself as a very unselfish person, and then someone tells you that you behaved very selfishly in a particular situation; or to take a more typical example, you have an image of yourself as a good parent, but your child lowers that image of yourself by doing poorly in school or by getting into some kind of trouble in the community.

The means that you choose to run from pain are various and unlimited. It may take the form of some kind of drug or pill; or some means of diversionary distraction such as TV, transistor radio by your ear, phonograph, DVD's, movies, reading, hobbies, and various kinds of escapist interpersonal and sexual relationships; or through the use of some kind of psychological defense mechanism, which may result in avoidance and escape through pleasurable fantasy, and/or through the distracting process of obsessive thoughts or pseudo feelings such as, anxiety, depression, tension, fatigue, etc.; or in the form of some kind of system of thought, such as, some kind of philosophy, psychology, or theology, which claims to offer a doctrine or method for giving you comfort, peace, and security, such as, "Never give up hope", "The power of positive thinking", or the value of chanting sounds or mantras; concentration on a symbol or joy and peace, or some form of self-hypnosis. Careful study of those "panaceas" will reveal that they are all, in one form or another, a kind of subtle escape from what is, and the encouragement of the pursuit of what purportedly "ought to be." For this is the essential basis of the psychologically pathological process. Emotional and mental disturbances are usually the result of some form of withdrawal from reality. The only real and profound sense of inner peace, security, and happiness that exists comes only when the mind quiets through the self-understanding which results when you confront, honestly, the moment to moment reality and truth of yourself. Toward this end, meditation can be extremely helpful.

In essence, you have learned to condition yourself to run at the first sign of anything negative, uncomfortable, or painful, and now you do it almost automatically and without being aware of it, which has resulted in an extensive dulling of your sensitivities. As soon as your mind catches the first glimpse of a painful feeling or thought, it "turns its back on it", so to speak, and pretends that it does not exist, and focuses the attention on something else. The more psychological pain you escape from, the more insensitive to reality and emotionally disturbed you become. This is because avoidance of pain necessitates a distortion and escape from reality,

not only internally, but also outwardly, in order to guarantee that you will not be exposed to anything that could possibly threaten you or give you pain. Thus, for example, if you cannot face the pain of your own angry feelings, then you will avoid those persons and circumstances that could possibly make you angry, and you will distort everything that is said to you that could possibly make you angry. Later on in the day, you may permit yourself to recognize what the other person was really saying to you, and you may then become angry because you are no longer in the other person's presence, and, therefore, you feel that it is safer and less painful to now let the truth come to awareness.

It is important that you recognize that the more you run from pain, the less pain you will be able to tolerate, and the more you will have to run. This kind of constant escape from self-confrontation prevents the self-discovery of the directly observed experiential truth within yourself, and it is the self-discovery of that which is real and truthful about yourself that liberates you from the grasp of constant conflict and tension, and is, therefore, the basis of peace of mind, and feeling fully creative and alive. So do not expect books or any other person to give you the truth of yourself, because the truth that you learn by these means is basically just intellectual, and still keeps you outside of yourself, distracted from directly, keenly, observing what is actually arising within yourself from moment to moment. This prevents, from taking place, the real integration necessary to yield the kind of self-understanding that liberates you from conflict, and produces emotional growth.

It is essential that you understand that your commitment to escape from psychological pain must be undone. You must come to see that psychological pain is not bad in an absolute sense. You must learn to acknowledge your pain in whatever degrees you can handle it, and learn to see what it is that is really causing you to interpret the event as painful. Come to recognize, for yourself, that just pinning the label of "painful" on an event contributes greatly to your experiencing it as such, and trying to escape it. See if you can learn to put such a label on a particular experience. This will help you to stay in contact with the experience longer, and, thereby, come to experience what it is really all about. If you run away from uncomfortable feelings and experiential states, you can never come to understand anything genuine about yourself or the thing from which you run. For example, see how often you label an experience as being "unbearable" even though you have never really tried to bear it. See how it becomes much more bearable when you do not label it as being unbearable or just passively observe it, without predetermined interpretations, to see what it actually is. The meditations or contemplative exercises that follow later in this article are designed to help you in all of these endeavors.

The self-alienation which results from your running from the experiential truth of yourself produces a dulling insensitivity to yourself, which makes you feel inwardly "dead" instead of feeling a heightened awareness and sense of vitality and aliveness. Thus, in order to feel "turned on", i.e., in order to experience a pulsating sense of inner vitality, you turn to artificial euphorics and stimulants such as, drugs and various kinds of excessive thrill-seeking activities, or intense and varied sexual and emotional stimulation. In essence, you have not really changed. Instead of being a mask with a down-turned mouth, you are now a mask with an up-turned mouth, as a pseudo smile. Your gaiety is superficial;

it is without real substance and happiness. Artificial euphorics keep you only temporarily from the experiential truth of your own inner sense of despair and emptiness, for eventually the truth must catch up with you, perhaps in an unguarded moment, or after a personal trauma, and then the price that you must pay in terms of psychological disability is substantially greater than had you confronted the painful truth originally.

Excessive stimulation only dulls and desensitizes the feeling-heart, mind, and senses. It forcefully captures the attention of the mind, and keeps it in bondage with self-alienating habitual responses. Thus, for example, after you tune into internet, television, or radio for a long time, you find that your mind is still chattering with the things that have been impression upon it even without your consent or approval. You find yourself humming inane commercials or jingles which you may not even like, but they are cluttering your consciousness, nevertheless. It is necessary to stop constantly feeding stimulation to the mind, and give it a chance to quiet, otherwise, the level of adaptation to stimulation will become so high that you will become addicted to the need for stimulation, and you will, one day, find yourself in a state of constant frenzy, trying to find greater and greater levels and variety of intense stimulation. The more addicted you become to the need for stimulation, the more you feel as if you were dying when the stimulation begins to wear off, or when you begin to adapt to it, or when you find yourself in moments of monotony or boredom.

The more that your mind and senses are dulled by the bombardment of intense stimulation, the more you become insensitive and unaware of the reality of yourself, others, and the world. Ironically, the more alive that you make yourself feel, through the ingestion of euphorics and stimulants, the more you are deadening yourself to life, for a genuine feeling of aliveness and vitality comes only with clear and full contact with, and awareness of, that which is most deeply real and alive in yourself. In order to achieve this, a quiet, non-distracting, non-chattering mind is necessary. Drugs and stimulants produce only a pseudo "high" through the varied and intense sensations that they bring, but the mind is still as petty as it ever was. Only a mind that comes to be profound, keenly penetrating, and quiet, through progressively deeper and deeper levels of self-observation and experiential self-understanding can produce the real "high" that comes with liberation from intrapsychic conflicts, and liberation from your identification with the false in yourself. This liberation brings the release of formerly tied up psychic energy, which, when made available to our conscious awareness, is experienced as deep feelings of peace, beauty, love, and joy. Meditation or contemplation can be extremely helpful in this regard.

Meditation Exercise

Before we discuss what meditation is, we will first try to dispel some false notions in regard to some popular beliefs about meditation. There is nothing to fear in meditation. It is not a trance state in which you lose consciousness. On the contrary, in meditation, you will find that your conscious awareness is heightened, sensitized, or made more keenly penetrating than ever before. Meditation is not day-dreaming. In day-dreaming, the self, or the conscious volitional intention, determines and controls the specific content of thought, whereas in meditation, the self or thinker is not active, and thoughts are permitted to come and go

as they will. True meditation does not involve the following of any system, method, or predetermined goal. It does not involve the repetition of words or sounds, and does not involve any kind of chanting. In no way does it involve anything imitative. It is a totally creative and spontaneous process. It does not involve concentration, i.e., fixing or focusing the mind on one thought to the exclusion of all other thoughts. Concentration involves a rejection of what is for what ought to be, which only produces effort, strain, and conflict, whereas meditation is a free-flowing, non-directed, and non-controlled consciousness. Meditation is in no way any form of self-hypnosis or self-analysis. It is entirely without any effort or purpose.

Essentially, meditation is facing or directly observing whatever is actually arising in one's own mind or experience. Meditation is to be aware of every thought, every feeling, every motive, and every desire, however trivial or transient; never to judge it as right or wrong, good or bad, but just to watch it as a fact, and commune in non-duality with it. In that watching or direct, unmediated, uninterpreted, observation, you will begin to understand the whole movement of thought and feeling, and out of this awareness comes a quiet and peaceful mind. Meditation is thought aware of its own activities, but not the separated thinker or observer being aware of his thought. Meditation is basically the understanding of the ego or personal entity self, which produces the transcendence of that limited and false conceptual self, which brings the awakening of oneself to that most deep, real, limitless, non-conceptual, True Self.

In order to obtain the best possible results in meditation, put aside at least one half-hour a day, preferably just after awakening in the morning, but if this time is not suitable, then do it just before falling asleep at night. At these times, you tend to be in a rather drowsy or groggy state, which may be called a highly suggestable or hypnagogic "twilight zone", and the controlling, interfering sense of self is least intact, making possible the creative intrusion into consciousness of those truths within you which have previously been rejected or repressed. Never sit in meditation when you feel pushed to go somewhere or to do something; your time will only be wasted. Try to find a suitable time to meditate when you have no immediate appointments waiting for you. Make sure that you are in a room that is without any noise or distractions of any kind, or at least kept to a minimum. The temperature in the room should be constant and comfortable. Sit up in bed cross-legged or on a chair with feet flat on the floor. Make sure that your back is erect. Lying down should be avoided, for that will lead to excessive rambling of thought, or sleep. Then softly close your eyes and relax all bodily and mental tensions. Just "let go" and permit whatever wants to come to your awareness to come. Be in that state of mind where there is no deliberate thinking or seeking of predetermined goals. You need only permit the contents of consciousness to rise and fall without making any effort of any kind to interfere with it. There should be no labeling, speculative interpretation, condemning, justifying, resisting, controlling, directing, or initiating the contents of consciousness. These only interfere with the free flow of consciousness, and distractingly prevent you from being able to closely follow the movement of your spontaneous free-flowing thought. Be totally desireless, completely without motives or goals, making no effort of any kind, in any direction, to do, achieve, or become anything. In essence, be in that state of mind in which there is no reaching

out, pursuing, or intention of any kind. Let go, and just be. Sit in peace. The acquisitive, accumulating, striving, drive of becoming a something or a somebody; of making the “me” more, must be put aside during this rest period. One day, it will put itself aside when its true meaning is deeply understood.

In reality, there really is no such thing as a personal entity self, which one experiences as the “me.” The entity self, or the defined sense of identity and separate self-awareness, has just apparent, presumptive, or imaginal reality, and consists basically of a collection of memories, experiences, desires, and motives, all held together with the thread of some apparently consistent self-concept. However, all that you really are is your experiential reality from moment to moment. Humanity’s basic problem is related to the fact that because he identifies with his ego, he lives in a sense of duality or psychological distance from his experience, as the separate knower, judge, and controller of it. The ego is always outside of its experience rather than being one or unified with it. He sees himself as the separate experiencer of his experiences, the observer of the observed, the knower of the known, the thinker of the thought, and the doer of what is done, when in fact, there is no such real separation. There is truly only the state of experiencing, observing, knowing, thinking, and doing. Both the subject and the object that produce the state of duality or distancing from our actual experiential states come into apparent existence only after the fact of experiencing, and are basically illusory but necessary in order for the ego, or the separate sense of self and defined identity to affirm and enhance itself. Otherwise, the fear would set in that one is basically just a nullity, a void, and this is tantamount to a fear of psychological non-existence, a psychological death anxiety. For all of one’s conscious life, all of one’s thoughts and feelings have repeatedly assumed and confirmed just one affirmation, and that is, the existence of the separate self. To surrender the false belief that one is a separate ego is to surrender all that has seemed to constitute one’s very existence.

With this recognition, it then also becomes clear that all of one’s states of elation are due, basically, to either the conscious or unconscious perception that some kind of enhancement, accretion, aggrandizement, or affirmation of the ego has taken place; whereas the dysphoric states such as, anxiety and depression are basically the result of the perception that the ego has been, or is about to be, diminished or lessened in some way. (Anxiety differs essentially from depression in that the experience of anxiety is the reaction of fear involving the putting of the ego “on the line”, with the expectation that a diminishing or a non-confirmation of the ego is about to occur; whereas psychological depression may be understood as the reaction equivalent to the experience that the diminishing or non-confirmation of the ego has already taken place). This recognition is usually accompanied by the unconscious fearful recognition that this lessening of the ego is moving in the direction of, and could ultimately lead to, the total annihilation of the ego. Because one is so terrified of this apparent state of psychological annihilation, and its symbolic equivalents, as manifested in more conscious states such as, loneliness, boredom, emptiness, and meaninglessness, one constructs an objectified “me” in the form of a self-concept, and then devotes one’s life trying to protect, defend, enhance, aggrandize, and in some way affirm, and make absolute, exclusive, and permanent, this conceptual self or presumptively defined identity.

Every desire and motive has as its basic aim the affirmation and inflation of the ego, which is one’s unconscious attempt to move further and further away from the sense of nullity or inner void. Many of one’s strivings are basically devoted to making the “me” more. This drive to accumulate takes many forms, such as, possessions, experiences, knowledge, power, fame, money, accomplishments, relationships, identifications with various kinds of persons and groups, etc. Anything to which one can attach the word “my” or “mine”, or whatever one invests pride in, serves to personalize and strengthen the sense of self.

It is this acquisitive drive that puts one in a constant state of tension, conflict, and unhappiness. It is this drive which also makes one live in imagination, in the state of Becoming, i.e., trying to become or conditionally achieve something that one presumes to be better than what one already is. In the process of trying to become or achieve some goal or ideal, there must invariably be conflict and tension. All attempts at Becoming is a rejection of what is, and a striving toward the imaginal or presumptive ideal of what ought to be. There must always be conflict, tension, and struggle, as well as a distortion of reality in rejecting what is, and striving toward what supposedly ought to be. As long as one is identified with an image, definition, or concept of self, be it judged favorably/positive or unfavorably/negative, one must be committed and devoted to the affirmation and enhancement of that image, or else be threatened with the fear of being a nothing. Therefore, to no longer live in a state of Becoming, one must be free of the identification with any and all images and concepts of self. Then one is free to live in Being, that is, in the timeless perfect moment, without the sense of self-awareness, and without the dualizing or distancing effect of imagination, but rather, as an integral part of and in communion with the momentary reality of what is.

The sense of self-awareness creates a state of duality not only between oneself and the not self world of reality, but also functions as the censor and wall of division within oneself, between the knower and one’s known experience, as well as between known and unknown, between consciousness and unconsciousness. The only way for there to be a true understanding of a problem or inner conflict is when there is an integration between the knower, the known, and the unknown. The sense of self-awareness prevents such integration, and maintains the distorting, illusory, sense of duality and separation between the knower, the known, and the unknown. When self-awareness is absent, then duality is eliminated. The thinker and the thought merge into the state of just thinking, which is the state of true integration. This is the basic therapeutic state, or process. It is only in this state that true growth can take place, for growth necessitates integration or restoration of previously unknown, rejected, and repressed feelings and experiential states into the natural wholeness of our psyche. This state may also be referred to as the state of creative understanding, or the state of creative healing, depending upon one’s particular interest and emphasis. (For many people, creative insights come spontaneously, effortlessly, of their own, early in the morning, just after barely awakening, when the sense of self is not fully intact). Healing, understanding, creativity, integration, and psychological growth are all essentially the same process. In each instance, there is the absence of any sense of self-awareness. With no censor, controller, or interpreter present, then there is no interference with the free-flowing process of thinking, feeling,

and experiencing. Then, in this non-dualistic, non-distancing, integrated, state where there is just undivided thinking, feeling, experiencing, without the interfering presence of the separate, controlling, speculatively interpreting thinker; that is, when the observer becomes one with the observed, consciousness and unconsciousness become temporarily integrated, and the totality of the problem become momentarily integrated, and the totality of the problem becomes readily apparent, and then the problem, with all of its ramifications, is then free to unravel itself to its genuine and full resolution. When the observer is fully unified with the observed, and you thoroughly understand what this means, then you can let thoughts rise and fall as they please, because you will understand that there is nothing else that you can do. There is no other you, in the form of the separate, controlling, observer, or thinker, to interfere with what comes. Then you are in the state or process of creative understanding when you come to recognize that you are not dualistically being, for example, your anger, your fear, your depression, or whatever, and not just holding yourself to be the separate observer of those from the outside. Then the basically psychologically pathological state of duality or distancing of our consciousness from our unconscious thoughts, feelings, and experiences is transcended, and the natural integrated wholeness is restored, which is what produces psychological healing and wellbeing.

In this undivided, self-unified state of creative understanding, insights come to you in flashes of vivid clarity. These moments of vivid clarity and understanding eventually enable you to see how each of your psychological activities belongs to some conditioned habitual pattern of behavior. The clear recognition of the chain of cause and effect of desire acting itself out in the present has an immediate liberating effect, for now come to realize that no desire is absolutely independent, i.e., has an absolute reality of its own, but that it is merely a reaction to a previous conditioning. In this way, repressed desires float to the surface of consciousness, where, in the strong clear light of a silent and non-judgmental mind, they are recognized for what they are, whereupon they spontaneously dissolve, never to come back. As the scriptures suggest, "You shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:32) Thus, that psychic energy which was previously tied up in keeping the truth from being discovered becomes drained, and the mind becomes quiet, and one feels unburdened, peaceful, and happy.

It is important to understand and remember that in true meditation, you must not make any effort or interfere, in any way, with the spontaneous free flow of your consciousness. Let thought, feeling, and experience operate on you as it will, instead of operating on, controlling, censoring, or manipulating your own thinking. In other words, let the thinker or observer of thought be put at rest, and permit thought to spontaneously run its own course, unimpeded. Perhaps you are concerned about how you will solve a problem if you don't actively think about it. The answer is, don't try to find a solution to a purported problem. Problems cannot be solved through effort of any kind. A problem is like a glass or pool of muddy water; the more that you stir it around, the cloudier it gets. So, do not press to find an answer to your problem. That is really an attempt to escape from the problem. The solution to the problem abides in the problem itself, and not outside of it. The solution to a problem cannot be brought to the problem from thought that has taken place away from the problem. For example,

for me to say that I want a solution to the problem of my loneliness is really my attempt to escape from my loneliness. I am saying that I don't want my loneliness anymore. I want to find a solution for it, and so I think about the ways that I can end my loneliness, which essentially involves finding newer forms of escapes, such as new friends, new places to go, or new activities to be involved with. However, no such "solution" that I bring to the problem of my loneliness will end my loneliness. Only understanding fully why I am lonely, and what loneliness is, and what it means to me, will I be able to transcend my loneliness. Loneliness is not just a problem of being without significant others; for many people who are alone do not feel lonely. So you must clearly see that the only way to come to understand and transcend your problem is not to try to escape from it in any way. Be content for the moment just to be with your loneliness. Let yourself be the loneliness (i.e., let yourself be fully non-dualistically unified with or fully immersed in the loneliness feeling), and do not just dualistically be the distancing observer of it from outside of it; for in truth, that is the only experiential self that you are actually being this moment. You are truly never being the separate observer, but rather are being only your moment to moment experiential reality. Now, instead of speaking for the problem, or interpreting it, let it speak for itself. Don't provide yourself with explanations, interpretations, analyses, theories, or opinions of your problem. Just be inside of it. Be one with it, and let it tell its own story. Then, in a moment of vivid clarity, your self-discovered experiential understanding will liberate you from the problem.

You must also be careful not to fall into the trap of "accepting" your problem in order to get rid of it, for that is also a form of trying to escape from your problem. Neither rejection nor acceptance of a problem is an appropriate solution to the problem. You should make no effort at all to try to change or get rid of your problem, but rather, only to be interested in being one with the problem. If your goal is to try to understand the problem in order to get rid of it, then you are back in the same trap. The effort to escape from the problem only puts you in the conflict of trying to make what actually is, what purportedly ought to be, and this conflict only serves as a distraction which prevents the full understanding of the problem, by making full and direct experiential contact with it, unmediated by predetermined goals and interpretations. The understanding is its own action and is sufficient to bring a transcendence of the problem.

Another major error that many persons make is to try to exert will-power or control over themselves in their attempt to coercively bring an end and resolution to their conflict. By doing so, they usually make the conflict worse. Will-power involves conflict. It is the attempt to reject what actually is for what purportedly ought to be. It involves the pitting of one part of the self against another part. A conflict can never be resolved through a means that involves more conflict. The arousal of further conflict only intensifies the conflict and tension that the person is already in. Therefore, will-power or effort toward a predetermined goal can never be effective in resolving an inner conflict, for it is, by its own nature, inherent conflict. At best, will-power can only temporarily suppress a problem, but never resolve one. Will-power only submerges one side of a problem, but because it is still there within you, it is bound to ultimately bounce back and rear its ugly head again. Those who have tried to handle a problem, such as dieting, with will power, will understand this well. People

usually eat too often and too much in an attempt to resolve a high level of tension within themselves. When they exert will-power over themselves, they put themselves in further conflict, which only intensifies their already high level of tension, and they end up wanting to eat more than ever before. Will-power only sets up an internal war within yourself, and whichever side loses, you lose too, for indeed, you are being both sides of the issue. You are being both of the conflicting desires. Therefore, instead of dividing yourself in conflict, let yourself be only what you are, and not the ideal image of what you want to be, and then you will be in a psychologically healthy, emotionally healing, natural state of integration, wholeness, and unity rather than self-contradiction. With a united psyche, or consciousness, rather than a conflictual effort, there will be nothing competitive or distracting to divide your attention and moving it away from naturally flowing the flow of thought, feeling, and experience to the essence or core of the problem. In that state, you will be able to clearly follow, for example, your intense drive to devour sweets, and ultimately come to understand and transcend this problem rather than just suppress it.

Some persons insist that they cannot permit themselves to be with the truth of themselves because the truth is too ugly. However, our view is that the truth can never really be ugly, nor can it be beautiful either, for essentially the truth is just a fact; it just is what it is. If there is anything ugly at all, it is your fearful attempt to reject and escape from the truth. As Gibran puts it,

“Call nothing ugly, my friend, save the fear of a soul in the presence of its own memories.”

(Kahlil Gibran, *The Garden of the Prophet*. New York: A. Knopf, 1933, p. 27)

You deem the truth in you to be ugly only because you live in the state of comparison in which you feel that you are not measuring up to the ideals and standards set by yourself or of those imposed on you by others. In being honest and real, there is great courage and beauty. But to defend against the awareness of the actual experiential truth of yourself, or to find excuses and justifications, in that, there is something ugly in that, because it involves a distortion of reality, which is a kind of destruction of life. To pursue the unreal fantasies and ideal images and reject what is honest, sincere, and real is ugly, also, because you presume to set yourself up higher than nature and reality; you have become a self-made God. You have created yourself in the image of what you want to be instead of what you are. Only by being with the actual experiential truth of yourself is there ever any chance to grow beyond what you now are, to be more and more of those things which are deeply embedded within you, but you cannot pursue it like another idealized image.

Only by being in that state of truth and clarity which Krishnamurti calls “choice less awareness” does growth and creativity occur. (Jiddu Krishnamurti, *The First and Last Freedom*. Wheaton, Illinois: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1954). To be in choice less awareness is to see the truth of what is, without uncertainty, ambiguity, or alternative. In the process of self-observation into the experiential truth of oneself, there is usually no room for “maybe,” “perhaps,” “it could be,” “I think,” “I believe,” etc. There is usually no room for opinion, theory, assumption, speculation, or conjecture if you are to ever understand the true nature of what is. The truth or what is actual, is really the easiest

thing in the world to see, and, as a child, you were probably much better at it than you are now. The actual experiential truth of you is usually, but not necessarily always, very precise, exact, simple, and the most obviously clear reality. The problem is that you are taught, and also teach yourself, to avoid seeing the truth. As you grow up, you learn to use psychological defenses and escapes, which makes insensitivity and avoidance your automatic response to whatever experience is actually arising in you. In addition, your mind becomes conditioned with all kinds of biases, opinions, beliefs, and idealized images and standards, so that the truth of what is becomes hidden behind a maze and barrier of psychological and conceptual irrelevancies, which makes the actual experiential truth of yourself very distant and extremely difficult to apprehend. So that now, seeing a fact as a fact has become the most difficult thing in the world for you to do. Thus, to be open and sensitively aware of what is experientially true for you, from moment to moment, you must first learn to identify your own particular defenses, evasive escapes, biased conditionings, and false images, ideas, or interpretations of yourself. This may not be easy to accomplish, but its rewards are unlimited.

Now I (Dr. Max Hammer) will describe an event from my own life which helped me to better understand this process of gaining insightful, psychologically healing and liberating, self-understanding through self-observation. Perhaps this discussion may help readers better understand and apply the principles previously discussed in this article. “I observe myself feeling and acting very destructively toward another person, toward whom I usually feel loving. That is the truth of what is actually arising in my experience, this moment. I observe that my immediate reaction to this truth is to rationalize my behavior by trying to justify it in some way. I recognize that my attempt to justify it is because I do not want to accept the fact that I can feel so violent without a just cause; that image of me is just too unacceptable. But I am still left with the fact that, this moment, I am feeling like a violent person. But again, I recognize that I cannot accept the actual experiential truth of my violent feelings, and I find myself making a vow to myself to make stronger efforts in the future to control my anger.

“Now, as I look at what my mind is doing, I recognize that I am trying to escape from the truth of what actually is arising in me, by trying to become what I purportedly ought to be. I am violent, but I feel that I ought to be non-violent. I ought to practice more self-control and will-power. I then become aware of the fact that no matter how much I control myself, or try to avoid the expression of my angry feelings, or act non-destructively, my destructive feelings will still be there shadowing me, and I will forever be in conflict trying to resist and deny them. Then the awareness comes that if I just let myself be fully unified with my violent feelings, then there is no contradiction and conflict within me. In this state of internal unity and self-integration, I am now in a position to understand the nature of my violence and thereby be liberated from it.

“But I immediately recognize that if my goal is to be free of my violence, then again, I am rejecting what is, and pursuing what supposedly ought to be. This yearning to be free of my violence distracts me from just looking at it, and thereby understanding it. So, I just keep watching, and it is clear that my mind continues to resist being one with my violence. As I look at it, I suddenly see why this is happening. If I accept the fact that I am feeling violent, then

this recognition will be inconsistent with my image of myself as a nice, kind, loving, and helpful person. How can I be both violent and also loving and kind? This apparent contradiction would make me question who I really am, and even more importantly, it would make me question if I am anything at all. If I am not what I always believed myself to be, then my entire identity is threatened. I begin to have a hint of my own psychological annihilation anxiety in this. Now I understand better why my mind has been so resistive to accepting this momentary experiential truth of my violence.

“Now I see clearly that it is not a case of my being angry, but more correctly, that I am anger, this moment. Anger is not an attribute or feeling apart from me, but, rather, I am anger, totally, this moment. Becoming one with my anger, rather than just holding myself to be the detached observer of it, the insight that suddenly intrudes into my awareness is that my anger is related to the fact that I was trying to influence, manipulate, and control this other person, but I was meeting with resistance, and counter-attempts from this other person to influence and control me. I am very angry at the thought of being controlled and influenced by another person, and at my inability to influence that person. I see this so clearly, as I just permit myself to be my anger, and observe what it is trying to do and say.

“With the recognition of what my anger is trying to accomplish, it subsides immediately, and is supplanted by a rather intense fear. Letting myself be one with that fear, I now see how my inability to control the other person makes me feel weak, helpless, and vulnerable to attack. Then I find myself thinking that perhaps my feeling of helpless vulnerability is related to a psychological castration anxiety, or a sensitivity around defending my sense of masculinity and potency.

“Although this may be true, I quickly recognize that, again, I have deliberately interjected this theoretical explanation, in an attempt to end the creative and spontaneous free-flowing inquiry process. Fearing where my thoughts were freely going, I intentionally provided myself with a theoretical explanation of what I was feeling in order to put an end to the uncovering inquiry. I now see clearly how all explanations and interpretations that come from outside of my own self-observation and self-discovery heightens my distancing sense of duality or divisiveness from what is actually arising in me, and only functions to prevent me from coming to the experiential truth of what is actually arising in me. All that it does is to shut off the free flow of consciousness, and prevents further deeper inquiry into the truth of myself.

“With this understanding, my thoughts spontaneously return to my feelings of weakness and vulnerability. But this time, contented to just stay with these feelings, there comes the awareness, in a moment of vivid clarity, that my inability to influence and control the other person has made me doubt my own psychological existence. Now I can really see clearly how I have been trying to affirm my own psychological existence through my capacity to be the cause of some effect. I subconsciously felt that I needed to influence and control the other person in order to affirm my own self or psychological existence, through my ability to produce the desired influencing effect on the other person. If I fail to produce the influencing effect that I intend, then my Will is without potency; as if to say, I cannot influence another person, I am no cause, therefore, I am psychologically nothing or non-existent.

“I can see clearly now that my getting angry was necessary in order to help me deny my basic inner conviction and fear that I am a weak and helpless nothing. To be a non-influencing Will is to be no Will at all, it is to be nothing. Apparently, my unconscious reasoning was that if I could get some kind of reaction from this other person, indicating hurt or defeat, as a result of my anger, then I would have restored my feeling of being something substantial and real. To have brought about such an intended effect, then I would have been able to deduce that I certainly must be some kind of substantial cause, and thereby be able to deny my actual subconscious conviction that I am psychologically nothing or non-existent. Seeing deeply into the truth of all of this, I now recognize that all trace of anger is gone, and instead, there is now a deep feeling of compassion toward that person to whom I have been violent, and a feeling of love or tenderness seems to pour from me without intention. The self-discovered experiential truth of myself has liberated me from psychologically unhealthy feelings such as violent anger.”

In essence, therefore, if one can just “let be” and observe whatever thought, feeling, motive, or desire arises in awareness, then he will find that those conflicts and problems, invested with the most psychic energy, at the moment, will present themselves to awareness until all the layers of self are so contacted, understood, and transcended. Finally, one confronts the Void, or inner feelings of emptiness and nothingness which various levels of presumptive conceptual self-interpretation are designed to conceal and alleviate. If, with this same sense of self-integration or self-unification, one is content just to be with this Void or absence of self-definition and self-interpretation, and be one with it, then, lost in union with the deep “Sound of Silence”, or the Void, a moment may come in which the mind will be freed of its false sense of being a separate, self-aware ego.

One then awakens to oneself as a new Self, which may be referred to as the true Self (for one clearly recognizes the illusory and false quality of previous identifications with the ego, or the separate, conceptually defined, sense of identity), or the Transcendent Self. This is not to imply that one has become anything new or that one has really achieved anything. Rather, one awakens to the recognition that one has always been this transcendent Self, but has only now awakened to that realization. This Transcendent Self is a limitless, undefined, non-entity, relational self. It is duality transcended. It is “Paradise” regained. It is Death transcended, for in a sense, one has already “died” psychologically, and been resurrected to a more real and fulfilling life. Death, like time, is clearly understood as an illusion. Life, in truth, is Eternal. There is also the recognition that Consciousness is One. One now stands as the Unity of Love, Peace, Bliss, and Beauty. There is a surge of free-flowing creative energy that brings a rapture to which only tears can give full expression.

All descriptions, no matter how inspiring, must of necessity fall far short of the reality, because words and concepts are tools of the mind, whereas the Transcendent Experience is beyond thought. The mind has no previous knowledge and labels by which it can comprehend this realization. It can only be said that there is the immediate awareness and understanding that our consciousness naturally aspires for this realization, as its greatest possible source of happiness, fulfillment, and wellbeing.

This realization cannot come as a goal or an ideal to be pursued and achieved. If it comes, it comes only uninvited. But if it does come, you will directly know the meaning of the scriptural declaration that “The Kingdom of Heaven is within you.” You will find no system, formula, or recipe to help you achieve this event. There can never be such a system, for a system initiates, directs, and controls the contents of consciousness, and only an untracked, un-patterned, spontaneously and creatively free flowing consciousness can ever come to its own Source and liberate itself. The attainment of the truth that can liberate us from illusions and unnecessary psychological pain can only be self-discovered, and that must involve the risk of making an uncharted journey. Only by permitting oneself to be cast adrift on an uncharted sea, in a rudderless boat, moved only by the tides of one’s own moment to moment truth, can one come to that Grand Other Shore which is the Kingdom of true and complete Liberation, Peace, and Bliss.

“And he who loses his way a thousand times shall have a homecoming” (Khalil Gibran)

May you have a pleasant journey and return Home quickly.

Recommended Meditation or Contemplative Exercise

At the end of each session of meditation, contemplation, or reflection, it could be helpful to write a journal entry or report to a trusted friend or family member describing the essential insights that you are learning about yourself, and any particular issues, questions, or experiences that seem significant to you. If you have forgotten most of what occurred during the meditation, do not be concerned. Write about whatever you do remember, and if you remember nothing at all, that is also alright. However, we recommend that you write at least one journal entry or report each week. If you find yourself defensive and resistive to meditating, then write about that, seeking always to understand the truth of it. What is most important is not to feel compelled to purposefully keep a particular thought or experience in your mind in order to be able to recall it and record it later, for that will put a halt to the spontaneous and creative unfolding of the mind’s natural healing process. So do not hold onto anything. Just let whatever comes to your awareness rise and fall as it pleases. If something comes which is extremely significant or moving, then likely you will have some impression of it afterward, but if you find that you do not, do not be concerned. What is important is your growth of self-discovery and healthy psychological development, not the report.

Students tend to resist meditating, at first, because they are a little frightened and do not know what to expect. This is natural. Facing the unknown and the unexpected is always a little frightening. But after about four or five sessions, you may likely begin to recognize that nothing terrible is going to happen to you, and then meditation will be easier, and you will be able to follow your thoughts more readily. It is not unusual that when one first starts to try meditation, he finds that his thoughts race about like monkeys swinging from tree to tree. Do not be discouraged. If you continue to persist, you will find, after a few days that the mind will eventually begin to quiet, and you will be able to follow where it is going much more readily. The reason for the mind being so flighty is because it has been so much overly exposed to intense excitement and stimulation that when there is no input of stimulation, then the mind tends to race about in an attempt to provide itself with stimulation at the same level to which it

has become accustomed; otherwise, one tends to react to the reduction in internal stimulation as a kind of psychological dying or loss of vitality feeling. However, if you continue to persist in this exercise, and you give the mind full permission to present to your awareness whatever it will, then eventually your mind will become drained of all that it has repressed and contained, and will become very peaceful and quiet.

If you find that your initial reaction while you are sitting in meditation is something like, “What a waste of time. I could be using this half-hour more meaningfully. I could be doing things that are really important, etc., etc.” Instead of quitting your meditation, use this as a wonderful opportunity for you to learn about the goals that you define as being important, and how driven you are to attain them. By just watching your thoughts, you can come to understand why you have pursued those particular goals, and learn about the particular conditionings in your life that led you to the assuming of these goals. It is also an opportunity for you to learn something about your defenses, and how you typically react to perceived threats to your psychological security and wellbeing. Regardless of the way that you react to meditation, contemplation, or reflection, be honest with yourself about it, and see if you can use it as an opportunity to learn something significant about yourself.

Relaxation Exercise

Learn to take relaxation breaks like you take other kinds of breaks such as for coffee, cigarettes, beer, candy, etc. These latter indulgences cannot bring real relaxation, but only an illusion of relaxation. Unless the mind is fully relaxed by totally losing separate self-awareness, the body or the mind cannot be fully relaxed. Take periodic relaxation breaks during the day by closing your eyes and taking a deep breath and exhale it as deeply as you can. With that deep exhalation, feel all the tensions in your mind and body leaving your being, along with the exhaled breath. Stay in a kind of psychologically exhaled mood until all thought and feeling has been exhaled from your mind, so that now your mind is very quiet and peaceful. Now concentrate fully on your breathing, feeling no purpose in mind in regard to it. Focus your complete attention on your breathing as it takes place naturally and spontaneously. Just watch our breathing, but do not try to influence it in any way, such as, by trying to make it go faster, slower, or more smoothly. Just watch it, and place your entire attention upon your spontaneous breathing for about 10-15 minutes. Watch your breathing so intensely that there is no place for any thought, feeling, or awareness to enter your mind. The key is to watch your breathing with such total attention that you become totally absorbed into that breathing, and lose all sense of self-awareness. The complete loss of the sense of self-awareness is the key to true mental, emotional, and physical relaxation. Just let-go fully, and with a let-be attitude of complete desirelessness, just go along with the natural spontaneous movement of the breathing, as though you were a leaf floating atop an ocean wave to nowhere in particular. Just go along with its own natural and spontaneous rhythm. If you practice this exercise regularly, then after some period of time, you will become one with the natural and spontaneous rhythm of your breathing, and your mind will feel very peaceful and relaxed. If you continue further with this exercise, the depth of your peaceful mind will continue to grow, and you will ultimately be carried to an experience of oneness

with the natural and spontaneous rhythm of the Cosmos, which will bring you “the Peace that passes understanding.” (Philippians 4:7).

“Who-am-I?” Exercise

This exercise is designed to help one develop self-awareness and advance toward the realization of one’s True Self. It is based on the realization that in each one of us, there are various layers surrounding that central core of Self. These layers of labeled self-perceptions and self-concepts, which may be positive or negative, represent different aspects of our personality and of our relationship to the world. Some of the layers may be like a facade or mask hiding those labeled aspects of ourselves that we do not like. But somewhere within each of us lies a deep center, which is not a labelled some-thing, but is a most real experiential Something, beyond all thought or self-interpretation, it is the innermost essence of our consciousness or being. The “Who-Am-I” exercise, repeated at frequent intervals, leads one to look deeper and deeper within himself with successive attempts to answer the question, not with conceptual self-definitions, but rather, with direct self-observation of one’s consciousness and life energy presence. Thus one reaches progressively toward the source of his being, or the center of his consciousness and life energy presence. This exercise may also be used as an indicator of change, and utilized over a period of time, can provide valuable insight into the direction of one’s own spiritual growth and psychological development.

Procedure

Step 1: Select a place where you are quiet and undisturbed. Take a sheet of paper from your loose-leaf notebook, write the date at the top, and give your page the title, “Who Am I?” Then write your answer to this question as freely and honestly as possible.

Step 2: Sit in a relaxed position. Close your eyes. Clear your mind. Ask yourself again, “Who Am I?” and this time, wait passively and look for the answer in the form of an image on the screen of your mind. Do not try to reason or interpret at this point. Simply look for an image and write down whatever you saw, giving as much detail as possible. Write down any feelings you had about this image and what it meant to you.

Step 3: Now stand up and close your eyes. Ask yourself, once again, “Who Am I?”, and this time, let your body answer the question. Let it move, spontaneously, in whatever way it wants, to tell you who you are. If a movement begins, go with it. Really experience this movement and be aware of your feelings as you move. Then write down any feelings or insights that this movement may have given you.

It is recommended that you continue to use this method as a means of furthering your own psychological/spiritual growth and self-knowledge. It has been found that continuing gains are made with its repeated use.

Contemplation Exercise

For those who are finding it extremely difficult to meditate, for whatever reason, it is suggested that you lead into meditation by first spending some time in contemplation, which will get the mind more disciplined and one-pointed. Choose one of the topics

below, and with eyes closed, as in meditation, explore the topics to the greatest depths that you can bring it. Do not try to think deductively about the topic, but rather, pose the topic to yourself, and see what thoughts spontaneously come of their own, relative to this topic. Continue to explore the topic as deeply and as thoroughly as you can, until you find that nothing new is arising in regard to this topic. While in contemplation, do not make an effort to remember what you are learning about the topic, but after you are done, write a short report on whatever you do happen to remember, or whatever lingers with you about the topic that was new for you. Each time that you sit down to contemplate a topic, you may choose the same topic to contemplate, or you may start with a different topic, but do not switch topics until you feel that you have exhausted your exploration of the one that you started with. If your mind wanders from the topic, keep bringing it back to the topic, even if it is not where you left off on the topic before your mind started to wander. Just bring your mind back to the topic, and see what thoughts then come about the topic. Don’t inject what you may have read or learned about the topic; let it involve only what you now see yourself or understand about the topic, from your own self-observation and experience.

Recommended Topics for Contemplation

- 1) What is love?
- 2) What is peace and harmony?
- 3) What is truth, or reality?
- 4) What is joy or happiness?
- 5) What is it to be perfect, and/or imperfect?
- 6) What is it to be whole?
- 7) What is beauty?
- 8) What is freedom, or liberation?
- 9) What is life?
- 10) What is death, and what dies?
- 11) What is it to be psychologically healthy?
- 12) What is desire, and how and why does it arise?
- 13) How and why does thought arise?
- 14) Who is it that observes your thinking?
- 15) Of what is the “I-feeling” comprised?
- 16) What is trust?
- 17) What is a feeling of worth, or worthlessness, in essence?
How does it come about?
- 18) What is it that I want most of all, and why, and what will I want after I get it, and why?
- 19) What is fulfillment?
- 20) What is creativity?

If explored deeply, these topics when contemplated regularly have the capacity to not only bring you to a greater understanding of your own personal nature, but should also bring you into contact

with a more universal aspect of yourself, which should bring you a much greater understanding and appreciation of life, and the world in which you live, both psychologically and physically.

Self-Disclosure Exercise

Persons can disclose aspects of themselves to others in a group with varying degrees of comfort, depending on how personally threatening the particular aspect of self-disclosure is to the person. Psychologists such as Sidney M. Jourard have long recognized the contribution to mental health of the person's ability to freely and openly disclose and reveal himself to others in a group. Self-disclosure contributes toward becoming more integrated and whole as a person, because it puts an end to the process of avoiding, escaping, and denying to oneself and others certain unacceptable truths and aspects of oneself. The accepting of these formerly rejected truths about oneself is the first step toward greater integration and enhanced contact with reality. It helps one to be more real, genuine, or authentic, rather than live by the dictates of certain social and idealized images and standards that have been imposed by influences outside of oneself, and with which one has become identified, as the presumptive sense of self, in place of the real self. It also helps one to build trusting and meaningful relationships with others, which involves enhancing the capacity to communicate well with others. It is when our relationships are deep, sincere, intense, and intimate that our experience of joy is greatest, which is what makes us feel most fully alive, and makes us feel that we are living to the fullest. Many individuals are often dominated, because it seems easier and less threatening, by the tendency to keep oneself in reserve, to hold back and not reveal our deepest selves to others. After many years of habitually behaving in such a pattern, this tendency becomes a lifestyle, which makes real intimacy, honesty, openness, and sharing very difficult to accomplish later in life, when successful marriage necessitates it. Being open and sharing ourselves easily with others makes it possible for others to make full contact with that which is most real in us, which is the essence of close and gratifying relationships. This capacity for openness, honesty, and sharing cannot come by itself overnight. It is a skill that one must learn and continuously practice, otherwise it is easily lost. This exercise is designed to help you develop and enhance this skill.

In this exercise, I would like for you to first disclose yourself to yourself, which is usually the easiest way to begin, by writing a detailed report containing your reactions and answers to any of the self-disclosure items listed later in this Self-Disclosure Exercise, which relate to you. Once you have disclosed yourself to yourself, you will then be in a better position to more easily disclose yourself to another person, and/or to a group. Don't panic. It has been our experience that although some individuals expect the process of self-disclosure to be a painful experience, after they have done it, they usually feel more relieved, "cleaner," and more real. They find that they like themselves better than they ever have before.

At first, you should disclose yourself to other individuals and/or to a group only on those items that you feel would produce no more than a little discomfort in you. The goal is for you to disclose to the group more and more items about yourself that you have previously been unable to share with the group. Try to be as sensitively alert as you can about directly, experientially,

observing what is really true about yourself, and try to share that truth with others as honestly as you can. Sharing your experience and current self-understanding with others makes it more clearly, precisely articulated and more extensively developed, in greater depth and detail, in your own self-understanding.

Self-Disclosure Items/Questions

- 1) The past-times that I most enjoy doing or being involved with.
- 2) The kinds of habits about myself that I most like and/or dislike.
- 3) The traits of personality that I dislike most in other people.
- 4) The traits of personality that I like most in other people.
- 5) My feelings about God and religion.
- 6) My feelings about marriage.
- 7) My feelings about having children.
- 8) My feelings about my father.
- 9) My feelings about my mother.
- 10) My feelings about my brother(s) and/or sister(s).
- 11) The things that frighten me the most and/or give me the most anxiety.
- 12) The things that make me the angriest.
- 13) The times that I have felt most lonely.
- 14) The times that I have felt most guilty.
- 15) The times that I have felt most happy.
- 16) The times that I have felt most loving.
- 17) My feelings about today's political, societal, and cultural situation.
- 18) How I feel about my own body image.
- 19) The qualities that make particular individuals that make them most sexually and/or emotionally attractive to me.
- 20) The past relationships that I most regretted losing.
- 21) The things that I often dream about.
- 22) The things that I often fantasize or daydream about.
- 23) What I like(d) and/or dislike(d) most about school.
- 24) My general attitudes and values about sex.
- 25) My sexual needs and habits.
- 26) What I believe that most members of the opposite gender think about me.
- 27) What I believe that most members of my own gender think about me.
- 28) My evaluation of my own intellectual capacities and/or problems.

- 29) My evaluation of my own emotional capacities and/or problems.
 - 30) My evaluation of my own sexual capacities and/or problems.
 - 31) My evaluation of my own social skills and/or problems.
 - 32) The kind of work I like to do most.
 - 33) The kind of work I like to do least.
 - 34) My attitudes and values in regard to money.
 - 35) What holds my interest the most.
 - 36) What I value the most in life.
 - 37) My immediate personal goals.
 - 38) My more long-term personal goals.
 - 39) How I define love, and what it means to me.
 - 40) My earliest memory.
 - 41) What people must do to convince me that they can be trusted.
 - 42) My feelings about the changes going on in society today.
 - 43) The unhappiest moment of my life.
 - 44) The image or view that most other people have of me.
 - 45) My feelings about making a total commitment to others.
 - 46) My feelings about being physically close to others.
 - 47) My feelings about being emotionally close to others.
 - 48) The time that I lost my temper the most.
 - 49) My feelings about the socio-economic status of my family.
 - 50) My negative feelings about myself, and what I like least about myself.
 - 51) My positive feelings about myself and/or what I like most about myself.
 - 52) What I want and expect most from my friends.
 - 53) The times that others have hurt me emotionally the most.
 - 54) The things I regret most having said and done.
 - 55) My beliefs about an afterlife after death.
 - 56) My most secret wishes.
 - 57) The things I remember most about my childhood.
 - 58) My feelings about members of the opposite sex.
 - 59) My feelings about members of my own sex.
 - 60) My feelings about taking drugs and/or alcohol for pleasure and relaxation.
 - 61) What the term "respect" means to me.
 - 62) My feelings about masturbation.
 - 63) My feelings about having sexual affairs.
 - 64) What I want most out of life.
 - 65) The areas in which I need to be able to take more risks.
 - 66) What I would do on my last day if I knew that I had only one day to live.
 - 67) The greatest mistakes I ever made.
 - 68) What embarrasses and/or humiliates me the most.
 - 69) My greatest faults.
 - 70) My greatest strengths and/or virtues.
 - 71) My real self-concept of myself.
 - 72) The self that I try to show to others or most want others to see me as being.
 - 73) My idealized image, i.e., the kind of person I would most like to be.
 - 74) The things that I am most curious about.
 - 75) My feelings about sports.
 - 76) What I would do first if I were President of the United States.
 - 77) My feelings about expressing myself in a large group.
 - 78) The things that are most apt to make me cry.
 - 79) The areas in which I tend to compete with others the most.
 - 80) The things I am most envious about.
 - 81) My feelings about growing old.
 - 82) The times I have cheated.
 - 83) The most serious lie I have ever told.
 - 84) The possession that I have that is most valuable to me.
 - 85) The times I have felt depressed.
 - 86) The times I considered committing suicide.
 - 87) The places in which I would most like to live.
 - 88) My definition of success and what it means to me.
 - 89) A discussion of my greatest failures and defeats.
 - 90) My definition of sin.
 - 91) My greatest frustrations.
 - 92) My ideal of what my marriage partner should be.
 - 93) The things that most tend to make me laugh.
 - 94) My definition of maturity and where I am relative to that definition.
- Please feel free to add to this list any items that you feel are essential aspects of your personality, and which you feel that you need to disclose yourself about.

Editorial Note:

Other related insights by Dr. Max Hammer and Dr. Barry Hammer are presented in their two published books, 1) *Psychological Healing Through Creative Self-Understanding and Self-Transformation*. (ISBN: 978-1-62857-075-5) and 2) *Deepening Your Personal Relationships: Developing Emotional Intimacy and Good Communication*. (ISBN: 978-1-61897-590-4). The primary author is Dr. Max Hammer, with contributions from secondary authors Dr. Barry J. Hammer and Dr. Alan C. Butler. These books can be purchased from Amazon, Barnes and Noble, or our author/publisher website, <http://sbprabooks.com/MaxHammer>. The latter website also posts our other articles, and describes our books and us as authors. More articles by Max Hammer and Dr. Barry Hammer are also available at: <https://independent.academia.edu/BarryHammer>