

DIALOGUE WITH THE HIGHER SELF

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The long night of reductionism is over. Its product, *homo reductus* – the reduced man – captive to his instincts, a mechanical toy with a computer for a brain, is losing his sway over the contemporary imagination. Increasingly, knowledgeable and sober men and women are re-admitting the higher human attributes into their visions of themselves and others. The evidence for this shift is to be found on every hand, particularly in the rising interest in the more humanistic and spiritual aspects of psychology, the study of religious experience, and the growing support for understanding and cooperation among the fellow men and women who constitute the nations of the world.

While this emerging trend is most hopeful, it can bring to the individual a new awareness of problems that the pessimism fashionable some decades ago obscured. One can be annoyed, troubled, perhaps even torn, by a sensed inner division – an inner division along a “vertical” dimension.

“I know what is right to do, but I fail to do it.”

“I know I can be a better person, but I don’t know how to get there.”

“I have a sense for the way things should go in order to be better, but I cannot translate it into a practical direction for my own life.”

“I know that the pulls of instinct and my social conditioning are often wrong, but I cannot quite see what to do instead.”

It is as if we know that our present personalities, the sums of our lives as we have led them, are not what they could be. The task is one of discovering and developing a clearer contact with our inner source of wisdom. But frequently it is not easy to know where to start.

An extremely simple method within easy reach of most people can be used as a way of beginning. It is the technique of “Dialogue with the Higher Self.” This technique emerges out of the psychological study of various philosophical and spiritual traditions. It is a practical application of the ancient and nearly universal twin belief – that man has a higher aspect, or soul, and that this higher aspect can be contacted by the personality and asked for guidance. It has been said that the fundamental goal of psychology, one only now beginning to be realized, is the understanding of the relationship between these higher aspects of human nature and the personality as we understand it. Those who hold this view call our attention to the root meaning of the word psychology. In Greek “psyche” means “soul,” and so “psychology” means the *science of the soul*.

The technique of Dialogue with the Higher Self is, in its essence, simple and straightforward. It consists of the assumption that within each of us is an endowment of wisdom, intuition, and a sense of purpose, which can become a source of guidance in everyday life. The next step is simply to begin to dialogue with it, trusting that it is there and it will answer.

In the Hindu tradition, this higher aspect is sometimes called the Atman. As is well known, Mahatma Gandhi, a practical and most successful political leader, used to talk of the “inner light of universal truth,” which he would consult on important matters. When confronted with such important issues, about which his colleagues were pressing him for decisions, he would retire into meditation to consult this “inner light,” and would emerge after he was rationally satisfied that with the help of this higher inner guidance, he had arrived at the best answer he could. The great Indian saint of the nineteenth century, Ramakrishna, used to practice a similar technique, having talks with Kali, the Divine Mother. In the midst of a crisis, he would go into the temple and talk to her.

In the Eastern tradition, there has been for thousands of years an ambiguity about such dialogues. On the one hand, the various deities involved are symbolized as being outside the person; but, on the other hand, they are considered to be within the person’s own psychological and spiritual nature. The *Bhagavad Gita*, the most revered of Indian scriptures, is presented as a dialogue between a young man in crisis, Arjuna, and the great Lord Krishna, a major Indian deity. But interpretations of the *Gita* going back over 2500 years have described it as an internal dialogue – a dramatic presentation of the dialogue between the aspiring personality and the divine light, or Higher Self, symbolized by Krishna. Arjuna is in real-life crisis – required to take a crucial role in Battle, he demurs and questions his role and destiny. In the midst of his crisis and despair, he turns to his inner light, personified by Krishna, to find a solution.

In the West, the tradition of dialogue with the Divine is at the very foundation of the Old Testament. The notion of dialoguing with a part of oneself that is attuned to the Divine is also found in the Jesuit practice of “Discernment of Spirits” – where the student attempting to decide upon his religious vocation seeks to discern, to distinguish the action of the “good spirit,” within him from the selfishness that is a reflection of the “devil.” One reads, similarly, of the “indwelling of the Holy Spirit,” as a psychological condition to be sought. The New Testament also speaks of receptiveness to “Divine Providence” as a technique where, having exhausted the ordinary and rational ways of wrestling with a problem, one turns to a higher source for an answer.

As we have said, such practices as these can be seen as attempts to contact an *otherness* full of power and wisdom. Or, they can be thought of as attempts to reach those parts of our own psyche that are not available in our ordinary lives. There are also more inclusive interpretations, according to which both the inner and the outer models are, in fact, complementary forms for the expression of the same formless reality. We can say that one makes contact with universal archetypes – which are in the *higher collective unconscious* – by means of their reflections or projections in one’s own individual superconscious. And it is the organizing and integrating energy of these archetypes that provides the mind with the needed solution.

Whatever the precise explanation, the answers that come may be seen as the result of letting go of our identification with the analytic mind, thus liberating creative aspects that are usually blocked. This does not mean rejecting the mind, only disidentifying from

it. Certainly, the common practice among creative people of wrestling with a problem, reaching a point of frustration, letting go, and then simply waiting for a solution, is structurally similar. And in this creative process, many report that when the answer does come, they experience it as coming from “outside” themselves, with, as one writer put it, “sourceless connotations of authority.”

So the notion that there is a source of such wisdom and guidance – a Self, or Essence, Soul, Spirit, Atman, or Ruach – is certainly not to be cavalierly thrust aside. But, as the experience of a great number of people has shown, it is not necessary to believe in a Divine organizing entity in man for the technique of Dialogue with the Higher Self to work. It is enough to accept the entirely reasonable proposition that there are aspects in each of us which are higher than many of which we are normally aware. In short, it is enough that we believe there are in us positive human potential for more wisdom, love, strength, compassion and growth, than we have yet discovered. If we believe these are accessible and that they can be explored, that is enough.

THE TECHNIQUE ITSELF

Assume, with many ancient traditions, that you have within you a source of understanding and wisdom that knows who you are, what you have been, and what you can most meaningfully become in the future. This source is in tune with your unfolding purpose. It can help you direct your energies toward achieving increasing integration, toward harmonizing and unifying your life.

Having made this assumption, close your eyes, take a few deep breaths, and imagine that you are seeing the face of a Wise Old Man (Some people may spontaneously visualize a Wise Woman. While this image can also be a useful one, a majority of people have found that the Wise Old Man, the Sage, seems to be the most natural and readily accessible symbol of their own inner wisdom. The results of employing the symbols of the Wise Man and Wise Woman are likely to be different and *complementary*. The reader may want to try both and find out which is more useful for different purposes and circumstances in his or her life.) whose eyes express great love for you. (If you have difficulty visualizing this, first imagine a candle flame, burning steadily and quietly, and then let the face appear at its center.)

Engage the Wise Old Man in dialogue, in whatever ways seems best: use the presence and guidance of the sage to help you better understand whatever questions, directions or choices you are dealing with at the moment. Spend as much time as you need in this dialogue, and when you are finished, write down what happened, amplifying and evaluating further whatever insights were gained.

The technique has the advantage of wide variation. While this particular form is useful to many people, there are many others that can be used. The Wise Old Man is an archetypal symbol in the Jungian sense. As we have said, it can allow us to contact parts of our psyche that ordinarily may not be so accessible – that belong to our higher

unconscious or superconscious. Symbols are the language of the unconscious, and there are a number of these higher symbols that can sometimes work as well as the Wise Old Man. Besides the Wise Woman, some people have used a lotus, a rose, the sun, a diamond, a flame, a silver cloud, a star, a fountain, an angel, an eagle, a dove, a phoenix, the Christ, or Buddha, among others. These symbols can also be used dynamically, and in combination. For example, many have found it very effective to imagine the bud of a lotus, or rose, that gradually opens, and then a Wise Old Man appearing inside it. Different images often emerge spontaneously to meet different needs, though the one most commonly associated with the inner source of guidance is the wise and loving old man.

A number of people who have used the technique over a period of years report that they have spontaneously developed several different symbols of inner guidance. This is experienced as the Higher Self reaching us by assuming different forms at different times. One psychologist reported these variations:

Usually he is a Wise Old Man who looks something like Lama Govinda, whose pictures I have seen. He is old, slender, bearded and dressed in ritual robes. He is Tibetan and ascetic, and has a very loving and blissful expression.

Another one is of fuller face and looks more like a Hindu swami. He is less ascetic, and though he is also old, he is not as old as the Tibetan.

Another person has a Moses-like appearance; he is more of the Charlton Heston type.

A fourth one is a sun symbol; round like the sun, an overlay of a face on the sun. He has eyes, a nose and mouth, but that's all.

Another person describes at least three varieties of her Wise Old Man:

The first is my "best self" – he is rather comic, and appears only with eyes, shoulders, and hands. He delivers a lot of "one-liners," and they are usually about things going on in the immediate situation; things like, "Forget it!" or "Keep going!" or "Hang in there!" This one usually accompanies his terse remarks with a hand gesture of a very emphatic sort. He is an old man with a great sense of amusement.

Then there is a young man. He is dressed like a monk and talks about larger issues than the first one. He doesn't communicate in many words, either; he indicates an experience to be had. For example, if I ask him, "Where do I have to go next in my development?" he would say just a couple of sentences: "You need to integrate your personality," or "Think deeply on the meaning of the word "Love."

There is also a third kind. This is a group. They appear as a cluster of white-robed old men who talk among themselves and give me advice. They are very joyous and very supportive. They are less "high" than the second one and more interested in me – less impersonal. They give me advice about groups of individuals or groups in general. I do a lot of work with groups of people, and they are sort of specialists in groups. They are more loving than the second symbol. He is more wise, and kind of abstract.

After some practice, one may prefer not to use any visual symbols; and indeed, they are not necessary.

An interesting variation of the technique is to write a letter to one's Higher Self and then to expect that the Higher Self will write back through you. For this, simply switch role and "answer" the original letter as if you were the Wise Old Man. (This procedure clearly has nothing to do with reported cases of "automatic writing," trance mediumship or any phenomena of that type. These are of a completely different nature. In such cases the person is unconscious or deliberately passive, while in the kind of dialogue suggested here, there is a normal, and often greater than normal, awareness and attention, and the mind can be *receptive* but is in no way *passive*.) This version is especially appealing to people who are used to a high degree of precise verbal exchange. As can be seen from the preceding examples, however, with other people the verbal interaction with the Higher Self can frequently be very brief, and others report that the communication from the Self is often primarily visual, e.g. hand gestures indicating "Stop" or "No" or "Yes" and so forth. Still others, especially after a certain amount of practice, report a kind of direct knowing of what the Higher Self is saying, and that the interchange is then beyond both the visual and the verbal mode.

Whether symbols are used or not, whether they are animate or not, whether the exchange is verbal, or not, let me stress that for the technique to work, it must be tried. Of those who have used it fruitfully, many say that the technique, although extremely simple, seemed strange to them at first, but when they gave themselves to it, the procedure worked quite well. Others already believed that they had such positive potentialities within them, but were pessimistic about being capable of contacting them. Sometimes they expressed feelings of being unworthy of such contact. In all of these cases, however, all that was called for was, in Coleridge's phrase, "a willing suspension of disbelief."

To put it another way, in attempting this or any other technique for self-realization, one needs to trust that it can work. As the Jaina philosophers of India have emphasized, trust is a precondition for any real progress in a given philosophy, approach, or path. Not blind trust, of course. Not trust that it will work, but trust that it *can*. Later on, one checks the preliminary results of the technique to see if the trust has been rewarded or not. All spiritual and psychological schools – from the sages of India to the Catholic mystics; from the exponents of the psychoanalyst's couch to those of the Gestalt therapist's empty chair – stress the limitations of efforts made without such commitment.

Accordingly, if the idea of a dialogue with the Higher Self is new, or strange to you, it may be worthwhile to begin by simply thinking through the reasonableness of the idea that there are latent parts of yourself wiser than your daily self. This kind of thinking helps to quiet skepticism and the tendency we all have, in one degree or another, to repress the sublime within us. For most people, taking this attitude of "provisional belief" is simply a matter of deciding to do so, and if they do so, they often discover that over a period of time the Higher Self provides better and better answers, surer guidance and more loving impulses. There are some people, perhaps because of temporary crises

or simply earlier conditioning, who have trouble giving even this provisional belief to a Higher Self within them. These may be people who are tormented by guilt and depression, a sense of worthlessness, and the like. Naturally, these are the people who most desperately need to cultivate an awareness of their higher inner aspects. Those in the helping professions – psychologists, counselors, teachers and others – have found it very helpful to use this technique with people in such crises, doing it first together, and recommending that they continue practicing it at home. (**Note to professionals:** A number of therapists report that consulting their own Higher Self to activate their intuition and gain insight about their clients has been quite successful. Naturally, such insights – like all therapeutic intuitions – must be scrutinized and evaluated before being put into practice.)

The technique very often yields useful results at the first try, although occasionally it may take longer. One client got no answer for the first week after daily attempts to contact his Higher Self. He didn't dare hope such an inner Worth would talk to him. But with the encouragement of his therapist, he persisted in the attempts. His written letters to the Higher Self, during the first few days were simply emotional, despairing pleas; "Help me, Higher Self; give me your advice! Appear to me, talk to me! I need you!" Gradually, attempting to write these "letters" led from this very needed emotional release to a more reasoned approach; a detailing of the young man's real-life dilemmas, and finally his coherent examination, for the benefit of the Higher Self, of his troubles and their particular causes. At the end of the week, the young man discovered he could assume the position of his Higher Self and answer his letters.

An important first result of this work was that he began to achieve an inner position that was detached from the turmoil of his problems. (In general, the use of the technique of Dialogue with the Higher Self is of help in achieving disidentification from problems and in cultivating the attitude of observer.) One of his further discoveries was the difference between the Higher Self and his "superego." It turned out that part of his resistance to making contact with his own inner source of wisdom was owing to the fear that all he would discover in his quest was not a Higher Self, but rather, a Higher Superego – a "super Top Dog," to use the language of Gestalt Therapy. In the process of attempting his dialogues with his Higher Self, however, he soon realized that the Higher Self was of an altogether different nature.

The Higher Self, insofar as I know him, is not like the superego. The Higher Self does not issue orders, he is not compelling, he is not harsh. He makes suggestions, he indicates ways – he is more mental, in a pure sense of the word. The superego, on the other hand, has a lot of emotional voltage – often negative. He pushes and urges...

*The Self appears serene, clothed in white...strong (though dimly seen) and radiant – like the Christ in Fra Angelico's "The Transfiguration." He speaks to me...He has the quality of a teacher. Interested and concerned, but detached. If he demands anything, he demands to be embraced. He opens himself to that. Take him or leave him, is what he says. He shows me directions and possibilities, leaving me to follow them or not. He is there. He is to be **chosen**.*

My superego, instead, is dark, more fleshy, and even stone like. There is a scowl on his face, a hammer in his hand. He bangs and chips away. He threatens and coerces. He exhausts me and he compels me. (The example illustrates a common tendency in many people to fear that their higher nature will be of a critical, authoritarian, puritanical and frequently life-denying character. This misconception is often a cause of the “repression of the sublime.”)

One may look upon the superego as a reflection, a static image of the Higher Self. We develop our superegos using material from outside ourselves, from society, our parents, and so on. Such a “construct” has a role to play in our early development and is temporarily necessary. But in time it becomes rigid and restrictive, and must eventually and gradually be replaced by a much more genuine and dynamic inner source of wisdom, values, meaning and good judgment. In cultivating the dialogue with the Higher Self, therefore, one should be careful to identify voices answering our questions that are not really coming from our authentic higher selves. Sometimes this may be the voice of a subpersonality that pretends to be the Wise Old Man, or the voice, interjected from childhood, of an angry or ambitious parent, and so forth. Discrimination, then – what the Hindus call *Viveka* in their spiritual tradition – must be used to identify other figures who impersonate the Higher Self.

DISCRIMINATION

When engaging in a dialogue with the Higher Self, we must test *any* message we receive in the “fires” of the mind’s critical discrimination. We must ask: is this advice really wise? Does it really make sense? This is a vital step, for it is clear that any such message can come from a variety of sources, not only from the Higher Self or from the lower unconscious, but also from many intermediate ones, where wisdom is combined with varying amounts of distortion, unmet needs and desires, unrelated thoughts and emotions. (This discussion of discrimination provides a useful place to make a precise theoretical discrimination concerning the way we have been using the term “Higher Self” in much of this paper. The dialogue with the Higher Self is not *directly* with the Higher Self. Rather *it is with one or another element in our superconscious, which itself is activated by the Higher Self.*

An analogy will help explain these distinctions and the reasons we choose to ignore them in the rest of our discussions. When we dialogue with another person, we are not usually conversing with his essence, his person-ness, so-to-speak. He doesn’t present himself in his essence nor do we perceive him that way. Rather, he presents us with an intermediary – a subpersonality or a feeling, for example. And, in turn, that subpersonality or feeling expresses itself through still other intermediaries such as his voice, facial expressions, and so forth. So, in actuality, a large part of our ordinary dialogues or conversations in everyday life are carried on by us at two removes at least from the personal essence of the conversants.

Similarly, the image of the Wise Old Man is not the same as the energy which activates that image, and that energy in turn is not the same as its source – the actual Higher Self. But just as in ordinary conversations, it would be awkward, if not paralyzing, to keep in steady awareness of our two-fold removal from the other person in

his essence, so it is generally unhelpful, in entering into dialogue with the Higher Self to keep in steady awareness that we are not in direct communication with the real article. On the other hand it is important to know, and to keep in the background of our minds, that the Wise Old Man and the “Higher Self” with which we may dialogue are not the actual Higher Self. This recognition helps us to have an accurate sense of proportion. For example, at times people have the experience of “becoming” the Wise Old Man. This can occur spontaneously on occasion, or it can be achieved intentionally, after practice with the technique of Dialogue. Such an experience can be an exalted one, charged with deep and beautiful feeling, and it can result in significant assistance to our growth. But as a result, people may tend to the erroneous belief that they have actually become identified with their Higher Self. It should be said, however, that the actual experience of direct contact, and eventual identification with the Higher Self is one of profoundly greater moment than these other experiences, no matter how authentic, valuable and important. The experience of contact and identification with the Higher Self in its true essence has an altogether different quality and opens the door to new dimensions of awareness that are – in experience and by definition – ineffable.)

Of course, the very fact that we consciously and deliberately address ourselves to the Higher Self has the result of weeding out many of the lower “voices.” And with continuing practice we become increasingly able to recognize the “voice” of our true source of wisdom and to build a reliable channel of communication with it. But we can never be *completely* sure that we are in touch with the genuine article. This is especially so in our first experiments with the technique, or during periods of intense conflict and crisis when many of our inner voices are clamoring at the same time. So we need to treat the answers we receive just as we would the advice of a good friend. We consider it, make sure we understand it, and try to decide whether it is useful or not. If the answer is really from the Higher Self, our task is likely to be easy, because it will often have some “peculiarly good” quality. This quality may be the very essence of common sense, it may be “just the solution I would have chosen if only I had thought of it;” it may be a simplicity that is profoundly beautiful; it may be the answer accompanied by a vision of the good that will come out of it, which becomes a source of joy. In these cases, the course of action is likely to be clear.

At other times, it will be obvious that the source is not the Higher Self. This will undoubtedly be the case if the message clashes with our best and highest values; if following it might lead to needlessly hurting ourselves or others; if its main effect is to inflate (or deflate) our ego; if it is mostly self-serving; if it has an autocratic, dictatorial character. One student lamented that in the early days of her using this technique, what she believed to be her Wise Old Man had the quality of “a New Age Top Dog,” urging her relentlessly toward more and more transpersonal attainments before she had built a sufficiently steady base in the personality life of every day. She recalled that she had not been discriminating enough to reject such pushy and harsh messages, messages without the mark of a loving acceptance coupled with a desire to be of help.

There are occasions, however, when it is not immediately clear whether the message comes from the Higher Self. Such situations need to be examined carefully,

especially if they deal with important issues. Some messages are “mixed,” and we need to separate what is useful from what is irrelevant, or even harmful. In such cases, the earliest and most abstract part of the message is often the valid one. The elaborations and details that may follow are more likely to contain distortions, or to be voices interjected by subpersonalities masquerading as the Higher Self. But sometimes, it is not possible to tell whether an answer is or is not valid by thinking it through. This can be because its content is “supranational,” beyond what the mind can reach. Or it can be because the results of the suggested action are unforeseeable, and will be apparent only after the action is accomplished. In these cases, we must decide whether we are willing to take the chance of trying it out, taking into account any intuition or hunch we may have, our past experience in similar circumstances, the possible consequences of a mistaken action, and whatever other factor may be relevant, including – and especially – our common sense.

If we do decide to go ahead in such a situation, it is important that we do so with an open-minded, scientific attitude. We are, in fact, performing an experiment: we are trying something to find out whether it will work or not. Maintaining such an empirical attitude has a value over and above the results or outcomes of our actions. This attitude allows us to learn from our choices, to better know the sources of our inner messages, to discriminate the voice of the Higher Self from other voices. In time, through repeated trials of this process, we come to have a clearer and clearer channel for the messages of our Higher Self. Such a channel can be of precious value in our future choices of action.

INTERPRETATION

Once we have satisfied ourselves that the message does come from the Higher Self – and sometimes in the course of determining whether it does or not – we often need to “interpret” the message. For the Higher Self does not always give simple, concrete answers to simple, concrete questions. Frequently an abstract, symbolic message needs to be examined to find out how it applies specifically and concretely to the issue of the moment. Or the opposite may be true: an apparently plain and simple message can hide an important insight that has broad relevance to our life as a whole. An example may make this clear. A woman was lying on her back porch and attempting to talk to her Higher Self about her life purpose. She had been thinking for a long time about changing her career, perhaps going back to school in one or another subject; but she was uncertain about how to begin, which path to follow, or even whether to make such a change. Her Higher Self answered her question about purpose with a single word, “Harmony.” The woman realized this message needed to be interpreted and began thinking about harmony. She entertained various images of harmony, including herself as a Pied Piper, sprinkling musical harmonies into the world. Another image was the tuning fork, which she interpreted as tuning the personality to the soul so it could be receptive to its energy. Eventually, she came up with the abstract thought that the “personality is an instrument through which the soul plays its music.” By interpreting this, in turn, she saw that the choice of one or another career pattern was not as relevant as the cultivation of an inner attitude of harmony within herself that would let her be as fully human a person as she could be. As she began to cultivate this inner attitude, problems with work, family, and friends gradually began to disappear. But for all these positive results to happen, it was

first necessary for her to have sufficient determination to use her mind to think things through, and then to gradually find ways to implement the wisdom of her Higher Self.

We see from this example that a fundamental goal of interpretation is to recognize at which level of generality the answer pertains, and at which level it is to be applied. Clearly, interpreting a message as belonging to the wrong level can have harmful, even dangerous effects. Many cases of fanaticism, ego inflation, or delusions of grandeur have such a mistaken interpretation at their roots. Such a mistake is possible even for very advanced people.

A famous example of wrong level interpretation is that of Saint Francis hearing God say to him, “Go and rebuild my church.” At first, Francis thought this meant he should rebuild the little ruined church of San Damiano, outside the walls of Assisi. It was only later that he realized its true import – to rebuild the venal and corrupt Catholic Church of his day, by means of examples of love, frugality and charity. It is interesting to consider here what would have happened to Saint Francis if the message had indeed meant to rebuild the church in San Damiano, and he had tackled the entire Catholic Church!

One can also experience different levels of the Higher Self’s wisdom in a single dialogue. A very busy man described the following interchange.

I was feeling very speedy, off center and unstable. So I talked with the Wise Old Man about it and at first he said things like: “You need to rest, to trust the process; everything will take care of itself. If you overwork yourself now you won’t be able to do the things you’re worrying about.” But I simply kept waiting for more; opening myself in a kind of silent expectation.

*After a few minutes, I experienced a quantum jump in understanding. I saw that my worries had a purpose. The Wise Old Man enabled me to see that the worries of today were a necessary part of the “process” he had talked about. “This is where you fit now – you’re irritable and strained, and that’s because you’re going through a **process of learning to work with people** and you don’t know how to do it yet. But that process is very important in the development of yourself as a person who can give something good to the world. It is, as you well know, the necessary step beyond your sweet but ineffective idealism. It is the step to make your idealism practical and useful in the world. That’s why you can be patient with yourself and even take the day off. You’re doing fine.”*

THE ROLE OF THE MIND

As we have seen, the use of the technique of Dialogue with the Higher Self does not in any way call for an occlusion of the mind. Far from it. The intellect can be and ought to be involved not only in the phases of discrimination and interpretation, but from the very beginning, and at every stage of the process. It is important to use the Dialogue with the Higher Self in conjunction with hard critical thinking, and not as a substitute for it.

But over thinking is not necessary. It is not necessary to feel that before we deserve the privilege of addressing the Higher Self, we must carry out extensive brain racking. As usual common sense is needed to keep the golden mean between excessive and insufficient mental work. (If in doubt, this is a good issue about which to ask the Higher Self for feedback.) For important situations it is generally advisable to think through the ins and outs of a problem as much as we can before presenting it to the Higher Self. Writing a carefully thought-out description of the circumstances, or silently speaking the essence of the problem to the Higher Self is the best preparation in these cases. Not only does this exercise the mind, it also mobilizes the superconscious, or higher unconscious, to produce a more creative solution, and at the same time puts the mind in an expectant attitude, making it most receptive to the answer when it arrives. In the language of creativity, having dealt with the problem extensively on the “horizontal” level (at which it presently exists), one can then more effectively turn “upward” for illumination.

To take a concrete example, one man is worrying about whether to take Job A or Job B. “A” is more financially remunerative and secure; but “B” is more creative. He begins to think about the consequences of each choice: more opportunity to grow and express himself in the creative job, but more money to save towards the education of his children in the other. Having listed all the arguments on both sides, he refers the answer to the Wise Old Man, who says, “Your main service to the education of your children will be through the quality of your being.” The problem has been implicitly solved by an answer at a higher level. Duty to children and his personal growth are not contraries. Thus, his initial thinking assembles the basic information with which the Higher Self can work. Frequently this kind of deliberate thinking things through is enough for the Higher Self to offer the solution to the problem without actually being invoked.

In general then, we may say that the most effective use of this technique occurs when the mind is well developed, or when there is the will to use it and develop it. Making contact with one’s own inner wisdom through the various symbols of the Higher Self is itself a strong motivator for developing the mind. With the assurance that we have an inner core, which is wise, good and loving, we have a basis upon which to build a coherent program of self-development. We experience our intrinsic worthwhileness, and we hear its gradual and gentle call. We can then increasingly align our will, our intellect, and our emotional nature to fulfill the best that is in us.

As this process continues, people report that they can turn to their Higher Self to answer more and more profound questions. They come to see that the ultimate usefulness of this technique (though not necessarily its best usefulness at first) is to pierce beyond the outer form of specific life problems (Job A or Job B), to the meaning, the principles, and the qualities behind them. This transition upwards in the use of the technique is generally a gradual thing. It is a natural transition, which can be encouraged but need not be forced. The process may start by asking the Higher Self about tiny dilemmas – “How can I make myself feel better now?” – but it will lead to seeking the underlying causes of the dilemmas. One use of the Higher Self technique that need not be reserved for later, however, is to ask it for understanding and awareness about various

abstract qualities – as in the Harmony example. Other qualities to explore are Love, Joy, Wisdom, Compassion, Courage, and Serenity; in fact, any of those qualities that the wisdom of mankind has identified as being close to the center of our highest humanness. Because it is in these qualities that the real solutions to our life problems will ultimately be found.

This technique has helped many people to recognize that the dimensions beyond their ordinary selves are real and living aspects of existence. And as they come gradually to know their Higher Self more and more, they find that their lovingness and wisdom, compassion and serenity are increasingly available. Some people who have used the technique for a long time report eventually being able to dispense with symbols for the Higher Self, such as the Wise Old Man, and with instruments of communication like writing, or formal dialogue. They speak of knowing the “note,” “quality” or “flavor” of messages from the Higher Self very well, and of simply wanting to be in touch with their Higher Self, and then “being there.” For example, a number of therapists who have used this technique for some years report that when they do therapy, the voice that used to belong to the Wise Old Man talks to them spontaneously, and simply operates *in* them – at times, they are even able to let it become their voice, to have it merge with their personality and inform it.

Such levels of realization may not be quick in coming, but they are possible. One important aid in that direction is writing – the practice of writing down our dialogues with the Higher Self. This can include, as I have already noted, writing the preparatory mental considerations – the thinking through of the problem – and then recording the actual answers, the work of discrimination and interpretation, and any other mental elaboration of what the Higher Self has said. In this process of writing things down, one is attempting to establish a palpable connection between the wisdom of the higher unconscious and the conscious mind. Another useful way to facilitate the process is to imagine that one is in fact building a “channel” or “path” through which superconscious energies can flow – and to actually visualize such a path with one’s imagination.

At times, when we pose a question, or express a need to the Higher Self, the answer comes in the form of energy of a particular quality. Thus people report a sense of joy, of illumination, flashes of light, an infusion of courage, and many other subtle and very positive experiences. But these tend to be short-lived and ephemeral, unless we “ground” them, expressing them in our actions and making them part of our everyday life. Writing and recording the insights and their later mental elaboration helps to do this, and seems to open the way for progressively higher illuminations. It is as if the work of introducing superconscious material into the activity of our lives makes room for more to emerge.

Such high experiences as feeling the Higher Self speaking through us, or seeking to build a bridge between the superconscious and the daily personality, or expressing progressively higher and higher intuitions, are ones that we have been used to imagine as being reserved for a specially gifted few. And yet it would appear, in practice, that the simple technique of affirmative inner dialogue with our best self helps open the doors of

the transpersonal to many who previously had thought them locked. Many who begin using the technique of Dialogue with the Higher Self become more and more aware of the value of connecting their personalities with their higher natures. For pragmatically educated contemporary persons, it provides a fully pragmatic approach to domains that used to be reserved primarily for formalized religion. This can lead to more systematic explorations, through meditation and other techniques, for opening broader channels to the higher aspects of individuality. Eventually, this in turn may lead to an experience beyond dialogue, wisdom, purpose, and love. People then will talk about the Self, the soul, the divine spark, the Atman, as an inner entity—a reality and not a metaphor, an experience of real livingness, beyond duality, the “place” where the individual and the universal are reconciled. And they will speak of such experiences as giving them a sense of fearlessness stemming from a direct knowledge of their true nature, of the ontological reality of their very souls, and of their immortality.

The double beauty of this simple technique is that while there are many who look back on it as having started them toward such exalted heights, it is just as useful in helping to solve the simple problems of everyday living.

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