

CLASS at Wisdom's Goldenrod, Hector, NY
with Anthony Damiani (AD)
January 16, 1983
PB BOOKS; WISDOM OF THE OVERSELF;
SERPENT'S PATH EXERCISE

TOPIC: PB Books

SUBJECT: Wisdom of the Overself

SUBSUBJECTS: Serpent's Path Exercise, Meditation

CONTENTS:

VIBRATING WORLD-IDEA; EGO'S CRAVING HIDES THE GAP

CULTIVATE ATTENTION

I-THOUGHT AND WORLD-THOUGHT INTERLOCKED

AFFIRM THE MENTALNESS OF EXPERIENCE

IDENTIFY WITH THE APPERCEPTIVE (UNDIVIDED) MIND

BOOKS READ FROM OR REFERENCED:

- Paul Brunton, *The Wisdom of the Overself*.

NOTES:

- This appears to be the only Sunday night meditation instruction that was ever taped. Additional instruction after the first meditation was not taped either. See note at end of this transcript.
- Earlier transcript versions exist, including Scan File 1983 0116 PB books serpent path C2-11R01.PDF.

TRANSCRIBED Verbatim by IT 2024 on the basis of V14r, with two more passes, updated prefatory matter, footer, and audio file name, tape markers replaced with audio file markers, new Subheads, updated notes within transcript, new formatting to accord with new conventions. Original transcript was transcribed from Audio Cassette Tape by HP, JF, et al. in 1993 as part of the set for *Living Wisdom* (but not used for that book). V11 version 2018. Reformatted from V11 version by JRM & JF 2019-2020, with Subheads and Table of Contents added by JRM.

Archival verbatim transcript - V14.1a.

AUDIO FILES: 1983 0116a.

1983 01/16 at Wisdom's Goldenrod
PB Books; Wisdom of the Overself; Serpent's Path Exercise
Archival verbatim transcript

VIBRATING WORLD-IDEA; EGO'S CRAVING HIDES THE GAP

[Audio File 1983 0116a Begins]

[Note: All quotes are from *The Wisdom of the Overself* by Paul Brunton, E.P. Dutton, New York, 1943.]

PB [*The Wisdom of the Overself*, "The Yoga of the Discerning Mind," p. 411, AD reading]: "...alternating and unbroken character. It was pointed out that the incredibly tremendous speed of its vibratory movement hid this character under the veil of an illusory unity and that actually there is an infinitesimal gap between each flash of the world-idea and the next."

AD: Try to keep that in mind.

[short pause]

PB [*The Wisdom of the Overself*, "The Yoga of the Discerning Mind," p. 411, AD reading]: "This gap is nothing else than the great stillness... [But] unfortunately..."

AD: Skipping a line. I'm just picking out what is really to the point.

PB [*The Wisdom of the Overself*, "The Yoga of the Discerning Mind," p. 411, AD reading]: "...although the thoughts are themselves discontinuous the personal 'I'-thought dominates them all and behaves like a caterpillar which lets go of its foothold on one leaf only after it has firmly created a foothold on another [AD reads: the other] leaf. [Consequently] the true gap between two thoughts is covered over by the personal thought which thus creates a continuous screen of sheer illusion and [AD reads: that] hides the reality of [pure] Mind out of which all these thoughts, including itself..."

AD: And the 'itself' here would be the I-thought.

PB [*The Wisdom of the Overself*, "The Yoga of the Discerning Mind," p. 411, AD reading]: "...emerge."

[short pause]

AD: Alright so-- [short pause] There probably would be a problem arising if you try to understand this. And, I can only explain it the way I've understood this exercise. So, why don't-- why don't we pick up the first point. And that was he speaks about an incredibly fast vibratory movement. And then, between these two flashes, he says there is a gap, which we have to try to get to. [short pause] Now, I might suggest that you try thinking of it this way. Think of a germ of light, or a circle of light, [Note: 'Light' could be 'life', but 'light' is what both HP & JF hear. IT hears it both ways.] within awareness, within consciousness, and that is constantly projecting the world-image. And this world-image, as he says, is a vibratory movement, one after the other, one image after the other. [short pause] And, the distinction between two of these images, or the interval between two of these images, is what we have to fish for. Now, he says here:

PB [*The Wisdom of the Overself*, “The Yoga of the Discerning Mind,” p. 411, AD reading]: “...[although] the thoughts are themselves discontinuous the personal ‘I’-thought dominates them all and behaves like a caterpillar which lets go of its foothold on one leaf only after it has firmly created a foothold on another leaf.”

AD: How do you take that?

VM/S(?): (I don’t follow) [couple words inaudible] but I-- the last time I saw the question mark but-- The only thing I can understand is that there’s a certain kind of momentum that can drive the-- and the identification with this I-thought and it’s enough to carry over this (infinitesimal) gap. What’s precisely the nature of this momentum or ability of the caterpillar to grab onto one before it lets go of the other I don’t know.

AD: Yeah you’re pretty close. We would call it ‘expectation’--you know--the ego, or the I-thought, has expectations of *becoming*. And this very expectation of becoming is the momentum that carries it from one thought to another and gives it a continuity which it doesn’t have. You can call it craving, you can call it becoming--but ‘expectation’ is a good word. [9¼ second pause] Then he goes on and he says:

PB [*The Wisdom of the Overself*, “The Yoga of the Discerning Mind,” p. 411, AD reading]: “[Consequently] the true gap between two thoughts is covered over by...”

AD: I’m sorry, (wrong quote). And he says that this expectation, this craving, this desire to become, it’s also, you might say, the endless duplication of the known. Right? Because anything that comes from the ego is always the known. It’ll never give you the unknown. So there’s-- there’s that continuity which is being provided by the ego to this-- its on-going process.

[13 second pause]

CULTIVATE ATTENTION

AD: In the next pass-- next page he says, the purpose of this exercise is:

PB [*The Wisdom of the Overself*, “The Yoga of the Discerning Mind,” p. 412, AD reading]: “...to make attention glide like a snake into reality by watching for and seizing the intervening state between ideas.”

AD: ‘Ideas’ here might be worthwhile to keep in mind that he’s speaking about the World-Idea, the flashing of the World-Idea. Now:

PB [*The Wisdom of the Overself*, “The Yoga of the Discerning Mind,” p. 412, AD reading]: “His task is to make his thoughts examine themselves in an effort to trace back their own ancestry...”

AD: In going all the way down that passage, I don’t translate this as ‘thoughts,’ I translate this as ‘attention.’

AD paraphrase of PB p. 412: “The task is to make *attention* examine itself in an effort to trace back its own ancestry. As soon as, or the moment that attention tries to know its own source, it travels a different path or a different route.”

AD: That's the way I translated it, it's my-- from my experience. I don't know if it's valid for you. And that's why I've been insisting that you try to develop this notion of attention, and that you just focus on attention, see if you can really cultivate a concentrated attention, because it's going to require attention.

S: The question [one word inaudible]

BS: But could you explain that a little please, what you mean exactly by attention and how we could--

AD: I will not explain attention.

BS: Well, then how could it examine--

AD (simultaneously): It's not possible.

BS: Well, then how could it examine itself?

AD: It is a double bind, Bert, in the sense that I'm asking you to take a thief to catch a thief. In the beginning, when you do an exercise on attention, you notice that you're always trying to be *aware* if you're attentive or not. [BS assents] But when you're really at attention, there is no longer the need to see if you're *at* attention. In the same way that when that you're listening to music, and you're truly listening, alright, when-- when you explain "I'm listening" it's over. [students assent] And then he goes on he says:

PB [*The Wisdom of the Overself*, "The Yoga of the Discerning Mind," p. 412, AD reading]: "...each [sensuous] image [AD adds: that] springs up in consciousness, [as] each movement of reason presents him with a new thought..."

AD: And, we said here the exercise demands that you smash it, crush it, don't permit it. I'm not using the philosophic method to examine it and try to understand that it comes from mind, I'm not using it. Preliminarily, I'm using this here, that you just strive to get attentive.

[short pause]

PB [*The Wisdom of the Overself*, "The Yoga of the Discerning Mind," p. 412, AD reading]: "...he should dissolve it promptly [AD: That is, each thought.] [again] by a thrust of the will, as it were. He should seek to get his consciousness back to its primal pure state and to keep it there."

AD: Now I-- again, I refer to this as attention. It is the attention that you want to get back to its primal consciousness, and you're not going to need a horse and wagon for that. [short pause]

Now, he speaks about in the next paragraph-- I'm leaving out the-- I want to avoid a philosophical entanglement, I just want to get rid of *doing*. [short pause] He says there's two obstacles that are going to stand in the way.

I-THOUGHT AND WORLD-THOUGHT INTERLOCKED

PB [*The Wisdom of the Overself*, "The Yoga of the Discerning Mind," p. 412, AD reading]: "The first is the world-thought. [AD adds: And] The second is the 'I'-thought. [And] both are [intimately] interlocked."

S (faint): Yeah.

AD: Now, we know that philosophically, in the sense that if the World-Idea is in the soul, and the soul projects forth the World-Idea for itself, in the projecting forth the World-Idea, it gets immersed in the Idea it projects forth. So these two are going to be inter-locked, in this sense when we speak about, you wake up in the morning and there's a sheer presentation, alright, there's only the World-Idea, so to speak, and then the whole-- a moment later there's a recollection and the ego comes in and is there. And, I'm using this example to show what he's speaking about when he speaks about these two thoughts are inter-locked, the World-Idea and the I. These two are together in that presentation.

[10¾ second pause]

AH: Anthony, is that the same "I" that behaves as a caterpillar, that-- that won't let go of one world-idea until it has a firm foothold on the next?

AD: Yes.

AH: So, the World-Idea is discontinuous, but the I-thought is continuous.

AD: No, they're both discontinuous [one/two words inaudible]

AH (simultaneously): They're both dis--

AD: Yeah, they're both discontinuous.

AH: Well how is it then that the I-thought presents us with a continuous experience?

AD: Well that was the question that Vic previously asked. How does the I-thought, how is it that it seems to be continuous? And I cannot stress sufficiently that the very nature of the ego, that is its craving to become, its expectations as to what future, the knownness of the past which projects into future, all of these various ways of looking at it, of looking at that [one word inaudible] you know, that-- it's like you project-- you have a pro-ject always going on, if I could use that term, alright. And insofar that you have a pro-ject always going on, that's it, that's enough for the ego to provide the continuity it needs and to bridge over the one world-thought from another. But again I say, it is difficult to understand, you know, how this craving or this expectation can provide this continuity. [Note: 'Pro-ject' is hyphenated because of the way that Anthony is using it.]

AH: Yeah the bridging over, the bridging over is not-- is not anything real in the sense that the I-thought is discontinuous as presented.

AD: It's real enough. It's not real in the sense that it actually *is* a bridge between two world-thoughts. But it's real enough insofar that the felt craving that we constantly experience has this power to mesmerize us into thinking that it-- there's continuity in the-- in the "I". And I think in one of the discussions we had at one time was that, if this desire nature or this craving is in any way reduced considerably, alright, then that gap starts coming into being. A retraction or-- in-- or a diminishing in any sense, in any way of our desire nature, makes it more and more difficult for that caterpillar to grab that leaf. Ok?

AH: It is clear then that the I-thought is just as discontinuous as the world-thought.

AD: Yes.

AH: Ok but they're-- they're inter-locked, but they're both discontinuous.

AD: Yes.

AH: And that apparent continuity is a felt-- is a felt one.

AD: Is-- the apparent continuity is the felt craving, expectation, making pro-jects. I think most of us are aware if we just introspect even slightly, there's this constant murmuring going on in our mind, almost like a-- well, what do I do next, you know? This restlessness, this agitation, this-- it's actually a form of drunkenness. Drunk, drunk in the sense that we got to be doing something. That's what I mean when I say we're always making pro-jects. [short pause] He speaks about the way the philosophic yogi must do it. I'm not getting into this because we spend hours and hours upon this subject. Now, he says:

AFFIRM THE MENTALNESS OF EXPERIENCE

PB [*The Wisdom of the Overself*, "The Yoga of the Discerning Mind," p. 412, AD reading]: "He must do it by understanding that the space-time form of the world, *which includes those* [AD reads: *the*] *senses themselves*, is primarily the outcome of his image-making faculty, [AD: his mind] and that the whole world is really a great thought-form in which consciousness has become immersed."

AD: Now, what he's asking you to do is to go back to the recognition that we've come across in our studies, and that was that the mind-- it is the mind which receives the world, the world is given to the mind, and the mind makes an image for us of the world, and we are immersed in that image which it makes *for* us. So what we're saying is the mind makes the image which includes the body with the senses themselves and the space-time form that we're going to understand of the world through those senses. So, you have to try to conceive of the fact that here's this formless mind. The world is given to it. It makes an image of the world. It is immersed *in* the image that it makes of the world. That's what we have to keep in mind. And he's going to ask you-- if you understand this, then you can accept the fact that the world is a thought. If you can't accept this, if you cannot understand this, then it'll be impossible to say that the world is a thought. You would only be parroting.

Now, of course that's the experience you want, to be able to see what he calls the image-making faculty or the mind to which the world is given, and the world that's being given here is, in our-- in our terminology it would be what the cosmic soul, the Sun, gives to it, and that makes the imaged world for us. So he says:

PB [*The Wisdom of the Overself*, "The Yoga of the Discerning Mind," p. 412, AD reading]: "[Hence] he has to acknowledge [and] accept its existence as being but a mental one..."

AD: And, when you understand that, then it is easier. I'm not saying it's easy, but it is easier.

PB [*The Wisdom of the Overself*, "The Yoga of the Discerning Mind," p. 412, AD reading]: "...to disengage consciousness [AD: Or let's say the attention.] from the thought itself not by rejecting it [AD reads: the thought] but by absorbing it."

AD: 'Absorbing' here doesn't mean that you're a blotter, but in understanding it, alright, the compulsion to see it, to look at it is removed, or considerably decreased. Similarly, like in a dream, when you wake up

from a dream, and you know that it all came out of you, you don't go around looking for it anymore. Now, he says:

PB [*The Wisdom of the Overself*, "The Yoga of the Discerning Mind," pp. 412-413, AD reading]: "The same kind of intelligent effort is demanded [of him] when dealing with the personal 'I'-thought. It is the worst sinner and will naturally oppose him... [18¼ second pause]

"He should dismiss each particular and separate thought continually as it comes into his field of awareness [AD reads: attention], as the ordinary yogi dismisses it, but he should affirm also [AD reads: also affirm] the consciousness [AD reads: mind] of which it is composed. [AD: Or constituted of, or its 'stuff'.] [AD adds: And] He should [not only] comprehend the important [mystical] truth that thinking as an activity is only a habit but [also] that the Mind which makes it possible is [ever] present."

IDENTIFY WITH THE APPERCEPTIVE (UNDIVIDED) MIND

AD: Now, he says that in order to understand this-- and I would put this passage here, when he says this here.

PB [*The Wisdom of the Overself*, "The Yoga of the Discerning Mind," p. 413, AD reading]: "...this [AD reads: it] requires an immensely sharp [and] dynamically alert attentiveness perseveringly cultivated to continue without fatigue..."

AD: Now I would apply that to the-- to the following paragraph on 414 where he says that through reflection--now, again, I'm using my terminology--through reflection, you're attempting "to isolate Mind." In other words, it's when you're sitting, you're very attentative, there's this reflective process, you're reflecting on what's going on, alright. And in this reflective process you could notice, and you do notice a thought, then another thought, and there is a slowing down of the thoughts--they're coming slower and slower. And it is through the reflection--this is not orthodox--but, if you understand reflection the way I was speaking about it--it's like the apperceptive mind. Reflection is taking place in the apperceptive mind, the undivided mind. It is through that that you can see the distances between two thoughts. You cannot see it as long as you think you *are* attention. Because, what I'm really saying is, true attention will get you into the apperceptive mind. You'll feel yourself sinking into it. Now whatever is going on, let's say, the ego is thinking, or there's one thought and then another thought, whatever's going on, insofar that you're identified with the apperceptive mind, you become aware of that. Now I'm explaining it the way I-- again, the way I understand it.

CdA: Then it's the gap? If you are in-- if you are in the reflective apperceptive mind, you've already inserted yourself in (the gap).

AD (simultaneously): Yeah. [short pause] It'll be momentary, infinitesimal. Because like you notice that your attention doesn't persist very long, you know, it spurts, and it may last 30 seconds, 20 seconds, a minute, but it's very short-lived, if it's really attention. And I'm speaking about--

AH: Anthony, if I'm aware of watching one thought follow another thought, and like that perspective of awareness I feel to be myself in some way.

AD: I'm going to leave out those words, even though he uses them in this exercise. Because that's not going to be the Self.

AH: Well, I know that I'm doing that, ok. How about, I'm aware that I'm trying to be aware.

AD: Yeah, it's not exactly that, alright, Andrew. What happens is like I said--if in a-- in the short time that you are *totally attentive*, the processes that are going on are reflected. It is that reflective-- that reflection going on that you become aware of. [short pause] I know it's difficult, but I'll say it once more, I don't-- I don't mean to disagree with what this-- you know, PB's exercise, I'm talking from personal experience. I'm not talking from his point of view. I'm altering things a little bit. But I have found that not only did I understand what I was doing, but I also found that that *was* what I was doing--the way I explained it to myself. So, you know, you could follow this or follow whatever clues I could provide. Let me try again. You're in a state--now I'm asking you to just quietly try to be sympathetic with this--you're in a state of very deep attention. Now I call that deep attention "the undivided mind." Think of it like a big mirror. And these processes that are going on, the ego and the chattering that's going on, or the thoughts arising, *are being reflected in that undivided mind*. You're aware of these processes *indirectly*. You get the point the way I'm trying to explain it? You don't directly-- you don't directly, so to speak, are looking at one thought and then another thought. But because you're immersed in the attention, that process is reflected in the attention. It would be impossible if you are, you know, very intensely concentrated, and your attention is fully there, you're fully alert, alright, that these processes go on that you're not aware of them. You will be aware of them. Later on you'll cut them out, but you will be aware of them. And you might even be aware of the mind perceiving one thought--let's say, perceiving the world, and making an image for it, and then perceiving the next. In other words, you can see that process, you can see the *mind* formulate its mental images and construction. But I don't want to put that as a goal right now. We're not interested in that. We're only interested that you get so attentive that this process-- the thoughts arising, alright, and their disappearance and this distance between them is reflected in your intense attention. You know, they give it another word, they call it 'absorption.' You can give it any words you want. I'm trying to use the simplest. Attention is what I found to be the key to everything.

[9¾ second pause]

PB [*The Wisdom of the Overself*, "The Yoga of the Discerning Mind," p. 414, AD reading]: "The aim [AD: he says] is self-reflectively to isolate Mind..."

AD: And I'm putting it slightly differently: through reflection, through reflection you will isolate yourself, and this isolation, so to speak, is the mind, is that undivided mind that you [one word inaudible]

My understanding is that *this is not the stillness of the mind*. Alright. It is the undivided mind, but it isn't-- PB went way beyond these states. Ok? So, just make a little notation [couple words inaudible]

LDM: Is the attention distinct from the undivided mind here?

AD: When the attention-- when the attention becomes *complete*, alright, then it is the undivided mind. It is also referred to very often as the Spontaneous Mind. In other words, the part of it which is active, alright, and produces the images is referred to as the spontaneous part. The part of it which is still, quiet, you know, Stillness itself--that too is the undivided mind, but they don't refer to it as the Spontaneous, they refer to it as Absolute Mind. But again, all these-- all these are a lot of words.

[short pause]

PB [*The Wisdom of the Overself*, “The Yoga of the Discerning Mind,” p. 414, AD reading]: “The higher meditation begins when thought is no longer preoccupied with its offspring...”

AD: I’m sorry.

PB [*The Wisdom of the Overself*, “The Yoga of the Discerning Mind,” p. 414, AD reading]: “[And], owing to the inconceivable quickness with which the world-thought vibrates as successive sense-images, this cannot be accomplished [AD reads: we cannot accomplish this] in a merely intellectual way.”

AD: Well, we’ve spoken about it in an intellectual way. But that isn’t the same thing as the experiencing of it.

PB [*The Wisdom of the Overself*, “The Yoga of the Discerning Mind,” p. 414, AD reading]: “It cannot be done without some kind of yoga but when his thoughts are directed to search with determination and understanding for [AD reads: of] their own ‘stuff’ they enter upon a form of yoga which is quicker in yielding results than almost all other forms. Consciousness [AD: Mind] is to be caught between two alternate ideas and [thus] cleared of all thoughts [and] kept attentively alert and wakefully alive to its own character at the same time. He must burrow beneath all thoughts to their deepest ground. He must reach inwards behind the endless series of disconnected thoughts... .. Thought [AD: or Mind] is that hidden ultimate element whose activity we know as [AD adds: physical] consciousness, whose manifestation we experience as thoughts and whose existence contains the world-idea’s [AD reads: the world’s-- the world-idea’s] own existence whereas a thought is something which the mind creates or has for itself and perceives in itself.”

AD: Alright, obviously when he says here “Thought or Mind is hidden ultimate element whose activity we know as physical consciousness,” you see I would be referring back to the undivided mind again, or the rational soul. The experience here that one has--the possibility of the experiencing of, for instance, you know, the so-called dream of Scipio when he saw himself out in space, or the dream of Jung, if you want to call it a dream, where he realized that (he was being) and that coincided with the world--that’s what we’re talking about [few words inaudible] [11¾ second pause] Alright, we’ll stop right there, we’ll go over it again--after 35 minute battle.

[short pause]

S (faint): Well, the (few) that arrive in that state of attention that defines the undivided mind [few words inaudible]

[Audio File 1983 0116a Ends]

[Additional Notes by JF: Additional instruction after the first meditation was not taped. JF’s notes indicate continuation of reading/discussion of rest of PB *Serpent’s Path* Exercise, as well as reading of some relevant PB paras. PB, *Notebooks*, V13, 19:4.172: “Whoever attempts this exercise should practise it with the eyes only slightly open.” Also see pp. 419-421 in 2015 North Atlantic reprinting of *The Wisdom of the Overself* for a selection of relevant PB paras on this exercise.]