INTRODUCTION

A small book called The Empty Chair sets forth the message of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, a Hasidic master who lived from 1772 until 1810. For Rebbe Nachman, "living in tune meant awareness—being aware of the transient nature of this world and the eternity of the next." Thus, when he spotted one of his followers rushing by, he asked the man whether he had looked up at the sky that morning. "No, Rebbe, I haven't had the time," was the reply.

"Believe me," responded the Rebbe, "in fifty years everything you see here will be gone. There will be another fair—with other horses, other wagons, different people. I won't be here then and neither will you. So what's so important that you don't have time to look at the sky?"1

I perceive myself as one who, for many years, had no time to look at the sky. Not only did I rush from one event to another, I felt lazy if I weren't doing several things at once. When I was in law school, I remember, I would feed the baby, study contracts, and cook dinner at the same time. Moments when my attention was totally absorbed in one activity were rare. I still regret the fragmentary attention I gave my children when they shouted, "Mommy, look! Look at me!" as they jumped in the pool, or rode a bike with no hands.

It is painful to recall how inattentive I was, how severely I blocked my perceptions with busyness. I wish I had paid attention, been more mindful. Charles Tart speaks of the recognition in Eastern and Western spiritual traditions that "we are all too mindless. Such mindlessness causes immense amounts of human suffering, suffering which is stupid and

unnecessary, because if you knew what you were doing and why you were doing it, you would have the possibility of acting more adaptively.” If we paid attention, we could see, and then we could choose.

In "Entering the Kingdom," the poet Mary Oliver describes another realm of possibility, a total surrender to the experience of paying attention:

The dream of my life
Is to lie down by a slow river
And stare at the light in the trees--
To learn something by being nothing
A little while but the rich
Lens of attention.\(^3\)

Her words communicate a sense of quiet patience and of wonder. Shunryu Suzuki calls this attitude "beginner's mind," saying:

When we have no thought of achievement, no thought of self, we are true beginners. Then we can really learn something. The beginner's mind is the mind of compassion. When our mind is compassionate, it is boundless... Then we are always true to ourselves, in sympathy with all beings... "\(^4\)

It is in this attitude of calm receptivity that attention can flow, in all of its forms. Attention, as described by Mary Oliver, is an openness, a stillness, a vulnerability to what is. As she and Suzuki both note, it is through true attention that we can truly learn. As for me, I have only begun to feel recently that attention is a necessity rather than a luxury. Still, I realize that there have been, occasionally, activities that called forth my full attention, and also there have been times that I paid more attention than I knew.


\(^3\)Oliver, Mary, New and Selected Poems, Beacon Press, Boston, MA (1992):190.

I have had a passion for photography for almost 20 years, and as a photographer, I have literally experienced being "the rich lens of attention." When I am engaged in photography, the experience of observing a subject has its own intrinsic value, even if the film were never printed. Looking through the lens, focusing, framing, composing, brings me into a profound space of attention and absorption.

In the way that photography focuses the attention completely, it is like meditation. Nothing exists except the moment, the flower, the breath of wind, the moment when the wind stops and the finger presses the shutter. Then, after the darkness through the lens, the next moment arrives. Stored in memory and on film, the image has already changed in reality, altered by the changing light, the intervention of something new in the scene, or my own change in position. All considerations other than the image, and seeing and recording the image, are gone. While I am photographing, I have no sense of time, only a sense of the movement of the sun and the clouds and changes in the wind and weather.

Yet I do not participate in this experience in isolation. The subject awakens responses in me, and my engagement with the subject impacts it, sometimes profoundly. As Henri Cartier-Bresson says, "The photographer's eye is perpetually evaluating. A photographer can bring about coincidence of line by moving his head a fraction of a millimeter. He can modify perspectives by a slight bending of the knees."\(^5\) So, as a photographer, my personal, unique perspective interacts with my subject and influences what is revealed.

Several years ago, I went with a group of photographers to Costa Rica. We spent

hours on the shining, black sand beaches. I photographed the waves rushing in, the white shells and driftwood lying stark on the sand after the waves receded, the rugged cliffs, the biker silhouetted against the ocean. When we had a group slide show later, I was shocked to see that another person had photographed the cruise ship debris that had collected in a cove. His pictures were of empty toothpaste tubes, rusty razors, plastic containers and plastic bags. Our pictures were taken at the same place, but he allowed his attention to include the unpleasant, the ugly, while I focused only on what was beautiful to me.

From inattention, to selective attention, I have come to an interest in--simply--attention. I say "simply," but attention comes in different forms; it is flowing, dynamic, and complex. Moreover, it is not incidental, but the essense of experience. Simone Weil says that prayer consists of attention. "It is the orientation of all the attention of which the soul is capable toward God. The quality of the attention counts for much in the quality of the prayer. Warmth of heart cannot make up for it."\(^6\)

Attention, learning to pay attention, is a faculty that becomes enhanced with practice. In her poem, "The Moths," Mary Oliver tells us:

If you notice anything, 
it leads you to notice more 
and more.\(^7\)

What I will describe in this paper is attention as it occurs in the practice of psychotherapy, in its different forms and with its different objects, with comparisons to

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\(^7\)Oliver:132.
meditation and other practices. I will also draw analogies to my camera work; I may look with a wide-angle lens, or focus in closely using a macro lens for minute detail. If I use a filter, I color or distort the entire landscape. This paper is illustrated with photographs from the Albany landfill, an incredible and mysterious place that can be interpreted as a psychological landscape. There are hills and beaches, broken rocks and old tires, rusty pipe, concrete slabs, roses and blackberries, avenues of fennel, a piano, skunks and sculpted metal. Photographing this landscape is like interacting with a client. I am present, here and now, my interest focused on the client. I am curious about her concerns, her interior landscape, and I look for clues in her exterior landscape. On the level of process, my attention widens, then narrows; I notice my own feelings and thoughts, I return my attention to her. On another level, my presence and full attention create a neutral space for her to allow herself to become more fully present, for what exists to reveal itself.

Alfred Steiglitz describes this experience in photography:

The moment dictates for me what I must do. I have no theory about what the moment should bring. I am not attempting to be in more than one place at a time, to do more than one thing at a time. I am not in any hurry. I want nothing from anyone. I simply react to the moment. For, to me, all lived moments are equally true, equally important. . . . When I am no longer thinking but simply am, the I may be said to be truly affirming life. Not to know, but to let exist what is, that alone, perhaps, is truly to know."8

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ATTENTION! ATTENTION! ATTENTION!

Although I had not heard of her, I signed up immediately when the flyer came from Spirit Rock presenting a day with Kathleen Riordan Speeth:

This day is for people helpers, people lovers, and all those who want to benefit from I-Thou applications of the compelling attentional practices found in Eastern and Western meditative traditions. How to witness the deep self truths of others? We all allow our minds to wander but few have learned the twin secrets of insight meditation and psychoanalysis in which attention bare of labels gently reveals profundities that heal and support the development of compassion and lovingkindness. We need to function well in the whole attention continuum, from deep empathy to holding a therapeutic stance, lest our work suffer from stagnation, desensitization, or burn-out.

At Spirit Rock, Joan Fenold introduces Kathy Speeth, who has studied Gurdjieff for a long time and who will be speaking on attentional techniques for people helpers. She notes three attentional modes—not new, but already known to us as evoked by the environment: concentrated attention, panoramic attention, and inner-outer attentional flow. The aim here, she says, is to get these under control.⁹

Speeth asserts that "attention of the finest quality is the fundamental instrument of the therapist."¹⁰ Yet, as therapists, we may be untrained, or only incidentally trained, in the art of paying attention. We may learn from our own personal psychotherapy to attune ourselves to the reality of the moment and we may learn from the discipline of meditation other techniques for directing and controlling our attention. But different kinds of attention are called for in the

⁹I have used bold print to indicate transcriptions/adaptations of my journal notes from Kathleen Riordan Speeth's Spirit Rock workshop on April 13, 1996.

practice of psychotherapy, and we can learn to attend to our attention.

Attention can be categorized in terms of the kind of focus of attention: narrow focused, specifically invested attention, or panoramic, wide focused, evenly invested attention. In addition, attention can be categorized by its contents: self (internal), and other (external). An awareness that encompasses all these forms of attention is called witness consciousness, containing awareness of the kind of attention, the object of attention, and correlated events.\(^\text{11}\)

The categories of contemplative practice noted by Michael Washburn blend some of these attentional forms:

Most spiritual traditions divide contemplative practice into three stages, which I shall call controlled attention, poised awareness, and contemplation proper. \(...\)

Dharana or controlled attention is the practice of keeping the mind alertly focused on a specific object (idea, image). \(...\)

[In dhyana] the mind is able to give easily flowing continuous attention to the chosen object. \(...\)

Samadhi is the culminating stage of practice in which the division between subject and object collapses and the subject merges with the object in a state of contemplative absorption.\(^\text{12}\)

We see that dharana resembles focused attention, dhyana, panoramic attention. When the contents of attention become a unity—observer and observed merge—samadhi occurs. Washburn points out that a similar division of contemplative stages takes place in the Roman Catholic tradition, beginning with meditative prayer (focusing on the theme of meditation), which is like specifically invested attention. The next stage is prayer of recollection, a "state of alert, silent receptivity to the influx of spirit."\(^\text{13}\) This receptivity sounds much like evenly invested

\(^\text{11}\)Speeth:143.


\(^\text{13}\)Washburn:302.
attention. The third stage, contemplation proper, begins when the silent receptivity becomes moved or stirred by the influx of numinous power. The person in prayerful attention experiences the Divine; subject and object are one. \textit{Enstasty} is the term Washburn uses (following Mircea Eliade) to describe a state of mature contemplation that incorporates all the other contemplative forms. It begins with controlled attention and becomes "a synthesis of opposites. It is a synthesis of fusion and infusion, absorption and expansion, composure and inspiration."\textsuperscript{14} This has the flavor of what Speeth calls "witness consciousness."

While Washburn deals with the division of attentional stages in the individual spiritual experience of contemplation, Speeth notes the flow and interaction of forms of attention in the interactive experience of psychotherapy:

As a psychotherapist I have a great deal of raw data with which I can fine-tune attention. There is information on what is going on outside of me and how much I am specifically focused on any particular aspect of it. There is information on what is going on inside of me and to what degree I am focused within. And there is meta-information that tells me how my attention is fluctuating from inside to outside and back again, and how the beam of my awareness is focusing narrowly or opening panoramically. Consciousness plays now on my client, now on myself. Now it is intensely caught by something, now even and free.\textsuperscript{15}

Linguistics professor Wallace Chafe defines consciousness as "an active focusing on a small part of the conscious being's self-centered model of the surrounding world."\textsuperscript{16} In this context, consciousness and attention are synonymous. The focus of consciousness, he says, is dynamic, moving restlessly from one item of information to the next. He summarizes:

\textsuperscript{14}Washburn:301-302.

\textsuperscript{15}Speeth:144.

All conscious experiences have a focus and a periphery, all function as brief parts of a restless sequencing in which each focus is quickly replaced by another, and all have a point of view and an orientation.  

His definition seems accurate, at least as to ordinary states of consciousness, whether referring to concentration of focus or evenly receptive attention. It is perhaps only in advanced spiritual stages of consciousness that point of view and orientation disappear from conscious experience. Joan Borysenko suggests that point of view and orientation need to be held, if the restless sequencing of the mind is to be stilled. "To develop a state of inner awareness," she says, "to witness and let go of the old dialogues, you need an observation point." She calls this observation point the anchor of attention, which holds the mind in place, keeping it from drifting out to sea.

Chafe's term for the witness consciousness that Speeth speaks of is introspections, which he defines as meta-awarenesses of what consciousness is doing, such as being aware of remembering, or being aware of perceiving. Speeth describes this awareness in more detail:

At the apex, the witness is aware of awareness. Ordinarily this part of the mind is a non-interfering observer of the fluctuating focus of attention as it flits from outside to inside, from wide to narrow, and back again. With training, it can also take control, intentionally directing the attention to focus on something, to maintain steady awareness of something, to stop focusing on something, or to play evenly over a field that encompasses everything without exception.

The flow and mix of consciousness are illustrated in this passage from Terry

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17 Chafe: 30.
19 Speeth: 145.
Tempest Williams' *Refuge*, in which we can experience the narrator/observer's perceptions, both outer and inner, as they narrow and expand:

Today's storm has brought in the birds. Everywhere I look, wind and wings. Swarms of swallows dip down at the crest of each wave to feed. Ibises, avocets, and stilts forage in the submerged grasses. Geese fly above them, and it is unclear whether snowflakes fall or feathers. It is one of those curious days when time and season are out of focus, when what you know is hidden behind the weather.\(^{20}\)

Williams first observes the expansive scene; she sees birds, wind and waves. Then she sees particular kinds of birds and the details of where they feed, where they fly. Her attention diffuses; snow or feathers? She subtly moves from the external world to the internal, when she experiences time and the weather "out of focus, when what you know is hidden . . . ."

Clarissa Pinkola Williams offers another aspect of attention in the wealth of detail she provides in her stories:

The hunter had turned to scoop up his net, so he did not see her bald head rise above the waves, he did not see the little coral creatures glinting in the orbs of her skull, he did not see the crustaceans on her old ivory teeth.\(^{21}\)

Attention to detail can emerge from concentrated attention, or from observing panoramically and watching what emerges or changes. For the psychotherapist, the ability to observe detail has great value. The client is often unaware of physical responses that the therapist can perceive, the gestures of the hand, stillness of the breath, tone of voice, flushing of the face. To notice and to share such detail with the client provides both information and a sense of careful, caring attention.


PRESENCE

Before an observer works with attention, in any of its forms, he needs to be present with the object of the attention. Shunryu Suzuki says this is true zazen: "What you eat, eat! You should eat what is there, you know. Sometimes you do not eat it. Even though you are eating, your mind is somewhere else."\(^2\) Psychotherapist William Dubin describes his technique for engaging psychology students in cultivating an open, receptive state of presence. "I brought in beach stones. I gave a stone to each of the supervisees and said, 'This is your client. Be with your client.'"\(^3\) Students had different responses. One felt irritable and frustrated at trying to be with a stone; another struggled with fatigue:

He did not realize how exhausted he was until he started to examine the stone. He looked at the stone carefully, appraising its cracks, coloring, shape, and blemishes, but he was worn out and began having trouble sustaining his concentration. . . After a few minutes he began to feel that it was alright to just be there with the stone and he started to feel somewhat better. It was a surprise to him that he felt more related to the stone toward the end of the exercise.\(^4\)

Dubin says that the notion of being with someone, rather than doing something, is alien to most people. "The potency of merely being open and receptive is usually overlooked or devalued as a monotonous waste of time."\(^5\) As Suzuki says, "When you are concentrated on the quality of your being, you are prepared for the activity."\(^6\)

\(^2\)Suzuki:83.


\(^4\)Dubin:68.

\(^5\)Dubin:68.

\(^6\)Suzuki:105.
CONCENTRATION

Concentration, or narrowly focused attention, is illustrated by that attention we have "when entranced with a work of art, horrified at an accident, or even lost in reading the back of a cereal box."\textsuperscript{27} In photography, it can be demonstrated with the use of a macro lens--also called a portrait or close-up lens. Whatever the subject, large or small, near or far, the macro lens allows it to fill the frame, every tiny detail becoming prominent.

The path of concentration on a single object remains the most familiar description of meditation for Westerners. According to Michael Epstein, describing the psychodynamics of meditation, concentration "involves the stabilization and quiescence of the mind through the development of one-pointedness and absorption in a single object. Attention is . . . restricted, narrowed and focused until a kind of oneness or merger is achieved . . ."\textsuperscript{28}

Speeth talks about concentration in meditation:

Concentration is the fixation of attention on something to the exclusion of everything else. Typically, though not exclusively, the meditator is instructed to diligently require the wandering mind to become wholly occupied with one object, perhaps a kasina--a distinctly colorful form like a light blue disk on a white background. . . or more commonly, the breath."\textsuperscript{29}

Suzuki says that the purpose of Zen is not merely concentration: "The true purpose is to see things as they are, and to let everything go as it goes. . . So concentrating is just an aid to help you realize 'big mind' or the mind that is everything."\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{27}Speeth:144.


\textsuperscript{29}Speeth:146.

\textsuperscript{30}Suzuki:33.
William Dubin, as noted above, begins working with students on centering after their experience of being with their stone clients. "Centering exercises are given to help produce conditions of balanced, open awareness. Thus, the next series of exercises concentrate on the individual turning inward and focusing on internal processes. . . The focus is intrapsychic. A good exercise is breath counting."31 Dubin indicates that he encourages students to focus on whatever discomfort or symptoms emerge during the exercise. He finds that focusing on the discomfort rather than trying to get rid of it has a paradoxical effect; subtle energies release and allow another state to evolve.32 Thus, focusing the attention internally and remaining open to the experience, rather than resistant to it, allows the experience to flow and change.

Borysenko recommends focusing on a mantra. The ancient Sanskrit mantra, Ham Sah, she says, is supposed to imitate the sound of inhalation and exhalation. "Ham means 'I am' and Sah means 'That'. That is regarded as the part of the mind that witnesses all our experience—or awareness itself."33

Kathy Speeth gives an example of concentrated or focused attention: being involved in watching a movie. She proposes a baseline for the day’s exercises. Reflect upon five or six issues in your life today, and list them. After listing them, number them in order of least concern (being #5) to most concern (#1). During some of the exercises, we will select a number from this list to work with. I make my list. #5-money, #4-dilemma about work, #3-transition, #2-aloneness, #1-frustration at lack of development.

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33 Borysenko:142.
First, however, we are to do a concentration exercise. Each of us is to choose a partner and look into our partner's left eye. We are first to make contact, then to focus with curiosity and generosity. Speech quotes Simone Weil as having said that concentration of attention burns away evil.

I look steadily into Neil's left eye. Around his eye, his face is changing, becoming young, growing old. When we finish the exercise, I feel that I know him, even though the only words we said were to exchange names. Speech tells us that this experience is similar to trance meditations, bliss meditations, like hypnosis. She acknowledges that the face may appear to change, that it is easy to construe past lives coming up. Bliss, she says, is produced when the mind capitulates. Concentration meditation causes you to lose all sense of self. Psychopathology, she suggests, can be described as a dysfunctional, or unwilling, one-pointedness. She mentions that the use of mantras causes focused concentration, and she talks about Stendhal syndrome—when, in Florence, for example, people go into samadhi trances in front of paintings, in bliss.

Gestalt therapist Joseph Zinker describes a similar experience in Creative Experience in Gestalt Therapy, using the term "lasered focusing" to identify the process.

I am sitting opposite a woman and we are focusing on one point between each other’s eyes. In this case, I am not gazing at all—my eyes do not move freely and my eyelids do not move over my eyeballs. I stare without closing my eyes. . . The woman in front of me has a round face with large brown eyes which change as I am staring between them. First, they look cold and morose. I visualize a murderess and think to myself, she could kill without a moment’s hesitation. . . The therapist can tune into feelings and images inside others which are already inside of him, if only on a fuzzy, undifferentiated, or archetypal level. Jung pointed out that the more frightening the vision is, the less assimilated it is inside the person. If the vision is a complete surprise, then one knows that it must
have roots which are not directly related to one's personal history.\textsuperscript{34}

Zinker goes on to describe the images that emerge as he stares at the point between this woman's eyes. He sees her as a cat, and as she identifies with the image he describes to her, he encourages her to act out her cat nature. The use of lasered focusing becomes a tool, perceptual and intuitive, which deepens the Gestalt experience.

As we observe in Zinker's description, one-pointed concentration leads to increased subjectivity and, potentially, profound identification with the object. Sometimes identification is involuntary, for instance, when we read a book and find ourselves weeping over the characters. In a study of caregivers—looking at attitudes that led either to burn-out or to professional satisfaction—it was found that in the positive caring encounter, the caregiver identified with the patient, experiencing union beyond the level of self, at the spiritual level. One caregiver described her experience, saying, "I have the opportunity to experience a thousand different lifetimes through someone else's eyes."\textsuperscript{35}

In psychotherapy, identification is a tool which can be used intentionally, just as in siddha yoga, where the practice of guru bhave involves intentional identification of each part of the body with the corresponding part of the body of the spiritual teacher.\textsuperscript{36} In psychotherapy, the therapist can choose to identify with the client through empathy. Speeth quotes Greenson, another analyst, in describing the intentional use of empathy:


\textsuperscript{36}Speeth:147.
Empathy means to share, to experience the feelings of another human being. Its motive, in psychoanalysis, is to gain understanding. It can be consciously instigated or interrupted. By shifting the working model of the patient into the foreground and pushing all that is uniquely me into the background, I have let the patient's words and feelings enter this part of me.\(^7\)

Speech offers an exercise, concentrating on one of the issues we identified above. We again pair off, and each partner is to take time for a monologue, without interruption. The speaker focuses on her issue; the partner is to be present and empathetic. I talk about the pain and frustration of being in transition, the distress of being in-between, in the unknown. As I talk, I realize this time is also a gift, a time for receiving rather than producing or giving. I feel how hard it is for me to receive, to allow myself the gift of this time. My partner Lisa then talks about feeling, "I'm not enough." I listen to her and am present to her, and at the same time I identify personally with her concern. I see her issue underlying my struggle to allow my transition. If I felt I were enough, I would give myself permission to be where I am in my life.

Speech quotes Simone Weil: "You who are before me are a mystery. If I don't remember that, you are just a nuisance." Concentration, Speech says, involves narrow focus, is specifically invested and subjective. Concentrated attention leads to subjective experience. Krishnamurti urged that you sit in front of a tree and be the tree. The observer and the observed become one, merged; empathy takes place. (There are problems with boundaries, but taste the bliss!) Someone asks a question about projection; Speech responds that our learning is about the taste of myself versus the taste of myself in you, the importance of discernment. "Union can be absolute--known from the inside."

\(^7\)Speech: 148.
Concentrated attention or "lasered focusing" also seems to influence physical experience. In the journal *Imagination, Cognition and Personality*, researchers Pekala and Arsek questioned what state of awareness people were in when they walked over hot coals. They found that immunity from burns in firewalking seemed to be associated not with a hypnotic trance state but rather with "a very absorbed attentional style where the mind is one-pointed."38 One firewalker described taking several steps over the hot coals and then becoming curious about what was happening. When he focused his attention on one foot, or began to think about what was going on, he felt very hot heat, and quickly refocused his attention. There were small red spots on that foot afterward. The researchers concluded that "high levels of one-pointedness and absorption, that is, how attention is deployed during firewalking, may be more critical (than an alternation in consciousness in general) for the fire immunity observed during firewalking."39 A missing element in this description is where, or how, the attention was focused. Clearly, there was a risk in shifting attention.

The use of focused attention is also a risk for therapists, not because dropping the focus is dangerous as in firewalking, but because of the risk of sustaining it without returning to the self. The experiences of empathy and identification allow a great deal of information to come to the therapist. At the same time, the therapist risks taking on the client's burdens and losing a grounded, secure sense of self.40


39Pekala:225.

40Speeth:150.
PANORAMIC ATTENTION

Philosopher and theologian Simone Weil says:

Attention consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty, and ready to be penetrated by the object. . . Above all our thought should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive in its naked truth the object that is to penetrate it.41

Panoramic or diffuse attention has a wide focus; it is evenly invested, impartial and objective. Speeth proposes a diffuse attention exercise. We are to sit and allow whatever comes into the mind to come and go. Afterward, my partner Phyllis says she went to sleep. Speeth tells us that this kind of meditation can be very difficult for Westerners, that we need interactive situations in addition to sitting on a pillow. "We’re in time and space so briefly and we’re made of nothingness," she says. This kind of attention is an effortless poise of the mind, where you just are. This is like night vision, peripheral vision. You just are there. This is the fundamental part of Vipassana meditation.

Panoramic attention uses a wide angle lens, allowing a sense of breadth and spaciousness to arise. The entire scene is observed, without choosing or selecting any particular object for the focus of attention. "One is mindful of whatever is the case, moment by moment. The idea is not to be fascinated or fixed upon any one thing, but to allow the attention to be flexible and to stay with whatever is in the field of perception."42 This is the kind of nonjudgmental observation Krishnamurti discusses:

41Weil:111-112.
42Speeth:151.
Just listen carefully, observe the dark and the light, the slum and the non-slum. Can you watch that? Can there be an awareness in which these divisions don't exist? Is there an awareness in which the division between poverty and riches does not exist? Not the fact that there is not the division, with all its injustice, immorality, all that—but an awareness in which this division doesn't exist? That is, can the mind observe the beauty of the hill and the squalor, and not prefer, or incline to one, opposed to the other?\(^4\)

This cultivation of "choiceless awareness" leads to disinterested knowledge of things as they truly are. Krishnamurti explains how the mind, rather than using energy in labeling everything, becomes free to deal with that which it observes:

To so observe is a form of discipline, isn't it? Not imposing any particular pattern, which means conformity, suppression and all the rest of it, but to observe the whole series of actions without condemning, justifying or naming—just to observe. Then you will see that the mind is no longer wasting energy.\(^4\)

In addition to his use of "lasered focusing," Joseph Zinker uses a form of panoramic attention, which he calls "gazing," in his Gestalt therapy practice. He scans, with his eyes calm and unfocused, "allowing objects and patterns to assert themselves. One feels alert and clear, without the need to cling to any particular thought."\(^4\) When he sits with a client, Zinker says, he is looking at the client but not seeing, listening but hearing the sound of his voice rather than specific content.

When I move into a state of gazing, my ego boundary is clearly separated from the other person's world. There is no confluence. I am an independent agent. I have complete freedom from the other's limited and specialized categorization of experience. When I am not seduced into the client's literal meanings, I can invent new metaphors of his world. . . At the same time, gazing gives me a sense of the equal beauty or ugliness or value of the world around me. I can homogenize everything and then let something emerge as figure from the

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\(^4\)Krishnamurti:445.

\(^4\)Zinker:262.
undifferentiated ground. The other person can be the 'whole world' and I can allow different parts of him to become figural at random. I am fascinated and focused and disinterested, all at once.\footnote{Zinker:263-4.}

Zinker's experience of gazing reminds me of using my 28 to 70 millimeter zoom lens. At its widest focus, I can see the 'whole world'; I can see the grasses at my feet sweeping to the huge chunks of concrete piled at the edge of the cliff, the sparkling bay, the San Francisco skyline hazy in the distance, the pale blue sky overhead. A movement nearby catches my eye. I press a button and the camera focuses close on a small bird in a dusty bush beside the trail.

Zinker continues his description of attentional flow:

When I move from gazing into a more focused attitude, the visual punctuality is firm and clear. My looking rhythm moves from homogenized equalization to clear-edged analysis, and later to a ground-glass equalization again. One attitude strengthens the other.\footnote{Zinker:264.}

Speeth offers a Gestalt exercise, the continuum of awareness. Maintain your awareness in the present, here and now. Attend to all experience, internal and external, abstract and concrete. With regard to every experience, verbalize "Now I am aware that . . ." Harriet generously tells me that she is impressed at how much I'm aware of, how much I notice. This makes me feel good, as if I've learned something.

The awareness continuum reveals the movement of attention inward and outward. Interestingly, the flow of inner and outer attention has become a subject of inquiry in competitive sports. For example, studies have been done recently regarding the attentional style of runners—the degree to which they focus on internal versus external stimuli during running. Long distance
runners have been characterized as using one of two primary attentional styles: dissociation, which these studies define as an external focus of attention, or association, an internal focus.

Dissociation was said to occur when runners cut themselves off from physiological feedback and focused on environmental cues or imagery while running. In contrast, association was said to occur when runners tuned into and maintained awareness of their bodies and physiological functioning during the run.⁴⁸

Runners are not locked in one attentional state, though one orientation is primary. And in general, they attend more to external stimuli during training than during racing, when their focus moves to "performance-oriented cognitive activities."⁴⁹ The flow of their attention thus is related to their intention, with a more external focus in practice and a more internal focus in competition.

Speeth informs us that bare attention opens us to a new world. Let things be, let things flow through us. Learn to see everything that is, not just those things that we relate to the separate ego.

In speaking of this world of bare attention, William Dubin quotes Goldstein and Kornfield:

What is it that is reactive? Our minds are reactive: liking and disliking, judging and comparing, clinging and condemning . . . . Mindfulness is that quality of attention which notices without choosing, without preference; it is a choiceless awareness that, like the sun, shines on all things equally.⁵⁰

So I have learned to photograph what is there—not only the fields of flowers but also the chunk

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⁴⁹Ogles:170.

of asphalt, the big rusty trash bin, the concrete monoliths. In the same way, with a client, my ability to be with whatever is there provides a space for the client to accept the reality of the life he experiences. He can be present to the realities he perceives as unpleasant and ugly, as well as his experiences of sweetness and pleasure, and we both have the potential to learn more about his world, in its entirety. Speeth explains:

Maintaining even attention regardless of content permits the client to express negativities, talk about taboo issues, and report unpleasant reactions to the therapeutic situation that would be hidden if the therapist showed by the subtlest of reinforcing communications that these topics were hurtful or unwelcome.\(^5\)

Alan Watts quotes Carl Jung in expressing a similar notion. Jung, speaking before a group of ministers in 1932, said, "We cannot change anything unless we accept it. . . If a doctor wishes to help a human being he must be able to accept him as he is."\(^6\)

Now we are to attempt free association; the therapist partner is to observe with evenly hovering attention. This, of course, is the traditional Freudian stance. We should be open, with panoramic awareness. Just lie down, Speeth instructs, therapist at your left shoulder, for 20 minutes. I feel willing to talk about whatever issue is coming up for me, yet when I write it down, this is all I remember: All I see is color; I tell my partner about my colors as they furl and unfold and dance. I see an Eastern face, like a monk's face, with one gleaming eye. It seems he has a message, but I feel sad; I feel I've lost the message or I haven't understood.

Arthur Deikman explains that free association is often used "as a way of by-


passing [the] controlled, hidden self. The more a person just allows their thoughts and emotions to flow, the more the underlying issue will manifest itself in the content. Then the client may begin to see connections where there was isolation before . . . ."53

William Dubin also discusses free association, quoting Freud's paper on analytic technique, in which he says, "The technique . . . consists simply in not directing one's notice to anything in particular and in maintaining the same evenly suspended attention . . . in the face of all that one hears."54 The purpose of this form of attention was not only to suspend judgment. Freud believed that the analyst's unconscious needed to be a receiver for the patient's unconscious. He was determined not to censor the patient's material; he insisted that the doctor "not tolerate any resistances in himself which hold back from his consciousness what has been perceived by his unconscious. . . ."55 The connection, then, was unconscious to unconscious.

Jean Shinoda Bolen describes another dimension of awareness of this connection. She quotes Jung as saying, "The relationship between doctor and patient . . . in more or less unconscious identification of doctor and patient, can lead to parapsychological phenomena."56 Bolen goes on to speak of her own experience as a psychiatrist:

In the analytic process, it often seems as if doctor and patient are in a mild, shared, light trance state. Face to face in separate chairs, they unconsciously mirror each other's body posture and gestures, while at the same time deeply sharing material and feelings. In such situations, I often think of something, and my patient's next words are about it. . . The therapist may have what he or she

53Tart and Deikman:32.
feels to be an "extraneous" mental image, only to find it is very significant to the patient.57

Speeth suggests using a tape recorder and free associating. She says it combs your mind--per Freud Rinpoche.

Has my adventure in the Albany landfill been an experience of free association? In a way, the entire series of pictures I took reveal the flow and movement of my attention as I walked through the place. Now I see the grasses moving in the wind, and I photograph them, and now a junk pile of tires and rusty pipe juts out against the landscape, and now I go through a tunnel of fennel, and now suddenly I come upon a piano that has been shattered (where are the keys, I keep wondering), and then a concrete and metal sculpture, complete with bicycle wheel, and now . . .

57Bolen:34-35.
WITNESS CONSCIOUSNESS

We have considered a number of attentional possibilities—focused or lasered concentration, open, receptive attention, outwardly directed attention, and inwardly focused attention. In addition, there is a form of attention, or meta-awareness, which requires that the therapist sustain an inner stance of impartial observation. "If the therapist is to know when and how attention is being used, a certain amount of awareness must be withdrawn from the therapeutic interaction to watch the process."58 This is witness consciousness. As a photographer, witness consciousness is the decision-maker looking through the lens, the one who chooses what to frame in the lens, how close to come in, whether to press the shutter or wait for the light to soften or the wind to die down. Witness consciousness is both engaged and detached.

While allowing most of the attention to play freely upon what the client is saying and doing, and what associations I have to it, how interested I am and how empathetic, I reserve just a little attention to notice all this flux. I allow my attention to play freely or to zoom into deep identification, yet I sustain a bit of myself above it. When I am immersed, I watch my almost total immersion; when I am engaged in evenly hovering attention, I watch that.59

Speeth describes witness consciousness. Trained attention, she says, has an "I", a witness, a chooser. She recommends the Janus maneuver, seeing inward and outward at the same moment. She offers an exercise. The client again chooses an issue from the list prepared earlier in the day. The therapist is not to speak but is to visualize two columns to write down when the exercise is finished. In one column, I will write "when he/she said..." and in the other, "I thought/felt/moved my attention." She says

58Speeth:155.
59Speeth:155.
it is only 20 minutes each; we will remember.

When Jerry said, "I've worked with most of my issues," I felt dismay. When he said, "I want to talk more about not being or having enough," I thought, "He has beautiful eyes." When he said, "I'm intellectualizing," I turned my attention to what my head felt like. When he said, "I'm embarrassed having exposed a weakness," my heart constricted. When he said, "I was a lawyer," I thought, "Oh, we are alike!" When his eyes wandered beyond my shoulder, I felt uneasy, as if I were not enough.

Now I reflect on the day at Spirit Rock, noticing belatedly that two of my "clients" dealt with issues of "not being enough." It is no coincidence, I suggest to myself, that this is the issue that begins and ends my day. In fact, I realize, my issue of greatest concern was my frustration at my lack of development—that, according to some standard I have imagined for myself, I am not enough. This is yet another form of attention, which Jean Shinoda Bolen's words validate. She speaks to the importance of noticing synchronicity:

Paying attention to synchronicity, like paying attention to dreams, adds an extra dimension that enriches our inner lives and adds another facet to our awareness. In order to understand ourselves and the situation around us, we are far better off if we can receive and process information from symbolic as well as from logical sources.⁶⁰

It seems remarkable that noticing does indeed lead to noticing more, and more—that attention to the client leads to greater insight about myself, and attending to my own issues expands my ability to grasp what is happening for the client. There is mutuality, an endless flow, attention in one direction expanding the possibility for attention in another direction.

⁶⁰Bolen:47.
CONCLUSION

Simone Weil says:

Something in our soul has a far more violent repugnance for true attention than the flesh has for bodily fatigue. This something is much more connected with evil than is the flesh. That is why every time that we really concentrate our attention, we destroy the evil in ourselves. If we concentrate with this intention, a quarter of an hour of attention is better than a great many good works.\(^{41}\)

Joseph Zinker agrees: "most people suffer from functional blindness. Not only do we overlook the subtle visual aspects of our world, we often overlook the obvious."\(^{62}\)

Attention, it seems, is the fundamental component of consciousness—and we are so often inattentive. "The cultivation of non-interfering attention to both inner experience and to the world of perception is a pre-condition for recognizing the power of the human mind," Frances Vaughan asserts, in describing characteristics of people who are both psychologically and spiritually healthy.\(^{63}\) In the practice of psychotherapy, my presence and my attention may be the most significant things I have to offer. My skill is irrelevant without them. If, through the quality of attention I provide, my client feels truly seen, something worthwhile has taken place. The attention I give my client perhaps models for her the attention she might give herself. It says she is valued, worthy of being heard and seen. If my attention-bare-of-labels allows my client to accept who she is, what she has been through, in a non-judging way, she has space to expand. If I notice details, in her inner and outer landscape, that she has not been able to observe, she has the opportunity to see more about herself than she saw before. Simone Weil

\(^{41}\)Weil:111.

\(^{62}\)Zinker:257.

illuminates what it means, really to give another person your attention:

Those who are unhappy have no need for anything in this world but people capable of giving them their attention. The capacity to give one's attention to a sufferer is a very rare and difficult thing; it is almost a miracle; \textit{it is a miracle.}\textsuperscript{64}

The implications of this miracle of attention are profound. Robert McDermott, in his book about Rudolf Steiner, relates a wonderful story about Goethe, who became fascinated by the cathedral in Strasbourg, examining it under all lighting conditions, sketching it, even climbing its tower again and again to cure his vertigo. When it came time for him to leave Strasbourg, he told his friends that the tower was incomplete, and he sketched how it would have looked had it been finished. One of his friends found that the original drawings confirmed Goethe's perceptions and wondered how Goethe knew of the original design. Goethe responded that he learned from the tower itself. "I observed it so long and so attentively and I bestowed on it so much affection that it decided at the end to reveal to me its manifest secret."\textsuperscript{65} McDermott tells us that Goethe and Steiner agree that natural phenomena "reveal themselves fully to a person who approaches them with a free, unbiased spirit of observation and with a developed inner life in which the ideas of things manifest themselves."\textsuperscript{66}

As a human being, what am I but my attention? As Kathy Speeth said, "We're in time and space so briefly, and we're made of nothingness." All that matters ultimately is the scope and quality of attention I bring to the experience of being embodied on this planet, in this time and place. Mary Oliver, in her poem "The Summer Day," speaks to this existential quality

\textsuperscript{64}Weil:114.


\textsuperscript{66}McDermott:40.
when she observes—with exquisite detail—a grasshopper:

This grasshopper, I mean—
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down—
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms, and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.  

Like Simone Weil, Mary Oliver knows that there is a relationship between prayer and attention, a connection between seeing, and seeing the Divine in all things. Rebbe Nachman of Breslov knew it; there is nothing more important than taking time to look. To look, to see, is to be alive, as Mary Oliver tells us again, in "Hummingbird Pauses at the Trumpet Vine":

Look! for most of the world
is waiting
or remembering--
most of the world is time

when we're not here . . .

Look! and then we will be
like the pale cool
stones, that last almost
forever.  

[Oliver:94.]

[Oliver:56-57.]