

Beginning with the Home Meditation

*(from *Drinking From the Darkness: Living Completely in a Time of Estrangement*)*

Since we'll be using this method recurrently throughout this book, it may help to practice the opening approach described below for a few days before you explore its various applications as they're presented in these pages—this will be especially helpful if you are relatively new to meditation. This will help to ground you in the method and mitigate the need for you to refer back to this section as you pass through the exercises in each successive chapter. Try this simple introductory centering and focusing exercise every day for about a week, and then you can give the “home meditation” a go after that grounding process has been completed.

Find a quiet place where you know you won't be disturbed or unduly distracted for a while. It can be outdoors or in, as you prefer, and this work can be done at any time of the day or night that suits you. The idea is to be with yourself for anywhere from five minutes to an hour, in a place that is relatively comfortable, quiet, and open. Once you've found such a place, sit down in a reasonably comfortable chair (in choosing the chair, use your common sense: you want to be relaxed but not in a sleepy, “lounge-chair” type of way). Your back should feel upright and supported—that is, straight but not rigidly so—and it is best to close your eyes and have your other outer senses undistracted (that is, as little ambient noise or other distractions as possible). Your feet should reach easily to the floor, so that you can feel the contact between yourself and the ground beneath you. The idea is to create an environmental feeling of a stable, open presence within and

around yourself—this will be your orienting point amid the emotional storms that will arise in these sessions.

Once you're in this position, take a fresh inventory of your surroundings and of yourself. Listen for any sounds that may be drifting about—the more remote and fleeting they are, the better. Feel the contact that your feet are making with the floor; the sense of your clothes around your body; the light or patterns that may be forming within your closed eyes; any physical sensation that may be arising within or around you—an itch here, a sense of swaying or imbalance there, a feeling of discomfort, restlessness, or of the impulse for movement. Just note each sensation as it arises, and then feel or look for another. Recall to yourself that we are, after all, animals in the realm of Nature: our bodies are constantly feeding us information about the environment we're in and how its elements are influencing us as organic beings. In this respect, it may actually help you to try this practice with an animal nearby: many people have pets who have no problem with sitting or lying still for extended periods of time. Spending some time with such a creature beside you, each of you in an attitude of quiescent alertness—relaxed but intently aware of your surroundings—can be very nourishing and supportive (I meditate with my cat all the time).

As you settle into the relaxed but alert awareness that is called meditation, become aware of your breath, and the movement of the bodily regions that are associated with the act of breathing: your nose and mouth, your chest and abdomen, your back and shoulders. There is no need to count breaths (unless you'd like to), nor to attempt to control your breath (i.e., by intentionally breathing deeply, or shallowly, or according to a

particular timing or sequence). The awareness is what matters: anything else that comes to you as natural or fulfilling as your practice develops will be unique to your experience.

There is no need to assign yourself a time period or limit for this practice: go with what feels natural to you—your body will give you a message when it's time to gradually return to your normal state of movement and awareness. In time, your experience will lead you to recognize that the gap between the “meditative state” and the “normal state” gradually narrows all the way to the point where there is no special distance or difference between them. Experienced meditators can be in the midst of seemingly hectic activity and suddenly turn inward—to access a still center from which to act outwardly, to overcome an impulse that may have arisen, or simply to gather a thought or remember a word or the time of an appointment! This is listening to the body’s messages in a way that surpasses the superficial machinations of the manipulative intellect isolated from its natural accompaniment within the psyche. So in each of your practice sessions, there is no need to “aim for” anything or to assign yourself a minimal or maximal limit. With that said and understood, a reasonable guide (not a prescription, but just a guide) to follow early on in terms of timing would be ten to twenty minutes per session.

Of far more importance than the timing is the inner direction of the meditation, once you've become grounded in its environmental setting. This is where the act of meditation takes on a particularly practical and deeply nurturing feeling; this is where we ask for help from resources that we may not have connected with for a very long time—perhaps not since we were children. This is the moment in which we ask that within this moment of stillness and inward-turning, we may learn what we need to come to a deeper or broader understanding of ourselves as moments of consciousness—sparks

arising from the fire of the universe. The spark and the fire, after all, are not separate or of a differing substance—they are of the same Nature, and they are each the light to the same darkness. So this is the moment in which you draw upon your personal connection to that greater and more encompassing light of which your spark is a unique emanation—a modest but distinct glow whose like has never before been known, and which will never be reproduced.

The Process of a Meditation, in Summary:

1. In a quiet and undisturbed place, sit comfortably where you are upright but not rigidly so.
2. Close your eyes and enter an inward-turning state of relaxed but alert awareness: feel your breath, your body, and the sensations within and around it as you settle into your meditative practice.
3. Now ask for help from a (perhaps hitherto unknown) hidden realm of awareness and feeling-knowledge that is the “fire from which your spark arises.” Ask simply that you learn what you need to know in order to grow, to experience yourself in your Wholeness, and to understand your place in the universe better than you did before. Make this request without any particular direction or doctrinal attachment—as if you didn't know to whom or what you are addressing your sense of need. Such moments, I have found, are often where our connection with the Source of our being is the most direct, unobstructed, and deeply nourishing.

The Home Meditation, Applied

As suggested above, the meditative state is itself a kind of “home”—a frame of reference, a point of orientation—to which we can return amid times of pressure, distraction, and conflict. There are also “home-centering” points within the practice itself: whenever we feel overwhelmed with thoughts, consumed with guilt or other negative emotions, or simply tired or impatient, we can return to a centerpoint of bodily awareness. This can be our position, our contact with the ground, floor, or seat; or it can be an awareness of a bodily rhythm such as the breath, the heartbeat, the flow and pulse of blood, or the energy-flows within the body. As you progress in your practice, you will probably feel a need to call on such a centering focus as you use this method in exploring the darker corners of your experience and memory.

“I Can't Sit Still—Even For Ten Minutes”

Once in a while, a client or student will tell me this: “I’ve tried meditation, and I can’t stay still for even a couple of minutes—it’s hopeless.” My answer is always, “Stop trying what you’ve *been told* is right, and go with what *feels* right.” What I mean by that is, there are many ways of meditating, and we can be assured that there’s a way that is entirely natural and appropriate for each of us. In nature, a tree’s branches move and sway in the wind: this is meditation. Among animals, a bird glides from point to point, seemingly without effort or direction: this is meditation. And in human experience, witness the athlete’s or the dancer’s performance when he or she is “in the zone”: the movement is unforced, liquid, and entirely free. This, too, is meditation. You don’t have to be sitting still in order to connect with the Source of your being and draw on its helping energies.

In Zen, there is what is called “kinhin”—walking meditation, in which the person gives full attention to the physical feedback of his steps and the movement of his breath. You could try that, or simply engage in an everyday activity such as washing the dishes or taking a bath while you practice the mindfulness steps described in the meditation. If you are a runner or an athlete, you could lightly focus on this meditation during your run or your workout, or while stretching or “cooling down”. You could also try it during moments when you are waiting or traveling—standing in line at the bank or supermarket, riding a bus or commuter train, or even on an elevator (but please, not while driving!). Or you could make this meditation (and any other, for that matter) a part of your life in the moments before sleep, while you are lying in bed. When we rid ourselves of forced, fixed notions of what meditation is or must be, we can find that meditation is quite a fluid and indeed a “portable” experience. Just keep trying different approaches within different environments, taking a light, effort-free attitude to each experiment, until you find what works for you. For when you do encounter the experience that *feels* right, then that is “your meditation,” no matter how it looks to anyone else.

Once you feel like you have an inner grasp of the basics of the practice described above, it will be time to begin examining inwardly the feelings and ideas that arise from the image of home. Ask for help in understanding, and then hold your awareness ahead of you, as if it were a candle whose light was guiding you down a darkened hallway. Then, it’s simply a matter of opening your inner senses to their full capacity. By inner senses I am referring to the same functions that your outer senses perform, but with a more deeply

probing direction—a pointing within, toward the invisible realm of energy-presence. The inner senses are known to all of us; they are a part of our language. We speak of one who “smells a rat” or of something “sounding strange” or of a situation that “doesn't feel (or look) right.” We might even say that something “doesn't add up” when there's nothing mathematical or calculating about it at all! Those are the inner senses in operation. As you work in meditation with the concept and feeling of Home, your inner senses will activate: you might have a distinct image or hear a particular sound; you may receive a “gut feeling” or have a set of related thoughts; old smells or tastes may also arise through memory or association. Follow these sensations—they are the candle leading you down that hallway.


Never mind what you may have heard about meditation through books or religious doctrine: in transformative practice, there is no such thing as a Master or guru; there are only guides. Your experience will lead you to inner places where no therapist, minister, Roshi, doctor, Lama, or other self-appointed expert could possibly take you. The best teachers of transformative practice spend plenty of energy in dismantling titles and projections of superiority or attainment. Jon Kabat-Zinn, who teaches mindfulness meditation for stress reduction at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center, is such a teacher: in one of his books he tells of the doctor's uniform—the white lab coat—that he was given, but never wears in his clinic. He makes the point that “the white coat would be a true impediment. I have to work overtime as it is to reflect back all the

projections I get from people that I am “Mr. Relaxation” or “Dr. Have-it-all-together” or “Mr. Wisdom and Compassion-incarnate.”¹


Once that point is made and understood, however, it is possible and even desirable that we share our experiences in transformative practice. What we learn from this exchange is that we are not alone in either our distress, our challenges that we meet within the practice, or in the benefits that meditation can bring. Therefore I offer what follows as an example of the kinds of experience that people have had through this meditation on Home; through seeing where it has led others, and how, you can discover your own application of the practice in the knowledge that others have tried it and found help.

¹ This is from *Wherever You Go, There You Are* (New York: Hyperion, 1994), p. 191.


The Home Meditation: Approaches and Insights

 **Word Association:** This is where many people start from, since we are generally trained in our culture to think in terms of words and phrases. Carl Jung employed word association as a therapeutic technique for himself and his patients; we can do the same thing in our meditation without need of professional help. The words, phrases, and ideas that arise during an association exercise can lead us to identifying the kind of consciousness or attitudes that are blocking us from a natural or living feeling-experience of what Home is for us. Once such thoughts and their representative language are recognized, then they can be discarded from within through the use of the “inner No” method, discussed in Chapter 3. An example of word association in this context would be the following:

“home...domain...lair...cave...castle...walls...possession...a locked door...escape, defense, privacy...isolation...” The person receiving these associations found that he was inhibited by certain culturally-derived notions about home as an insular, walled-off space that led to feelings of crowded isolation rather than community (much as the metaphor of the office cubicle does to many of us at work); and that there were also patriarchal prejudices bound up in this inner language of home, as in the expression, “a man's home is his castle.” Finally, the rigid conception of home as possession arose from this work—a metaphor for an “owned thing” within oneself that must be defended from invasion, rather than as a gift from a benevolent universe that is capable of protecting as well as providing.

 **Image Reception:** This is a process of receiving pictures or images that are related to the topic of the meditation. Such a practice differs substantively from

the more common term, “visualization,” because Image Reception is unforced inner action. Visualization, by contrast, is consciously-forced imaging: we are *told* (by an instructor, a therapist, a hypnotist, etc.—or we may even deliver the order to ourselves) to see a particular thing in our practice, and so we must “produce” the desired visualization. But Image Reception is not so constrained: it simply involves asking for help from the invisible energies of the universe to “see” what we need to in order to grow and better understand what is limiting or obstructing our progress; then, allowing the images to arise effortlessly. In the “home meditation,” images may appear to us that will reveal a kind of inner disrepair to our vision of Home, or to a particular aspect of it. In this context, the old saw is true: a picture can be worth a thousand words; it can also evoke a thousand insights. Or simply the one we most need to have at the moment.

 **Feelings and Emotions:** A feeling that arises during a meditation can be physical, as in a bodily sense (of pleasure, discomfort, pain, etc.); or it can represent the operation of those inner senses we talked of earlier (a smell, taste, sensation, sound, or sight connected with a memory, an association, a thought, or a person). A feeling may give rise to or be connected with a particular emotion. The two are commonly lumped together or confused, but it really helps to see the distinction between them: a feeling is *inward information about what is really happening in the moment*, while emotion tends to involve the addition of an interpretive or judgmental—often a harshly self-judgmental—stroke. This is not to say that emotions are “bad” or “undesirable”, while feelings are “good” or “pure.” Both contain the teaching potential to help us on the journey back toward our natural

selves; both are valuable to us and our inner work. But if we can understand the difference and recognize each inward movement—either as it arises in meditation or afterward, as we are reflecting our experience—then we may be helped to a greater sense of clarity about what we are learning, and to what kinds of solutions we are being led. For example, recognizing a negative emotion such as guilt or self-hatred, perhaps in connection to a memory or a learned expression about Home, can open up a dam of repressed energy from places within ourselves where it may have been stuck for years. Such a sensitivity will also give us needed warnings about areas of our inner life where we have to be careful in our progress, so that we aren't overwhelmed with an excess of emotional experience in one session—encounters like this will often cause a person to shy away from returning to the work of inner learning.

These are some of the approaches along which we might take the meditation on Home. I have found that each person who does this work discovers avenues that are unique to his and her experience; in my counseling practice, I learn from every encounter (I sometimes will tell a client, “I should be writing *you* a check, I've learned so much from your experience of this”). The central point of this work, however, is very plain and simple: begin with the word, Home, and follow it; see where its mental, visual, sensory, feeling, and emotional associations lead you. You will find that it helps to keep a journal, an informal written record, of your experience. It also helps to re-visit this area as you progress through the other chapters and exercises in this book, and even to new phases and events in your life. As much as we seek stability in our material lives, our inner life

cannot remain static for long without the psyche crying out from within. What it seeks is not change—a forced or contrived re-arrangement of things—but transformation, the quantum process of death and regeneration that breaks the rules, crosses the boundaries, and furthers the personal evolution of the self that in turn contributes to the evolution of the Whole of which each of us is a part. To gain a feeling-sense of that transformative potential within yourself—or even the sense of its mere possibility—is to take the first faltering steps on the journey through the darkness of estrangement.

Siphoning the Excess: Entering the Pensieve of Meditative Practice

(from The Tao of Hogwarts: Transformative Practice From the World of Harry Potter)

The "unburdening" that Lao Tzu speaks of, and the "siphoning of the excess" that Professor Dumbledore recommends, are best accomplished in the context of a regular practice of meditation. Indeed, Lao Tzu repeatedly encourages us toward such a practice throughout his *Tao Te Ching*, and the Pensieve itself may be considered a vibrant symbol of the experience of meditation. But if you are new to meditation, or better still if you've tried it and found it impossibly difficult, then perhaps there is some "unburdening" to be done with respect to ideas or assumptions you may have received, having to do with meditation. And even if you consider yourself an "experienced meditator" and feel no discomfort or distress about regular practice, it still might be worth going over the following exercise at least once. Many of my clients and students have found it beneficial—not merely in terms of facilitating a natural and health-giving personal practice, but also as an opening to the very heart of natural magic: discarding from within all the conditioning and acculturation of ideologies that obstruct inner growth and prevent us from fulfilling our personal potential. Here, then, is a "meditation for everyone who has been told that meditation is difficult."

Call it a pet peeve of mine: the idea that meditation should be arduous, difficult, involve long hours twisted up into a painful posture, or that it should lead to some elevated and pristine state of spiritual enlightenment (after, of course, a long period of struggle, confusion, and expense, usually at the hands of a self-appointed "master"). This

is the kind of nonsense that keeps people away from a perfectly natural, relatively effortless, and completely healthful form of inner practice. Meditation is the natural and restorative activity of all life: observe how animals, plants, and even some people are able to slow down outer movement, settle into a state of relaxed but aware silence, and simply absorb the regenerative energy of the Cosmos. In the ongoing meditative activity of Nature, there is no thought of complexity, struggle, difficulty, or attainment: there is only the practice itself, and the often visible well-being that arises from the quiet openness of one being toward the bountiful energy of the Cosmic Whole. This is how we are meant to meditate; it is nothing special, and in no way should it be a hardship or strain. Indeed, if there is difficulty, then it is not meditation (obviously, we can be conscious of difficulty during meditation—we are, after all, not meant to stop thinking or feeling during our practice, because this is impossible; however, to build difficulty into the meditative act itself is simply a distortion of Nature).

So we must, it seems, begin our practice of meditation with an act of inner separation from falsehood and error—a separation that the *I Ching* calls "Retreat", in Hexagram 33. We must say an inner Noⁱ to the idea that meditation is a difficult process that can only be engaged by our "higher" or spiritual nature, at the expense and often the abasement of our "lower" or bodily nature. This act of retreat from these incorrect ideas will become our first meditation: we will begin by preparing ourselves to say an inner No to such false notions.

1. Find a quiet place to sit or lie down. Go with what feels comfortable and settling to your own inner sense. You don't need a cushion, altar, icon, incense, or any special environmental trappings, unless any of these feel natural and comfortable to you:

all you really need is a quiet place where you can be with your inner self and the Cosmic energies that flow through us when we are in a silent and receptive inner place.

2. Get into a comfortable position where you can be relatively still for a few minutes. Listen to your body: let it tell you what position allows you to settle down and open to your inner life. There are no special rules: you do not have to keep your back ramrod-straight and stiff, you do not need to cross or twist up your limbs, and you do not have to lock your hands into a "mudra" or make any special noises to place your body into the optimal state for receiving Cosmic energy. Just find a position in which you are comfortable and still aware.

3. Take a few simple breaths in awareness of your own body. Again, there is no need to breathe in a particular way (deeply, shallowly, forcefully, or anything else): just be aware of what happens within when you breathe. At the beginning, it is best to gently close your eyes for the meditation; this may be adjusted or varied in later sessions.

4. Now inwardly ask the helping energies of the Cosmos to help you in discarding false ideas about meditation. Once again, let your body ask for this help: perhaps your request will center around the area of your heart, perhaps it will come from the back of your head or neck, or maybe you will feel it most in your stomach. Let your body be a part of the act of requesting this help, because after all, the transformative energy received in response to our inner No will come through our bodily cells.

5. Repeat the phrase that seems to best capture or summarize the mistaken ideas about meditation, quietly to yourself, and offer that phrase, sentence, or image to the teaching Presence of the Cosmos. If any of the ideas mentioned above resonate with you, or if some other expression is suggested to you as a personally obstructive phrase, go

with that. Let's say you choose the sentence "meditation must lead to spiritual enlightenment, and to do so it must be painful and arduous." Speak that sentence in silence to yourself, and then see it being removed from you—*physically taken out of your body* and offered to the Cosmic Whole for correction. Some folks like to imagine the phrase or words being deleted before them, or painted over in "cosmic white-out"; others might see the "paper" on which the phrase is written crumpled up and tossed into the garbage—that's fine, too, if such images naturally occur to you in the moment.

6. Now say an inner No, three times, to the phrase. Let your entire being, body and psyche, say "No, No, No, to (the idea that meditation must lead to spiritual enlightenment, and to do so it must be painful and arduous)." Some people actually feel the phrase being eliminated from their heart, abdomen, brain, or other organ or body system; other folks just sense a kind of inner relief, a lightening of their load, sometimes with images of lights or other sensations taking the phrase out of their being, carrying it away. Some others, like my friend and teacher Carol Anthony, experience remarkable scenes of the phrase or image actually being destroyed, as if by a Cosmic army of soldiers (see her book on meditation, *The Other Way* for details on her experiences). All you have to do is follow your unique experience as the Cosmos takes away the phrase or image to be discarded and transformed.

7. Finally, once you feel that the inner No has been completed, thank the Sage and Cosmic helpers for their assistance. Then you may continue to meditate and absorb the transformative Cosmic energy that your inner No has activated. Or you may simply get up and carry on with daily living.

If you have never meditated before (or never thought you had, or could meditate),

and you have tried the little seven-step practice above, then congratulations—you've just practiced your "first meditation." It may have taken all of three, five, or ten minutes—the time does not matter. What matters is each experience, and your feelings of each experience. If you are new to meditation, try this simple practice each day for about a week (this ensures that the benefits of the inner No are enduringly realized), and then you can work on deepening your experience with meditation—if you like, you may go on to try some of the other meditations described in this book. As you continue your meditation practice, try varying the place, time, and length of your practice, until you arrive at the general routine that is most natural, comfortable, and effective for you. I wish you peace and progress in your meditative practice (but never difficulty!).

Another Exercise in Unburdening

Here is a practice that I've adapted from an exercise taught to me by a Feng Shui practitioner who helped me in doing some space-clearing exercises on my apartmentⁱⁱ. It is meant to further your ability to "siphon off the excess" of belief and attachment that separates us from our true nature. Like the meditation exercise above, it involves the releasing of conditioned learning, but adds a potent interactive element that many people find refreshingly purgative.

Harry emerges from the Pensieve and its mist of the past with clarity and a certain detachment, which enable him to meet the challenges in his future. We will draw upon a similar perspective, yet with the help of a different element, in separating from the attachment to the past. In this exercise, we will use the written word, along with fire, to

clear the mists of our own Pensieve of memory.

Begin in a quiet, undisturbed setting, as you did for the meditation exercise, and have a pen and paper handy. You will be writing down phrases from the ego-noise of your past: it can be from childhood, from school or work experiences, from societal or religious training, teachings absorbed from books or other media, from a spouse or other family member, or any other marked ego-influence from your personal past. In fact, it can be from all of these, or any combination—it is often helpful to order such influences according to their place in your life's past, as in the table below, offered as an illustrative outline from which you can create your own diagram of such phrases.

Source of ego-phrases	<i>Demands, ideas, phrases, beliefs transmitted</i>
<i>Parents</i>	<p><i>"Don't get smart with me." (okay, I'll be stupid instead)</i></p> <p><i>"I punish you because I love you." (a rationalized deceit that contains one of the most pervasive and destructive societal delusions of Western parenting, captured in the ridiculous phrase, "tough love")</i></p> <p><i>"Don't ask questions—just do as you're told." (you've heard of the golden rule—this is the iron rule)</i></p> <p><i>"Can't you ever listen?" (i.e., "obey")</i></p> <p><i>"When you behave well, you get nice things." (a rather devious means of enforcing obedience, through what Lao Tzu called "inner commerce")</i></p> <p><i>"I'm so proud of you!" (a claim of ownership with an implied threat—if you ever betray that pride, look out)</i></p>
<i>Spouse or ex-spouse</i>	<p><i>"What will people think about us if we do that?" (obsession with appearances)</i></p> <p><i>"You never pay attention to me." (a global demand for "inner payment")</i></p> <p><i>"You always give me that excuse." (another demand, couched in an accusation of insufficiency)</i></p>
<i>Teachers</i>	<p><i>"Follow instructions or you will fail." (blind obedience means more than truth)</i></p> <p><i>"I don't want to hear questions—I want to see results." (again, obedience is the only measure of success)</i></p> <p><i>"I don't care how you feel about it—problems are solved with logic." (the repression of feeling-nature and the isolation of intellect)</i></p>

<i>Priests, ministers, religious leaders</i>	<p><i>"You are made in God's image—live up to it." (a demonic self-image statement that puts the soul under an impossible burden)</i></p> <p><i>"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God." (the defining and distinguishing attribute of humanity—language—came to us as a special gift from an external divinity; this is a foundational belief of anthropocentrism and the separation of humankind from Nature)</i></p> <p><i>"Thou shalt have no other gods before me." (another demonic spell that reinforces divisiveness and exclusivity)</i></p>
<i>Books/TV/Newspapers, etc.</i>	<p><i>"Heroes die for their country." (a spell that binds the individual to the ideology of sacrifice and the parochial allegiance to a state)</i></p> <p><i>"Miserable weather ruins holiday." (how often is rain—one of the most nourishing and cleansing gifts that the universe brings us—demonized as "miserable" by the media? Such public projections can have alarmingly negative inner consequences)</i></p>

You could even add a column showing the times in your life associated with these influences, and order it that way. Once you've experimented a bit and settled on how your diagram is to be structured, write down as much as you can in the way of ego-noise—the phrases and sayings that arise to you as you think of the clutter of belief that's affecting your ability to listen to your inner truth. Note that certain beliefs may sound positive and appealing, yet still be repressive. You can take a few sittings and some repeated effort in producing what you feel is a representative listing of conditioned ego-beliefs: there is no hurry. Just remember that this exercise can be done time and again throughout your life, and so it never has to be exhaustive, because to attempt that would be, well, exhausting. Therefore, don't look to write an "autobiography of ego"; just get a few things down and then go to the next stage of the exercise.

Read the list of phrases over, as dispassionately and non-judgmentally as possible, as if you were about to separate completely from all that these beliefs represent (*you are*). If you like, you can engage in a brief meditation, in which you say an inner No to those beliefs and their sources. Keep in mind that you are not saying "No" to the *people*

associated with the phrases; you are just saying No to the ego-influences that they were themselves affected by in imparting those phrases to your consciousness. When you're ready, take the paper into a safe area—a fireplace, a sink, a concrete patio with no flammable objects or material nearby—*and then burn it*. Yes, just light it up and watch it burn into ashes. Hold in your awareness the movement of consciousness represented by this series of acts: the transfer of false belief and negative emotions from your body-consciousness to the paper, followed by their movement from this written record into the dissolution of fire, smoke, and ashes. As the paper burns, offer up the obstructive ideas that you have incinerated to the Cosmic Whole, and ask that all the ego-noise represented on that piece of paper be taken up and transformed by the teaching energy of Cosmic Consciousness. Finally, thank the helping energies of the Cosmos for their part in this exercise of "burning away" the growth-inhibiting beliefs of the past. Once again, you may repeat this exercise as often as you feel is necessary to effect a comprehensive clearing of your inner space; you can also try it in concert with some of the other exercises and meditations described in this book.

An Insight Meditation: Experiencing Invisibility

Throughout the Potter stories, Harry—often accompanied by his friends Ron and Hermione—is brought to increasingly deeper levels of experience and understanding with the help of his invisibility cloak. It is more than a facile narrative device on Mrs. Rowling's part; it represents an insight guide for her characters, to which they turn in times of challenge and crisis—you might say that it performs the role of an oracle. That's why it is so interesting to find the following text in the *I Ching*, from Hexagram 52, "Keep Still":

He keeps still
And is not taken captive.
They pass his house
And he is not seen.
He escapes harm.
(from the translation by Greg Whincup)

This hexagram (and, I believe, the image of the cloak in the Potter stories) is a metaphor that teaches us how we may effectively separate from the invasions of ego—especially from the ego-invasions of others upon our inner space. This is the meaning of "they pass his house," where one's "house" is the psyche or inner truth. When we are able to "keep still," we cannot be seen by others as an object, an enemy, an idol, or a hero; thus, our independence is preserved and protected (the meaning of "he escapes harm"). To "keep still" means to retreat from acting out of impulse or aggression (which would only feed negative energy to the individuals or groups that place themselves in opposition to us); what it does *not* mean is that we become frozen in a state of passivity. To keep still is to let inner clarity catalyze outer action; this is the experience that Lao Tzu describes as *wu-wei*, or unforced action. Once it is practiced and the results

experienced in real life, one realizes that there is scarcely a more pragmatic approach to daily living. When we are able to "keep still" within, we hold to our center of being, as Lao Tzu expressed in Chapter 42 of the *Tao Te Ching*:

Each compressed form bears yin behind
And holds yang before it.
At the still point in the center
These complementary energies merge,
And harmony is thus realized.

Lao Tzu emphasizes the image of merging energies in this verse, to remind us that "keeping still" is not passivity, but simply action of a different and more subtle, comprehensive kind. Consider a pond, or even a glass of water: how still it appears, though we know that if we were to place a drop of it under a microscope we would discover a world of movement and energy.ⁱⁱⁱ This is the stillness that the *I Ching* and Lao Tzu encourage us to learn and adapt, each to his or her own unique personality and circumstances. Like Harry's cloak, this stillness takes us out of the realm of opposites—"mind over (versus) matter"—and into the center of being, where death and life, yin and yang, male and female, self and other, are no longer experienced as opposites, but rather as *complementary* energies. This understanding is the "realization of harmony" that Lao Tzu describes in his poems.

Here, then, is a brief meditation to help you in "putting on your invisibility cloak." This meditation has many benefits, which are best discovered through experience rather than suggestion, but one that deserves to be mentioned is the way it assists in re-balancing energy within the body, creating reduction where there is excess, and replenishment where there is scarcity. In terms of one of the more difficult physical problems faced in our current time and culture, this meditation may be considered helpful

to those who wish to "lose weight" (a misleading and inaccurate expression for restoring energy balance). For those who wish to realize this particular benefit from the meditation, I would recommend doing it for two sessions per day—morning and evening—at 20 minutes for each session. For working through psychological distress, this meditation has been found helpful in overcoming anxiety disorders such as agoraphobia, with its terrible symptoms of panic, in which the line between physical and psychological suffering becomes thoroughly erased. Finally, as an aid to concentration, emotional balance, and that clarity, discussed earlier, which is fundamental to successful action, this meditation will provide benefit even if practiced for a few minutes per day.

Begin by getting in touch with your body. Take a comfortable position in which you are relaxed and aware; if you are sitting, feel your spine become straight yet without stiffness, and your shoulders relaxed. Sense the weight of your body where it contacts the floor, chair, or cushion that you're sitting on; feel the connection between your feet and the floor. Note the sense of the clothing on your skin, the feel of the ambient air around you, any sounds that reach you in the moment, and the light and images before your eyes (whether they are open or closed). Feel each of these sensations in turn, and then the movement of your body-breath, in and out, without making any attempt to control or direct the experience.

Now begin feeling yourself—your whole being—as energy. From this point, let the experience become uniquely your own: see which of the following sensations or metaphors brings you the most benefit.

← *You could feel an "invisibility cloak" passing over your body, and let its aqueous material reveal your light-body. As the cloak covers you, feel the*

transformation of your body from matter to energy.

- ← *You may find that a feeling-image of movement is helpful: nebulae in motion, wind blowing through trees or high grass, microscopic cellular activity, radiant heat, clouds moving across the sky, osmotic movement between cells, an aura or energy field; or you may have a flowing sensation, as of moving water.*
- ← *Remember that the basic idea is to experience yourself as energy—activity, motion, formless, kinetic being without any particular material reference point. Consider the "stillness" referred to by the I Ching in Hexagram 52, and by Lao Tzu in his teaching poems. You are living the experience of your body in its vital and enduring Cosmic presence—as a dance of complementary energies, the yin and the yang commingling formlessly, effortlessly, and timelessly in a harmonic that Lao Tzu compared with the coalescing flow of the breath of lovers.*

The variations, again, are seemingly infinite: one client of mine who regularly watched "Star Trek" found herself either in the "beam-up" energy transfer mode (matter to light) or as "becoming" (or sometimes simply feeling) the soft, blue light emitted by the "tricorder" mechanisms in those stories. You may find that any of these images, a combination of them, or still another not mentioned here that best suits you, will bring you the feeling of energy-presence, and the accompanying practical benefits.

I do not want to project anything onto your personal experience of this meditation, so I'll add no more about what I or others have experienced in this practice, except to

note, in general, that most people have found this to be refreshing, insightful, often transformative, and always—in the spirit of Black Elk—a *fun* meditation.

Looking into the Mirror of Erised

Often, Mrs. Rowling depicts things in a grand size when she wishes to point up the metaphorical association between some of the objects in Harry's world and the monumental distortions of group ideology and its institutions. This seems to apply in the case of the Mirror of Erised: the mirror is enormous—it is said to reach all the way to the ceiling, and thus would be at least seven or eight feet high (maybe more, considering the general spaciousness that pervades at Hogwarts). Its size and magical qualities would seem to make it an intimidating presence indeed—especially to an eleven year old boy—yet it is, after all, "just a mirror." Professor Dumbledore helps to bring this point home to Harry: "the happiest man on earth," he says, "would be able to use the Mirror of Erised like a normal mirror..." Later, Dumbledore adds that, when he looks at himself in the Mirror, he sees himself "holding a pair of thick, woolen socks...one can never have enough socks." The Mirror, then, merely reflects us as form; what we project onto the reflection is another matter entirely.

The notion of looking into a mirror as an insight practice is not at all new or unusual. The Tibetan spiritual teacher, Akong Tulku Rinpoche, describes such a practice in some detail in his book, *Taming the Tiger*. He describes a very helpful meditation which you may wish to try for yourself. It involves looking into a mirror and allowing images and emotions to arise from within, and then "moving" these into the mirror on

one's every out-breath. He then asks that we perceive the negative and positive qualities, traits, and emotions that pass into the mirror and then "take back" those we wish to keep within ourselves. While this approach will undoubtedly have value to many, I personally prefer a more loosely-structured practice, and I do not see the need to "take back" anything, since whatever is intrinsic to our true nature will never leave us or be lost. Now with that said, I think there is considerable benefit available to those who would give this practice a trial on a reasonably regular basis (Akong Tulku recommends 15-20 minutes, twice per day, but I've found that just ten minutes of focused effort on the exercise, a few times a week, brings plenty of insight and benefit). So here is Akong Tulku Rinpoche's "mirror exercise", adapted to the context of the inner work described in this book.

- ⟨ Take a few minutes to position yourself comfortably as described in the beginning of the energy field meditation described above. Remember to have a small mirror available. You can do a little centering and relaxation with your eyes open or closed before you begin working with the mirror.
- ⟨ Then, look into the mirror and begin to work with the images—those that arise from within and those that appear in the reflection (they will tend to coalesce after a time). Just stay within your own body and avoid the temptation to "get at" the images or the emotions you encounter in contemplating the reflection (in terms of interpreting, judging, or otherwise projecting upon the image before you). Nothing genuine can be taken from you, nor can anything be "lost to the mirror"—the images that we project are the ones we need to get rid of; everything that is unique and true to our personality is safely preserved. If you feel or see something in

the image that you "want back," just look deeply into your reflected face and ask questions: "do I really need this? Is it really a part of my true nature? Or is it something I've been taught or programmed to be, a mask I've been told to wear, for the benefit of others or a group?" T.S. Eliot wrote that "there will be time to prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet..."^{iv} He was talking about the masks that are worn in society, which prevent others from seeing us as we are, and which inhibit our self-realization. This is why, in the following lines from the same poem, Eliot describes "the works and days of hands that lift and drop a question on your plate..." I am encouraging you not to wait for Fate or trouble to intervene, but that *you* be the one to "drop a question," so that you do not wind up living behind the mask, while every day you make "a hundred visions and revisions before the taking of a toast and tea." The ego, with its capacity to steal our inborn creative energy, has devised a number of masks for all occasions—there is the corporate mask, the parental mask, the mask of piety, the mask of patriotism, a mask of asceticism and sacrifice—the list has been steadily growing for a few thousand years. If you see or otherwise sense any such masks in your contemplation before the mirror, ask for help from the Cosmic realm in firmly dispersing them from your psyche, and use the "inner No" method described in the earlier chapters to help you further in releasing this inner excess.

< I am now going to take you a little beyond Rinpoche Tulku's instructions, and ask whether you may need to apply some destructive energy to the

task at this point. If you feel uncomfortable with this, by all means refrain, and continue to ask questions instead (of your feelings of hesitation, fear, or revulsion, for instance). Masks and images, after all, must be destroyed. Let your feelings guide you in the process, and allow spontaneous perception to lead you from there. Some folks decide to see the masks burned; some "shoot them" with the weaponry of disburdenment; some simply throw the self-images of ego out a "Cosmic window" where the dissolving and healing energies of the Cosmos can completely clear them from the field of consciousness—in effect, "kill them." This is the activity of what Robert Bly refers to as "the interior warrior."^v

⟨ Finish by separating from the mirror and its contents (what you saw in it). As Tulku Rinpoche says, it's important "to realize that what you see is not at all solid." Let it become a pane of glass once more, and ask the Helper of Meditation to call you back to your center once more. Then, as always in completing a practice of your inner life, thank the Sage, the Cosmos, the helping energies of transformation, or whatever personal metaphor you invoke in your conversation with the invisible realm, for the help and insight you have been led to in this experience.

The Elements of Cosmic Protection: Water, Vapor, Light

The leading metaphors of the Potter stories have a satisfying internal harmony among them; as elements of an artistic whole, they communicate. This is not surprising when we consider that, according to the author herself, the stories and characters arose within her during a single train journey. In particular, there seems to be an intricate relationship between the "invisibility cloak," the "Pensieve," and the web of light that is the subject of this chapter.

The invisibility cloak is a device which Rowling returns to time and again throughout the stories: it is a metaphor on the movement from matter-consciousness to energy-consciousness. Gary Zukav refers to this movement as the evolution from "five-sensory" to "multi-sensory consciousness."^{vi} Frequently within the tales, Harry and his friends are helped to increasing depths of insight and learning through the use of the invisibility cloak, whose guiding metaphor is aqueous: it is described as like "water woven into material." The protection that the principal characters receive from the cloak is that of solubility rather than mere concealment; yet it is not their bodies that are being dissolved (after all, *they* can still be felt and heard from within the cloak), but rather *the force of ego within them*. Thus, they are guided via the cloak to their true natures and the experiences that will further lead them into fresh understanding of the inner world of natural magic and its ways.

The metaphor that the image of the Pensieve points to is gaseous: the vapor within that magical bowl is said to be like "the wind made solid." In the fourth and fifth stories, the Pensieve helps Harry to prepare for future challenges through an understanding of the

past that informs his present. His first encounter with the Pensieve is just before the scene that leads him to the graveyard confrontation with Lord Voldemort: during that particular immersion within the Pensieve, Harry is given an intimation of the lesson to be later completed regarding the illusory nature of evil. When he is drawn into the Pensieve again, in the fifth book (*Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*), Harry has a much earlier lesson reinforced. For it is then that he discovers a side of his idealized father that had been to that point concealed from him, and which he had concealed from himself, thus presenting him with another perspective on what he had learned from the Mirror of Erised in the first book. As the Mirror showed him the ways that idealized or derived self-images tend to obstruct our inner progress and outer movement in life, so did this second encounter with the Pensieve demonstrate to him the folly of trying to deify our loved ones who have died, and then wasting our lives in attempting to emulate them. These stories and their metaphors are so popular because their teachings resonate so deeply with us: most of us know at least one person (perhaps even ourselves) who has become thoroughly stagnated in their progress through life, all because of their obsessive idealization of a dead loved one, to the point where their ability to form new or deeper relationships with *living* people has been severely impaired. By stepping into the vapor of the past, Harry is able to clearly perceive this error; and even though it causes him some pain, it is the pain that comes just before healing. The protection that the Pensieve provides Harry is the inner clarity that is the prerequisite of successful outer action. By virtue of this clarity, he is able to navigate the dangers that await him once he is carried out of the mist of the past.

The principle that guides the metaphor of the golden web from the graveyard

scene is light. Light, even more than water or air, is the essential medium of our being: it is the living substance of the energy-dialogue between Earth and its sun that makes organic life, in all its permutations (as far as we know it) possible. Thus, in all ages and cultures, light is the prominent metaphor of insight, progress, inner truth, knowledge, blessing, and love. In the Potter stories, light is the medium through which all the magical objects work—it defines the images of the Mirror of Erised; it fills the energy-field created by the watery cloak of invisibility; it is what clarifies the vapor of the Pensieve. Every spell and charm is cast through a beam of colored light, an energy-stream in which inner truth connects with its radiant Cosmic Source, in an interactive, subatomic dance that awakens the helping energies of the invisible world. It comes as no surprise, then, that at those points in the stories at which Harry faces his most crucial and life-threatening challenges, he is visited by light. In the first book, it is the glow of the stone in the Mirror; in the second, a sword that is "gleaming, glittering," arrives to protect him like a shaft of pure light; in the third story, a luminous necklace is the instrument of rescue; and in the graveyard scene from *Goblet of Fire*, the web of light is Harry's protection. Indeed, as the stories progress and Voldemort's presence becomes larger, more solid, and threatening, the movement from object-based help toward pure luminosity becomes emphasized. Light is the ultimate medium and protector of Life, because it is the pure energy that potentiates all form. We can discover, as does Harry Potter, that this light-energy is an effective and enduring means of personal protection—in interpersonal relationships, at work, amid conflict or crisis, and through all the challenges of life in a world seemingly shrouded by the looming presence of Ego and its delusions.

Meditation: Engaging the Personal Energy of Protection

This work is best done on a regular, perhaps daily basis, and can be fit into normal routines that are part of many people's lives. It can be done during a commute to work on a train or bus; as part of one's preparation for the day's work; during a break or after work; or even in the space of something as fleeting as a ride up an elevator or escalator. This meditation can also be helpful at bedtime, particularly if you're having difficulty falling asleep. It naturally clears out the dross of the day from within and thus permits full and restful sleep. However the timing suits your personality and schedule, try to find a few minutes' worth of room within each day where this meditation can be done, and I am sure you'll soon feel yourself more grounded, centered, and invisibly protected from harm and invasion throughout the day. We can begin with the "energy field meditation" which I have described in the chapter on the invisibility cloak; since it is brief, I will reproduce it here.

Begin by getting in touch with your body. Take a comfortable position in which you are relaxed and aware; if you are sitting, feel your spine become straight yet without stiffness, and your shoulders relaxed. Sense the weight of your body where it contacts the floor, chair, or cushion that you're sitting on; feel the connection between your feet and the floor. Note the sense of the clothing on your skin, the feel of the ambient air around you, any sounds that reach you in the moment, and the light and images before your eyes (whether they are open or closed). Feel each of these sensations in turn, and then the movement of your body-breath, in and out, without making any attempt to control or

direct the experience.

Now begin feeling yourself—your whole being—as energy. You could, if you like, feel an "invisibility cloak" passing over your body, though this is not necessary. You might find yourself with an image of energetic movement, such as nebulae in motion, wind blowing through trees or high grass, microscopic cellular activity, radiant heat, osmotic movement, an aura or energy field, or have a flowing, aqueous sensation. The basic idea is to experience yourself as energy—activity, motion—formless, kinetic being without any particular material reference point. Feel your body in its vital and enduring presence—as a dance of complementary energies, the yin and the yang commingling formlessly, effortlessly, and timelessly in a harmonic that Lao Tzu compared with the coalescing flow of the breath of lovers.

This initial phase can be as long or as brief as you need it to be; with a little experience, you can enter this "energy field" center in a minute or so. Next comes the protective aspect of this meditation, which you can engage as soon as you feel your energy field opened and ready—indeed, the one phase leads naturally into the other, so that it's often scarcely possible to differentiate where one phase ends and the next begins.

Now begin to feel a field of light forming around you. It can take any shape, direction, or expression that is natural to you and your moment in time: a web of laser-like beams such as Rowling depicts in the story; an aura that flows from your center outward; or a pulsing, membranous glow of colored energy that radiates around you. No matter what shape it takes for you, a simple, modest glow of luminosity is the most beneficial image, since a harsh, glaring, or piercing light is not protective but instead tends to provoke the ego within others. Remember that you are seeking protection, not

display.

Once you can feel your light-field moving, surrounding you, then you can focus on its function. See and feel it as a Cosmic energy filter which catches toxicity—emotional, intellectual, and even physical toxicity—from within and especially around you, and then neutralizes, cleanses, and disperses the poisonous energy. You can also synchronize this protective movement with that of your breath: on the in-breath, feel the membranous web opening to receive nourishing Cosmic light-energy; then on the out-breath, feel the web expelling toxic consciousness, out and away from you. Remain with this feeling of your energy-glow trapping and filtering out the poisons of Ego, and call on the helping energies of Clarity, Detachment, and Purification to complete and support this work of your inner toxicity filter of light. As you near the end of the meditation, thank these helping energies and the Cosmic Whole for its presence in your inner work.

Try this exercise for a few days, and adapt it to your personality and inner needs as you go. You may well find that, in a very short time, you will find yourself increasingly protected from invasion, conflict, stress, and pressure from others' egos, and from other types of danger. As you continue with this meditation, pay attention to the presence of any "holes"—gaps, blank or dark spots in your light-field, or weak areas in the energy pattern. See where these may be emanating from in terms of bodily regions or points that you feel associated with the gaps. The awareness of such points often leads us to an understanding of areas in which we are especially vulnerable or where our life-force is obstructed or occluded; these gaps can even be helping us to recognize the presence of an illness of the body or psyche that needs attention.

Uncovering the Seeds: A Regressive Meditation

What we will now learn is a new meditation, in which we will return into childhood and the earliest phases of the conditioning process, through the familiar metaphor of the home. The starting point for this work has been suggested in the above discussion of psyche and body. The fact is that there is no true separation between them; to speak of them as if divided is a necessary nod to the cultural assumptions that seem to guide our dialogues about body and mind, or body and spirit. Consciousness is, by nature, "embodied"; every living cell is formed of energy and expresses consciousness. To divide psyche and body, and then to declare that one is "higher," "holier," "better," or "dominant," is one of the fundamental illusions of the institutional ego, which we must deprogram from our total body-consciousness. The falseness of the belief in division is betrayed to the simplest reflection of common sense: you may as well say that one ventricle of your heart is "higher" than the other; that one lung is "the master breather"; that zero is "holier" than one. Our heart needs both its ventricles; our breath works best when both lungs are present and equally healthy; the computer needs both elements of its binary language, with no discrimination toward, or against, either.

Begin by sitting comfortably, with your spine straight but not rigid, your shoulders relaxed, and your feet grounded beneath you. If you have a background in, or preference for, cross-legged meditation such as is practiced in Buddhism, you may of course use that: just remember that it is not only unnecessary, but counterproductive, to intentionally assume a painful or uncomfortable position in meditation.

Now take a few gentle, regulating breaths as you close your eyes and ask for help from the invisible world of the helping Cosmic energies. Ask simply that you be shown

the cause of your emotional or physical pain, or the source of your anger, sorrow, or loneliness—let the request come from your deepest body and finds its own unique expression.

Now, see yourself approaching a house—it could be your current home; a home of your childhood; another house that you've been to and which evokes detailed memories for you; or it could even be a fictional house like 12 Grimmauld Place. It need have no specific physical character, shape, or inner association (big or small, dark or light, friendly or malignant, empty or cluttered): it just has to be a place that you're familiar with in either experience or imagination, and which you feel as if you can walk through safely and in some detail. See yourself going up (or down) the steps to the entrance—count them as you go—and then step through the door and see what impressions meet your inner senses. There is no time limit on this exercise, so pause to observe the details, textures, and sensory experiences that each phase of your journey within this house brings. As you move through each room, each part of the space, note the people, presences, sights, sounds, smells, feelings, and memories that are evoked. If you find yourself feeling constricted, panicky, or in darkness in any particular place within the house, simply move on, or if possible, open windows, letting in light and air: see yourself being helped in this work of opening to fresh and light-giving energy. Aside from this, do not try to change, move, or "fix" anything within your house; for now, just make note of your feeling-responses to the various rooms, spaces, things, and people you encounter during your tour of the place. Stay as long, or as briefly, as you feel is right for you—again, there is no maximum, or minimum, time limit to this practice. You need not even tour the entire space in one sitting: if you feel as though you need to stop, then leave

and return to your breath and your body. For some people, this exercise is best done alone; however, if you feel safer or more comfortable doing it in the company of another—a counselor, therapist, or just a close friend—then follow your intuition as to what is best for you. When you are ready to finish the meditation, it is best that you actually "leave the house"—see yourself going back out of the place and into the light of the outdoors. Then take a few more regulating breaths, open your eyes, and gently begin to reflect on what the Cosmic teaching energy is showing you through this experience.

Now, if you're by yourself, and you feel safe and ready to work with the experience, write down as much as you can about the most vivid aspects of the meditation: the emotions, memories, sense-impressions, people, and feelings you encountered. See what images, patterns, objects, and significant inner responses were presented to you. If you are in a group or with another person, talk about them if you're ready to do so. If you're by yourself, you may prefer to simply write down all you can remember and felt deeply from the exercise, as if you were writing down a dream; then you can set the work aside and allow a period of inner assimilation to develop on the unconscious plane, perhaps overnight, as you sleep. Later, you can come back to your notes and see what insights now appear to you. If you wish, you can use an oracle such as the *I Ching* to draw further upon the Cosmic teaching energy to nurture the clarity of your inner learning. Your experience from this will be utterly unique to your personality, your life circumstances, and your moment in time; however, you may wish to consult the list below in organizing your own learning.

- **Approaching the house:** Did you sense any feeling of weakness, age, wear, structural imbalance, or disproportion in the images of the house, as

you approached its entrance? Was there anything about the look or feel of the place that made you fearful or otherwise apprehensive? Follow those images, and see where they might lead you; if you like, you can draw pictures of what you saw, and be nourished by their teaching energy.

- **Entering the house:** Note in particular here the change in lighting and mood; any smells that appeared to you in the meditation; the look and feel of the door and its condition; and any other feeling-impressions that came to you on entering the house.
- **Experiencing the movement of time within the flow of space:** As you move through the house in your meditation, you may find yourself moving in time as well—specifically, backward. This is why it's called a "regressive meditation," because many people seem to be drawn back, often to childhood, in the context of the "house meditation." If this happens for you, then obviously it will be important for you to note memories, impressions, feelings, and objects that were prominent in your experience as you moved through the house.
- **Experiencing the ordering (or lack thereof) within and throughout the space:** Note any feelings of disorientation, loss of perspective or proportion, fears, clutter within certain parts of the house, changes in the balance of light and darkness, changes in the size or look of the rooms, and any claustrophobic inner sensations you may have experienced.
- **Leaving the house:** Recall what your feeling was about leaving the place: was it a relief to get out of there? Did you get lost or stuck on the way out?

Did something or someone try to obstruct or prevent your leaving? If you found yourself looking back at the house, compare your inner feeling then with the sense you had on first approaching the place.

A Few General Guidelines on Interpretation:

Once more, and it cannot be overstated: your experience from this work will be entirely unique to you, and so should its interpretation (which will itself change or develop over time, as you repeat the meditation). Given that proviso, here are some orienting points that you can "take off" from in discovering your own interpretation:

Images of breakage, age, wear, decrepitude, or waste: These often indicate a belief or system of beliefs that is incorrect, no longer applicable or furthering to your own life, obstructive in the sense of "holding you back" to a dead past, or a tradition that must be either updated or simply discarded. See what associations arise to you, based on the images themselves and your feeling-response to them. To borrow the ready example of Harry's experience, he was aware of a foreboding, limiting presence as soon as he approached the house at Grimmauld Place and had walked through its front door. Should you encounter such images and feelings upon entering your own house in meditation, that's the time to ask for help from the Cosmic helping energies in clearing out the encrustations of a false and lifeless past; this especially applies to any group-centered ideologies, doctrines, commandments, or moral strictures that may have occurred to you in connection with the images, either during or after the meditation.

Images of clutter or feelings of "microsmia": We all know what clutter is, and how narrow, limited, and uncomfortable it makes us feel: clearing out any clutter you

find within your house is crucial to growth. If an accumulation of objects had appeared during your meditation, go back in the next time and see yourself throwing them out; it's best if you have a feeling of a helping presence beside you, assisting with this work.

Microsmia, on the other hand, is a less familiar term to most people; but the experience to which it refers is more common than many may imagine. Microsmia is the sense of space imploding, foreshortening, or closing in one; it is often experienced as a feeling of being small, insignificant, and impossibly, dangerously vulnerable within a shapeless, distorted space that seems to shut itself around one's being—a space that seems both dauntingly immense and hideously compressive and restrictive at once. This is a demon of the psyche that has installed itself, probably from earliest childhood, and shrieks in malevolent terror within us, like that painting at Grimmauld Place. It is telling us that we are insufficient, weak, and helpless as individuals—it may have been a message installed by a parent or other caregiver, a teacher or minister, or some other authority figure. As Welwood says, this kind of demon becomes implanted in our very bodily cells, where it will fester and obstruct the free flow of the life force, causing illness and the perpetuation of negative emotion. It must be exorcised, firmly destroyed, and forever silenced. This can only be done with help from the invisible world of consciousness: no human expert, psychological method or school, and certainly no drug, can completely and enduringly disperse such a demon.^{vii} Ask for help from within your deepest heart to have this demon killed and silenced, for otherwise it will become what Rilke refers to as the "stone coffins of the ancient world,"^{viii} in which our hearts are forever caged in fate and fury.

Images of specific rooms, and any people, objects, or aura they may contain:

Let's begin with the bathroom. It is a private place, in which the processes of elimination

and the cleansing of the body occur; it is meant to be a place of solitude, comfort, and intimacy, but it is often the metaphorical vessel of our most terrible and insidious inhibitions and fears. Mrs. Rowling herself has demonstrated a wonderful understanding of this inner dynamic: the bathroom takes a central place in several of the stories and substories of her Harry Potter novels; this is a theme that will be considered in detail in Chapter 12. The fact that trolls, screaming dragon eggs, mournful ghosts, and the entrance to a pit of darkness should be found within a bathroom in these stories should come as no surprise to most people in our culture. We should add, in fairness to Freud (whose ideas have come under some criticism in these essays), that one of his more significant contributions toward a better understanding of mental health and socio-cultural threats to healthy inner development can be found in his clear and open discussions of toilet training issues in childhood. However, since much of this discussion occurred within his rather skewed and rigid developmental ideology, I would prefer to cite the American psychiatrist Harry Stack Sullivan in this respect:

Some of the really unfortunate people of the world have been exposed to strict bowel training well before early childhood, and as a result of their parents' preternatural interest in their toilet habits...have come to suffer rather grave disturbances of life thenceforth.

—from *The Psychiatric Interview*, p. 139

Thus, any clutter, filth, constriction of space, or other abnormality that you may encounter in the bathroom of your meditation-house may be calling your attention toward a need to examine your feelings about your body and its natural functions. Should you discover any false ideas, negative emotions, or obsessive or ritualistic aspects of your thinking associated with the bathroom and its imagery, try to make note of them and then

face them down with a firm inner No, along with a call for help from the Cosmos in dispelling these limiting ideas about the body as unclean, about its natural eliminative functions as sinful or dirty, or about one's nakedness as a source of guilt and moral vulnerability. Such ideas must be firmly and forcefully dispersed from consciousness, again with help from the Cosmic realm.

Another area to attend to inwardly, in the context of this meditation, is the kitchen or eating area: this is where nourishment is brought into the body, and where many of the daily family gatherings and interactions of life happen. Unfortunately, many difficult, troubling, and even violent scenes are played out in this setting amid the family, and quite a lot of people have very unpleasant associations with this area of their inner house.

During your meditation, any clutter, filth, bad smells, scarcity, or disproportion in the kitchen or dining area will probably stand out for you and be easily remembered. Follow the path of these sensations and images to see what insights may develop from them. As Anthony and Moog mention in the Commentary to Hexagram 27 of the *I Ching* ("Nourishing"), "the Sage distinguishes between what nourishes the true self and what feeds the ego." They add that this applies to both the food we eat and the ideas we accept into our psyche, and that "many ideas are taken into the psyche simply because we have thought they might be true and thus have accepted them by default." This especially applies to many ideological notions that are bred into children from before the time they can speak or walk, often having to do with a demonization of the body and its natural desires and functions as "sinful" or grounds for guilt.

You may also find some of the baggage and dust of patriarchy lying on the floor of your kitchen in particular, in the form of gender-defined roles and responsibilities

which usually mark off the kitchen as an area of the woman's domain. The problem with domains, however, is that they are restrictive: when your identity is confined to a specific functional space within a home, then your true self is held captive to that place and that function. You can free yourself by saying an inner No to the beliefs that embody the restrictive image, and by seeing yourself step free of the boundaries so defined, in your next house-meditation exercise.

Overall, you will find that, as you progress, the house that you return to in this meditation will become increasingly more stable, welcoming, and clear of obstruction and inner debris. This effect is the action of the helping energies of the Cosmic Consciousness at work; no human method, ideology, treatment, or medication can deliver the same transformative energy as the healing that comes from within, through one's personal and harmonic connection with the Cosmic realm of inner growth.

Inner Plane Communication: The Unspoken Language of Love

(from *Drinking From the Darkness: Living Completely in a Time of Estrangement*)

The minimalization of Love that has occurred within our culture puts us in a real bind as individuals: we only seem capable of the most strained, forced, and stereotyped expressions of Love. As a result, we become dysfunctional and obsessively demanding lovers—rigid, hard-hearted, suspicious, and consumptive. How can we regain the natural, full-bodied, unconfined love that still resides within us all, trapped under layers of socio-cultural conditioning and learned self-consciousness? How can we return to a love that connects with another while not attaching or absorbing her? Remembering Karen Horney's insight, how can we fulfill our natural *need* for warmth, companionship, and intimacy, without imprisoning ourselves and others in the cage of Claim?

One approach is to invite our whole being into the communication that happens in our relationships. We have been specifically trained—drilled, in fact—in the slavish reliance on very limited means of communication with significant others in our lives. We can talk or we can write, and we are constantly, obsessively developing new technologies for these two media of communication.

But the approach I am suggesting does not require you to throw away your cell phone, your Blackberry, your PDA, or your laptop computer. I am simply asking you to give it a much-needed rest now and then—all the so-called machines of our lives would operate much better if we did that one thing. What needs to be exercised now is *your own* ability to communicate over the invisible spaces of consciousness. If a little bundle of circuits and wires can do it, how much more so can your body—an extraordinary

physical compression of electromagnetic energy? You know that you can communicate on the inner plane with others, *because you already have*.

So, before you laugh off the idea of such communication as another New Age smokescreen, consult your experience. Think back to your childhood, and how you were able to “send a message” to a sibling, friend, or parent; think of some of the more intimate moments from your love life or your marriage, when you could understand what the other wanted, or what she was thinking, without a word being exchanged between you—and sometimes not even a look. Think of relationships you’ve had with pets or other animals, where you felt you could interpret what they “said” or even sense what they were feeling, and respond in kind. Think of all the times in your life when you were thinking of someone and suddenly the phone or the door bell rang—can it all have been mere random coincidence? Really?

You won’t know for sure until you’ve tested it in the crucible of your own lived experience. It takes very little effort (as little, in fact, as would dialing a cell phone, and you don’t have to worry about whether you’re near enough to a tower); and no one will be watching or listening (in fact, there won’t *be* anything to see or hear). Try it for awhile, following the steps in the text box, and see what happens—but retreat from the impulse to look for empirically measurable results. Instead, let your *feelings* guide you—let them tell you whether, and to what extent, this is “working.” This entire experiment is meant to engage a vast range of resources within your personality that regularly go either repressed, minimalized, or ignored in our culture. These resources of the psyche are the forgotten functions within us that connect with and communicate the most essential and fundamental wave-form of the Universe—Love.

Inner Plane Communication 101: The Essentials

If you're not very familiar with this kind of communication, you may be surprised that there are many approaches to it—usually involving practices favored by professional psychics, wiccans, or occultists. These may require that a picture, possession, or other article personal to the person being communicated with be a part of the work; but for our purposes here, I think it is best to stick to the basics, which I have found are more reliable and easy to learn than practices that require various objects and rituals. Remember, your body already knows how to do this—you don't need special trappings or equipment.

- Begin with your regular meditation, as presented in Chapter 1 and with whatever personal additions or features that have come naturally for you in practicing the meditation. Be sure to connect first with your own body—your physical presence, your environment, clothes, position, breath, and the sensations around and within you.
- When you feel grounded and connected within yourself, now is the time to let the other person, with whom you will be communicating, arise to your consciousness. It is best for starters that it be someone you are familiar with. Obviously, it helps if it is someone you know well or are intimate with, but that is not a requirement. Since you are likely to turn to this method at times when you feel that a certain message can't be easily conveyed outwardly, or when conventional means of communication have failed with the person in question, it may also help you to have someone in mind for whom you have a specific inner message. In any event, let it be someone whose presence you have felt before “in real life” (as it were), so that you can connect with the same or similar feeling.
- Now *connect* with that person, and send a message, as if he or she were right there, before you. “Say” what you've been wanting to tell him or her but haven't had the courage or opportunity to say outwardly. Your message to the other may not even be a verbal communication—that is, anything that can be put easily into words. It could simply be a *feeling* that you want to convey, to share, with the other. Let it emerge from your heart or your bodily center.
- Ask the helping energies of the invisible world to “send” your message through the plane of consciousness, and ask that the inner truth of the other be opened and made receptive to your message. Then thank those guides for their help in this work.

Once you've tried this a few times, there should no longer be any problem with self-consciousness or skepticism. After all, even if you don't believe that “it's doing any good” or that “it's working at all,” it will certainly do *you* some good. Once again, try not to measure the other person for results or a response: if you do this exercise several times

in a mindful way, with sincerity and openness, you will find that there is no need to watch for results—they will positively leap out at you in the field of experience. I have found personally, as have many of my friends, clients, and students, that inner plane communication is probably the most reliable and effective form of connecting deeply with another person that there is, because it is *whole-being communication*—it both embraces and surpasses the conventional, the intellectual, the verbal. Through the quantum strength of feeling-energy, it “says” what cannot be spoken.

Penetrating the Darkness of Fear: A Process Guide

1. Ask for help in gaining a fuller understanding of the fears that haunt your inner life and obstruct the forward movement of your outer life. Then begin a meditation and allow images and thoughts to pass before you. Have your notebook or journal nearby.
2. Listen for voices, phrases, noises from memory; feel for any marked sensations of discomfort or even physical pain that may arise; follow the course and movement of the emotions that visit your awareness in this meditation. Hold them long enough to feel their personal meaning to you; then let them go, with the assurance *they that are not real*—they are the phantoms of a darkness that you are preparing to free yourself from.
3. If a memory, phrase, or emotion arises that is guilt, or that contains guilt, once again: attend long enough to feel or hear its source, its strident, unforgiving voice, and then banish it; let it go.
4. Your body will tell you when it has had enough for this session: listen carefully to its helping messages. When your bodily senses of discomfort, pain, fear, and disorientation become pronounced, it is time to leave off for now. You won't get to the bottom of this in one sitting: be patient and understand that "The Sage" is speaking to you through your body-consciousness, carefully providing the measure and direction that you need to navigate this work safely.

5. Return to outer awareness and take a few steadying, regulating breaths as you look around you. Then, begin writing a few notes on the essence of what you just experienced. It need be no more than a few lines to remind you of what you heard, saw, felt, and understood from that meditation.
6. Then give yourself a break: do something that you enjoy, or simply rest. Later, you will be able to return to your notes and your memories of the meditation and start doing the work of disburdenment. Once again, there is no hurry: it will all be done much faster than you could have imagined possible, if you will be patient and let each stage of understanding develop naturally.
7. If you have identified some images or set phrases that you felt, both during the meditation and now, as the symbols of something that is obstructing your life's growth and progress, then in your next meditation, you can apply the inner No method to these beliefs or images. As you work with the inner No, see if you can feel the poison of the destructive beliefs being physically cleansed from your body.

Finally, here are a few more general examples of the kinds of memories, associations, and emotions that people have experienced in doing this work on Fear, along with the doctrinal metaphors and statements that often accompany them. Once again, this is meant to provide a starting point of inspiration and orientation for your personal work, which will be unlike anyone else's for its personal meaning and insight.

- ❖ **Guilt** is a frequent emotional element that's connected with our fears, and it is particularly manifested in fixed religious and moral ideologies. Phrases that may arise often have to do with a doctrinally-fixed stain or flaw on our being,

as represented in a term such as “original sin”. Wherever it appears, and in whatever context, guilt must be firmly rejected, for it has no psychological or spiritual meaning in the Way of Nature. An inner No to guilt in whatever form it takes is fully justified and encouraged as a crucial step in liberating the true self from the grip of Fear.

❖ **Punishment** is another theme that may arise for you, in the context of powerful emotional memories or flashbacks to childhood experiences. It is often deeply connected with guilt, but adds the component of physical or psychological suffering as a justifiable act of control and violence against us. Once again, recall to yourself that *we were not designed by Nature to live this way*: punishment is the outer mark of every tyrant’s deepest fear—the fear of exposure and abandonment. The ideology of punishment is a Levitical medievalism—an eye for an eye. If memories of punishment arise to you, hold them long enough to hear the demonic voice, or to see the demonic shape, of the punisher. And then let it go as you recall to yourself that no matter what that voice or image was telling you, *you do not deserve to be punished*. Later on, say a firm inner No to the Cult of Punishment and reject its claim to validity. As the history of nations has shown us, and continues to reveal, punishment is perhaps the most corrupt and inefficient means of solving problems and correcting people or situations. Punishment has no place in your life from this point forward, and the fear of punishment has no place to dwell within your body or psyche.

- ❖ **Societal Abandonment** is a time-worn scheme of the institutional ego for reinforcing the Premise of Lack (“I am insufficient”) from the competition syllogism. If you experience images and fears of isolation or abandonment in your meditations, then these are pointing you to a recognition of a fundamental confusion that has been programmed into us intentionally. Collective ideologies want us to confound our natural *social* needs—for companionship, love, and acceptance within the community—with an institution’s projections of *societal* needs. More will be said in the next chapter about this distinction; for now, if you find that abandonment is a prominent theme in your meditations about fear, see if you can detect the ego-noise that is being made—in terms of threats, pronouncements, or self-fulfilling prophecies—about the imputed cost in isolation of any renouncing of group values and institutional beliefs. To some, such ego-talk comes in the shape of Commandments voiced by Authority, as in the phrase, “Thou shalt have no other Gods (or Priests/Presidents/Popes/Masters/Gurus) before Me.” If you do hear any such noise, take note of its force and expression, and apply the inner No method to all such statements and threats. We are no more meant to be isolated in this life than we are meant to be guilt-ridden or perpetually punished for imagined offenses against God or The Law. When we reject the poisonous projections of the institutional ego, we liberate the natural abilities that we possess to join with others in a community of equals.
- ❖ **Invasion** is another theme that frequently comes up in the meditation on Fear—often with tremendous emotional force. Invasion can encompass

memories of abuse—either psychological or physical; punitive or sexual. It can also raise feelings or memories of other kinds of trauma, from any phase of our lives—even a simple injury or fall from when we were young, that we were never quite allowed the time and attention to resolve within us at the time it happened, can be re-experienced as Fear. If, for example, you have images or feelings of a traumatic experience or encounter during a meditation, see if you can focus your attention on the ego-talk that arises amid these kinds of memories, rather than on whether the memories are “real” or not. Inner experience is *always* real, whether or not it relates back to a particular outer experience from your past: one principal message of this entire book is that there is scarcely any outer reality that is so immediate and crucial to our growth as the lived experiences of the psyche and the spiritual self. Indeed, we are only held back in our life’s progress when our inner experience is minimized or debased as “not real.” This, actually, is what much of the ego-talk that whispers through us in such invasion-moments is all about: it tells us, “this didn’t *really* happen, so it’s not important; and even if it *did* happen, you’re making more of it than it deserves.” If that minimalization of your inner life is the kind of noise you hear amid your inner experience of traumatic events or invasions, then perform the inner No toward all its associated images and expressions that come to you. This will free you to work through the invasions of your past and present more fully and naturally, with a trust in the guiding Presence that is beside you on this journey.

❖ **Encroachment** is a variant of invasion in the context of the Fear-meditation.

Encroachment involves the efforts of others to manipulate or pressure us, either outwardly or on the inner plane. Probably everyone has had the experience of being stared at or of feeling “vibes” from another that are distinctly unwelcome or disturbing. This kind of experience can evoke intense fear and discomfort, because it is so frequently not demonstrable according to external “rules of evidence,” to borrow a legal term. Nevertheless, our feelings of being encroached upon—invaded on the inner plane—can be so pronounced and vivid that our psyche will not allow us to repress them completely. In meditation, we allow these feelings some freedom of movement and expression, and we validate their authenticity. If the sense of fear you experience in a meditation is related to feelings of control, manipulation, or deceit coming from others on the inner plane, then affirm the validity of those feelings within yourself; and if other voices are heard within that tell you “it’s not real” or “you’re making it all up” or “you can’t prove it”, then turn a firm inner No upon those voices, and ask for help in silencing the petty skepticism of ego.

❖ **Death**, in one form or another, will most likely arise to you in meditation as you work through the darkness of Fear. Some very old demons of the psyche, who have been living in our bodies for a very long time, will be shaken and aroused as images and thoughts of Death appear to you in meditation. Many of the threats, punishments, and other oppressive messages of institutional ideologies are couched in the language of Death, and they relate directly to

guilt and many of the other inner torments that are applied to keep us towing the line of belief and self-sacrifice to the group. These voices of the institutional ego may tell us “*The wages of Sin is Death,*” and other nonsense of this sort. If you hear any death-talk from the threatening, fear-inducing voices within your meditation, turn the inner No upon them. The only death worth fearing is *inner death*—the death of our individual, true nature. When we sell our souls to the aggrandizements of power and belief, then we become like those pale, sunken-eyed, fear-mongering zealots of Desolation that we now see leading the nations of this planet into one endless war after another, disemboweling our planet as they march from depredation to depredation, spilling lies, bombs, and poison upon the Earth as they go. As you continue to practice, you will discover that as you inwardly expel the ideologies of inner death, the true nature of Death-in-Form will be revealed to you—as a transformation of consciousness rather than an icy termination of Life.

If you persevere in your practice of meditation and transformative work, making it a normal part of your life, you will most likely find yourself facing all of the features of neuropia that we’ve discussed: competition, conflict, and fear. You will feel the pressure of painful emotions as you encounter the demons of cosmic racism and emotional consumerism, in whatever forms they take to your psyche. You will no doubt make new discoveries amid your darkness that will contribute to our understanding of neuropia, and of the means to free ourselves from its grip. You will feel a palpable and amazingly refreshing lightening of your inner burden as you progress, and these feelings of relief and of return to your true nature will inspire you and your practice further. You will also come to understand that the journey of learning is never complete, never finished—that it goes on until the moment of our

physical death, and that it probably continues even after that. You will find that this journey, though never complete, perpetually renews and fulfills itself in the regenerative dance toward our deepest treasure—the individuality and destiny of purpose that is each being’s authentic natural gift—and the enduring recovery of our original sanity.

Chapter 61 of Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching

(from *Poems of the Universe: Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching, A New English Translation*)

How does a great nation know its neighbors?
As a river modestly accepts its feeding streams;
As a woman blissfully receives the man she loves.

The way of Nature is attraction:
Pure strength rests below,
And thus absorbs what lies above.
Genuine love receives its complement;
The greatest nation yields.

Small and great are mutually fulfilling:
Set them into opposition,
And you have made your first and final error.

Therefore, let your nation follow Nature's way:
If it is big, let its actions be small.
If it is small, it is already complete,
So it need not strive for greatness.

In the service of the Cosmic Teacher,
Borders and boundaries, fences and flags
Have no meaning.
In this there is benefit for all.

Thus among both hearts and nations:
If you would discover the great,
You must look first below.

All sense of territory is the mark of ego, and is repugnant to the cosmic order. Thus the poet declares that "borders and boundaries, fences and flags" are meaningless to one who follows the Sage: this applies to both "hearts and nations"—individuals and entire civilizations.

Here, a personal meditation image may help to illustrate Lao Tzu's point. It is a meditation that I have sometimes wished I could offer to members of the armed forces. It is very simple: you close your eyes and take a space flight, journeying out to an orbiting distance of the earth. Then, as many astronauts have done—often in a transformational experience, as was the case with Edgar Mitchell—you look back onto the earth and see

both what is there, and what is not. Water and clouds, light and shadow, earthen colors of varying hues, from tawny mountain to verdant plain, all appear to the eye. But no borders, walls, fortresses, or other emblems of territory are seen from this distance. In such a setting, the Cosmos is seen to lack a sense of power, and the superficial paradigm of the universe as a mechanical system is annihilated and transformed: things in motion appear to rest in stillness, while the Whole, in this suspension, seems to dance with small, unceasing movement. But perhaps the most significant part of the meditation is the return to earth, where the perspective thus received is brought back into contact with a chair, a room, and light through a window. It is here, rather than in the "space flight" that the transformation is revealed; it is back on earth where the discovery occurs that, as Lao Tzu says, "pure strength rests below, and absorbs what lies above."

ⁱ For the marvelous insight on the "inner No," I am indebted to Carol Anthony and Hanna Moog, who present the practice in their *I Ching: The Oracle of the Cosmic Way*. For a complete description of the practice and benefits of the inner No, see the Appendix to that book.

ⁱⁱ The Feng Shui practitioner mentioned is a consultant named Gregg Nodelman, whose work I highly recommend. More information about Gregg can be found at his website, <http://www.ddfengshui.com/content/publish/home.shtml> .

ⁱⁱⁱ Here, it is worth recalling Rowling's description of Harry's cloak: "like water woven into material."

^{iv} "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1917)

^v in *Iron John* (1990). The subtitle to this book is "A Book About Men", but it is a gift to anyone of either gender, which can be recommended to women every bit as much as to men.

^{vi} Gary Zukav, *The Seat of the Soul* (1990).

^{vii} One thing must be made clear: I am not "against medication," or "anti-drug." Pharmaceutical agents, when applied on the basis of necessity, as helping elements that are part of a holistic solution to a health problem, are a desirable component of treatment. Medication, however, should be perceived within a total treatment picture, analogous to a correct view of the intellect's function within the total psyche: as a contributing but not dominant aspect of the whole (the personality or the healing process) that truly and enduringly comes from within the client's own connection with Cosmic energies and Helpers of health.

^{viii} Rilke, 1923: *Sonnets to Orpheus*, X.