

LEARNING PRINCIPLES

'There are as many paths to Truth as there are souls of people.'
Adage

Individual Differences

Every individual has a unique background and specific abilities and capacities which must be taken into account in the learning process. One of the sayings of the Prophet Mohammed was: "*Speak to each person in accordance with their understanding.*"

Human beings are not simple creatures – we have multiple facets – and our multiplicity makes each one a quite different individual. At each mating a single male and female could produce *64 trillion* unique individuals. The genetic complement differs, our upbringing differs, and our cultures have different strengths and weaknesses. Personalities differ, intelligence differs, experiences differ, and most importantly, circumstances differ. If you take into account these differences then you will teach different people very differently.
(1)

Due to individual differences a viable spiritual teaching must be applied in a unique manner to each student: "The fundamental aim of education is that it shall be brought to the student in accordance with the nature, capacity and character of the student: and that what is brought to the learner shall be in the manner, at the level and through the knowledge of the subject which is required."

The teacher and the Teaching must take into account many different factors to ensure that learning occurs in the proper manner. For instance, any teaching will be ineffective if it is not sensitive to the natural variations from hour to hour and day to day of the human mind. Pupils will inevitably vary in receptivity, attitude, energy and ability as a function of time. The teaching process should also take into account each person's differing circles of beliefs, including those held by the surrounding community, those based on accumulated experience, and ones acquired by direct perception and intuition.

Different styles of learning need to be chosen in order to address and reflect, to a lesser or greater degree, the possibilities and circumstances of the student. Effective teaching requires *both* accurate analysis and diagnosis of the learning situation *and* the proper 'prescription of the remedy' to facilitate learning. "In real teaching situations, as in therapeutic ones, studies are 'prescribed' for the needs of their beneficiaries. If you mix someone else's medicine with your own, don't be surprised at an unpleasant, even harmful, result."

Ultimately, people must be taught and communicated with in such a way that they can truly learn and make use of the knowledge that they are acquiring. Mere exposure to a teaching

without ensuring that the individual is actually learning has little effect. A person must be in contact with a form of teaching that *really* has transformative power. There is a wise saying: "*A donkey stabled in a library does not become literate.*"

Traditionally spiritual teachers have interacted and communicated with their students in an individualized manner. An example is the Buddha:

Shakyamuni Buddha taught many wonderful things, and he taught them according to the circumstances. He spoke according to the profession, the understanding, and the experience of the person with whom he was speaking. When he talked to a poet, he spoke in and of poetry. When he talked to a mother, he talked about her children. Above all, he spoke of the unity of life everywhere, and of compassion for every living being. His teaching came from his own experience of the human condition, from his intuitive understanding of its essential character. (2)

It is the responsibility of the teacher to prescribe an appropriate course of studies based on each student's capacity and potential. Sufi teacher Omar Ali-Shah: "One of the great subtleties of the Tradition is the way in which the teaching communicates itself to the requirements of each individual while remaining constant over a time-span of many generations. It can do this only because the teaching takes place through contact with a living teacher of the Tradition, rather than limiting itself to cruder tools like books, theories and rudderless groupings of well-wishers."

The teacher understands the uniqueness and capabilities of each disciple as well as the direction of each individual's journey. A degree of personal tuition is necessary so that the teacher can monitor the progress of each student and indicate changes or modifications in the course of study:

This level of sympathy is essential, since whatever may be the formal trappings of the master-disciple connection, its essence is wholly flexible and living. Each process of instruction is unique, however much it may resemble others, since each is the outcome of a personal relationship. The teacher never really has only a group of disciples whom he instructs; he has around him selected individuals with each of whom he stands in a unique relationship. Even when he appears to speak to all, he bears in mind the different impacts of his words on each. (3)

Spiritual understanding comes to people in different ways, at different times, and by means of different influences and impacts. Since the teacher is presenting a higher knowledge which has little in common with ordinary experience, he or she has to approach the student in a way which is understandable and meaningful. One of the roles of the teacher is to observe the pupil and identify the nature and pattern of each individual's conditioning.

The function of a spiritual teaching is to transmit knowledge and understanding. Different ways of communicating are chosen as the most effective for a given person and circumstance:

When you read about different 'systems' among the Sufis, you are seeing studies which have from time to time been prescribed for people in accordance with their possibilities, like a doctor prescribing according to the hopes he has for his patients. People adopt these and imagine that they should be applied to any and all students, regardless of the flexibility which, in the first place, demanded that courses must be scripted for the prevailing conditions, and taking into account many other factors. (4)

Cults and imitative or deteriorated systems are based on the general application of ideas and techniques regardless of the situation or the individual or group being taught. There is a desire, especially in the Western world, for a standardized or mass-produced product which applies to all. Such systems fail to teach individuals, in individual ways. By contrast, authentic teachings of inner development always 'prescribe' studies for individuals and groups on the basis of their actual needs and possibilities.

Alignment of 'Time, Place and People'

One of the fundamental principles of a teaching situation is that successful learning depends on the correct alignment of three factors – right time, right place and right people. "Every part of your development as a human being needs correct time, right place and suitable company. Without these you will be as complete as anything else which lacks three desirable elements in due concert: like a plant, say, without water, sun and earth."

The importance of correct 'time, place and people' in spiritual studies is recognized in most schools of higher development. Sufi teacher Idries Shah: "There is a time when nothing can be done, a time when something can be done, and a time when everything is possible. Keep this in mind, so as to be alert to discern each different quality of time." When both the teacher and student (or group) are sensitive and alert to those 'occasions' when learning is possible, progress in the development of higher awareness can occur.

Effective spiritual teaching is possible only at specific times and in certain circumstances when the human mind can escape from the limitations imposed by conditioning and thus be receptive to the transmission of higher knowledge. This concept is familiar in ordinary life under the guise of: '*There is a time and place for everything.*'

Everything has its own, correct time. Now, this is part of our daily experience (you cannot catch a train if it is not there, for instance, apart from all the other pre-requisites needed to get on that train), but people tend to imagine that this sort of argument is always advanced to *stop* someone doing something, or to avoid having to do it. People who can keep calm enough to realize that there may be a time and a place – and other requirements – for anything, are *more*, not less, able to benefit from that thing. (5)

Fixed or standardized systems which apply the same methods and teaching approaches to everyone are ineffective: the teaching must be suited to the specific needs and circumstances of the learner(s). "What is appropriate always depends on the situation and cannot be standardized, because everything is fluid and 'organic.' Each situation is different, depending on person, time, and place."

The term 'skillful means' is applied to the words and actions of a teacher who is sensitive to the characteristics of each individual student and the time and circumstances of the teaching situation:

The great Masters possess what Buddhism calls the *Wisdom of the Skillful Ways*, or capacity to create and employ different methods suitable for different mentalities and different occasions . . . But these means are only truly skillful if they are suitable to the *particular circumstances*. They must be *effective* and for this reason should respond exactly to the real needs and to the particular mentality of those whom they seek to guide. If the Master is not capable of understanding the mentality of the student, he will no longer be able to create these skillful and effective means. A single means cannot be employed in all circumstances. (6)

Wise teachers are able to sense the 'right measure' to effectively teach each student in a way suitable for their spiritual needs and possibilities. Buddhist scholar Thomas Cleary: "The living eye is fresh and new. It is precisely because the enlightened are not obsessed or blinded by tools that they can assess their appropriate use and apply them freely without being locked into set patterns."

In Buddhism we talk about looking at four basic elements – time, place, person, and amount – and realizing that those four elements are always changing. But having considered those four key factors, you finally just have to feel what the right direction is for you. And it's important to realize that what's right for you is not necessarily right for me. We're two different people. What's right to do in the library isn't necessarily right to do in the zendo; they're two different places. What's right to do now isn't necessarily right tonight; different places, different times. (7)

An authentic spiritual teaching is eminently practical, adapting ideas, methods and practices to the real needs and capacities of individuals and communities. Jeanne de Salzmann worked intensively with Gurdjieff for 30 years and noted that his teachings were always responsive to the requirements and circumstances of each pupil. It was an organic teaching, never fixed but constantly evolving. "He never mixed groups, but occupied each with a different work, according to the state of their preparation and their powers."

While the truth sought for was always the same, the forms through which he helped his pupils approach it served only for a limited time. As soon as a new understanding had been reached, the form would change. Readings, talks, dis-

cussions and studies, which had been the main feature of work for a period of time and had stimulated the intelligence to the point of opening it to an entirely new way of seeing, were for some reason or other suddenly brought to an end. This put the pupil on the spot. What his intellect had become capable of conceiving had now to be experienced with his feeling. Unexpected conditions were brought about in order to upset habits. The only possibility of facing the new situation was through a deep self-examination, with the total sincerity which alone can change the quality of human feeling. Then the body, in its turn, was required to collect all the energy of its attention so as to attune itself to a new order which it was there to serve. After this, the experience could follow its course on another level. (8)

Margaret Anderson, observing Gurdjieff near the end of his life, remarked: "Gurdjieff himself seemed to me essentially unchanged. There was teaching in all that he did or said, only its form had changed: he was teaching now chiefly through his presence – from his being." And other pupils, such as Olga and Thomas de Hartmann, perceived a consistent thread that ran through the variety of teaching methods that Gurdjieff employed to touch the inner consciousness of his students:

The outer behaviour of Mr. Gurdjieff was so different on different occasions – depending on the person concerned, the level on which this person stood, and which side of him Mr. Gurdjieff wished to approach at a given moment – that it seemed as if Mr. Gurdjieff was very changeable. But it was not so. He was always the same – only the impression he deliberately created was different. Mr. Gurdjieff wished – perhaps it was his highest task – to bring to life in ordinary man 'something' of which man has hitherto been unaware . . . In his 'divine acting' with people, Mr. Gurdjieff consistently followed the same line of Work from the time we met him, although he always, so to speak, dressed it differently. (9)

Cyclical Nature of Learning

In order to learn effectively there must be sensitivity to the time element involved in studies. Many spiritual practices are designed not to be carried out continuously, but only at auspicious times when effort in this direction can yield real results:

Effort and work have many different forms. One reason for the institution of a Guide is that he knows when to direct the disciple's effort and work, and when not to direct it. He also knows the kind of effort and work which each individual should do. Only the ignorant mistake any work for useful work, or extra effort at any time they wish for even a little effort at a right time. (10)

In any successful learning process, the energy and focus of the teaching must be correct, allowing for the cyclical nature of the availability of transformational energy and the student's ability to absorb it. An authentic school of inner development will vary its practices and studies in accordance with an organic, non-repetitious pattern. "The teacher is in contact with a cosmic intention. The operation of this 'Great Plan' is cyclic and discontinuous. To continue activity when the 'Great Plan' is quiescent (for its own reasons) is harmful to the pupil."

The belief is that the community is an organism which is constantly changing. The experience of the individual human unit in this must change from time to time to produce an all-round development (known as 'maturing') and a harmonization (known as *Hamdard*, sympathy, literally 'breathing together'). An example of the inter-relation of factors in the Sufi system is seen here in the matter of constant and irregular activity. While the irregularity of the activities is held by the Sufis to mirror the rhythm of another (spiritual) dimension, the unfamiliarity of this behaviour places a strain upon those who seek constant or regular activity, leading many of them to eliminate themselves from the study course. Hence the learning process itself is employed to sift students and to dissuade those who cannot harmonize with it, without a word being said. The Sufis also make no attempt to explain what has happened; with the result that many disappointed students have always claimed that 'nothing happens among the Sufis,' without refutation. (11)

Giving and withholding teachings may be based on an invisible rhythm of learning which is not apparent to outsiders through external assessment: "People are trying to learn things without realizing the simple fact that certain things can be studied only at certain times. These times are not necessarily by clock time. They are known to the teacher through inner cognition, and unless he teaches at those times, all the books or exercises in the world will have next to no effect."

Although spiritual activity can take almost any form, it has to be selectively exercised in accordance with the time, conditions and state of the student:

The disciple can only be taught by the Master when circumstances are favourable. This means that anyone may have to wait for any space of time until the Master has judged that this time has arrived. More than a little fortitude is necessary if the pupil is to be able to endure the waiting which this involves. This is one of the reasons why Sufis teach, or have taught, their followers to distinguish between the desire to learn and the impulsion to be stimulated with thoughts and actions. It is often necessary to abstain from applying any stimuli to the learner while he or she is waiting for the Master's special *baraka* (high spiritual force) to be available under the right conditions. (12)

An authentic spiritual teacher is always cognizant of the importance of the ebb and flow, the rhythm of the teacher-student relationship, in the learning process:

Sufi teaching techniques, in their true form, depend very much upon an inter-relation between master and disciple and between these two and the whole community of mystics. The 'current' which flows between these is the most important element in their being and progress . . . The sporadic nature of the Sufi activity, when there may be a lecture or a series of exercises, there may be a lecture or distant instruction, or there may not, from time to time in a real Sufi school, ties in with this current. The fluctuation of activity parallels the fluctuation of potentiality and the knowledge of the teacher. (13)

A common feature of real spiritual schools is to suspend studies for long or short periods, withdrawing stimulus and attention from the student. A period of teaching may be followed by a period of seeming fallowness, which is actually an integral part of the teaching process itself. In fact, there are times in a teaching situation when a disciple may be required to do nothing at all for long periods of time. Individuals (or groups) who are unable to tolerate any separation or break from their teacher are working on the relatively crude psychological basis of reassurance and conditioning:

Nobody's 'psychic life' is in suspension. People who are in groups and have no studies to do, people who have been in formal contact with us and do not receive regular letters, lectures, and so on, may be unaware of their continuing spiritual life – they are not disconnected from the Work. It is sad if they imagine that their intellectual and emotional life is their spiritual life. It is not. (14)

The Teaching, by its very nature, is discontinuous. Yet people tend to regard such teachings as inherently less attractive, interesting and fulfilling than studies which are carried out in a regular, predictable fashion. They fail to understand that by patiently 'storing up' experiences the student is eventually able to assimilate, under the impact of calculated 'trigger' events at a later date, the essence of the teaching:

In addition to rhythm and its effects, there are phases within the human being, which can be contacted and employed to enable him to think, to work, and to exist outside of familiar time and repetitiousness. Human beings, however, have an affinity for repetition. Sufi techniques explore the switchover from continuity to discontinuity by a large number of devices, both literary, physical and mental. Many Sufi exercises are in fact based upon this conception. It follows from this that people who are not able to switch attention from repetition to discontinuity will not be able to benefit from such techniques, even if they knew what they are. It is for this reason that a Sufi teacher is always needed: unregenerate man will always automatize inputs, and only someone who is consciously outside of time as well as within it can hold the line. (15)

Teachings that are based on constant activity and the giving and receiving of attention may in actual fact be merely conditioning their students to a narrow range of belief and behaviour.

“Chronological repetition, meetings and studies, activities and exercises, which are carried out by means of a fixed schedule are almost always a sign of a deteriorated tradition.”

Q: What is the major difference between your treatment of students and that of other schools?

A: There are many. To single out the one which fewest people can understand: we work to contact people at a level deeper than working on their emotions. All other systems concentrate upon conversion, giving people attention, giving them things to do, tests to perform and so on. Our major test is to leave people alone, until they find out whether or not they can feel anything true about us. We have discovered, you see, that the system which is supposedly testing people by means of trials is in fact maintaining their attention in contact with itself. The result is that people are trained (conditioned, you call it today) to concentrate upon the school or system: they have become brainwashed, though they call it faith. If they reject, not becoming trained, all the better for the system in question, for it is spared the problem of a recalcitrant in its ranks thereafter. With us, it is different: we cannot survive with “conditioned” people in our ranks. We reach something different in them. (16)

Balanced Development

In most human endeavours the principles of balance and harmony are essential for a productive outcome. For instance, in both inner development and scientific research a balance must be struck in the methods of investigation:

The twin exercises of identification and detachment are valuable in the training of the self. Too much identification produces an atrophy of the faculty of detachment. Fanaticism is the frequent result. A man becomes attached to something and cannot escape. When the sage ibn-Sina (Avicenna) was writing his work on minerals, he used to study the universal world, in general and in particular. He concentrated upon individual examples, and then detached from this and absorbed himself in the whole. Thus did he strike a balance, together with concentration and detachment in other fields of thought and essence. (17)

The concept of balance implies an interplay between extremes and opposites. Rumi: “Those things which are apparently opposed may in reality be working together.” On the spiritual path there must be a balance between inner perception and growth and effective action in everyday life, encapsulated by the saying, *‘Be in the world, but not of the world.’* This approach is an expression of the twin principles of ‘harmonious integration’ and ‘due proportion.’

There are numerous examples of balance and complementary harmonization in nature and in human activity:

- There is an underlying unity of matter and spirit, form and emptiness.
- The respiratory functions of inhalation and exhalation work in tandem.
- The right brain (holistic) and left brain (linear) perform complementary tasks and functions.
- Receiving and giving, gathering and letting go are mutually supportive operations.
- Societies need to achieve a balance between individual and collective interests.
- Flying a kite requires a skilful tension between keeping the line neither too slack nor too taut.
- Novel tasks can be performed which challenge and 'stretch' our capacities and abilities without creating non-constructive stress and strain.

One of the great challenges facing humanity is to solve the apparent contradictions between perceived opposites. In the words of St. John: "All extremes are vicious, and in behaving thus, persons are working their own will; they grow in vice rather than in virtue because they are acquiring spiritual gluttony and pride in working in this way."

How do we solve the problem existing between the material and the spiritual? Between natural medicine and chemical pharmaceutical medicine? Between the real and the ideal? Between the evolutionist and the traditionalist? Between the artificial and the natural? Between the negative and the affirmative? Between the individual and the community? Between the civilized and the wild? Between the philosophical and the methodologic? Between movement and non-movement? Between the objective and the subjective? (18)

One of the major pitfalls on the spiritual journey is unbalanced development. "In a true higher organization functioning correctly the concepts of love, devotion, effort, discipline and self-training, as well as moral principles, must be in balance. Deterioration of function takes place when an organization stabilizes itself on one principle or a narrow range of theory or technique." Zen teacher Charlotte Beck speaks to this problem:

I meet people who have been sitting a long time and who have power and some insight, but who are all screwed up because their development has not been balanced. And that balancing is not a simple thing to do. As we sit we come to know how complicated we are. And there may be various little eddies in our complicated selves where we need experts in other fields to help us. Zen will not take care of everything. When the intensity level of practice becomes too high, too soon, there is a danger of imbalance and we need to slow down. We shouldn't see too much too soon. (19)

One of the central teachings of Buddhism is the 'Middle Way' or path of balance between the extremes of asceticism or self-denial and indulgence or excess. "The Middle Way embraces and reconciles apparent opposites, it integrates and goes beyond all contradictions, it is beyond every dualism, even beyond every synthesis." The Middle Way is also succinctly encapsulated in a proverb: '*Water which is too pure has no fish.*'

On the spiritual path insight and understanding must be balanced by compassion and service. "Our balancing of wisdom and compassion is always changing, growing, maturing, being directed into the various circumstances of our lives. When do we do enough, and when do we do too much?"

Unless one develops compassion and sympathy, one is not rightly attuned. Of course this doesn't come entirely through enlightenment. But certainly with enlightenment and the dropping away of habitual self-concern, feelings are liberated that allow us to become more deeply sensitive to every kind of situation. Some people, however, try to help others on a large scale before they're ready. Remember Milarepa, the great Tibetan Buddhist teacher, who says, "There will never be any end of people to help. Till the end of the world there will always be people to help." But to help people without hurting them at the same time, or hurting yourself, means that we must first work on ourselves. But certainly this does not exclude helping in emergencies or times of crisis or simply whenever you're asked. Nor does it exclude doing whatever might be useful or beneficial in general. If you can see it, then you can do it. This is a natural part of practice, but we must not become attached to it . . . A middle way alternates between the life of inward meditation and the life of action-in-the-world, the twin poles of nirvana and samsara that are ultimately one. What we take in through meditation we must give out in love and action on behalf of our fellows on this earth. (20)

A certain degree of balance, harmony and equilibrium in one's efforts is a prerequisite for evolutionary growth. Aspirants have to be flexible and find the path between extremes and opposites. This principle of 'right measure' plays an important role in both everyday life and spiritual studies:

Measure means the necessary amount of attention placed upon anything. You should note, too, that the more devout or sincere people imagine themselves to be, the fiercer becomes their selective attention towards detail and intensity of belief and action. The principles of measure go by the board. These principles obtain in all fields of human endeavour. If you want to develop something, or in something, you must be able to adopt and progress the right balance and measure towards that thing. To become obsessed about it will end only in conditioned blindness or in obsession for its own sake. One's objectives, both in the ordinary world and in one's learning process, will yield results to the extent to which they are correctly focused upon a relevant aim: what we call a 'destination.' (21)

In schools of higher development balanced development is expressed in many different forms and ways:

- Students must be able to alternate their focus between the relative and the Absolute, the approximate and the Real: "The manifest and the unmanifest are both vehicles of realization. Attention might be drawn to the concrete to interrupt preoccupation with abstractions; conversely, attention might be shifted to the abstract to discourage pre-occupation with the concrete."
- Inner teachings contain both "hard" and "soft" realities, discord and challenge as well as harmony and peace.
- The Path requires perception and experience, as well as interpretation and reflection.
- Both intellect and intuition must be developed. "The union of mind and intuition brings about illumination and love."
- Exercises of concentration and focus of mind must alternate with diffusion of attention, open awareness and "effortless absorption of impacts."

In talks with his students Gurdjieff spoke of the importance of a balanced development of *knowledge* and *being*: "A preponderance of knowledge over being is observed in present-day culture. The idea of the value and importance of the level of being is completely forgotten. And it is forgotten that the level of knowledge is determined by the level of being."

There are two lines along which man's development proceeds, the line of *know-ledge* and the line of *being*. In right education the line of knowledge and the line of being develop simultaneously, parallel to, and helping one another. But if the line of knowledge gets too far ahead of the line of being, or if the line of being gets ahead of the line of knowledge, man's development goes wrong, and sooner or later it must come to a standstill . . . If knowledge gets far ahead of being, it becomes theoretical and abstract and inapplicable to life, or actually harmful, because instead of serving life and helping people the better to struggle with the difficulties they meet, it begins to complicate man's life, brings new difficulties into it, new troubles and calamities which were not there before. The reason for that is that knowledge which is not in accordance with being cannot be large enough for, or sufficiently suited to, man's real needs. It will always be a knowledge of *one thing* together with ignorance of *another thing*; a knowledge of the *detail* without a knowledge of the *whole*, a knowledge of the *form* without a knowledge of the *essence*. (22)

Gurdjieff also taught that only when we *understand* with our mind, heart and body can we fully awaken: "All the parts which constitute the human being must be informed – informed in the only way which is appropriate for each of them; otherwise the development will be lopsided and unable to go further." In *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*, he proposed 'Five Obligations' for daily effort that would harmonize, through 'Conscious Labours' and 'Voluntary Suffering,' the three physical, emotional and intellectual functions:

1. *Preserve your life.* (Be just to the body; satisfy its needs; treat it as a good master treats a good servant.)
2. *Find your place in the scheme.* (Understand the meaning and aim of existence. Know more and more concerning the laws of world creation and world maintenance.)
3. *Develop yourself.* (Constant, unflagging need for self-perfection in the sense of Being. Improve your 'being,' make 'being' efforts.)
4. *Help others to develop.* (Assist in the most rapid perfecting of other beings.)
5. *Pay back.* (To lighten the load of the Creator, pay back in gratitude and effort for the fact that Evolution has helped you to get this far.) (23)

Multi-Dimensional Learning

The term 'scatter' has been employed to describe the multiple activities and effects of a composite impact or series of impacts. The idea is that the various components of a holistic teaching harmonize and fit together to form a pattern so that "a wide range of disparate, even contradictory ideas and insights may be built up into a global apprehension."

Indirect teaching, and the accumulation of a number of impacts or teachings to make up a single whole, is another feature of Sufi study. What is called in some disciplines 'enlightenment' can be, in the Sufi process, the result of the falling into place of a large number of small impacts and perceptions, producing insights when the individual is ready for them. The fact that one may be learning bit by bit, and storing up little pieces of information and experience which are, almost insensibly, to come together at some later date, naturally does not recommend itself to people who may be offered elsewhere something which, it is claimed, will give them instant insights. (24)

By approaching the needs of the student from many different directions, the whole picture ultimately comes together to produce understanding. The concept of a constellation of impacts is comparable to the one employed in teaching children by surrounding them with information and experiences that they absorb piecemeal until "the penny drops." This method involves exposing the students to numerous extrapolations from a central idea or truth, so that the essential concept may be built up in the mind, following the dictum '*The known is the bridge to the unknown.*'

In Arabic the term 'scatter' is derived from the root word NSHR which has multiple meanings: to expand, spread, display, propagate, disperse, revivify. The sense of this concept is given in Sufi teachings by the analogy of the 'oil-spot technique.':

If you have a piece of cloth or paper and you put drops of oil on different parts of it, they eventually coalesce over a period of time and come together. They

could be considered initially as individual entities which are separated or isolated from each other: but in joining together, each spot or circumstance brings with it the experience of how it travelled, or how or why it came together. Whether and how they come together depends to a very great extent on the texture of the material on which you drop the oil. If you drop the oil on a metallic surface it is very likely that the spots will eventually come together in an almost accidental way. But if the material is cloth, the drops will expand in a more uniform way. In the analogy the cloth represents the Tradition or Teaching. (25)

One effective teaching method is to approach an idea, formulation or subject from a number of different angles or perspectives. In order to understand certain concepts, repetition in the form of permutations or variations on a theme may be required. Ideas are presented in different forms with a different emphasis to meet the needs of the specific learning requirements of time, person and circumstance.

There is a human tendency to interpret new ideas within a framework of previously established cognitive structures. One of the purposes of the 'scatter' technique is to bypass normal emotional and intellectual patterns by challenging the student with a constellation of ideas and impacts from many different sources. "The cumulative effect will be that the pupil will begin to examine their own assumptions and prejudices and look at these, as well as the world, with new eyes."

A learning situation may contain multiple dimensions and levels of meaning. "The net effect of experiencing an idea at several different levels at once is to awaken the innate capacity for understanding in a comprehensive, more objective manner than is possible to the ordinary, painstaking and inefficient way of thinking."

The effectiveness of a teaching often depends upon how much and on what level a student can grasp multiple meanings. "Esoteric teachings contain layer upon layer of meaning, and one cannot pass to a second meaning until a primary one has been absorbed." Each student can simultaneously learn several different things, depending on their degree of perception and potentiality. An analogy that has been employed to illustrate the nature of a composite, multi-dimensional teaching is that of a fruit containing colour, texture, flavour and nutrition:

This multiform [teaching] is in a way like a peach. It has beauty, nutrition, and hidden depths – the kernel. You can eat the peach, and taste a further delight – understand its depth. The peach contributes to your nutrition, becomes a part of yourself. You can throw away the stone – or crack it and find a delicious kernel within. This is the hidden depth. It has its own colour, size, form, depth, taste, function. You can collect the shells of this nut, and with them fuel a fire. Even if the charcoal is of no further use, the edible portion has become a part of you. (26)

Multi-dimensional teachings have a number of salient qualities:

- The Teaching is of a composite nature and the individual methods and techniques each form part of, and harmonize with, a larger comprehensive whole.
- The elements contained on various levels form an overall pattern that embodies an essential, underlying higher truth.
- Following the principle of parsimony and economy, each idea, activity and exercise has multiple purposes and effects.
- One and the same impact may yield multiple benefits.
- The teachings may include content that, in ordinary circumstances, may be neglected, dismissed or ignored.
- The diversity of methods may include forms that appear unfamiliar, strange or even absurd at certain times.

Comprehensive teachings, unlike diluted ones, are 'organic' and 'holistic,' with an emphasis on the totality of impacts and experience. "Any teaching which does not use all kinds of procedures (exercises, study-tasks, theory and practice and so on) *in due proportion* will inevitably arrive at a point where some people have obtained as much as they can from each procedure and thereafter will go 'downhill' as far as their development is concerned."

The science of higher human development has been carefully researched and established over a period of millennia and the fundamental basis of the skillful application of methods has been worked out: "We have every sort of technique which fits every sort of situation, and we apply them according to the demands of the person, situation and context."

The teaching methods embrace a wide field, involving the practice of a complex of activities. The teacher selects from this whole those materials which will develop the inner and outer being of the learner. The teacher must be able to teach in many different formats and styles to meet the needs of individual students and the requirements of the prevailing circumstances:

There is no one specific, over-riding technique. Teachers are expected to be able to teach in accordance with the peculiarities of the people who are learning from them. That means that you have to have a very versatile and sophisticated type of mind as a teacher. You must not have a doctrinaire or dogmatic approach. You must not have a system. But you must have a tremendous amount of information as to how to put the same thing in different ways. (27)

The teachings can be projected and absorbed in a multiplicity of ways, including:

- Literature, poetry, myths, fables and stories, folk wisdom
- Metaphors, analogies, proverbs, sayings
- Humour, jokes
- Symbols, mandalas, geometric shapes, colours

- Music, chants, recitations
- Sacred dance, physical movements and exercises
- Meditation, concentration, contemplation
- Teacher-student relationship
- Demonstration, example, emulation
- Talks, conversations, dialogues, questions and answers
- Role-playing, method acting
- Life tasks and experiences
- Journeys, undertakings
- Action and inaction, work and play
- Retreats, withdrawal
- Silence

People can learn in many different ways (observation, experiment, demonstration, analogy, indirect teaching and so on) and a comprehensive education will employ multiple methods and a variety of experiences:

From the start, one was exposed to a tremendous number of experiences. These experiences were not selected like you might select experiences for a public school boy, say, in order to bring out in him characteristics of leadership, or the ability to make decisions, or how to solve problems, because a well-rounded human being ought to be able to do more than just this, shouldn't just be a product very useful for the administration of an empire, for instance, but should be a person of interest and usefulness to the human community as a whole. For example, one might be expected to be entertaining, or interesting, or capable of doing things, all kinds of things. They might be conjuring tricks, it might be cooking, it might be all sorts of other things, in the course of studying which one could imbibe the capacities to make decisions, to solve problems, to acquire and discharge leadership: these qualities not being an end in themselves, but being acquired by practice and through exposure to expected and unexpected circumstances. (28)

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