
Continuity in the Inner Work

Claudio Naranjo

In contrast to the typical psychotherapeutic situation in which one individual comes to another for help. Buddhism and other spiritual traditions stress individual self-help and self-therapy, "working on oneself" moment after moment throughout the different circumstances and experiences of day to day life. Help from others is, of course, possible and generally necessary; but if we think that there is nothing more important than to wake up from samsaric-mindedness and to help others to do the same, that we are here on earth to realize and manifest Being—we inevitably come to feel that there is no time to lose and that every moment is a precious opportunity. There are tools with which we may work through pleasure and pain; and the more we understand about the path and the goal, the more relevant each moment seems to our life task and the more each circumstance or mental state reveals itself as a learning situation and a challenge.

It is one thing to see the truth of this occasionally, and it is quite another to sustain this perspective throughout the hours of the day, the days of the week, and the weeks of the year. And how can there be continuity in the inner work if there is no continuity of purpose and motive?

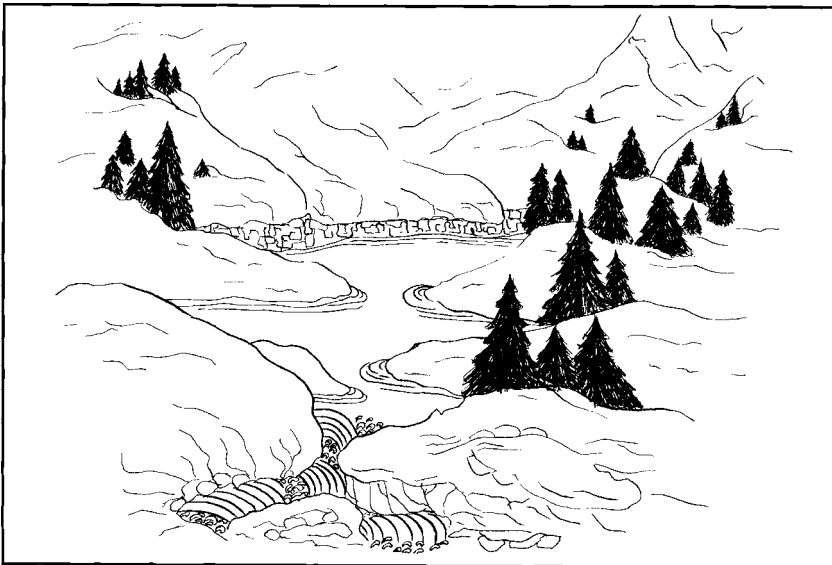
Continuity of purpose and stability of motive develop naturally as our understanding deepens and we harvest some fruits from our efforts. There are things that enhance motivation, such as reading or hearing spiritual teachings and being in the company of others who are sincerely working on themselves. Also, we are advised to hold in mind the certainty of our death—for then we see our vain concerns for what they are and to gravitate toward the substantial. However the extent to which we may effectively realize our mortality is an elusive blessing and already the sign of a certain development. Yet one thing that we can always do is to observe the continuity—or, better said, discontinuity—of our attention. If we want to reach a certain measure

of continuity, we can gain much from becoming aware of the gaps in our awareness.

We may have a good repertoire of techniques to work on ourselves, but during what proportion of our waking life do we employ them? Not even in the simplified context of sitting meditation are our attention and intention continuous; rather we are likely to be disturbed by involvement in our thoughts. When it comes to meditation in action, however, the task becomes considerably more difficult, and to meditate through interpersonal situations may prove at times impossible. This task is difficult or impossible to carry out, and even difficult or impossible to remember, for we are conditioned to relate to the environment in a way that entails being "swallowed up" by it. And what can be the use of the most skillful techniques if we have forgotten the job?

I think that a major factor in the stagnation of our work may be our over-evaluation of how much and how well we actually work on ourselves. Once we see how limited our capacity is and how our work on our selves is like a sponge full of air, this realistic appraisal can spur us on beyond our previous limits.

Watching our watchfulness is closely related to what has given contemporary psychotherapy its measure of effectiveness: awareness of resistance and awareness of process. Awareness of resistance in-



volves the recognition of our wish *not* to work, and it was one of the merits of psychoanalysis to discover that the observation and analysis of resistance can be a way through it. Awareness of process refers to the *how* beyond the *what* of our mental life, also progressively underlined throughout the evolution of depth psychotherapy. Attempting to be mindful of our mindlessness requires a fine awareness of our mental process, for it involves an exploration of the "edge" of awareness. When do we stop being mindful? And when do we remember the task once again? How do we shift to a diminished awareness? Is it anxiety that distracts us, so that we go "on automatic"? Or a concern with the self-image? By becoming aware of these "switch points", we may increase our measure of choice and gain the possibility of working through the difficulties. It is like working over the difficult passages in a musical performance. A well practiced pianist will spot the troublesome passages and concentrate on them. Likewise we may develop continuity of attention through concentrating on the "difficult passages." Of course, in life we cannot usually repeat them on our own initiative, yet we may be aware of their special significance and work against their temptation toward unconsciousness. It is at these points that resistance may be observed if we manage to stay mindful.

Meditation throughout daily life, as distinct from secluded sitting meditation, is already an act of working in the field of resistance, and to meditate throughout a situation evoking passionate involvement is even more so. Yet it is always specific moments in our mental life that constitute the "difficult passages," and to tackle them we need to become more "introsopic" in our self-observation, noticing first the fluctuations in our awareness and then what takes place in our mind when we cease being present now. With continuity of intent and attention there is much that we can do in and for ourselves. Without them, our capacity to work is very limited. For this reason the cultivation of "continuity of presence" is a good way to begin extending meditation into life.

Claudio Naranjo, M.D., has spoken and written widely about modern spiritual and therapeutic practices. His works include The One Quest, On The Psychology of Meditation, and The Healing Journey.