

## A Great Return on Your Investment

An excerpt from *The Life We Are Given*, p. 114 - 115



Practiced properly, meditation is a richly efficient means of self-transformation. Like a good business deal or scientific theory, it produces great returns on investment of time and energy. Economically, it enhances many of our inborn capacities. In this respect, it resembles imagery practice and other transformative modalities that draw upon various human endowments to produce several fruitful results at once.

Herbert Benson, a physician who has pioneered research on the relations of mind and body, invented the term “relaxation response” to represent the integrated changes produced by contemplative activity. With other researchers, he has emphasized the fact that meditation produces multiple benefits by activating the parasympathetic nervous system, which mediates the slowing of heart rate and respiration, reduction of muscle tension, and other components of relaxation. Meditation *economically* produces many good results because it triggers a coordinated response of our whole organism. We emphasize this observation because it applies as well to other integrated changes produced by transformative practices. Creative work and athletic discipline, for example, facilitate a condition that resembles certain inherited behaviors of animals in the wild. Like hunting (or hunted) animals, many artists and athletes exhibit a trancelike focus of attention, an indifference to discomfort and

pain, and a remarkable forgetting of difficulty. The deep concentration, analgesia, and selective amnesia that characterize creative absorption is analogous to--and may be derived from--the freezing and stalking behaviors, freedom from pain, and blindness to adversity that is evident among hunting animals. Like the relaxation response, creative absorption economically enlists many psychosomatic processes.

And a similar enlistment of inborn tendencies is evident in sports and the martial arts when a contest stimulates heart rate, adrenaline flow and strong bursts of energy. The fight-or-flight response, like the relaxation response and creative absorption, is part of our common human endowment, and can be enlisted for transformative activity. It, too, operates synergistically and can facilitate the development of mind and flesh.

In *The Future of the Body*, Michael Murphy suggests that all transformative modalities have some of this “all-at-once” character, by which they produce creative change in a coordinated manner. Imagery practice can give rise to metanormal powers and consciousness by the recruitment of many somatic processes. Through such recruitment, countless cells are somehow enlisted by mental images so that *as an integral whole* they support extraordinary functioning. Similarly, the repetition of affirmations, sustained expectation of success, focused intention, surrender to ego-transcending powers, and other transformative acts can trigger complex changes in us. All programs for healing and growth depend upon such responses, and integral practice is no exception. Drawing upon the wisdom inherent in religious and other transformative disciplines, we have incorporated activities with an “all-at-once” character into the program described in this book.

### *Lasting Benefits*

Our Kata ends with meditation, but in a fundamental sense it is not finished then. Several years of ITP classes have taught us that this set of exercises often produces an afterglow. Typically, its results spill into one’s everyday activities. The ongoing effects of repeated affirmations, the pleasure of exercised muscles and ligaments, the multiple benefits of imagery and meditation last longer than the Kata itself. That is the ultimate reward of this forty-minute practice.

The Taoist saying “meditation in action is a hundred, thousand, a million times greater than meditation in repose,” reflects the aim of integral discipline. The exercises described here are meant to join meditation with action in every part of our lives. New freshness of perception, increased empathy for others, alert relaxation, enhanced sensory-motor skills and other improvements of mind and body have been evident in members of our classes, as they have been in the contemplative traditions and scientific studies of meditation.