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Friday Lent, Week 4

In the early stages of learning to meditate – we are still learning, if we are disciples, into the ultimate stages as well– we discover the difference between attention and concentration. Usually when we concentrate on something, a problem, a book, a sound or an object, we become more tense. The brow furrows and the body tightens. After a while the tension starts to become tiring because it is using energy on many different levels.

Attention, by contrast is precisely a-tension (my apologies to the translators. Feel free to explain). This means an absence of tension. There is a definite shifting of the centre of consciousness away from the me-universe of introspection and self-evaluation – how am I doing, what do other people think of me, am I happy? But there is also an expansion of the range of consciousness, its depth and breadth. Usually when an expansion like this occurs there is a weakening of energy. But with attention, as with a mother's love, it increases in proportion to its own potential to be received or to give itself.

So with meditation, it matters whether we learn to meditate as a discipline or as a technique. Techniques are inherently self-limiting. They hit a wall quite quickly and have to get over the wall – to transcend the ego – or collapse back into themselves and their own bio-feedback. Discipline, on the other hand, is inherently self-transcending because it seeks the master, hidden in the mystery, on whom its attention is focused.

Jesus calls this attention a 'narrow path'. It is narrow but, like zero, it is closer to infinity than we can possibly imagine. Anyway, it 'leads to life'.

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