

A Peace You've Never Known

*An article on early morning meditation and dream reliving that was published in
Venture Inward*

Gregory Scott Sparrow, Ed.D., Professor
University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

A man by the name of Theodore Gordon, who is famous among those who know of his work, once said, "Time flies so fast after youth is past that we cannot accomplish one half of the many things we have in mind...The only safe and sensible plan is to make other things give way to the essentials, and the first of these is..."

I know that you would like for me to complete the sentence. For Gordon, who introduced dry fly fishing to North America, the answer was flyfishing. And I have to agree that fly fishing ranks pretty high in my estimation. But what Gordon inserted at the end of the sentence is relatively unimportant to us. It is our own words that matter. You might complete the sentence with an ideal or a governing principle for your life. You might identify an acquisition or a goal—a singular achievement that would confirm the fulfillment of your soul's purpose. But regardless of what you choose, you must then answer the question, "And how will I go about accomplishing it?"

It is difficult enough to identify the principal goal or governing ideal of our lives. But the greater challenge is in describing the method of its attainment, and then setting about actually to do it. Indeed, we must determine the active process that will assure us of the eventual realization of our deepest, soulful aspirations. Or it just may not happen. My personal answer to the "how to" question is the same answer that Hugh Lynn Cayce prescribed for countless people during his life—meditation. Hugh Lynn was often asked if we had free will. He answered by saying that our free is limited to a single choice: to meditate or not to meditate. He essentially challenged each of us to consider how we can possibly be free—and become what we are destined to be—without engaging in regular spiritual practice. Life was, by this simple formulation, a process of choosing to let God govern and transform our lives through meditational practice—or clinging unfreely, as it were, to our own agendas.

As a consequence of his lifelong commitment to the discipline of meditation, Hugh Lynn enjoyed extraordinary visions and dreams, including several now-famous visions of Christ, and experiences of the white light. He was a modern mystic—whether measured by the extent of his practice or by his prodigious attainment. While many of you did not know him, he had an infectious spirit that inspired people to meditate. It wasn't so much what he said, but his manner of speaking that instilled an unshakeable conviction that we could—all of us—experience what he had experienced, if we would simply do what he did.

I had the immense good fortune of meeting Hugh Lynn when I was only 20. As we shook hands for the first time, he looked at me with such intensity that I could sense that he already knew me. Many people had that experience when meeting Hugh Lynn. Needless to say, I was "on board" from that moment onward. My karma must have been

particularly good, because I also met Mark Thurston around the same time, and became part of the growing ARE youth community in the Austin, Texas area. We meditated each day together in a Catholic Church near campus, and when I was alone in the evenings, I would walk a few blocks from my apartment to a Lutheran Church that was always open at night, and meditate there. By my second year at UT, I was sharing an apartment with Mark, and meditating an average of two hours a day. Something in me was stirred to a greater life by my exposure to Mark and Hugh Lynn and others who shared a common vision of what was possible in this lifetime.

As if that wasn't enough to insure an active spiritual life, I soon learned something from the Cayce readings that accounts for virtually all of my writings in the field of dreams and religious experiences. It was an often-overlooked promise uttered by the unconscious Cayce that opened my mind and heart to a vast array of spiritual experiences.

So what was it? Cayce said that if a person were to meditate for an hour every night from 2 am to 3 am, and continue this practice for an entire 28-day lunar cycle, he or she would "know a peace that you've never known." Cayce's promise is not unlike the words of the poet Rumi, who once asserted, "'What nine months does for the embryo, 40 early mornings will do for your growing awareness.'" Indeed, Cayce was alluding to an ancient tradition of treating the wee hours of morning as a fertile ground for meditation and other contemplative activity.

While it is probably true that most people would rather sleep than invest in the indeterminate fruits of a month of interrupted slumber, Mark and I were young and eager. So we promptly began middle-of-the-night meditation (MNM) shortly after moving in together. As I slowly became aware of the promised "peace I'd never known," my attention was also drawn to a dramatic development in my dream life.

It would take far too long to share with you what happened to me as result of MNM, but it included out-of-body experiences, lucid dreams, and perhaps the most precious experiences of all—communion with the white light and the presence of the Master. Given the sheer struggle of getting out of bed in the middle of the night—when the body screams to be left alone and the undisciplined mind nods in weary assent—I was fortunate to have had such immediate and resounding confirmation for my efforts. Very little has been written about the salubrious effects of MNM on the waking life. Cayce's "peace" has never, to my knowledge, been tracked and measured over time by anyone interested in verifying his claim. Much less has been written about the remarkable impact of MNM on the dreams that occur upon returning to sleep. In 1976, however, I suggested in *Lucid Dreaming: Dawning of the Clear Light* that MNM was an excellent way to induce lucid dreaming and other exceptional dreams without necessarily intending to do so. Following Hugh Lynn's example, I had always tried to put my devotional life above any phenomenal consequence of my practice, but the dramatic impact of MNM on my dream life begged to be acknowledged at a time when various researchers were developing methods that had as their sole aim the induction of lucid dreaming without honoring the spiritual dimensions of the quest. What exactly happens when we juxtapose meditation with the dream state? We don't fully know, but there are some indications from meditation research that offers some clues. First of all, meditation is known to effect a quieting of the "old brain," or limbic system while activating at the same time the witnessing center of the forebrain, called

the reticular activating system. To put it in the language of the Cayce readings, meditation allows us do a better job of "standing aside and watching self pass by." As we carry this constructive disengagement of the witnessing mind into sleep, the dreamer then enjoys greater reflectivity and resilience in response to the unfolding dream drama, which is driven in large part by the older structures of the brain. It is possible that the juxtaposition of meditation and dreaming allows two somewhat distinct paths to wholeness to intersect.

In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, meditation or *mahamudra* is referred to as the "path without form," and is considered a safer, but slower, approach than six related forms of tantric yoga that activate and raise the kundalini. Referred to as the "path with form," the six yogas—one of which is represented by the practice of lucid dreaming—offer an accelerated path to enlightenment. However, the tantric approach is more precarious since the practices are designed to unleash the powerful—and thus potentially destabilizing—formative energies of the ordinarily dormant kundalini force. Cayce recognized both the potential and the hazards in awakening the kundalini, and emphasized the importance of "knowing who and what one serves"—of having a clear ideal in place—before activating the kundalini. The Tibetan texts concur with Cayce when they say that it is important for a person on the accelerated path to have a guru guide and oversee the process. Of course, any authentic path to wholeness is hazardous to the ego, and may temporarily destabilize the status quo. Commenting on the process of individuation, Jung once said, "the way is not without danger," and "every development in consciousness is experienced as a curse." In a similar vein, Herbert Puryear has said, "The only thing more dangerous than meditating is not meditating." Last night, I awoke around 4:30, and quietly slipped into my robe. Stepping gingerly over three sleeping dogs, I headed to my office where, as always, I lit a candle and sipped some juice in order to awaken more fully before attempting to meditate. Frankly, nighttime mediation is never easy, and the older I get, the more effort it takes to "show up" for my practice. But after adjusting a pillow to cushion my aching lower back, I managed to go into meditation. It was, by no means, an especially "good" meditation, but I felt a little of what I experienced as a younger man—a sense of expectancy and optimism as the world around me slept. About 30 minutes later, I headed back to bed and fell asleep.

The dream that followed was extraordinary. I don't remember much about the first part, but I seemed to be heading for a place to go fishing with a friend.

We are walking across a field, and I look up and see two full moons about 45% above the horizon, side by side. Knowing that this is impossible, I decide that I have to be dreaming. So I promptly sit on the ground and begin meditating on the two moons, knowing that what I am seeing is really the holy light. The two orbs slowly became a single brilliant orb of white light. I lie down on my back, and gaze upward at the radiant disc that is now directly overhead. The light becomes more intense, and the center of the orb becomes a latticework of quickly shifting, subtle forms. As I contemplate the light, the kundalini awakens and begins to fill my body. I surrender to it, and pray for the Master's presence.

I see no one, but feel embraced by the energy. It slowly subsides, and the dream continues as a non-lucid, ordinary dream.

I share this dream only to let you know what is possible for you. If you doubt my assertion, you might want to read Malcolm Gladwell's latest bestseller, *Outliers*, in which he makes the compelling case that we mistakenly think that successful people are more innately endowed than other people. Again and again, from Mozart to Nobel laureates, Gladwell has found that the distinguishing characteristic of those who achieve anything remarkable—beyond having "enough" of whatever it takes, which is far less than what we believe—is the sheer amount of time they spend practicing.

But then again, maybe you are one of those individuals who are poised to experience the more immediate impact of MNM. Hugh Lynn often said that when we meditate, we are like a person in a dark room holding an electric plug searching from the wall socket. We never know, he said, how close we may be to experiencing the light. So you may be much closer than you think! Indeed, just yesterday, I received an email from Kim Phetteplace (currently DreamStar Institute's Principal Trainer), who had completed only her second night of a 28-day regimen of nighttime meditation. This is the dream that she had:

I'm in a grotto made in a cave; I immediately realize that I am dreaming and lucid. The inside walls of the cave have been painted white. J. and two children with golden hair (as in the precious metal) are with me. The children are a little boy and a younger girl with about the same age span as my grandchildren, but a bit older. The children are playing with small old fashion model toys with a Christmas theme. I kneel on the floor of the cave and begin praying. After each small prayer, I see either a wispy, fluttering small white dove or a flame flash on the cave wall. J. tells me "its time" and hands me what I know is a zen meditation chime ... but it's very unique ... it's actually a stack of meditation chimes of progressively smaller sizes stacked up to form what looks like a Christmas tree shape. The little boy with the golden hair strikes the chime and I immediately feel a powerful wave of energy sweep over me. I think, "Oh, Lord! Here it comes!", and am swept into a supine position. I feel my body become a wave of energy and I feel a mild sort of ecstasy beginning. I can feel myself resisting and I begin to wake up. As I move through a hypnopompic state, I hear a voice say, "Have you ever wondered where confidence comes from?" Then I am fully awake in bed and can still feel that my body is flowing with energy.

Whether you are poised to have such transformative experiences, or "just" to experience a peace that you have never known, you will probably have to apply yourself for a period of time before your practice bears such fruit. And yet there is every indication that the outcome is assured if you will simply keep doing what it takes. You may still be wondering how Theodore Gordon finished his sentence. You may also wonder what he's famous for. Of all things, Gordon's singular aim was to understand how to catch trout on a fly rod. He was a sickly man who had to retire from his law

practice for health reasons, but his daily observation of stream life on the Neversink River in upstate New York, and his radical innovations in fly design, resulted in a series of breakthroughs in fly fishing. Today, he is hailed as the father of modern fly fishing—not because he was a genius but because he showed up day after day after day and, in time, became a master of his art. We can, too.

And yet, I know how hard it is for people to embark on a journey so ambitious and so lonely as middle-of-the-night meditation. When we began our practice 38 years ago, Mark and I were fortunate to have each other and a community of supportive friends, and even today I know that he is also meditating in the wee hours of the night, even though we are 2000 miles apart. Since we know that a supportive community can make the difference between the inauguration of a lifelong practice and just another abandoned effort, Mark and I have decided to launch an E-Group that will endeavor to assist its participants in developing their own MNM practice. As academic researchers, we will also collect data during the E-Group's month-long activities in hopes that we may arrive at a better understanding of the impact of MNM on a person's overall sense of well being, as well as to assess the measurable impact of MNM on their dreams. In addition to creating a supportive environment for the participants, we will also be teaching them to record and to analyze their dreams in such a way that they can learn to better discern the influence of MNM on their dreams.