

# Chapter 33

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## Spiritual Practice in the Workplace

There are a number of different places I can start this talk. Since this is a small group I encourage lots of questions, let's make this something of a dialogue. That way I don't have to work so hard. I'll start with a vignette from my own career path to frame my professional life with respect to spiritual practice.

My official title is "Vice President of Professional Services and Support" for a software company that makes a security product. One of our largest customers and investors right now is Goldman Sachs. That's a nice blue chip name. Goldman Sachs has afforded me (whether I wanted it or not) lots of trips to the East Coast, so I often find myself hanging out in a building on the New Jersey side of the Hudson River. It's the tallest building in New Jersey, I'm told, and it's right next to the water. You almost feel like you'll fall over into Manhattan. The views out of this building, whether you're on the ground floor or the upper floors, are tremendous. You see Manhattan; you see the Statue of Liberty; you see Ellis Island. It's like this perfect location.

Recently I was sitting down in the Goldman cafeteria on the ground floor with some people that I'd been working with as well as some of their colleagues. We were all having lunch and conversing. The subject of our spiritual bookstore (Many Rivers Books & Tea) came up because now that we have on-line purchasing, I don't miss an opportunity to try to get people to buy tea from us.

I was describing the store and someone asked, "Well, what about the spiritual side of it?" So here I find myself at Goldman Sachs, looking out across the water at Lower Manhattan, describing the spiritual outreach of Many Rivers and the fact that the store is a vehicle run by a meditation organization that I am a part of. Someone asked about Tayu Meditation Center, and the context of the conversation very naturally moved into some fairly detailed descriptions of practices like Self Observation. Some people were really interested in the topic, but other people were interested because the topic was so out of context for what people are usually talking about there.

At one point a woman who is a vice president (she manages one of the desktop application groups) asked, "So how have you found that all this has helped your work life?" It was an interesting question to me because the way she was hearing what I had been talking about was that my spiritual practice could actually help me with my career. The natural conclusion that she drew was that the work I do

in spiritual practice, the work that I do at Tayu, sharpens my career skills and makes me more effective in the workplace. That was something that has real value for her.

The reason I bring this vignette up is that if there's any point that I want to grind into the ground here this evening, it's that we actually we have the opportunity to establish the opposite relationship to our work environment. That is, that our workplace exists to serve our practice. This is a very important point. Our workplace can serve our practice, and that means that our relationship to our workplace has to be different than the way that we normally relate to it and the way that we have been brought up to relate to it.

For most of us work is a necessary evil in life where we have to make money in order to support other things that we do. For some of us work takes the form of a path in which, because of education or because of a random walk in life, we find ourselves accumulating a set of skills and interests. This process builds on itself, and we find the universe moving us into a theater space where we become really consummate performers. And we discover that we have a career. This career then builds momentum, and we start to think about the career all the time and nurture it.

For some people, that which gives them the most meaning in life is found in their workplace. For other people, they work to fund those activities which give them meaning. In both cases, though, the work environment is the condition in which most of us, as Americans, end up spending the majority of our waking time.

When I think about the amount of time I spend in my professional existence – particularly right now because I'm working for an early-stage company that is at the stage where we are rubbing sticks together and trying to get sparks to light fires – I realize that it consumes a lot of my time. And because it consumes that kind of time, I have a choice: do I do my spiritual practice outside of that context and have a small slice of time, or do I try to turn this whole work-a-day context into fuel for my practice.

This is the fundamental point about our relationship to the work environment. It's an important point because so often today when people look at spiritual practices, these practices are made enticing and sold to us by virtue of the ways in which they can make the rest of our lives more efficacious. Many of the books in this store (which I'm happy for you to buy) maintain at least in part this perspective that spiritual practice, focusing your attention, meditating, and being grounded are all very useful skills for creating an effective work environment. But to really use the work environment as an engine for spiritual growth requires that we surrender to the work environment in a very different way.

What do I mean by that? Let me give you an example of how I came to this opinion through my own personal experience.

I moved up to Sonoma County originally to be involved with Tayu Meditation Center. At that point in my life I had made a decision that I was going to be part of a spiritual school; that was my intention. Because of basic economic considerations, I needed to have a job. The first job I took was that of a house painter because one of the Tayu students at the time had a house painting business.

I was not a great house painter, but it was good practice for me in the sense that I'd just come out of a technical education with various degrees in physics and was pretty much all in my head. Getting up on ladders and house painting – even not very effectively – was good work, in the Fourth Way sense of Work, because I was struggling with resistance in myself.

After this house painting phase passed, I again needed to get a job and began to look for work outside the context of our spiritual school. I had this idea that I wanted a “Zen-like” job in the sense that I wanted something that didn't require me to engage my mind that much. I sought a job that was not necessarily physical but at least routine enough that I would have all my creative energy available for the Work I was doing with Tayu Center. I ended up finding a job with an electronics company in Rohnert Park as a repair technician.

Technically, I was supposed to know something about being a repair technician, but I didn't have much experience in that role. But the hiring manager was intrigued by my application because I was highly overqualified for the position. I managed to get the job, and I was very happy for a while because I had a lot of time and it seemed like my work was over there and my spiritual practice was over here.

Over time, however, the situation started to change, and I changed in relation to it. I began to realize that within this job context, desires were arising in me; I wanted more responsibility; I wanted to do more things. At the same time, circumstances started to open up such that I got a promotion to an engineering group after six months as a repair technician. This engineering position was quite fun for a while because it was more matched to my skill set.

After about a year and a half, however, my boss left the company, and in the transition (owing in part to the fact that this was an early-stage company) I stumbled into the position of becoming the manager of my boss' engineering group. When he announced his departure, my boss asked our team what we wanted to have happen. We didn't want to be absorbed by the other larger engineering team, but none of my peers were particularly interested in managing the group. So I volunteered to manage our group to maintain our relative autonomy. What I did not realize, though, was that this managerial position required me to report to the general manager, and I suddenly found myself a member of the executive staff. This wasn't something I had planned.

As part of this transition, I also inherited an engineer (from the other team) who was brilliant but also extremely moody and sensitive – some days he would be really happy and other days he would be incredibly angry. I was just thrown into this situation, and it turned out to be an emotional roller coaster for a number of years.

I mention all this because my experience of what was happening, in terms of my spiritual practice, was that I had surrendered myself to the situation and established the perspective that whatever happened in this context was happening because I was asking the Universe to provide me with food for my practice. When you make this kind of declaration to the Universe, when you open yourself to the Universe and say, “I want to grow; I want to grow spiritually,” you have to surrender your right to pick and choose in order for anything to really happen.

You have to give up the right to make choices about what is “right” for you and what is “wrong” for you. This doesn't mean that we don't have to act appropriately in a given situation when the situation requires a certain kind of response, but it does mean, for instance, that when I found myself in the situation of the new responsibility and the meta-stable engineer (which was all fairly overwhelming for me at the time), I had to embrace the situation as fully as I possibly could.

It's this embracing of situations that arise in the context of our lives that is the heart of the idea that I want to impart tonight about what it means to turn your workplace into an engine for spiritual transformation. If we are willing to take that step and turn ourselves over to the Universe, openheartedly and nakedly; if we can sincerely say, “Yes, I want to grow. I want to grow spiritually. I want to transform. I surrender myself to the Universe,” this action necessarily creates a reciprocal response in the Universe.

It is something of a mystery because we can't predict it, but my claim (and this is something that I invite you all to test and reflect upon in your own experiences) is that the Universe is lawfully bound to respond by starting to provide specially tuned circumstances that push your buttons, keep you a little bit off of your comfort zone, and challenge you in ways that may be relevant to the very things you are working on in your spiritual practice.

The important thing about this process, which gets back to my point about not picking and choosing, is that to turn the workplace into an engine of spiritual transformation means that you have to keep enhancing this effect. This means you have to embrace more fully *everything* that comes at you. So with difficult conversations, difficult people with whom you work, challenging work assignments, etc., you try to move closer to the situation as opposed to distancing yourself from it and trying to control it. And when you do this right, the Universe gives you more!

The moment you turn away and say, “that's enough,” or “that's not right,” or “I know better,” this transformational process starts to break down and dry up. So we have to keep the knowingness in mind that whatever is happening is meaningful. “Whatever is happening has meaning for my practice now,” and “I need to embrace it with full attention.” Embracing what is happening with full attention doesn't mean we become rugs and let the Universe role over us. Embracing what is happening with full attention means that we move toward that which is uncomfortable.

Many of you have heard me use the phrase, “Follow your Dread,” I find following your dread in the workplace is wonderful practice. But dread in the workplace isn't necessarily only about having difficult encounters with people. Dread in the workplace can be as small as picking up the phone and making a cold call in a sales context, knowing that 90% of the time the person on the other end is going to get you off the phone as fast as possible. Even this creates resistance in us.

But then there are the times when we have to deal with people who annoy the heck out of us, people with whom we wouldn't hang out, and whom we normally arrange our lives to avoid. But the workplace is a perfect crucible. There are all these people, and we can move closer to them and see all the things in ourselves that get called up. This provides us with raw material for our Work.

At this point I haven't talked yet about what you do with all that reactivity; I'm more setting the stage. But I am curious if there are any questions or comments right now.

*Q: Moving toward your dread is sort of like using a detector; you're scanning the world to see where you're going to put your attention. I'm wondering if you move equally toward things that you're positively or enthusiastically attracted to.*

Well the reason I use the formulation of “Following your Dread” is that we don't need any coaching in terms of moving towards things that we're attracted to.

*Q: I think we do, but that's another story.*

That's fair and we can explore that, but “Following your Dread” is more about the areas where there is resistance in our conditioning that blocks us from admitting, embracing, or feeling free within certain circumstances. So it might be a person, it might be someone who annoys you and you feel like you want to say something but you don't know what to say and how to say it. Moving toward such a situation is moving towards an area that stirs a bunch of things up within ourselves.

In the Fourth Way we have a model about how we are organized as psycho-physical beings. Like all models you should take it with a grain of salt, but it's a model that states that our organisms are composed of three centers. We have a Body or Moving Center, we have an Emotional Center, and we have an Intellectual Center. In this model, each of these centers is independently conditioned and functions through a process of association in reaction to the external world. These centers operate more or less independently from each other, and there are only loose couplings between them.

What this model implies about our lives is that our day-to-day existence is very reactive. Situations come up, you see something, someone says something, you feel something, you're in a particular posture, and that engenders a set of associations independently in each of these centers. Yet we interpret this state of affairs as a spontaneous psychological experience.

*Q: What came up for me when you said, “Follow your Dread,” is that for me it's not following my Dread or my Bliss; it's following whatever arises and staying open in the moment to whatever is being presented.*

I would agree with that in principle. But the reason that we talk about following your dread is that in the model I was just describing about our automatic associations and how often we are not really open to the events of our lives, our inner experience is completely conditioned by thoughts, feelings, and sensations that we're used to experiencing. This means that these habit patterns keep us moving along narrow channels of expression and experience.

The boundaries of these narrow habit patterns (in a subjective, interior way) can be found at the frontiers of our dread or fear. “Following your Dread” is more of a device, not an absolute way of living. Ideally we should be open to all that life presents. “Following your Dread” is a practical tool that we can use to test where we may be unconsciously keeping ourselves from opening up.

In any sort of situation when we say to ourselves, “Open to what's happening,” there will be resistance from our conditioning toward actually taking that advice. The nature of that resistance often takes the

form of discomfort or dread. There are lots of other ways in which we can recognize this kind of resistance as well. We've simply found that "Follow you Dread" is a simple, easy to remember phrase; it is a reminder to move towards the things that we are most contracting away from.

*Q: In the organizational development work that I do, there is an almost innate need to be a selfless instrument to the process. So in any situation (especially when it is uncomfortable), it is important to be really aware of that need and to move toward it. The work we're doing is to guide and facilitate and to be transparent enough to help the client move through that process as well.*

Right. In the framework of what we do in our Tayu practice (which is similar to the Fourth Way practice some of you may know about), one of the key practices is Self-Observation. Self-Observation is not about self-analysis, and its purpose is not to fix ourselves. Our aim is to be present in a certain way to what is happening so that we can inhabit our organisms as fully as possible. When we practice Self-Observation we are learning to open ourselves and see objectively everything that arises in this organism.

We observe the sensations, the thoughts, the feelings, and the exterior situation all from a place of non-judgment, non-identification, and non-action. In this sense, we are not trying to change anything. Self-Observation is a foundation of this practice because when we have the spaciousness to see in this non-judgmental way, we can open ourselves more fully to what is actually happening. Whatever context we find ourselves in can now speak to us because the context begins to pull at us and cause things to arise in the organism that we're able to see clearly. This act of seeing partly transforms the content as well, but, that is not really the point; it doesn't matter what the details are.

This is getting a bit abstract, so let me bring it back to the work situation. When we are engaged in spiritual practice within a work context, our focus of attention and our primary aim is to cultivate spiritual presence through that practice and through being in that situation as fully as possible. Our aim is not to get the next promotion or to achieve some other particular end. If our focus is on the details of the dream, as it were, that focus becomes a diversion which takes energy away from our spiritual practice.

*Q: I go just as unconscious moving toward an attraction as I do when I'm shunning something I want to stay away from. I find it an even greater challenge when I'm moving in a pleasurable direction to maintain my awareness. Often a problem will be so challenging that I'll be stopped and then be reminded to take stock. But when I'm pell-mell after that strawberry ice cream cone or that woman on the corner – whatever it is – then I just dive right in to an old pattern without much awareness.*

What you're describing has certainly been true in my experience. As I said earlier, "Following your Dread" is a device for a particular kind of inner work. What you're describing here is in many ways more challenging because it's very easy to get lost in a positive identification.

When we start this kind of Work or practice, we begin by focusing on establishing a presence in ourselves through this Self-Observation practice I described. Part of the practice of Self-Observation involves returning attention to the body. I don't want to over dramatize this process because "being

in the body” has almost become a cliché in spiritual discussions these days. But when we return our attention to the body, this becomes the starting point of simply experiencing the presence of sensation.

When we are able to be present with the sensation in our body and to just be there within that experience, we start to develop the stability to be present to other varieties of experiences arising within the three-centered organism we inhabit. We can be present to the play of what we take to be emotions in ourselves; we can be present to a train of associated thoughts without necessarily getting stuck on the train; sometimes we can even step off the train and stand on the platform and watch the trains go by. When we are able to manage these feats of attention even occasionally, we begin to establish an interior spaciousness within which we can open ourselves more fully to what's happening in our lives.

But let us return to the workspace – you know, this talk could just as easily have been about bringing the Work to the kitchen or to taking out the garbage. We spend so much time in our professional existence, however, that it's a useful reminder that there's no reason why you can't do this kind of spiritual practice fully and with dedicated intensity in the middle of Goldman Sachs, looking out over Manhattan. There is no reason why you can't, and yet there are unique challenges to bringing practice into the set of well-worn habit patterns that constitute our work life.

It's because of these big challenges that I haven't found it possible to do this kind of spiritual practice in the workplace on one's own. Here is an example. I was at a Study Group with some of our students in San Francisco this week. One of the things we've been doing is working on some basic, you might call them, “tasks of attention.” Each week we'll work on some task of attention or particular exercise and then talk about our experiences at the next Study Group. This week several people in the group, particularly the ones deeply enmeshed in their professional existences, didn't have time for the task (or didn't make space for it, more accurately). That's not so unusual. In part, the purpose of trying to do these tasks of attention is to demonstrate to oneself how difficult doing something outside of one's well-worn habit patterns really is.

This situation reminded me, however, that it's really hard to maintain a spiritual practice without plugging into some sort of community – a tradition, a *Sangha*, a group of people who are committed to this kind of spiritual work – because the power of one's habit patterns and the power of the environment are very strong. A work environment, especially, has lots of people who are operating under very focused habit patterns all for an aim that has nothing to do with one's spiritual practice. It all has to do whatever the job, the situation, or the business is about. It is almost impossible not to get caught up in these ordinary aims. But as long as we have some way of throwing some lifelines out or floating some buoys on the waters of spiritual awareness, we can keep what we call “reminding factors” active. These reminding factors help us to keep returning to the perspective of awareness, particularly in the early stages.

Even though it almost sounds very straightforward to bring spiritual practice into the workplace, the really powerful forces of habit energy that everyone at work are engaged in and radiating make it very challenging to actually maintain this kind of presence. Yet, it is for this very reason that if we make

efforts in the direction of this practice, the work environment – our day job – can become that much more effective for us. Because if we can create that opening, surrender ourselves, broaden our presence, accept whatever is happening, and observe all the things that arise in us as we engage in the work environment, there is the opportunity for developing more quickly the kind of depth of presence than we might get in other types of situations. There are powerful forces at work, and if we can use those forces as food for our practice, there is more energy available.

Of course, it's a lot like white water rafting: it's thrilling and exhilarating but it's also dangerous, dangerous in the sense that it's very easy to become very identified. Even in my own work there were ways in which I became identified. There came a point for me where, long after I was an electronic technician just humbly soldering my resistors and integrated circuits onto broken circuit boards, when I started to take my professional existence seriously. I started to identify with the role.

That identification exposed all sorts of interesting realms of Work for me which took me many years to move through. In particular, I had strong unconscious habits around how I sought a certain kind of affirmation from my boss. I wanted this affirmation but didn't want to be clear about what I wanted. In one case this tension culminated in my finding an excuse to leave one company and go to another company, only to recreate the same situation with different people. I really had to deal with the underlying habit pattern. Once I dealt with it, the situation changed, and I went onto another company and had a completely different experience with my new boss. When you notice this sort of pattern happening, you can't run away from it. These patterns will continue to assert themselves unless you take them head on and move through them.

*Q: Gurdjieff is famous for having said, "It's a good idea to try to make your living with your left big toe," to have all this other time for "real Work." It sounds like you're saying something very different tonight. Do you want to comment on that?*

Gurdjieff did indeed advise people to make their living with their left toe so that it doesn't fully consume you and you can spend time engaged in your real Work. And, in sense I am saying something different: if your true aim is to do Work on yourself, it's possible for that aim to condition your circumstances to support your spiritual work. Perhaps it's a peculiarly American thing to say because we seem to have the condition where we have to work in some form or another; so it's making a virtue out of necessity.

I've certainly found, however, that as long as I maintain the attitude that whatever the Universe is providing is what I'm supposed to be working on, the situation unfolds and I move with it without trying to change it. I try to be present and to respond to it as it arises naturally to respond. I'm not talking about simply rolling over and letting circumstances just roll over you. Within ourselves we know (or have the possibility of knowing) when we have to do certain things.

For instance, I've had situations where when an injustice was done to me by my boss, my mechanical instinct would be to not let it bother me. "I'll just go with that; I won't deal with it." But the thing that I really dreaded was actually confronting the situation. This is another example of what I have been calling, "Following your Dread". I could see that my mechanical instinct was to avoid the need to truly

confront the situation by creating a showdown because every habit pattern I had affected since I was a child was about how to get along, get out of the way, and not create problems.

My Work in those moments was to be willing to have a showdown with my boss. Doing just that amounted to a huge energetic shift in my organism because I was intentionally moving through something that I had a tremendous amount of resistance toward. This is not to say that everything worked out perfectly in those moments, but in those moments the situation itself presented an opportunity for a major shift in my state of being. I was surrendering to the situation because within that situation it became absolutely clear what was necessary to be done.

In our work lives, when we surrender in this way, we're not giving up our responsibility to be true to ourselves in the situation – in fact, quite the opposite. And we might make mistakes; we might do something that might be a product of a mechanical reaction or identification. In such cases we embrace the consequences, and the consequences will be instructive in the situation. In other cases we may have to do something that goes against our habitual grain and make ourselves vulnerable to the unknown.

That's really what we're talking about here: what we dread most is to jump off into life and make ourselves vulnerable to that which we cannot control. Virtually all of our habit patterns, particularly in a workplace, are about CYA (covering your anterior) and making sure we're safe and have everything under control. So when we take hold of these moments of truth and actually dive into the unknown, they are the moments in which transformation is most readily to be found.

*Q: It strikes me that the spiritual endeavor is not a part-time or a left toe process. If you're not doing it during the workday, but only at some other special times, then you are not really fully engaging in spiritual work. Going back to the comment that you made about giving up picking and choosing, when you're fully engaged in spiritual practice, and that's what you have really decided to do, then you have to do it at work; you've given up your choice over that.*

That's exactly what we're talking about here. You don't have a choice. And the question that we all have to ask ourselves is the degree to which we've made the commitment that our spiritual path trumps *everything* in our lives. Everything in our lives may feed and support our practice, but our spiritual path and our spiritual Work is senior to all exterior phenomena. I find this is a very useful mirror to look into because all these questions become very simple. No matter where you are and what you are doing, the potential for practice is there.

But often, particularly in early stages of encountering spiritual Work, people have a tendency to relate to spiritual practice as an avocation or a hobby. “I can go to this class or that talk on these days, and I can go to this meditation group on this day, and then I will go to my drawing and poetry classes on these other days.”

What we're talking about here is exactly what you were suggesting in your question. There is a radically different approach we have to take with our spiritual life, our spiritual practice, to direct the engine of the material world toward service for that practice. Either we're blindly serving the material world by fulfilling a role in the great mystery of nature (nature uses matter in all sorts of creative ways,

transforming energy from one state into another), or we are turning that whole material engine toward service for our spiritual Work. We do this by surrendering to and embracing what arises in our lives. We allow our lives to become conversations with the events in our lives so that we can look at ourselves and see ourselves more clearly. In that looking, we begin to cultivate the Presence that I spoke about earlier.

*Q: Do you see a fundamental difference between what you're calling "material", and "spiritual"?*

Yes, there's a difference, though *fundamental* is a tricky word.

*Q: Beyond appearances?*

There's a truth beyond appearances. There's a truth beyond the phenomenal. We sometimes use the term *non-phenomenal* to describe that aspect of ourselves that is behind the exterior manifestation. But the idea that there's a distinction between the phenomenal and non-phenomenal is relative. It might be a useful distinction for a particular Work or practice, but I would say there's no *fundamental* distinction. But what does this really mean practically? It's very easy to logically say, "Oh, everything's one!" Practically, however, we find ourselves exteriorized and reacting to an exterior environment; first and foremost, we have to come to terms with that.

*Q: Unless someone pulls me into a verbal context that distinguishes between the spiritual and the material, I find it hard to see anything that I do as not being part of the same soup I call "spiritual." What I hear you saying tonight is that there is in fact no real separation between our spiritual lives and our "mundane" lives.*

S: Certainly I'm an advocate for the position that between the spiritual world and the mundane world (and going to work on Monday morning is as mundane as it gets for many people) there is no separation; that any separation that we make is merely habit patterns that we're creating. But I am also making a stronger statement: we can do something at a non-phenomenal level that allows us to transform the phenomenal realm into something that speaks back to us and allows us to cultivate greater presence in the non-phenomenal.

At a "spiritual" level, we have the capability of deciding where we put our attention. There's not a lot else out in the material realm that we may be capable of actually doing because, for all we know, our genes and the accidents of our lives have thoroughly programmed us to react in certain predetermined ways. But we have some choice about where we turn our attention. If we turn our attention back onto the nature of our presence as expressed in phenomena, we can begin to change the dynamic of the subjective experience of our presence in this realm. This is what spiritual practice is really all about. It's the turning of our attention in a different direction.

In ordinary, unconscious life, our attention is riveted by the automatic internal associations of the mental, emotional, and physical centers. We live a life that's a dream with a myriad of constructed goals and ambitions which simply amount to our attention being fixated on the exterior drama. Taking that act of will which turns our attention in a different direction, which pulls our attention back from

the things that we normally find ourselves identified with, and which allows us to explore an identity which transcends any particular formal realization, is the essence of the Work of spiritual practice.

*Q: I haven't heard you play the flute – I wasn't here that night – but it seems that some of the things that we do that are out of band may inform other part so of our lives. In the situation you described at Goldman Sachs where you found yourself talking about meditation, your spiritual life infused your work life and it seems that your work life became more spacious as a result. Maybe that IT person would have ordinarily been in resistance to a discussion about mediation, yet you had the confidence in that setting to say something that might have been exactly what that IT VP actually needed to hear.*

*Recently I was walking various precincts in Sebastopol in support of the 5<sup>th</sup> District Supervisor and my introverted self found it very difficult to go out and talk to people door to door. But I thought, “This is a friendly universe,” and I discovered that I was rewarded with what turned out to be very interesting conversations. When we blur the distinction between “the world” and “the Path,” things seem to open up and become more fun.*

S: It's interesting that you mentioned me playing my flute because being in a work situation is very much like being in an orchestra. We are each playing an instrument, and we have a responsibility to the sound that the group is making. We have a responsibility to know what notes we're producing; we have a responsibility to listen to the music coming from the other performers. In the conversation I was describing with the IT VP at Goldman, I was practicing listening to know how much was enough to say before I started to turn someone off as opposed to opening someone up. When I say I was practicing listening, I don't mean that I was mentally processing what to do and when to do it; it was like I was playing music and feeling the movement of the situation.

To the extent that we can feel the movement of a situation like that and know the right thing to do, even if we're in a business meeting and everyone is talking back and forth, and we can be present and participate with it, then that situation has the quality of a dance. It has the quality of fun, as you say, because of its inherent lightness. The moment the situation seems heavy, we've got something to look at.

You were describing how the fear of knocking on someone's door and pitching an idea causes an emotional center response, a cramp, to come up. From a place of spiritual practice we can simply put full attention on that arising and keep moving forward. In moments like that the energy of the cramp will shift, and when we practice this enough, the emotional habit pattern will change. We don't have to make it change in a particular way; all we're really trying to do is to be better musicians and dancers in our lives.

One of the consequences of this work that we are talking about here is the cultivation of lightness. Our subjective experience when we can be in a situation and surrender to it fully is like dancing, like floating. It's fun and it's light. In that place, the details take care of themselves. You don't have to worry when a situation comes up which is a challenge. You can say, “Oh! This situation's come up that's a challenge so now I have to respond to that.”

I find it interesting to observe people watching the stock market. The market goes up and everyone's happy. Situations become a challenge, people get depressed. Yet it's possible to go to neither of those extremes but just to be in the place in the middle; to do exactly what's required when the situation calls it. Sure, you can enjoy it when things are good and be focused when things are challenging. But for the *you* that's experiencing what's happening, you inhabit a completely different place: the details are all out there and the dance is going on in here.

*Q: It strikes me that the major obstacle for people in the work world isn't so much the work that people do, although that does arise; it's the relationships that we have with other people in the work world that are usually the issue. Sometimes this comes up in the sort of situation you described about your relationship with bosses, and you're recreating these relationships with each new boss until you learned to work through the issue. In my own case, I have found it hard to let myself be open to suggestions from a boss who knows how to do something right, better, or more efficiently because I'm contracted around my identification with, "This is how I do this." Can you comment on that?*

The range of habit patterns that comes up in a work environment covers a broad spectrum. What you're describing is our willingness to hear other people, our willingness to actually be wrong, and our openness to letting someone else tell us what to do. This includes whether we open to that experience and just let that go through us or whether we act at the surface like we're going to do what the boss says and then make snide comments all the way.

When we find ourselves in these kinds of workplace situations where we are contracting because, for instance, someone is telling us what to do and we don't want to hear it, we have an opportunity. We can learn to watch the process happening and to see it from an internal place with enough spaciousness and presence that, at some point, we no longer feel the need to reactively defend against the person who's trying to tell us something. When we do that, we find that the energy of the situation shifts dramatically.

I once had a colleague who had the fairly compulsive habit pattern telling me why I was wrong about things that I was doing at work. This manifestation really pressed some buttons in me, and it was wonderful to experience because these reactions would come up so strongly. I would get onto these manic thought trains about how annoying this person was and what do I do or how do I respond to this.

So as a practice I moved towards these occasions, let the energy in, felt it, and then crafted a response or allowed a response to emerge. By doing this, though I still found the person annoying, I would only get annoyed briefly and then it would die out. I would then respond to the comments, as opposed to getting annoyed and being annoyed for the next week (which is what typically happens with these sorts of things).

One of the arts that we cultivate in this way of embracing situations that come up in the workplace is to become transparent to the energy that comes toward us. Part of the practice is to learn to be transparent, to let this stuff come in, to see that it's going to all sorts of internal places, to feel all the invitations arising for us to react as we have always habitually reacted, but to have the possibility of not having to react and to just let that energy go through. When we become transparent in situations

like this, they become like dances. The most annoying person or challenging situation becomes like a kettle drum being beaten in time to the dance, as opposed to being an attack on the very nature of our existence. It just becomes a loud sound that we reverberate with, and when it dies out, we continue to move on with the music making.

I've been describing an advanced stage of practice. When we are not at that stage with a work situation, there's still the opportunity of looking more clearly at the condition that's arising in ourselves. We can put full attention on what is arising and embrace it without trying to change anything. "Oh, that's what's happening. I'm getting really upset when this person tells me for the 14<sup>th</sup> time that I didn't do such and such the right way."

When our reaction keeps coming up and we see it more clearly, we don't have to change it or make it go away. We simply grow larger than that habit pattern. It's in this growing larger than the habit pattern that we do what we call "cultivating presence." When we cultivate presence in this way, we become bigger than any of these situations. You see people who are bigger than situations in the work world; these are people whom nothing seems to bother. They're able to intentionally maintain a certain tone of energy and are often positive sources of energy. They always seem to bounce back from whatever situation happens. They're bigger than the situation because there is some cultivation of presence beyond the mechanical reactions that are so common in the workplace.

*Q: You mentioned that you're doing a lot of traveling right now. I'm curious about this because travel is sometimes very problematic (busy airports, cramped airplanes). This is part of your work world. Could you talk about that briefly? It might help me because I've been in the situation many times where the anxiety of making that flight arises when I've just wanted to stay home another five minutes, and it rules me well after I board the airplane.*

I'm still working this one, and I expect that I have an excessive travel schedule because I'm supposed to figure this one out. Rob has been very generous in his pointing out to me the degree to which I have had strong habit patterns around this kind of compulsive mode of, for example, trying to get to the airport on time. Sometimes I've found that I can leave enough time to do something different and have a completely relaxed experience. Even then, there's a compulsive need to control the universe. "What if I'm late? What if I miss my flight?"

As I said, this is something I still work on a lot. Because this sort of travel situation is very goal oriented, we're subject to forces larger than ourselves. There are strong consequences if we miss the flight, because it really throws our schedule into disarray. Also, there has been a macho thing about not being late, no matter what (at least for me).

*Q: Just hearing you talk about how working with this sort of thing is a process helps.*

The challenge – what I look for in myself – is to find a place where I have objective information on when I need to rush and when I don't. There can be a balance there; I'm still working on that balance. Sometimes I find it, sometimes I don't. If I'm taking a cab from one part of the city to get to the airport, I've found that I have maintained a strong habit pattern of being anxious. At other times I've been able to surrender to the situation and let whatever happens, happen. It's work.

The best thing about it is that it's not a problem that we have to fix. The way that we can use these habit patterns is to not only embrace what the exterior world presents, but to cultivate that same quality of embracing for what the interior world presents. We can love that neurotic cramp that arises, and loving it means putting full attention on it – not trying to change it. You don't need to change the thing you love; you just see it fully for what it is. To the degree that you can see it fully, love the fact that you're getting a great look at this neurotic cramp that you've had every time you've stepped into an airport. That's all you need to do. The details will take care of themselves. We don't have to fix anything or change anything.

*Q: Yes, I agree with that. Departure times and arrival times are just the stage that we're operating on. There are always opportunities for fun things there too. That person that we meet, that moment that's so different and so out of our normal everyday existence: these can actually be exciting experiences, if we're open to them.*

S: Airports really are adventures. There are all these different people, different situations, and most of the people are in the same state we've been talking about: very anxious and focused. It's actually very similar to the workplace: all these people just trying to get by, all these different types, and all these different sets of habits and personalities. It's wonderful because we rub up against all these differences. It's when we run up against all these differences that friction stirs things up in ourselves and gives us the opportunity to embrace that which is arising.

This is an important piece that I want to emphasize again because we've been talking around the topic. This hasn't been a nuts and bolts kind of discussion where we talk about specific practices beyond Self-Observation. So it's important to always keep in mind that when we engage in this kind of work of bringing our non-phenomenal attention onto the phenomenal manifestation, that we're not trying to change anything; the details do not matter. The particular manifest details are not as important as the act of turning that attention onto ourselves.

The analogy I find most useful regarding our spiritual growth is that we have a seed. With our attention we can provide this seed with the conditions necessary for it to grow, but we don't need to determine how it grows. We don't have to figure out where the shoots break out, and we don't have to figure out what the form is or anything like that. We only have to maintain those cultivating conditions. The presence that we bring to whatever our situation happens to be is the necessary condition to allow this growth to take place.

Similarly, bringing our attention to the world outside of ourselves is what then allows the Universe to respond back to us and help us in this process of cultivation. In this process, then, there isn't any separation. We don't experience any separation because whatever happens in our exterior lives is effectively God speaking to us and through us to assist in this process of growth. I find this perspective extremely useful, because with it, what I have to do is fairly simple. I can turn my attention toward my life in this particular way, and I don't have to worry about the details. This releases a tremendous burden; we don't have to figure it all out. All we need to do is enjoy the process as it unfolds.

*Q: This suggests the statement, "The Universe loves us." What I sometimes reflect upon is that the Universe loves me just the way that I am right now, in this situation, and that takes me off the hook.*

When we are willing to turn our attention onto ourselves or another and to embrace fully what's arising, this is the act of love. This is love in manifestation. This is the beginning: all our actions and all our manifestations follow from this willingness to look. Looking at ourselves and others is part and parcel of the same thing.

*Love* is a useful word to use for this, but it's also an overloaded word these days. It's okay to use that word for purposes of discussion, but it's far more important to experience this phenomenon directly. Then the vocabulary is less critical.