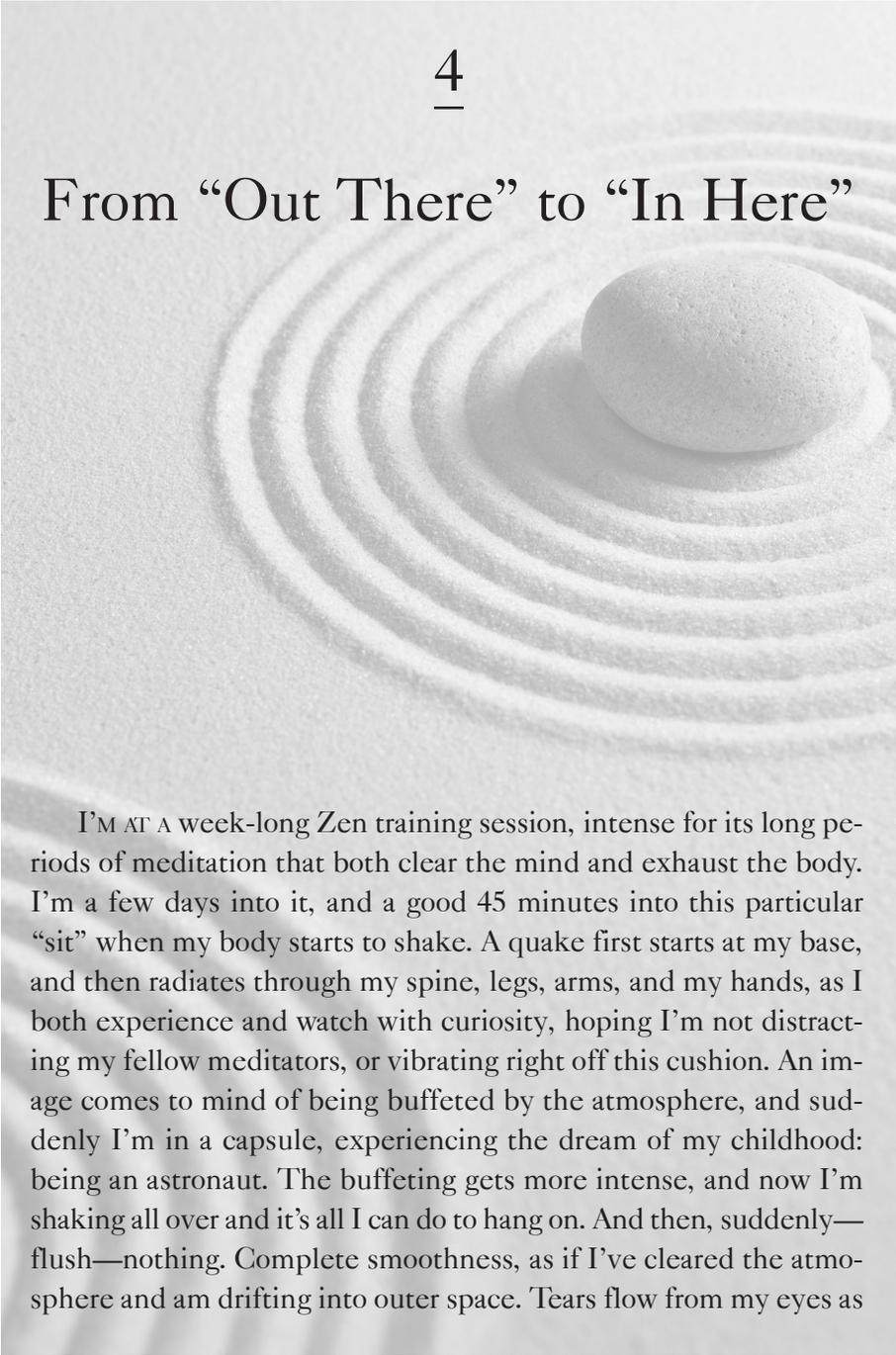


4

From “Out There” to “In Here”



I'M AT A week-long Zen training session, intense for its long periods of meditation that both clear the mind and exhaust the body. I'm a few days into it, and a good 45 minutes into this particular “sit” when my body starts to shake. A quake first starts at my base, and then radiates through my spine, legs, arms, and my hands, as I both experience and watch with curiosity, hoping I'm not distracting my fellow meditators, or vibrating right off this cushion. An image comes to mind of being buffeted by the atmosphere, and suddenly I'm in a capsule, experiencing the dream of my childhood: being an astronaut. The buffeting gets more intense, and now I'm shaking all over and it's all I can do to hang on. And then, suddenly—flush—nothing. Complete smoothness, as if I've cleared the atmosphere and am drifting into outer space. Tears flow from my eyes as

I recognize in a flash that this—*this* experience—was why I wanted to be an astronaut: to break all bonds and be free. And now I see that the outer journey—all that we seek and do and struggle with—is a perfect mirror of the inner journey. Likewise, the inner journey *is* the outer journey; there is no real in or out.

In thousands of ways, I have watched this truth play out through the leaders with whom I work. For example, the leader who

- ☉ thinks large and creates a grand, overleveraged life.
- ☉ thinks small and creates a tiny, safe life.
- ☉ seeks outer greatness in answer to inner doubt.
- ☉ is outwardly impatient, because it's hard to control inner impulses.
- ☉ is relentlessly drawn to what's new to stave off inner boredom.

Who we are shows up in how we live, what we seek, and what world we create around us. Conversely, the issues we attribute to the people and situations around us are mirrored in our own internal tensions, where—good news—we always have the power to attend to them. “Drive all issues into one,” Zen teacher Charlotte Joko Beck learned from her teacher, meaning to drive them into oneself, see where one is playing into them, and get to their inevitably singular root.

This chapter guides one into the flip of seeing where an outer drive has an inner source, where a difficult relationship has an inner cause, and where the things we don't like “out there” are mirrored in what we fear “in here.” With this flip, one is freed from fear, and the Zen leader in us emerges to create a new world.

Slippery Ground

“Shit happens.” Great bumper sticker; great phrase. It's the unlikely mantra of a former nun, Joyce. She's a wonderful teacher I'm getting to know, who has a rare circulatory disease that cropped up 10 years ago. She'll be dead in five years. She's in her early 40s, and I attribute her remarkable presence to this basic acceptance that, sometimes, shit happens.

There is no fairness in her disease. She didn't do anything to bring it on. And apparently there is nothing that can be done medically to stop its progression. It is what it is.

But Joyce has the disease; the disease does not get all of Joyce. In this week that I'm with her, she never plays victim. Indeed, her energy is beacon bright. She has so impressed me with her skillful guidance of this group of NASA managers (myself included) that I will eventually change careers to follow her example. She is also living the wisdom that we cannot always control what happens to us, but we can always control our response to it. A protégé of the great psychologist Will Schutz, she has opened my eyes to the mind-body connectedness of illness¹: how her circulatory illness, for example, relates to (which is not to say was *caused* by, but simply *relates* to) matters of the heart and issues around openness. She opens up the possibilities of “choice” with such odd questions as, “Why did you choose your parents?” And by way of softening our startled gazes, adds, “Or if you had chosen your parents, what would you have gotten out of making that choice?”

Great question, I realize, as I can instantly think of a dozen reasons I would have chosen my particular set of parents, and realize how the very mind that is conceiving these answers was shaped by that “choice.” (Try it!) The ground is getting slippery under my feet, as my ordinary way of looking at a world “out there” is getting turned on its head. Did I choose my parents, or did they choose me? Did Joyce choose her illness, or only her response to it?

Now that you've been tuned to paradox, you know the answers are neither simple nor static, and deeper truths can be found in all possibilities.

A World of Our Making

The idea of a world of our making does not mean we can consciously control everything. Whether it's winning the lottery or shit happening, events in this moment have been preconditioned by the past. Winning the lottery, for example, is only possible if some group has already

organized a lottery, sold tickets, and we acquired one. Joyce's circulatory disease was apparently genetic. The idea that the past conditions the present is old and familiar, variously expressed as karma, action creating reaction, energy being neither created nor destroyed, or even "what goes around, comes around." Our choices in the moment are shaped by the past, and even the us that's choosing is preconditioned by all manner of nature, nurture, and previous experience. So constrained can our choices seem at times, that they can feel like no choice at all, and philosophers for ages have taken up this matter in weighty discourses on free will and determinism. Which one is right?

Surely you're onto it by now: it's another paradox. Yes, we are creative forces capable of imaginative leaps, awakened consciousness, and changing the course of history. And yes, we are corporeal beings living in a world where matter is governed by laws and causes have effects. In making the flip from a world "out there" happening to us to a world "in here" of our making, we come up a level in the game of life, dancing in a paradox of seemingly contradictory forces, in which we become not merely the one who has free will or is determined, but the Zen leader playing the game, free to use both.

The flip from "out there" to "in here" starts by accepting that reality contains much more possibility than, as a board player in the game of life, we can see. For example, most of us can think in two dimensions; really skilled spatial thinkers, such as architects, can think in three dimensions. Although theories to understand "out there"—so-called unified field theories in physics—vary in the number of dimensions they attribute to the universe, they agree it's somewhere around 10. Ten! We don't see all these dimensions. We can't think in all these dimensions. What we do see and think is "real" is more like a three-dimensional shadow (like a projection) of a 10-dimensional universe.

Consider for a moment the enormity of what this means. If you hold your hand up to a light so that it casts a shadow, you can get an idea of how much information is lost in going from your three-dimensional hand to its two-dimensional shadow. If you wiggle your fingers, you'll see that some form and movement information is preserved as you move

from three to two dimensions, but color information is lost, as is depth. Imagine how much more information is lost in going from 10 dimensions to three! The flip to “in here” starts with the humble recognition that “out there” is vastly more complex and interesting than we can comprehend, and that we own the limited sensors with which we’re sampling this vast pool, and the sense we’re making of it. Because everything we experience is coming through our own filters, by the time it gets “in here” it has “me” written all over it. In the broadest sense, these filters can be as humanly common as eyes that register only certain frequencies that we call visible light. Because most people have similar eyes, billions of people around the world can roughly agree on what “blue” is, although their word for it may vary.

Somewhat more specific are filters that come from our society. For example, if we’ve grown up in America, we have a cultural filter (whether we personally agree with it or not) that asserts the rights of the individual ahead of the group (such as the state). If we’ve grown up in China, our filter would say the harmony of the group is more important than the rights of the individual. Within our respective societies, we might not even be aware of these filters, because “we all know” that’s how it is. But bring our two societies into contact, and we can have grave misunderstandings about what it means, say, to protect human rights.

But potentially the most distorting filters are those specific to one’s personality. For example, if I have an issue about being controlled, when someone tells me to do something, I may think they’re trying to control me. They could just be trying to spare me from making a stupid mistake, but seeing the world through the lens of my own distorting issue, I will misinterpret others’ actions, and this may trigger a chain of defensive reactions within me. This mistake, which happens all the time in relationships, is called false attribution: I falsely attribute aspects of my own personality or motives to others. As these distorting filters become more specific, and less widely shared, more room opens up for misunderstanding and false attribution. If I were at a pathological extreme of mental illness, virtually no one would understand or agree with my interpretation of “out there.”

Even well short of the extremes, our layers of distorting filters based on our human limitations, culture, family, gender, age, strengths, weaknesses, experiences, fears, position in life, and on and on, create our perceptions and the meaning we make of “out there.” Not only does this make for plenty of misunderstandings between people, but these filters also give rise to an even more insidious problem. Because we are never without them, even once we become aware of these filters, it’s surprisingly easy to forget we have them. We forget that we’re living in a world of our making. We actually convince ourselves that it’s “out there.” As the brilliant physicist David Bohm observes, “The mind creates ‘reality’ and then says, ‘I didn’t do it.’”²

In the flip from “out there” to “in here,” we open up to the possibilities present in all that we don’t know, and recognize that what we do know about “out there,” and what we do with that knowledge, comes from “in here.”

What World Are You Making?

Perhaps you’ve never thought of yourself as making a world. “I didn’t make this world,” our ordinary mind might say, “I stepped into it. And it’ll all be here when I’m gone.” In a paradoxical sense, that would be correct, and not complete. True, the entire world is a composite of the contributions from many people, many forces, and many causes and conditions all pouring into now. But we could just as easily flip that around and say the world is unalterably different because you are in it. Now how do you want to use that power? Depending on your self-image—consciously and subconsciously held—you will cast a net across the vastness and define your world.

If you regard yourself as small and powerless, you will create a tiny world in which you are often victimized by large and powerful forces.

If you regard yourself as a persistent, creative genius, like Walt Disney, you’ll create a world of fanciful characters, transforming the entertainment industry.

If you regard yourself as a highly responsible person with something to prove, you will create a world where people rely on you, and life endlessly presents you with mountains to climb and challenges to overcome.

If you regard yourself as a dramatic person, you will create a world with plenty of ups and downs, conflicted relationships, and bold moves.

If you regard yourself as a disruptively creative entrepreneur who cheated death well before he succumbed to it, like Steve Jobs, you'll fearlessly create a world where whole industries leap to a new paradigm, and make a “ding in the universe,” as Jobs was known to say.

“Your story is your destiny,” proclaims Jim Loehr in *The Power of Story*,³ which abounds in examples of how our deeply held self image—our “story”—creates our world. Jim helps people re-create their world by rewriting their story. Similarly, Betty Edwards⁴ helps people connect their story to their world by having them write an important episode of their life, first from the perspective of a victim, and then from the perspective of a hero. No surprise that they find the second version vastly more empowering.

These are but two of the voices and bodies of research pointing to a world of our making. We could add to them the work of Martin Seligman and the Positive Psychology movement, the Law of Attraction, the “if you build it they will come” promise of a positive vision, and the only thing optimists and pessimists agree upon: optimists have better lives. Yes, we live in a world of causes and conditions. And yes, we define the scale, slice, or sliver of that world we operate in.

So what world are you making? The following exercise gives you a chance to think through some key elements of your personality and how they show up in your world.

What World Do You Make?

We don't normally look for connections between how we are on the inside and our everyday world on the outside, but when we do, the connections can be surprisingly revealing. Try this:

Start with your strengths. List five things you know you're good at, which might be specific skills (for example, math or music) or traits that have supported you through your career (for example, being good with people).

Then list five core values or beliefs—things that you stand for; qualities that even others would recognize as your “Leadership Brand.”

Part 1: Consider your typical week, including both work and personal time. How does the week reflect the items on your two lists? Consider positive, satisfying connections, as well as things that irritate. Find a connection to each item on your list and, where one is not obvious, force a connection (a technique known to stimulate lateral thinking). As you write, also notice any feelings that arise.

Part 2: Considering your 10 items as a whole, answer the following:

- ☯ How big or small is my world, and how do my items play into this?
- ☯ How fast or slow is my world, and how do my items play into this?
- ☯ What role do people play in my world, and how do my items play into this?

This kind of awareness is invaluable, for it helps us see how we’re playing into situations, even if we’re not *causing* them entirely. It also helps us know the distortions of our filters, what we might be missing, and how we might misinterpret things. Just as navigators of the sea learned how to correct for the distorting difference between true north and magnetic north in their compass readings, so we can apply conscious corrections to our filters: for example, knowing we have a hair trigger for thinking people are trying to control us and that they may have other intentions.

A World in Our Image

“What are the people like in this town?” the allegorical traveler asks a village elder.

“What were they like where you came from?” the elder asks.

“Oh, they were very good people,” answers the traveler.

“You’ll find the people here are the same.”

Later on, a second traveler arrives, meets the same elder, and asks the same question.

“What were the people like where you came from?” the elder asks in answer.

“They were scoundrels and thieves!” says the traveler.

“You’ll find the people here the same.”

This old story speaks to the way we unconsciously play into situations, giving roles to others that we, in some way, expect them to play as part of our deeply held self-image—our story. And because a human being is like a multifaceted gem, the part that we expect to see is often the only part that we *do* see. Now and then we might catch a surprise, but expectations are another way of saying that “in here” we’ve pre-tuned our senses to notice only certain things and to place certain interpretations on them.

I've just told this story to Jan in our coaching session because she's thinking of leaving her job. I'm not so sure that changing jobs—the “geographical cure”—is going to fix what she wants fixed. She says the people where she currently works are aligned against her. There may be some truth in that, but I'm encouraging her to explore her own role in the situation, her expectations, and what she gets out of feeling “aligned against.” “I can't imagine what I'm getting out of it,” she says, “I feel so alone!” I point to the report in front of us—a profile of her personality and leadership style that highlights her hard-charging ways. “This type of leader prefers working fast and alone,” I tell her. “Maybe you're getting just what you want.”

We review written feedback from others that she has also received this week, and the comments from her direct reports are particularly severe. “She doesn't make time for us,” one says. “She's puts her own ambitions over the team,” says another. On the positive side, everyone agrees that Jan is a real go-getter, “an achievement-driven machine.” “I love to get stuff done,” Jan agrees in part. “It's not that I don't care about my people, but they're old-fashioned and don't have the attitude to learn—especially from me! I used to be their peer, and they resent that I got promoted above them.”

Becoming a boss of former peers *is* a challenging role. But as we talk, Jan sees how she went into the role *expecting* problems, and when she sensed something “off” in her early interactions, she was quick to read her expectations into it, as in: “They resent me; they're lining up against me,” not “They're feeling their way through a new relationship with me and right now they're not feeling very good about themselves because I was the one promoted,” which could have been another completely legitimate interpretation. Whether it was true for them or not, Jan was choosing to read resentment and retaliation into their actions.

Jan is also seeing the effect of her rapid-fire achievement drive on others, “No one else thinks they can keep up, so they give up, and I'm stuck doing the work.”

“Perfect!” I say. “Here you are, a person who needs to achieve a lot, and you've created a world where you need to achieve a lot.” She's still

not convinced that this is her doing, but her puzzled expression tells me that she’s beginning to doubt that all of this is simply happening to her from “out there.” A possibility is dawning that she may be able to change something “in here” that would change her unpleasant world of work. By the end of the week, she will have built a plan of action in which she still explores other jobs, but also commits to a brave experiment to transform the role she’s currently in, and leave her direct reports better off for having worked with her.

What’s the Real Battle?

Mark is speeding along in the left lane of the expressway, doing the expected 10 mph over the speed limit, catching up with a driver who clearly didn’t get the memo, and is creeping along. “Who said it was Slow Driver in the Left Lane Day?!” he bellows, pounding his fist on the steering wheel, flashing his lights. “Get the hell out of my way!” He does it to blow off steam, he says, and doesn’t mean a thing by it. But he’s visibly upset, as is now the driver in front of us. And I, sitting in the passenger seat, am getting that old familiar walking-on-eggshells-around-conflict feeling that I absolutely hate.

Let’s freeze the frame and ask, What’s going on here? Not in the usual blame-placing perspective—what’s happening “out there” is not the story that interests us. Let’s look instead at how each of us in this little scene is creating our world from “in here.”

First there’s Mark, driving along with an expectation that “we all know” driving in the left lane calls for going faster than the speed limit, and irritation flashes when that expectation is not met. Mark has a funny, boisterous, dramatic temperament, and his irritation triggers all of those traits. He has no doubt learned (he’s a psychologist, after all) that big reactions like this make him the center of the drama, put other people on guard, and may lessen the chance that his expectations will be disappointed in the future. Let other people react as they will; he’s staked out his territory.

Meanwhile, I'm riding along, I see the scene unfolding in the left lane, and suddenly the car is filled with sound and fury. Instantly, responsible me thinks I have to *do* something; calm this situation down, talk sense into this person. Why? What's my real battle? It's with conflict itself, and all the fear it unleashes within me. As a child, it would literally make my skin crawl and take my breath away (I have a long history of eczema and asthma to show for it). I'm sure one of the reasons I spent 30 years in martial arts is that I had to get a handle on my reactions to conflict. Good thing I did. Sitting in the car, I can still feel these vestigial pressures inside—*do* something!—but now in my world, they get very little of me. An earlier version of me in the car with Mark would have created a much more argumentative world.

And what of the person in the car in front of us? He was just driving along, minding his own business, perhaps more tuned in to his inner life than to outer conditions. Along comes some speeding Jeep on his tail, lights flashing, with the driver gesticulating wildly. What world will he create in this moment? If he's an easy-going fellow who knows he tends to daydream while driving, he might offer up a shrug, as if to say, "Sorry, spaced out," move out of the lane, and return to his dreamy world. If he's an angry driver, prone to road rage, he might just have to show Mark a thing or two, slow down even further, roll down his window, and jam a one-finger salute into the air. As it turns out, he's somewhere in between—a cautious fellow who has looked over his shoulder now three times to see if it's safe to move into the middle lane. But he doesn't like what Mark's done, or how Mark has made him feel about himself. He's grim-faced and determined, eyes straight ahead, as we sail by.

A late report, an infuriating e-mail, a warm exchange with an old colleague, a serious meeting, a jam-packed schedule, a slow car in the left lane of the expressway...our day is filled with scenes that trigger emotional reactions within us. The scene is just the scene. Where the real story and, in many cases, the real battle unfolds is "in here." How does it make us feel? What do we fear may happen? What do we fear may be true about us? By reacting a certain way, what fear do we reinforce? We may not normally reflect on everyday scenes with this depth, but it's

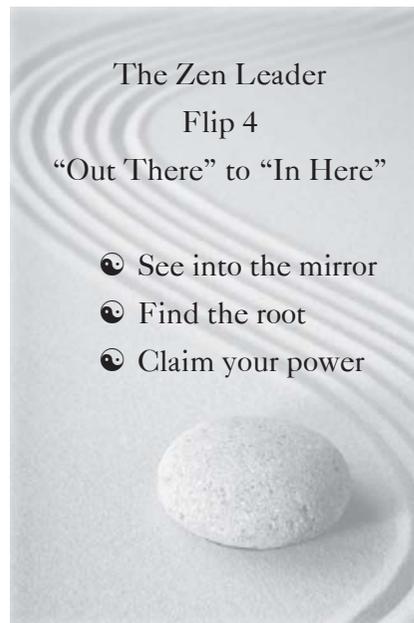


surprisingly instructive when we do. For what we learn is that any outer conflict traces its roots to an inner fear. And once we can stand in that fear, get to know it, and make friends with it, our world becomes a vastly bigger, freer, happier place.

The Zen Leader Flip 4: “Out There” to “In Here”

This flip is best made in the spirit of open curiosity. We do well to suspend judgment, set aside any expectations of what we’ll find when we start digging around “in here,” and be guided by a sincere wanting to know—and a good sense of humor! Bring along your laughter. As you see into the mirror or find the root of difficulties “out there,” you may think you’re the only person carrying such baggage. The great joke is we’re all born baggage carriers, and we also have the potential to be free of our baggage. Even baggage itself is neither good nor bad; the term may sound negative, but if you’ve ever taken a trip and had the airline lose your baggage, you know how comforting baggage can be. On the other hand, carry too much of it, and you don’t go very far.

See into the mirror. We enter this flip by shifting our perspective from something happening “out there” to inquiring: *What is it related to “in here”? How am I playing into this? If, at some level, I chose this, what might I be getting out of it?* Any time we catch ourselves entering coping mode is a great time to practice this flip. For whatever has triggered our coping reaction is the very situation we want to explore, not in terms of how it appears in the world, but how it appears in the mirror of our self. We can support our inquiry physically by practicing the flips we’ve learned so far. In time,



we can vastly accelerate our “inside” insight through meditation and other practices (see Sitting Meditation at the end of this chapter, as well as the Chapter 4 exercises online). In the moment, we can simply relax, center our self, release tension in the front of the body, and allow a sense of extension through the back, through our legs, arms, and fingers. We’re ready to see into the mirror.

The mirror, of course, is a metaphor. And seeing into it calls for a bit of abstract thinking, in which we come up a level to make connections that may not seem obvious. As a player on the board, Jan, for example, couldn’t imagine at first what she was getting out of thinking people were aligned against her. But as she came up a level to look at herself playing the game, she could see that her preferred style was to work fast and alone, that she valued achievement more than she valued relationships, and that she never felt that she had enough time. She could see how believing that people were aligned against her justified the way she wanted to work anyway.

Earlier you had a chance to write down several strengths and elements of your “leadership brand” and connect those to your world. Seeing into the mirror is being able to make these connections from self to world, as well as from world back to self. When we notice, for example, that we’re irritated by a talkative visitor who has popped into our office, we can ask our self: *what is it related to “in here”?* We might not register these trifle irritations as full-blown fear, but we will almost always see they represent a violation of something we value. Ah, we may see our visitor violates our sense of order, our expectation that we control our schedule. Our knee-jerk reaction might be to dismiss this person, which would return us to our orderly world. This talkative person could be an irritating distraction, or could be bringing us a game-changing business idea; only by seeing into the mirror, and correcting for “order distortion,” do we have a chance of telling the difference.

Seeing into the mirror is not meant to ignore that there are other players and other forces shaping the present moment. But it is meant to discover how we’re playing into the contours of our world, and the choices we’re now making. By sincerely inquiring into how we’re playing into the situations we face, and what they relate to in us, we see more clearly how “out there” is mirrored “in here,” where we have all the power in the world.

Find the root. Seeing is always the starting point, but before our actions can come from a deeper, fuller, freer sense of self, we have to find the root of what’s holding our current story in place. We don’t have to free up our whole story in one fell swoop, though there are systemic ways we can advance our freedom in leaps and bounds, especially through the core practice of meditation. But one can regard the sort of coping situation for which this flip is particularly useful as a little weed—something that crops up that we don’t like. And similar to pulling a weed, if we don’t find the root, our efforts are superficial, and the problem will crop right back up. But also, we don’t have to unearth every root in our yard to deal with *this* weed.

Roots are our underlying fears. These fears might be that we’re not good enough, lovable enough, strong enough to be present with difficult emotions, or name-your-own enough. These fears underlie what Hubert Benoit nailed as “The Great Lawsuit”;⁵ that is, the unwinnable case to justify or secure our ego’s existence, to make this little, fragile self feel safe. Truly, as long as we regard our self as separate, we can never, once and for all feel safe enough. Hence, our little ego-token on the game board of life is bound to have fears. Lots of them.

To find the root is to inquire deeply into this question: *What do I fear in this situation?* Positive, go-getting people may at first think they don’t fear anything, which was Jan’s first reaction. But coping mode is itself evidence of fear. People who have truly mastered their fears don’t spend much time in coping mode. I nudged Jan to go deeper with the question, “What does this situation make you fear that you may not be *enough*?” “Likeable enough,” she answered instantly. “What kind of leader can I be if people don’t like me?” This is finding the root.

Michael O’Brien, coauthor of *Quicksilver*,⁶ helps his clients find the root all the time. He’s categorized four of the most common fears as being:

- ☉ Stupid / Foolish / Idiotic (not smart enough)
- ☉ A Pretender / A Fraud (not good enough or authentic enough)
- ☉ An Outcast / Rejected / Unlovable (not likeable enough)
- ☉ Powerless / Weak / Ineffective (not strong enough)

This is a good list to start with anytime we want to find the root that is informing our story in a coping situation. These fears are crucial to recognize and name, because they are operating whether we recognize them or not. These fears are the tools the ego uses to keep its game going—for better or worse. The fear of death is perhaps the most obvious way the ego keeps its game going. But in subtle ways, all of these fears can trigger our ego's fear of death.

For example, you can imagine in the wandering tribes of our human ancestors, not being likeable and being banished from the tribe was a virtual death sentence, given all the predators ready to pounce on solo prey. Our nervous system developed through hundreds of thousands of years of this sort of learning, passed from one survivor to the next. Little wonder that the fear that we're not likeable is so primal. Likewise with not being strong enough, smart enough, and so on. At the same time, if our ego values achievement over being liked, we might subtly sabotage relationships to keep our achievement game going. Sometimes our poor, confused ego—our little token on the game board of life—doesn't know which fear it fears most, or which way to turn.

To find the root is to dig down and name the underlying fears in our coping situations. Once we can see our fears, they can no longer get all of us. For here's the good news: the awareness that sees the fear is not itself afraid. This awareness is the Zen leader in us, coming up to the level of playing the game, and claiming our power.

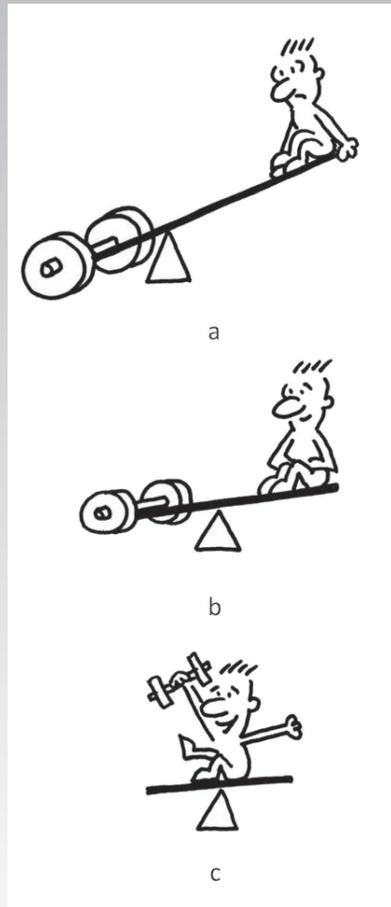
Claim your power. The truth about fear is that it can only do its dirty work underground and from a distance. From Franklin Roosevelt ("We have nothing to fear but fear itself") to Henry David Thoreau ("Nothing is so much to be feared as fear") to Francis Bacon ("Nothing is terrible except fear itself"), it seems we've known for some time that fear attacks in the dark. In the light of awareness, which is not itself afraid, fear loses its force. That's not to say it disappears altogether, but when we stand in our fear—move into the very thick of it—and act anyway, it loses its leverage over us.

Leverage. The word has become equated with financial meltdowns, but if you think back to a playground seesaw from your childhood, you know the principle of leverage: the farther away you are from the pivot point

(the fulcrum), the more counterbalancing weight is needed on the other side, and a short drop on that end then puts you *way* up in the air. That’s also how our fears feel and function from a distance: like a huge weight that we try to keep away from, and that somehow has us stuck up in the air (as in Figure 4.1a). Imagine the fulcrum represents our fear, and the weight represents how strong that fear is for us, which counterbalances how far we are from it. The closer we move to our fear, finding the root, getting it out in the open, the lighter it gets (Figure 4.1b). Claiming our power, we move right into it, stand right on top of our fear-fulcrum, and now our fear hardly weighs anything at all (Figure 4.1c). We’re free to act. From inside out, we can extend our energy into the situation, and a problem “out there” is transformed by the Zen leader emanating from “in here.”

How does this work in practice? In Jan’s case, she was able to claim her power by accepting (there’s that word again—always the hinge point between coping and transforming) that, okay, maybe her people don’t like her, or they don’t like how they feel about themselves around her. After all, she hasn’t been giving them much attention. But now she wants to help them feel more capable—she cares about these people. Jan knows she can’t

Figure 4.1



Moving toward the fulcrum of our fears, their weight lessens. Standing right in the fear, we are free to move.

control whether she's liked, but she can control whether she invests in her people, and let the liking fall where it may. She's determined to make the investment, not for the sake of being liked, but because she knows it's right for the people, right for the company, and right for her. It's as if a weight she's been avoiding suddenly lightens.

Here's another example. I'm in a conversation with a prospective client who wants a leadership program for 100 high-potential directors—and I want to sell it to her. We're talking about possible designs and I keep bringing up our unique approach to whole leadership and mind-body oneness, which is the reason I think someone would come to me for a leadership program. She keeps dismissing what I'm saying. I reword, try again, and get the same dismissal. I'm feeling like I'm pushing upstream, and I'm growing more uncomfortable in the conversation. I can see how I'm playing into this: the more I push, the more she pushes back. I believe in the value of my work and I want her to see it too. What is my fear? That she won't see it; my work won't be valuable to her; *I* won't be valuable—and I'll lose the deal. Claiming my power, I stand in the middle of these fears and say to her, "Maybe I'm not fully understanding what you want, and I'm just telling you what we're good at. Tell me what you're really going after here, and if I can't deliver it, I know I can connect you with someone who can." Completely different conversation.

For the leader who thinks small and creates a tiny, safe life, claiming your power might be to stand in your fear of things getting out of control, or your fear of not being 100-percent dependable, and making a larger decision anyway.

For the leader who seeks outer greatness in answer to inner doubt, claiming your power might be to stand in the middle of your fear of being insignificant and still making the most valuable, seemingly insignificant contribution you can offer in the moment.

For the leader who gets impatient listening to others, claiming your power might be to own your desire to blow up or run away, and still choose to be present. "I'm afraid if you make this too long, I'll tune out," you might say, "So please make sure I hear your most important point."

Claiming your power is moving into the space your fear would otherwise occupy. It is bringing your fear so close it can no longer operate on you. It is regarding yourself with the deepest curiosity and compassion—your ego-token on the game board of life—seeing your fears, and bringing the ego and fear together, revealing *there’s nothing there*, except greater space for freer action. This is leading fearlessly, which doesn’t mean fears never happen, but that by merging with them, you become bigger than the ego that had been avoiding them. Through this merge, your Zen leader emerges to change the world from “in here.”

Putting It to Work: Turning a Difficult Relationship

A great place to apply the flip from “out there” to “in here” is where something seems to be happening “out there” that we don’t like. Difficult relationships are perhaps most interesting, because they involve another person onto whom we can project our fears, assign a role, and engage in staggering misunderstandings—all subconsciously! So start by thinking of a relationship that you find difficult, or that is important to you to make even stronger than it is, and jot down answers to the following questions.

1. Describe the current reality of the relationship. What’s a typical exchange? Where do things go wrong? What pattern recurs that troubles you? How do you feel about this person? How does he or she feel about you?
2. **See into the mirror.** Looking over the current reality, answer the following:
 - ☯ How am I playing into the way things go wrong?
 - ☯ What pattern keeps cropping up in me? Where in my life have I seen this pattern before?
 - ☯ How does this person make me feel about myself?
 - ☯ If I had chosen to put this person in my life to learn an important lesson, what would I be learning?

3. **Find the root.** What are some of the fears this relationship triggers in you? Either things you may be afraid are true about yourself, or fears about the consequences or the future. Answer:
- ☉ What am I afraid will happen? What will that lead to? And *that* lead to?
 - ☉ What do I fear may be true about me? What am I not *enough*? (For example, not strong enough, smart enough, likeable enough...)
4. **Claim your power.** Look over your list of fears, recognizing that these are discoveries about yourself; it's impossible to say whether they have truth beyond that, but their power over you comes from the fact that they're *your* fears. Remember that fears are the way the ego keeps its game going. With that in mind, go through each of your fears, stand in the middle of each one, completely accepting that it's a fear operating in you, and write a statement of intent for how you will act in the relationship regardless of the fear. How might you change the game your ego has been playing? For example, if this difficult relationship makes me fear that I'm not likeable, a standing-on-my-fear statement of intent might be, "I will help this person be successful, whether she ends up liking me or not." Or if one of my fears is of being weak in conflict situations, my statement might be, "I will be real and present in the relationship and let tempers fall where they may." Completely move into the fear, and declare what freedom you find there. Remember, you are more than the ego who has these fears. The awareness in you that could uncover these fears is not, itself, afraid. Using that awareness, stand on the fear and declare your larger intent.

Because you're reading a book at the moment and probably not engaged in that relationship, you may have to wait a bit to put these intents into practice. But perhaps you can already feel the empowering possibility they represent. You can do these things and no one can stop you! Such is the power of acting from "in here." And because you've freed up a fear that had been operating "in here," you will see that the contours of

your world “out there” can now change. That’s not to say everything you want to happen will automatically happen; things take time, causes have effects that have to play out, and every person around you will be in his or her own state of readiness to accept something new from you. But in time, you’ll notice that things that have become non-issues for you also cease to be issues in your relationships with others.

We could run through this same process (including most of the questions, slightly reworded) to explore transforming a difficult situation. For example, say we’re worried about money, or irritated by the many demands on our time. How are we playing into it? What are we afraid will happen? What do we fear about ourselves in this situation? And how can we move into that fear and claim our power anyway?

In applying this flip, we need not limit ourselves to difficulties. My opening story about my experience while meditating shows what insight we can gain from seeing how our outward goals relate to inward yearnings. What do you seek “out there?” What does it relate to “in here?” In the case of a goal, we might ask, “If I attain this goal, what will that do for me? What fears about myself do I hope to lay to rest?” Achievement-driven goals, for example, often find their root in proving we’re good enough, smart enough, or powerful enough. There’s nothing wrong with this, but only by finding the root of even worthwhile goals in our life can we use them productively, rather than them using us.

We can also apply this flip to consider great opportunities “out there” for what needs to change “in here” to take advantage of them. Seeing into the mirror, we might ask what strengths or values “in here” would be served by moving in this direction. What would it call out from us? How satisfying would it be? Finding the root, we could probe what fears might hold us back or sabotage our success. How are we likely to get in our own way? Claiming our power, we can move into those fears and decide whether to move forward on the opportunity. If we do move forward, we know what fears we have to master to move fearlessly.

The flip from “out there” to “in here” is widely applicable and endlessly empowering. In making this flip, it becomes increasingly clear that there is no real “out there” separate from “in here,” but only one

thing going on, in which we're a creative player. In making this flip, the Zen leader in us is able to use both what's free and what's determined in any moment. It's as if we're able to shift out of being merely a token on the game board of life to being the one playing the game, using broader awareness to illuminate and dissipate the fears that are part of the game as we know it, and then send in a better game plan to our token-selves on the board. In the flip from blaming "out there" to claiming our power "in here," we cultivate fearlessness. We also develop the extraordinary awareness that allows us not only to play to our currently understood strengths, but also to vastly strengthen our play, which we turn to next.

The Zen Leader

Flip 4 Takeaways

"Out There" to "In Here"

What we seek or avoid "out there" relates to yearnings and fears "in here," where we have the power to master them.

To cultivate fearlessness:

- ☯ **See into the mirror.** Ask, *How am I playing into this? What is this related to "in here"?*
- ☯ **Find the root.** Ask, *What am I afraid of? What may be true of me? What am I not "enough?"*
- ☯ **Claim your power.** Merge with the fear, accepting it, not as a judgment, but as a discovery about yourself. Find your freedom to act and declare your intent.

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Core Practice: Sitting Meditation

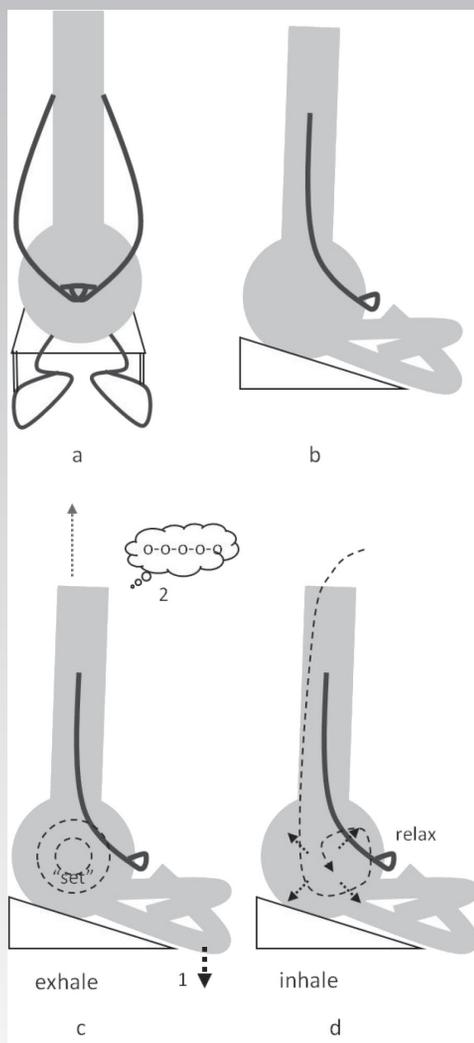
Our ability to see into the mirror and find our root fears can be accelerated by practices that build awareness and relaxation in the body. Sitting meditation is a core practice for doing that. In meditation, sitting still with all our senses open, we can cultivate a condition of complete relaxation and complete awareness, inside and out, all at the same time. After about 20 minutes of “sitting” (that is, “sitting meditation,”), people commonly experience an abrupt drop in tension. The best way to learn meditation is with the guidance of a skilled teacher. But to get started on your own, or refresh what you already know, the following will guide you.

1. Loosen up your neck and shoulders, shaking out any superficial tension. Sit on a cushion or chair, with your spine as naturally straight as it would be if you were standing. Your hip joints should be slightly higher than your knees (see Figure 4.2a and b). Eyes take in 180-degree vision, with your gaze splashing off the floor a few feet in front of you.
2. Arc your arms into letter Cs, with your shoulders relaxed and the blades of your hands on your center (*hara*), palms up, one hand on top of the other, slightly below your navel. Here, your hands can feel the breath move to and from your *hara*. Fold in the thumb of your lower hand and close your upper hand around it.
3. Breathe quietly in and out through your nose. As you start to exhale imagine two things: first, a slight current of energy extending through the balls of your feet (or through your knees, if on a cushion) down into the earth. With this slight extension, you’ll notice a “thereness” or set feeling in your *hara*, and a sense of extension through your spine and out the top of your head (Figure 4.2c). Second, in your

mind's voice, link your exhale with a deep vowel sound, starting with "ahh," and working through "ay," "ee," "oh," and "uu" on successive breaths. Let the imagined sound penetrate all the way through your exhale, making it as long and slow as you comfortably can. After you finish "uu" (or if you lose your place at any point), go back to "ahh."

4. At the end of your exhale, relax completely (quit extending energy) and allow the inhale to happen on its own, from the bottom up (Figure 4.2d). Continue in this way, alternating slight extension as you exhale and relaxation as you inhale. As thoughts or impulses arise, simply watch them without getting lost in them, and blend them with your breath and voiceless vowel sound. Sit for 20 minutes.

Figure 4.2



Posture for sitting meditation.