



Automatic Reactions, by Toni Packer

There are two aspects of quiet sitting, or meditative inquiry, if you will, which are not mutually exclusive. Description and language divide what is indivisible. So maybe we can keep in mind that what is being described separately right now is one complete whole. One aspect of meditation is becoming intelligently aware of what we call our conditioning, our habitually unconscious or semi-conscious reactions toward each other and the situations around us. We may think we are aware (in the sense that all human beings are "conscious"), but we are not really in touch with true, undivided awareness. True awareness has no element of judging, analyzing, rejecting, or clinging. No "me"-center from which to observe, rather awareness shedding light, bringing the "me" into fresh view. Meditation is coming into intimate touch with our habitual reactions of fear, desire, anger, tenderness, or whatever, discovering them freshly, abstaining from automatically judging them good or bad, right or wrong. Beginning to realize that every incident, every encounter with another person, is instantly interpreted according to ingrained prejudices. There is constant comparing ourselves and others to ideal standards of good and bad and right and wrong, that have been internalized long ago. At a moment of insight there arises a new sense of wondering: "Why do we live bogged down in automatic reactions? Is it the only way of relating in this world?" Will we be seduced into explaining or philosophizing about it, or can we simply stay with what is going on in the light of the question? Genuine interest has a way of kindling energy to illuminate the ways of automatic reactions for instance immediately getting hurt because of a critical remark, and instantly defending or paying back, and then mulling the whole affair over and over which is the alienation, the conflict and suffering for us all. --Toni Packer