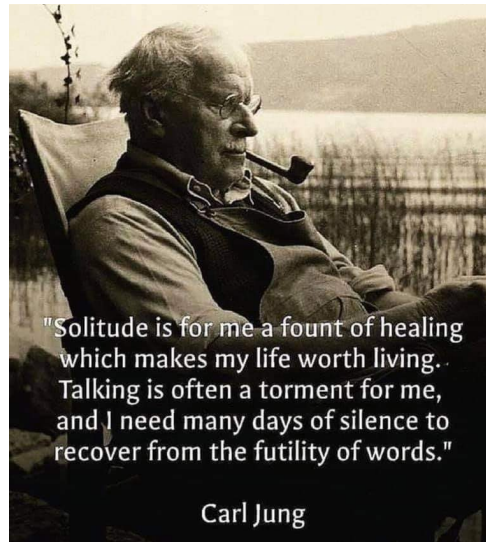


'Reflection' as 'Western' 'Meditation'

Differences in emphasis between Western style Reflection and Meditation as inspired by Eastern traditions



It is rare to find a compilation of quotations devoted to the category of Reflection. That does not mean that people have not thought about Reflection but it does mean it has not featured as much as a category of thought or activity that should be compartmentalised in a separate category. There is no category on a bookshelf entitled 'What people think about reflection'.

People like a publicly celebrated authority figure to dress up worthwhile sayings but in truth we all can have our say in our democratic times and we can all learn from each other. That said, many are the thoughts and sayings of celebrated people about aspects of reflection

They only babble who practice not reflection. I shall think; and thought is silence

- Seneca

You have power over your mind - not outside events. Realize this, and you will find strength.

- Marcus Aurelius

To refuse to recognise any part of reality is to confuse our vision of the whole, and to make ourselves incapable of the redemptory action which the world requires.

- *Dame Rebecca West*

If you are losing your leisure, look out!... it may be that you are losing your soul.

- *Virginia Woolf*

In order to improve the mind, we ought less to learn, than to contemplate.

- *Rene Descartes*

A true philosopher is like an elephant; he never puts the second foot down until the first one is solidly in place.

- *Bernard de Fontenelle*

Reflection doesn't take anything away from decisiveness, from being a person of action. In fact it generates the inner toughness that you need to be an effective person of action. Think of leadership as the sum of two vectors, competence (your specialty, your skills your know-how) and your and authenticity (your identity, your character, your attitude)

- *Peter Koestenbaum*

Ultimately knowledge in martial art means simply self-knowledge. It can become intelligible only in the vigorous and constant process of self-inquiry and self-discovery.

- *Bruce Lee*

It's our mind which forces our self to do positive activities and also negative activities. So first learn to control your mind then automatically you will start doing positive activities which will result in a discussion of different great ideas.

- [Zeeshan Talib](#)

We can ... go beyond mere opinions and so-called common sense conclusions. One must learn to be a skillful scientist and not accept anything at all. Everything must be seen through one's own microscope and one has to reach one's own conclusions in

one's own way. Until we do that there is no saviour, no guru, no blessings and no guidance could be of any help

- *Chögyam Trungpa*

-

The evolution of man is the evolution of his consciousness, and "consciousness" cannot evolve unconsciously. The evolution of man is the evolution of his will and "will" cannot evolve involuntarily.

- *Gurdjieff*

If you feel drawn to solitude, give yourself complete permission to go in that direction. We need silence and beauty to re-connect with the spiritual side of ourselves. The world is a noisy place, as is the mind. The spiritual journey is not about developing more and more beliefs and opinions. Rather, it is about shedding away our beliefs and preconceived notions about reality in order to have the True Nature of things revealed to us. This requires radical self-honesty and humility. The truly wise understand the limitations of the intellect and seek to go beyond it rather than refining it.

- *Beau Norton (PerfectlyatPeace.com)*

Develop the heart. Too much energy in your country is spent in developing the mind instead of the heart. Develop the heart.

- *Dalai Lama*

We are only falsehood, duplicity, contradiction; we both conceal and disguise ourselves from ourselves.

- *Blaise Pascal*

Act in haste, repent at leisure.

- *William Congreve, English playwright, poet and Whig politician*

The above quotations could feature in an Anthology of Western Thinkers on Reflection but, as stated above, the subject, crux as it is to all of us, has not been thought fit for attention as a separate category to date, albeit with exceptions such as Rodin's sculpture, '*The Thinker*',.. Even this piece, as conceived, was only a small part of a much larger work¹ until it was realised that it had something of particular interest to impart.

¹ The Thinker was made to sit over the lintel of Rodin's monumental bronze doorway, The Gates of Hell, contemplating the fate of the damned.

In eras past, Reflection implied that a 'thinking cap' had been donned whereas 'Meditation' was slightly more formal, more deliberate somehow than rumination or reverie, almost at a stage where - to milk the image of head gear - a Top Hat or Skull Cap was more suitable for it. Here is an extract from a Jewish prayer of the Victorian era:

'...Can I better employ this holy Sabbath than in endeavouring to exalt my mind, and purify my soul, than by meditation on Thy Holy Law, by prayer, and by the severe examination of my thoughts and actions... Then my body will enjoy rest, my heart elevated in gratitude, and my faith and courage sustained by meditation and prayer; thus will my soul be prepared for eternity....'

The word 'meditation' since transcendental trips of the Beatles in the 'sixties to the Ashram of the Maharishi has developed an orientation towards the oriental. It has acquired a capital 'M' in keeping with its new-found status of a respected lifestyle associated with wellbeing topped up with the merest hint that the practitioner exudes a fashionable odour of spirituality.

A capital 'R' is now the due of 'Reflection'.

Excellent and varied as are Eastern traditions it behoves us in the First World to tread warily on some of its wilder shores. It is not claimed here that alluring spots are marked on maps *'Here be dragons!'*, just a little caution might go a long way. Occidental Meditation - aka Reflection - should come out of the closet. The cults and beliefs emanating largely from the East may have elevated aims and much to commend them and they are in vogue but Western traditions of reflection deserve a place in the sun. to Reflect as distinct from some goals of 'Meditation'. They are another path to self-realisation and should be fully signposted.

The habit of thinking over matters of relevance to one's personal life and those of one's society is a primary aim of western-style meditation, namely reflection.

As the author James Clear says: *"If you want to master a habit, the key is to start with repetition, not perfection."*

The habit of challenging habits of thought - one's own and those of others - lateral thinking, rumination, care in coming to conclusions, and peace of mind, and more, are part of a mix that makes of reflection an activity of value. A clear-minded, rational, serene, detached look at what we suppose that we truly know and at what individuals and society can do can go hand-in-hand with spirituality. Finding one's self can build on the above mental processes. Reflecting on scientific breakthroughs can help shed light on variegated intangible realms. These arguably actuate us and can supplement our Faiths or core Beliefs. Thinking critically with rational thought has a long and proud history in the West, with repercussions in society for instance in producing inspiration for manifestos that have toppled oppressive systems of government. Reflection is the enemy of impulsiveness and rashness; the friend of care and aforethought. Knee-jerk snap decisions - a tendency of our modern times - gullability, and immaturity can come at heavy price. Too late we may wake up, collectively and individually. Better decisions mean better actions.

The point is to be aware of a problem, even an intangible one, so as to better repair it. We 'know' much of what needs to be done but we often don't do it. We do not take it seriously enough. Because it seems deceptively easy. We slide away from the obvious.

John Updike wrote: *'We skate upon an intense radiance we do not see because we see nothing else'.*

It is a further reminder of the things and the ideas that we do not see and so do not consider. This myopia can relate to obvious questions about our lives as well our place in the scheme of things.

Peter Cook, the comedian, was asked by David Frost whether he would like and meet Sarah Ferguson, shortly to become the Duchess of York, on a given date. There was a rustle of paper as Cook consulted his diary after which he replied:

"Sorry! I'm afraid I can't do that evening!"

"But she is going to marry Prince Andrew! It's a great opportunity to meet her!"

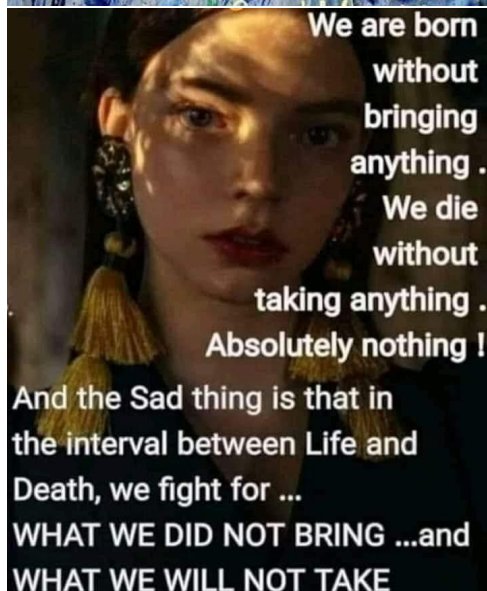
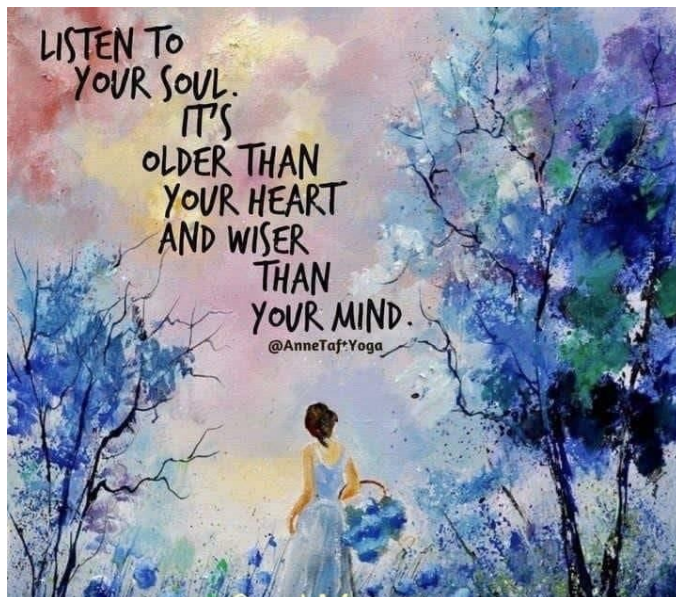
"I find that, on that evening, I will be watching television!"

Imagine someone saying:

"Thank you for the lovely invitation but I've checked my diary and, so sorry, I have a prior arrangement. That is the time of my day set aside for reflection!"

At the time of writing that line of reasoning seems eccentric. If one says - using the largely communal mind that is so influenced by what others think - *'I can't deal at the moment with (this or that) problem as ...I'm reflecting'*, it has an odd ring.

It is not as if Western Reflection and Eastern Meditation are in opposition to each another. We can borrow from the best of both traditions. Gurus and profound thinkers have much to offer in terms of guidance and inspiration. The emphasis in the West, to speak in general terms, is different. The two illustrations below could have come out of either way of thinking.



Nothing in these pages should run counter to nostrums which give fulfilment to those seeking Enlightenment or seriously militate against techniques designed to help devotees on that path.

'East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet', Rudyard Kipling² wrote in 'The Ballad of East and West'.

It is often overlooked that the poem continues:

*'...But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,
When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the ends of the
earth!'*

² Rudyard Kipling was a journalist, novelist, poet, and short-story writer. He was born in British India, which inspired much of his work. His works of fiction include the *Jungle Book* duology, *Kim*, the *Just So Stories* and many short stories, including 'The Man Who Would Be King'.

There is an appetite shared by many irrespective of their geographic origin to wonder about the Big Questions of Why We Are Here and other issues, sometimes fascinating, sometimes taxing, in life.

Eastern-style Meditation, in the sense now generally understood, has techniques that range from breathing exercises and mantras to help muffle the ebb and flow of thoughts and they often transport votaries to a far-reaching destination, aiming towards Essence and a reach to the Stars, Finding Yourself, discarding petty concerns, excising individual personality, all come into it. It ideally leads to a peak of joy. Who would say 'No!' to that! Pity the man who wallows for a lifetime in the shallows without dipping a toe into happiness such as this. Some forms of Meditation may bring about all that is claimed of them but ...on occasion might this Wish List be a bridge too far?

There is a great deal to be said, of course, for infusing ourselves into the cosmos-lit uplands that owe much to faiths originating in the East. It is doubtless a top-notch experience, there for the asking, but some people, less ambitious perhaps, might pause a moment. Will the experience follow to order from a belief in this goal? Truly enlightened people know their own exalted minds but many ordinary folk may like to think with care before becoming over-ambitious against what might be their better judgement, once wheeled into action.

But the target! A form of supra-consciousness! Ecstasy? Nirvana! Bliss! Yes, I'll go for it! Unless - perish the heretical thought! - a *soupçon* of self-delusion is involved. Splendid as it is to travel 'there', some people without their realising it may not wise up to the fact that, for them, in Alice B. Toklas's³ phrase, '*When one gets there, there is no there, there!*'

Sir Harold Nicolson⁴, with the eighteenth century in mind, stated:

'Once the sober and excellent organised disciplines of religion are removed, the resultant vacuum is filled by frivolous ideas and cabalistic superstitions'.


One need not be in quite so sceptical a turn of mind but...

Is it *de rigeur* to undergo all the rituals - however pragmatic their basis - of the approved preparation for 'Meditation'?

Take 'clearing the mind' to quiet the onrush and jumble of thoughts that often close in on us when we want to have a stillness of mind: sometimes it is the stillness itself that we want rather than to actually stop our thinking. This deluge of ideas and emotions is what we are often told takes us away from our essence. That may be the case; but why throw the baby out with the bathwater?


³ Alice B. Toklas was an American-born member of the Parisian avant-garde of the early 20th century, and the life partner of American writer Gertrude Stein

⁴ Sir Harold Nicolson KCVO CMG was a British politician, writer, broadcaster and gardener. His wife was Vita Sackville-West

Bola Abimbola

TRANSFORM

What is STILLNESS?

Stillness is the ✨ neutral space ✨
where you disconnect from external
noise and reconnect with the infinite
intelligence within. It's the frequency
where you stop chasing and start
✨ attracting ✨



~ Bola Abimbola
Author of Daily Soul Bytes,
Energy Practitioner
Speaker/Mentor

www.soulpacehealing.com/quantum-healing

Why are our own thoughts such an enemy that we should strive to get rid of them altogether even for a short while? Our stream of consciousness is one of the things that make us human. Feelings are a large part of us. Heart, brain and guts all are in our unique consciousness. It might come from an animating spirit that lies behind physical organs that laboratories identify as a locus. A slowing down of the mind as per much of prescribed Meditation is controversial if taken too far, for all its vogueishness. Thinking is human; and we are human. *'I think, therefore I am'*, says Descartes. Dr Johnson, the great diarist, had a point when decrying a stoppage in the track of thought: *'The cow in the field (if it could talk) would say: here I am in this field with this grass, 'what being could enjoy greater felicity'?''*

What of the idea that we should transcend our ego in Meditation?

One mainstay of oriental meditation is that it is partly designed to uplift a practitioner out of his ego. In trying to do this, one can concentrate more on oneself than normal. One approach is to become aware of one's own body. The concentration on self often goes on to the point where it is easy to fall into the trap of a form of egocentricity (as distinct from 'vanity') by another name. There is a distinction between 'what we are in' and 'who we are' and there is a risk that some 'oriental meditation' can focus attention on the latter question.

Rishika Anya, as reported in *Quora*, is a proponent of meditation; it *'...purifies and replaces (the ego) unifying it with Divine Essence'*. Anya refers to some potential pitfalls:

'...the ego senses its imminent end, and it fights back. That's when the hard work starts. You'll stare into the mirror and not recognize yourself or know exactly how you got there. Your name/career/lifestyle/partner won't fit anymore. You'll see all the toxicity and dysfunction in close relationships and have to struggle with how to handle

them. Friends will sense your new energy and feel threatened by it because it touches on their own lies. They start to drift away and loneliness shows up. The ego will whisper to you it's not worth it. Who did you think you were, anyway, waking up like that? You go to war with yourself.... You will wonder if you're going crazy. There will be dark nights of the soul. You may feel like an alien in your own body and in a sense you are...'

It does not sound like a barrel of laughs!

There is a backlash in some quarters against some of the extreme injunctions of Eastern fashion. Frédéric Lenoir⁵, to give one example, talks of the widescale self-deception of people who wish to deny their emotions and their essential humanity.

There is a vast corpus of philosophical literature in the West, concomitant attitudes and accepted modes of behaviour that are conducive to thinking about the Big Questions of life, about how to lead a rational and a productive life. This includes taking stock of evidence such as there is about the spiritual dimensions. All this goes to an understanding of how to reflect in the Western Way. There is much value in Vedic traditions or Buddhism and so forth but this should not detract from the ideas of great Western teachers. The path of reflection does not lead only down a strict Cartesian line, turning away with indifference from anything that one cannot see with the physical senses.

Is there a difference between the mindset of the East and that of the West?

'The goal of meditation is not to get rid of thoughts or emotions. The goal is to become more aware of your thoughts and emotions and learn how to move through them without getting stuck.'

- Dr Philippe R. Goldin, Professor of clinical neuroscience, University of California

One way or the other, there are arguably differences in the wellspring of thinking that distinguish East from West.

The global village has been urbanised. New age people, South American tribes, people from far afield in the East share cyber-space with the First World when being drawn into Meditation. It can be that our fundamental thinking wells out of a Collective Unconscious, as Carl Jung posited. Straight away, questions arise: if so, is there a single Collective Unconscious? Did it exist when major religions got going and there was no communication between peoples separated by vast distances but striking similarities in the underlying belief systems? Are there different Collective Consciousnesses. Many and controversial may be the supposed differences in the mind-sets of people around the globe.

⁵ Frédéric Lenoir is a French sociologist, philosopher and writer

There are studies on differences between Eastern Meditation and Christian Meditation. In Eastern Meditation, one goal is to empty one's mind with the intention to connect with essential nature. Christian meditation has the goal of filling one's mind with Scripture with the intention to connect with God.

In terms of different personality type, it is held for instance by Christophe Allain⁶ that an alignment of chakras comes more readily to a person of Eastern background when seated without movement whereas this chakra alignment works to better effect in his Western counterpart when engaged in athletic activity.

Whatever the political correctness of it, most people think that in general there are different types of thinking going on in different countries and continents. For present purposes, an authority is Carl Jung. His view was that the oriental psyche is more oriented towards understanding man's nature than the psyche of the Occident which is more directed towards the exterior world. The Orient has a spirituality of self-deliverance centred on Man whereas the mainly Christian Occident is moved more by faith in a divine exterior. The Oriental wants to finalise or complete Man's sense of the world by an affirmation of the spirit that is facing the material world and looks for a true sense in man's nature: Man is the measure of self-realisation. The Occidental faces outward or upward towards Divine revelation. Some Oriental teachers like Lama Chogyam Ripoché in 1971 laid into would-be devotees of Eastern traditions going as far as to refer to *'the spiritual materialism of the Occidentals who 'consume' Oriental spiritualities to nourish their egos like they consume everything else.'*

Vive la Difference!

A question of ego – of who are you and I? – is among the differences in what is here called the Eastern as opposed to the Western approach. Jung wrote:

'It is through our emotions and feelings that we have consciousness of ourselves with the strongest acuteness.'

Reflection affirms a basis in feeling as well as in thinking and aims for clear thought about it; we can work on understanding our feelings and the part they play in motivations.

Charles Dickens wrote in *Great Expectations*:

'Heaven knows we need never be ashamed of our tears, for they are rain upon the blinding dust of earth, overlying our hard hearts. I was better after I had cried, than before - more sorry, more aware of my own ingratitude, more gentle. So subdued I was by those tears, and by their breaking out again in the course of the quiet walk..., and still reflected for my comfort ... while I was occupied with these deliberations...'

⁶ [Christophe Allain](#) wrote in *'Vacuité, contemplation et jouissance de la matière (Spiritualité)'*: *'The degree of man's sleep and unconsciousness today has reached unprecedented levels. He prefers to kill his feeling of life, and ultimately life itself, rather than make his way of functioning all together, which, however, leads him in an obvious way to his downfall.'*

A 'Western' aim of reflection need not be glamorous or ambitious. Common sense and contentment can take precedence over Bliss and Nirvana while we are incarnated as human beings. We can console ourselves that '*All good things come to he who waits.*' We can get our kicks, our ecstasy, elsewhere, without decking it out in exotic robes and philosophies. Contentment is a great boon; we can try harder to appreciate what we have in life.

In 'reflection' in the West, there is not the same emphasis on the perfecting of the self as is the tendency in 'Eastern' approaches; more encouragement is given to a free-wheeling ambit covering a range of subject matter which goes beyond self-absorption.

To quote Susie Woodman in '*Sassy Godmother*':

'There's a huge amount of bullshit around meditation. And a lot of misunderstanding about what meditation actually is and how you do it. It's become much more mainstream in the last twenty years or so. ... some people want to make it prescriptive and mysterious. Something which is basically very simple is in danger of becoming complicated and intimidating.'

Some basic concepts of Western Reflection thinking:

- Language can confuse or clarify basic thought.
- Practical wisdom is of crucial importance in life and can be enhanced by practice
- Mental tics, psychical blocks and culture can divert from a personal True North.
- A clear road map may not indicate the straightest journey to True North.
- To fix a problem, sort out first what exactly it is.
- The morality of an Age may not be a wisdom for all Ages OR for all age groups.
- Shifting sands risk shifting edifices, be they in a mind or the construction trade.
- Lift operators go to the top floor but are privy mainly to what goes on in the lift.
- Reach for only those stars that are within reach.

The emphasis is different from what one might hear if one was in an Ashram being treated to a discourse by the Maharishi.

Many are the academics who have realised the power and purpose of deliberate reflection.

Jenny Moon⁷ has written on reflective learning and the use of learning journals to support professional development. In '*Reflection in Learning and Professional Development: Theory and Practice*' (the word 'practice' there refers to practical work), she defines reflection as a thought process: "[Reflection is] ...a mental process of thinking about what we have done, learned and experienced..." (J Moon, 1999)

⁷ Jenny Moon, an Associate Professor at Bournemouth University, developed a framework for reflective writing, which outlines key differences between descriptive and reflective writing

'Thinking on our feet' (immediate reactive reflection) can solve immediate challenges, whereas critical reflection (i.e. after-the-event proactive reflection) can produce more complex changes for future improvements. Put very simply, thinking about a task as we are doing it can lead to making changes to improve the outcome of the task.

Reflection can help us:

- Understand our own strengths and weaknesses, and become better learners,
 - Encourage and plan development of our capabilities,
- Adopt and apply Reflective Practice in the workplace, in professional situations, so that:
 - Very serious risks are minimised,
 - Quality on a wide scale is optimised,
 - Others adopt and use similar Reflective Practice methods,
- And ongoing improvement and risk avoidance become deeply embedded into organisational culture, to avoid stagnation and encourage innovation.

We can start using Reflective Practice by simply (and mindfully, intentionally) thinking about things that have happened in our lives, whether in a personal or professional situation. We can reflect in lots of different ways on a range of different events or experiences that are important to us. Using Reflective Practice does not require any extra time.. For example, on our journey home from work or study, (especially on public transport when we don't need to concentrate on traffic) we can devote a little time to consider things that happened during the day.

We can reflect while walking the dog, doing the washing-up or ironing, mowing the lawn, cleaning, and even when watching TV – you'll be surprised at how much time is spent sitting in front of a TV not actually engaged with what's on the screen, just day-dreaming, in a trance. Instead, we can use and build on these moments to trigger deliberate reflection. During this process be mindful of the requirements to:

- Reflect at the right time – Reflect at appropriate times in relation to any experiences which are stressful or intense (intense experiences need a cooling-off period before 'cold' reflection is possible).
- Balance subjective and objective reflection – Be aware of the difference between your subjective reflection and your objective reflection – both are useful and relevant, but you must understand what is subjective and what is objective, and you must strive to balance each in arriving at the most helpful and clear overall understanding.
- Understand how and why you think in the way you do - generally and about specific things - this is 'metacognition' – ("Awareness and understanding of one's own thought processes.")
- Seek external clarifications - external references, advice, information, clarifications, facts, figures - especially where you believe that your thinking is not factual enough or are not fully informed about situations. (See heuristics tendencies within Nudge

Theory⁸, which offer helpful alerts to our natural human vulnerability to making assumptions, blind faith, unsupported fears, following the crowd, etc).

- Consider your personal role and responsibilities – examine your strengths, skills and development needs (for example assess your multiple intelligences to understand your different skills and abilities – and perhaps find new ones)

There is more to Reflection than meets the eye. It is part of the preparation in some Universities for training the mind, indeed it is an academic discipline in its own right. As such, it might be the thing for you to take it seriously, practise it. Let it become a habit so that one does not have to consciously to put oneself in 'the right mood'.

What is involved in reflection

Reflection is largely about cultivating the right attitude, about practising, forming the habit of thinking things over, thinking them through as best as one is able.

One can be unflinchingly honest with oneself. No one else is present to express disapproval. One's own understanding, as opposed to soaking up unfiltered views of others, helps the process of thinking to be unclouded as far as possible by too much prejudice and emotion.

Many thoughts rise to the forefront of the mind, no doubt from a subconscious realm unless one posits the idea of inspiration coming to one from outside oneself - when one is sitting quietly thinking, contemplating...

One needs to make time for this. If it is seen as an important thing to do, making time for it will be that much easier.

The West has a vantage point on Reflection that also has been long in the brew. Westerners too have a vantage point on cogitation. There are so many things in Western culture, long and hard fought for in the past, that we are in danger of forgetting. Perhaps we have had it too easy for too long; perhaps we are not vigilant enough in defending freedoms.

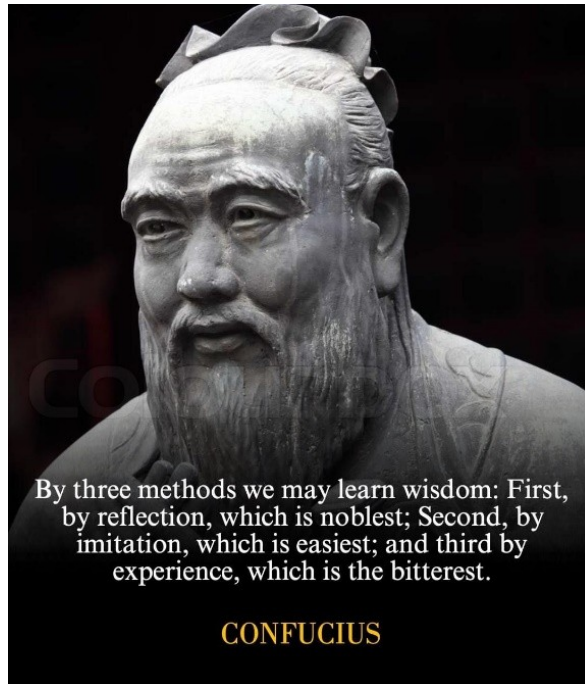
To touch the tip of a tip of an iceberg given that so much can be said on this subject, not just in books but whole libraries and lifetimes' worth of study, here are some quotations:

Marcus Aurelius⁹ wrote '*Meditations*' but it can be described as '*Reflections*'.

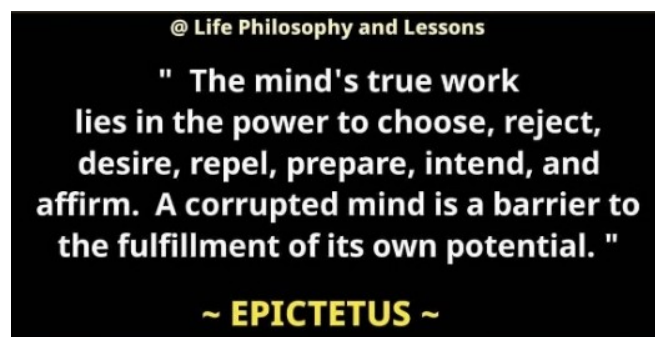
Or.....

⁸ 'Nudge theory', popularized by Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein, suggests that small, subtle changes in how choices are presented can significantly influence people's decisions and behaviors, without restricting freedom of choice.

⁹ Marcus Aurelius was Roman emperor from 161 to 180AD and a Stoic philosopher.



Or....



Or...The success of Fontenelle¹⁰ was due partly to his handling with a light touch subjects that until then were for long-faced pedants. His Dialogues contained juvenilia, or worse it is sometimes said, but taken in the round his attitude led to much rethinking about the mind-set of the day. He was not mesmerised by tradition. One has only to think of the contemporary doctrinaire attitudes to religion. He thought for himself, much as is being advocated afresh in these pages.

¹⁰ Bernard Le Bouyer de Fontenelle (1657-1757) was a French author and an influential member of three of the academies of the Institut de France, noted especially for his accessible treatment of scientific topics during the unfolding of the Age of Enlightenment.

Commentators had taken Cato's¹¹ suicide as one mark of his greatness but Fontenelle reflected on the story and concluded the suicide was merely about sullenness and vanity. He was seen by some in French pre-revolutionary drawing rooms as a vapid, if witty, dilettante and he had to fight to get into the *Académie Française* but when he achieved his ambition, he saw the key issue and he knew where to stop.

Socrates said with what may seem like unction: *'The unexamined life is not worth living.'*

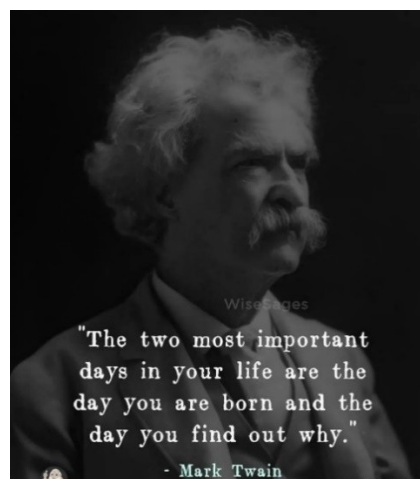
Surely one does not have to go quite as far as that? There are plenty of achievers who never ask themselves why they are doing what they are doing. It is enough to say that one ought to think carefully about what one is doing.

If we think we're up to date in our thinking, there is a good chance that we have been pipped at the post several centuries ago. 'Philosophy' was in its infancy when Plato signposted a path but we can just as easily say: *"Life is an awfully strange can of worms or wonders."* Separated by time and cultural tides, we are of the same clay as was Plato. 'He was a man for all that!' Some of us – if we've pretensions to be sentient let alone cerebral – hanker to get to the bottom of profound Mystery, or at any rate to whatever bottom we can delve down to.

The ancients may not necessarily have put things better than you and I but like the friends to whom we often feel closest, they got in there first. There are no end of possible citations in this field. Cue Plato:

"Philosophy begins in wonder"

In philosophy we can be lazily relaxed in both mind and body, and this endangers our well-being. Laziness in mind is a threat to proper philosophising.'

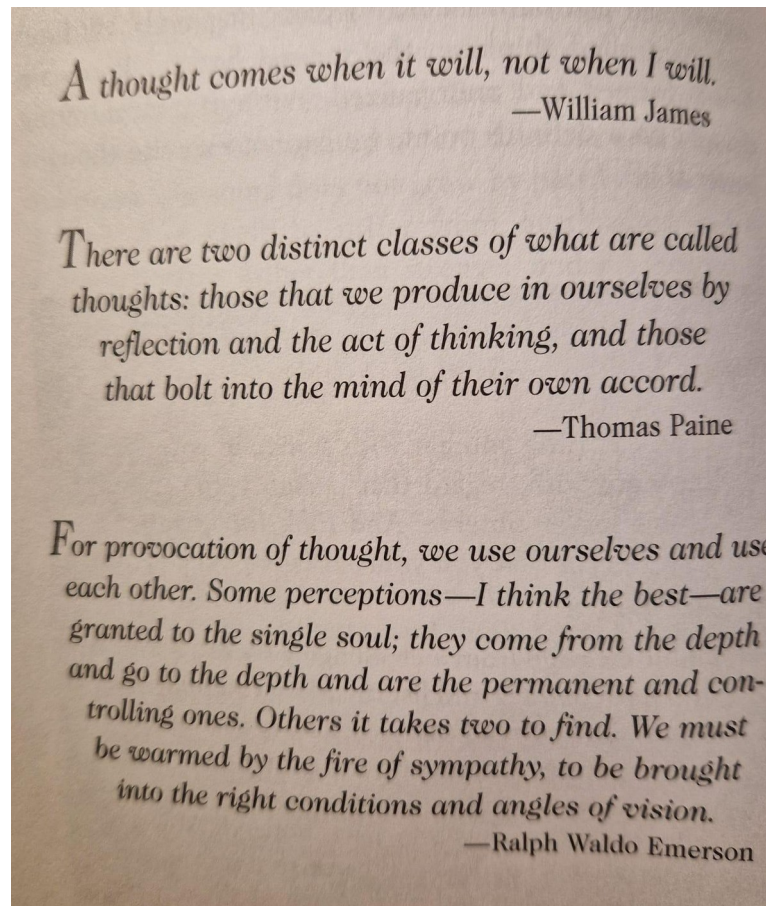


We don't want to reinvent the wheel, especially in a square shape. It is often as well to think about what is said by those who think things logically through to a *reductio ad absurdum*. It is comforting to know that there are professionals on the case. It is in any case not easy to think anything up on this subject that is genuinely 'new'.

¹¹ Cato the Younger was an influential conservative Roman senator during the late Republic

There are so many ideas that have tended towards the idea of reflection in Western culture.

Or....



Some age old, wise - and sometimes maybe not so wise – precepts could be reconsidered.

It was an axiom of Anglo-Saxon culture that a man should fight to the death to uphold the right of another to hold principles with which he totally disagrees. This cornerstone is under attack partly through an indifference to this hard-won freedom. It is an aim of the Institute of Reflection that in a small way it can help restore generally tolerant open-mindedness.

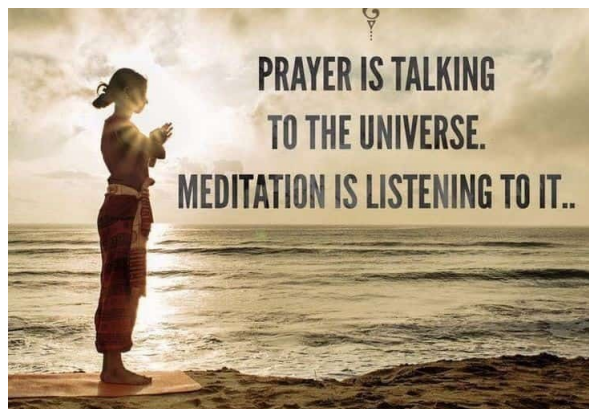
The goal of being able to direct personal thoughts and then rise above them as an observer, see them for what they are, re-evaluate them much as we can do in dreams and recall them in wakefulness, may tell us enough of what we need or want to know about ...ourselves, both individually and as a species. It is a far cry from the notion that arose mainly in Oriental lands that we need to rid ourselves of our ego, our human feelings, and gravitate to our true essence and our ethereal Home. In the West, our personality tends to be seen as an integral part of us - our 'lower nature' perhaps - and though we can try and rise above it we rarely see fit to completely shed it.

When we sink into meditative trances or attempting to reflect on what matters in life the better to attain self-awareness, we can make a start by asking ourselves if this is the one and only true goal.

What is it that makes 'me' tick? What is important to us and our loved ones, or makes the best use of the gifts with which we are personally endowed? We may for instance see a need to fuse a perspective of the long-term with exigencies that arise day by day. This may provide ample matter on which justifiably to reflect.

There are advantageous repercussions in any given context of forming the habit of quietly thinking by and for oneself. They may not necessarily lie in the specific conclusions reached during a process of reflecting but in the habit acquired. The more one does something the better at it one gets. Few people think of training intuition but most agree that it comes from one knows not where and quietness of mind can help coax it to the surface of the mind. One can train the mind as well as the memory. Enhancing intuition is not to be done from one day to the next. Spirituality and comparable intangibles fall into the same category; there is more chance that they can be brought into the open by concentration.

There is an emphasis in the reflective tenor of the Western mind on probability rather than on certainty. There may be no certainty almost anywhere in life and usually the most that is to be hoped for is probability. The likelihood is that the forming of a habit can lead on to the habit becoming second nature.



There are ways in which the validity of principles and understandings, especially those that are personal, are best curated by ourselves so that we can live better-adjusted lives without need to follow some Faith or lifestyle prescribed by Teachers.

Hard-won hallmarks of civilised thinking such as open-mindedness, respect for others, care in thought and so forth should be kept clearly in mind. The best habits of mind are rarely a quick fix. Thinking things over may result in better life choices and attitudes.

This approach should reinforce an understanding of our place in this world and what might be the Hereafter, or as much about them as can be reasonably surmised. It can

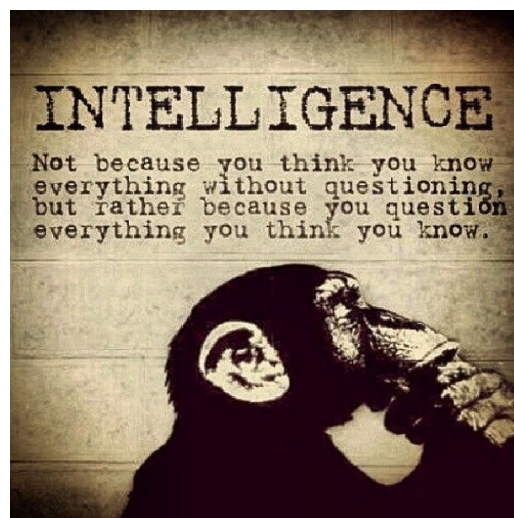
help to query 'fixed' landmarks in some of society's root concepts, and enhance personal fulfilment, peace and happiness.

It is a sceptical starting point from which to reflect on trends.

We should be as certain as possible about why we want to do things.

A large part of why some people like to meditate is because they recognise a need to set apart a space to do an unostentatious thing, reflection. How many of those who go in for a Meditation Session separate this goal from what they might have wanted to achieve, unschooled and uninfluenced by others? Reflection in the ordinary sense of the word can be the ingredient that takes one where one really wants to go. It has no need to call into play all the *bruhaha* of cult or ritual.

People like a 'purpose' that is respectable, justifiable. The *fons et origo* of their wish can be to simply to sit quietly and reflect on life. Meditation as a practice can come from that deep-seated wish. It may be that we tend to conflate a fashionable idea about meditation with this humbler goal of what we may wish to achieve. A prejudice has crept in against, for instance, silently staring into space but it is fine today to say 'I am doing my Meditation'. We may not be following our own wish as much as we like to think when we go in for Meditation with all its bells and whistles.



Reflection makes no grand claims of itself. It is not like people in gaudy attire giving a large flaunting themselves to grab attention. Unobtrusive types in the background can be overlooked despite having valuable ideas.

Reflection: is a staple of our *persona*, a 'given' part of how we 'are'. It comes into intuition which is not taught in schools where curricula concentrate on intellectual pursuits. We are so familiar with it that there is no need to think about it, or we think. Will you reflect on the *idea* that you reflect for more than a moment? Moods and duties get in the way of doing it but because you are reading these lines and not otherwise occupied, might this might be a good a time?

