

"Acem Meditation improves performance"

Alfred I. H. Chien, Professor of Sports Psychology

Alfred Chien is deceptively modest. Even at the time when he was learning Acem Meditation in Taipei 16 years ago, he was a soft-spoken man who asked simple questions. It was not immediately apparent to some one meeting him for the first time that he was Taiwan's leading authority on sports psychology or that he was an accomplished professor who often appeared in the newspapers and on radio and television. In the words of the old Chinese proverb, "A True Man does not reveal his worth."

Oasis of silence

Dr. Chien has been President of Acem Taiwan since its foundation in 1986. Since that time, he and his team have often invited Acem instructors from Scandinavia to give lectures and courses in Taipei. On several occasions, he has made the long journey to Scandinavia to participate in retreats and seminars, and so have a number of his fellow countrymen. Just last spring, Dr. Chien opened Acem's new premises in central Taipei, a place that he refers to with a smile as an oasis of silence in a city of noise. This coming spring, Acem Taiwan, in collaboration with Acem Travels, will hold its second weeklong international retreat near the idyllic village of Puli.

"Acem Meditation has taught me how to listen to my body," says Dr. Chien. "By closing my eyes and letting thoughts and feelings pass freely, I can relax my body and become more aware of it. In my work, I often have to pay close attention to the needs of others, but I have recently come to realize that I have to maintain a balance between my own needs and the needs of my associates. For my personal

wellbeing, and for the sake of my wife and my sons, I have to draw the line somewhere. Acem Meditation has helped me to relax when I need to and, at the same time, has made me more effective in my work."

In the literature of Ancient China, one often encounters tales of sages who try to escape from the duties of officialdom but who, because of their universally recognized abilities, are eventually persuaded to serve the state. In a similar way, Alfred Chien never applied for a job in Taichung, but for several years there, he was in charge of Taiwan's most prestigious college of physical education. He never sought office in the Ministry of Education either, but



Alfred Chien

he spent five years there as the Director of the Department of Physical Education. In both cases, he was persuaded to accept the posts, though he had initially refused. Two years ago, the same thing happened again after he had returned to his teaching position at National Taiwan Normal University. He now serves there as the Dean of the College of Sports and Recreation.

Patience and persistence

Because of the stress of his everyday life, patience and quiet

persistence are now his most valued qualities. Acem Meditation, he says, has helped him to achieve a more harmonious balance between the responsibilities of his work and his private life. At a recent public lecture entitled *Acem Meditation, Another Way Out of Stress*, Alfred Chien was one of the speakers.

As part of his work, Professor Chien has taken an interest in the use of relaxation techniques to benefit athletes. He believes that they can maximize fitness by meditating either before or after training sessions and that they also perform better if they meditate before competitions. He knows, from his own experience, that meditation can reduce stress and improve a person's performance.

Although Dr. Chien comes from a culture with a long and established meditative tradition, he has chosen to learn Acem Meditation, which originated in Norway. In essence, he made this choice because most traditional meditation techniques are meant to confirm some religious tenet or metaphysical system.

Acem Meditation goes beyond the boundaries of conventional religion and is based on an open attitude that does not presuppose a specific world-view. The focus in Acem, says Dr. Chien, is on the physiological effects and the long-term psychological process.

Some of Dr. Chien's associates expressed alarm when he first told them about his meditation. The Chinese word for meditation can also be used to refer to political demonstrations.

He chuckles to himself as he says, "That was before the lifting of martial law in Taiwan, and my friends were afraid that I might have to go to jail!"

From “I want” to “I demand”

Contemporary culture has a tendency to idealize demands and strong expressions of emotion. It is as if the stronger the expression, the more justified the demand or the emotion. Acem Meditation counteracts this tendency and helps us find better compromises between our own needs and the needs of our surroundings.

In Acem Meditation, as in everyday life, we have a tendency to treat feelings of need or want as though they were justified demands. Emotions that appear are often given a ring of absolute truth. However, both the meditation technique itself and the framework within which the technique is taught contain elements that counteract this tendency to treat our demands and strong emotions as though they were absolute and justified.

Demanding more

Groups or individuals that are seen as weak — because they have no power, little money or low prestige — are often encouraged to press their demands. They are less often encouraged to increase their own efforts to make personal changes.

In countless newspapers, advisers' columns often tell people to listen to their own needs. The predominant political approach tends to support this mentality, and so do the theories of many psychologists. When one encounters people who have participated in awareness groups, one often hears, “I have realized that I adapt myself too much to others and suppress my own feelings.” It is far less common to meet someone who says, “I have realized that I demand too much, and that I am too preoccupied with myself.”

Many meditation movements promote a similar attitude to the one discussed above. Their focus is on what individuals feel, or how pure, spiritual or refined their consciousness is. This focus easily becomes an individualistic approach that ignores social conditions. From such a perspective, responsibility for others may be experienced as a disturbance.

Are strong emotions true?

Many people, especially those who grew up in the 1960s, tend to favour

strong emotional expressions. More nuanced expressions, ones that leave room for ambivalence and personal reservations, are perceived as weak or vague.

This is a tendency which romanticizes the primitive element. Emotions that appear in regressive states, such as dreams, are thought to be more original and true. These, it is said, are more justified. One might, for example, say to one's partner, “In my dream, it became clear to me how hurt I feel!” — as if the dream itself were proof that one had been wronged.

Strong primitive emotions are less ambiguous and, therefore, easier to relate to. For this reason, they can be thought of as truer and more sincere. The truth is, however, that most emotional matters are so complex that, to understand them fully, one has to allow for the existence of nuances. Even if this approach appears to make the whole question more complicated, it is still necessary.

Unresolved matters

Our culture's tendency to idealize demands and strong emotions forms the cultural ballast that we carry with us, and it appears in the various moods which express themselves in our meditation. To a large extent, these moods are manifestations of unresolved mental issues. In order to induce a process of personality development, meditation must be able to provide a contact with the irrational.

In essence, our character traits are compromises between our own needs and the need to adapt to our surroundings. Bringing up a child involves setting limits. The child has to relinquish its own needs and, because of this, experiences a sense of privation. For any number of reasons, such compromises can be painful. For instance, the establishing of limits may occur too late and therefore come as a shock to the

child, or the limits may have been imposed without sufficient consistency or clarity. In other cases, the child may have been forced, at a certain point, to relinquish too much, or perhaps the limits have been set in too aggressive a way.

All children have, to varying degrees, experienced feelings of privation. Sooner or later, these feelings reappear in one's meditation, not as memories of childhood events, but as emotions tied to present circumstances.

When we explore the emotions and moods that take shape in meditation, we enter into our *inner* world, a world that does not necessarily relate in any way to external reality or social issues. The emotions we experience in meditation often give us, instead, a deeper understanding of ourselves and how our perception of the present has been shaped by earlier experiences. The strong imperative moods that our contemporary culture identifies as our most sincere and justified states of mind, are often those which have been distorted by our own past experiences. Understanding this can reduce our tendency to construe the feelings that occur during meditation as absolute truth.

Performance and guidance

There are also elements in the actual performance of meditation that counteract such a tendency. Actively pursuing moods and emotions instead of returning to the repetition of the meditation sound represents a psychological hang-up, a kind of concentration that leads to stagnation and not to growth. Most meditators have experienced this temptation in their own practice when they encounter a feeling that appears so important to them that they are reluctant to return to the repetition of their meditation sound. Returning to that repetition, even under the

influence of strong emotions, is a sign that one is able to relate in an active way to one's own impulses, that one can mobilize his or her efforts to seek an adult presence and not simply be overwhelmed by those impulses. When our repetition becomes supple, and we have established a free mental attitude, strong feelings can appear without having to be suppressed. If we can achieve this goal, then we have learned to live with our emotions and feelings of privation in a new way.

In the performance of meditation, the meditator should be more concerned with what he or she is actually doing than with the achievement of any particular feeling or states of mind. In guidance, therefore, a practitioner of Acem Meditation must work for a long time with technical questions, with such issues as how he or she should repeat the meditation sound in different situations. Only when this focus has been established can one begin to use a guidance session to discuss the content of one's meditation.

With the help of an instructor, one can then begin to explore his or her inner world and find those elements that distort one's experience and turn emotions into imperative states of mind. Our goal is to become aware of feelings of privation and other unresolved problems without turning them into demands that we feel must be met. By allowing such feelings to come into view, without being passively overwhelmed by them, we may be able to reconcile our own inner conflicts and create new and better compromises between old feelings of privation and the pressing demands of the outside world.

Translated by Nina Tjomsland and J.G. Hubbard. Maria Gjems-Onstad works as a Clinical Psychologist and is a Meditation Teacher in Acem.

Questions for discussion

1. How can you recognize, in yourself and in others, a tendency to turn feelings of need into excessive demands?
2. What is meant by the idealization of strong emotional expressions?
3. What do we mean when we say that moods and emotions in

meditation belong to our inner world, and that these moods tell us more about ourselves and the way we experience the present than they tell us about external reality?

4. How does Acem Meditation counteract the tendency to endow strong emotions with absolute truth?

Next summer's
main Acem event:

Acem International Meditation Retreat 2003

**With Dr. Are Holen,
founder of Acem**

**July 12-20, 2003
Location: The Agricultural
University of Norway**

This will be the first event of its kind. Four hundred meditators from around the world will gather for one week of meditation and reflection, social interaction, and intensive discussions.

The programme will include:

- long meditations and guidance
 - afternoon seminars on existential issues, health, lifestyle, and organizational matters
 - evening talks and group discussions on the psychology of meditation
- awareness training relating to body, breath, space and interpersonal relations
- yoga and group dynamics

The Agricultural University of Norway is situated in beautiful peaceful surroundings and is approximately 30 km south of Oslo. The retreat will be followed by an optional four-day tour of some of Norway's most scenic places.

Professor Halvor Eifring Becomes A Meditation Teacher in Acem

Professor Halvor Eifring, who is in charge of Acem's international activities, has been appointed to the position of meditation teacher. At present, Acem has approximately two hundred instructors, but there are only twelve meditation teachers. The role of these teachers is to supervise the teaching activities of the organization and to develop a psychology of meditation.

Dr. Eifring is forty-one years old and a professor of Chinese at the University of Oslo. He has been a visiting scholar at Harvard, at Princeton, at Peking University, and at the National University of Taiwan.

He has lectured at more than 20 universities around the world, including Stanford, UCLA, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and the Academia Sinica.



Halvor Eifring

In his capacity as an eminent Sinologist, Dr. Eifring has been requested to provide information about China to the King and Queen of Norway and to the Prime Minister and other members of the Cabinet.

Dr. Eifring has practised Acem Meditation since 1976, and since 1979, he has instructed more than a thousand students in Acem Meditation.

In 1985, he established Acem activities in Taiwan; since that time, he has taught and lectured on Acem Meditation in many different parts of the world.



Practising other kinds of meditation?

If you are already an adept practitioner of a type of meditation that uses sound or mantra, you will probably find that the transition to Acem Meditation is easy and rewarding. Such a transition is facilitated by the advanced degree of psychological understanding that accompanies the teaching of meditation in Acem. Even experienced practitioners of all types of meditation who have turned to Acem Meditation have found that it enhances the long-term effects of regular meditation.

For more information on this topic, please contact Acem International.

No Acem centre in your country?

Do you want to invite an Acem instructor to your country or city? If you would like to arrange a course, and think that you will be able to gather a number of participants, it may be possible for Acem International to send an instructor to your location. Although funds may be available to cover the instructor's international travel expenses, other costs, such as rentals, advertisements, and accommodations for the instructor, will have to be covered locally through course fees.

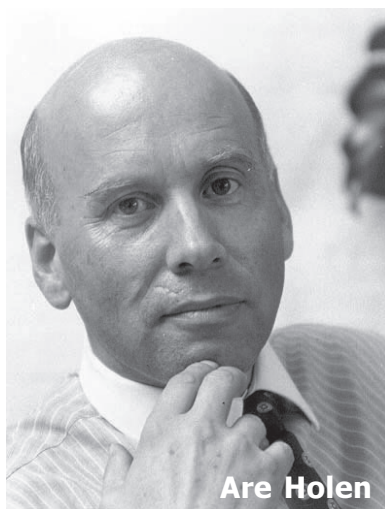
For additional information, contact Acem International.

International Summer Retreat in Norway with Dr. Are Holen, Founder of Acem

July 13-20, 2002
Skaugumåsen Retreat Centre
- near Oslo

Some people come to recharge their batteries. Others seek a change of direction in their lives. This year's summer retreat in Norway will provide an excellent opportunity to make full use of the potential of Acem Meditation.

This retreat for practitioners of Acem Meditation will be led by Dr. Are Holen, who founded Acem in 1966 at the age of 20, and who still heads the international organization. His evening talks will explore new facets of the psychology of meditation and offer participants a



Are Holen

renewed approach to ways of looking at meditation and at life. All who are present will be encouraged to ask questions relevant to their own meditative practice. During the retreat, Dr. Holen will also give instructions in awareness training as it relates to body, breath, space, and inter-personal relations.

Skaugumåsen is Acem's main retreat centre, located in a scenic area only 20 minutes by train or car from Oslo; it is also easily accessible from Oslo Airport. The centre lies

The Acem School of Meditation is a non-profit organization which helps people develop existentially by means of a mindful, reflective process known as Acem Meditation.

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at the edge of the Vestmarka forest, with its fascinating network of footpaths and bicycle trails. Along with other meditators, you can take a swim in the idyllic lake Semsvannet nearby, and without too much effort, you can climb hilltops that give you a panoramic view of the city of Oslo and Oslo Fjord. The natural beauty of the location forms an ideal backdrop for meditative activities. The retreat is expected to draw participants from Scandinavia and from a variety of other countries. There will be first-timers as well as meditators who are in the habit of spending a week at an Acem retreat every summer. Easy exercises in group dynamics will bring participants closer together and provide a basis for self-reflection.

Experienced Acem instructors will offer daily guidance sessions. In general, extended meditation practice will expose deep layers of stress and tension, and these will gradually give way to a calmer frame of mind. Yoga classes will help to make the body more receptive.

Participants from outside of Scandinavia will pay a course fee of only EUR 435 / USD 385 including board (lacto-vegetarian menu) and lodging (regular course fee EUR 725 / USD 640 - all fees are subject to changes that result from fluctuations in currency rates).