

# MEDITATION

## Monks of the Ramakrishna Order



meditation





***MONKS OF THE  
RAMAKRISHNA ORDER***

**Meditation**



**Sri Ramakrishna Math  
Mylapore, Madras 600 004**

Published by :  
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Sri Ramakrishna Math,  
Mylapore, Madras 600 004.

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Nineth Impression  
IX-5M 3C-10-92  
ISBN 81-7120-046-X

Printed in India at  
Sri Ramakrishna Math Printing Press,  
Mylapore, Madras 600 004.



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## *Publisher's Preface*

*Eight new chapters have been added to this third edition of a book which many have found helpful to the practice of meditation.*

*In this volume senior monks of the Ramakrishna Order discuss methods of meditation as found in the Upanishads. As they show us, meditation is not so simple as some Eastern teachers appear to indicate; nor is it as difficult as Westerners sometimes suppose.*

*Most of the teachings were given first as lectures and informal discourses and the reader will see how directly, in some cases, they are addressed to the circle of listeners. We have preserved this intimate style.*

The Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre  
Bourne End, Buckinghamshire

## *Biographical Notes*

**Swami Adiswarananda** is Head of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York. Born in West Bengal, he joined the Monastic Order of Sri Ramakrishna in 1954. Before being sent by the Order to the United States in 1968, he was Joint-Editor of the Order's English-language monthly magazine *Prabuddha Bharata* (Awakened India) prior to which, he served in one of the Colleges of the Order.

**Swami Ashokananda** (1893-1969) was born and educated in what is now Bangladesh, he became a school-teacher for a short period, during which time he endeavoured to put into practice Swami Vivekananda's principles of service to God in man, in a community of cobblers. He joined the Ramakrishna Order in 1920 and served chiefly as Editor of its magazine *Prabuddha Bharata*, before being posted to San Francisco in 1932. There, as Head of the Vedanta Society of Northern California, he revived the Monastery, founded a Convent and started what is now the Vedanta Society of Berkeley and Sacramento.

**Swami Bhavyananda** is President and Swami-in-Charge of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre in Buckinghamshire and Editor of *Vedanta for East and West*. The Swami was born in Bangalore in 1917, he joined the Ramakrishna Order in 1942 after finishing his studies in medicine and worked at the Centres in Karachi, Brindavan and Shillong before taking up his post here in England on the retirement of Swami Ghanananda in 1969. The Swami has appeared on television and is in frequent demand as a speaker on the platforms of the Interfaith Movement. He is also frequently invited to give talks at colleges and monasteries of different Christian Orders. His advice and experience are constantly sought in countries where at present there is no monk of the Ramakrishna Order. Swami Bhavyananda has organised many retreats at the Centre, inviting as speakers senior Swamis of the Order.



**Swami Ghanananda** (1898-1969) was Founder and Head of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre of London, which he started in 1948, having served in various capacities in the Order's Centres in India, Ceylon, Mauritius and the United States. He also visited South Africa. He was born near Trivandrum in Kerala, and when he had finished his studies at college, he joined the Order in 1920. For twenty-one years Swami Ghanananda taught in London, in the provinces and on the Continent. He founded the bimonthly *Vedanta for East and West*, for which he wrote many articles and also published three books. He was a potent influence in the lives of many students of Vedanta.

**Swami Gnaneswarananda** (1893-1937) was Founder and Head of the Vedanta Society of Chicago, Illinois. A man of great personal charm, he was a powerful speaker and an inspiring musician as well. He published a book of devotional songs in Bengali. The present Bangladesh was the land of his birth and upbringing, on graduating from college he joined the Order in 1917. The Swami was active in many fields of its work and in 1922 established a Centre at Patna, where his selfless love for all endeared him to the populace. Having first served the Vedanta Society of New York for two years, he went to Chicago to found the Centre. There he gave many lectures and published a volume of prayers and meditations, before passing on at the early age of forty-four.

**Swami Nityabodhananda**, President of the Centre Vedantique of Geneva for the past twenty-five years, was born at Trichur, Kerala, in 1914. After graduating from Madras University in 1934 he took Sannyas in 1946. In the following years the Swami became Assistant Editor and Editor of *Vedanta Kesari* until 1949, when he served at the Rangoon Branch of the Mission. In 1951 he became President of the Rajahmundry Math, Andhra State until 1956 when he was posted to the Centre Vedantique, Gretz, France, acting as Assistant Minister



for two years. Swami Nityabodhananda who is the author of six books in French and of one in English, is well known for his articles in the magazines of the Order. The Swami is Editor of the monthly publication in French, *Commentaires sur le Yoga-Vedanta*.

**Swami Pavitrananda** was head of the Vedanta Society, New York, from 1951 until his death in November 1977. An initiated disciple of Swami Brahmananda, the Swami was for nearly 24 years closely and continuously associated with the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati and its Publications branch in Calcutta. He was Editor of *Prabuddha Bharata* from 1931 for 4 years and in 1947 was made a Trustee and Governing Body member of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.

**Swami Ritajananda** was born in 1906 in South India. Entering the Ramakrishna Math and Mission in 1931, he served subsequently in Deoghar, Colombo, and Madras. In 1954 the Swami was called to the United States, where he worked as Assistant Minister at the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center in New York and at the Vedanta Society of Southern California in Hollywood. In 1961 Swami Ritajananda was appointed President of the Centre Vedantique at Gretz, France, a position he holds at the present time. He is author of a standard biography of Swami Turiyananda and has published a translation of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, rendered directly into French from Sanskrit. The Swami is well known as a lecturer and spiritual advisor in France and many other countries on the Continent.

**Swami Swahananda** is Head of the Vedanta Society of Southern California in Hollywood. Born in Sylhet, now in Bangladesh, in 1921, he was educated in Calcutta and joined the Order in 1947. He worked as a Lecturer at the Belur Math College under the University of Calcutta, and was Editor of the *Vedanta Kesari* in Madras. The Swami has translated and is also



the author of several books. He was Head of the Ramakrishna Mission in New Delhi before going to the United States in 1968, first to San Francisco and Berkeley, then to Hollywood in 1976, where the Centre runs two monasteries, two convents and a publications center.

## *Introduction*

# THE CONTEXT OF MEDITATION

*Swami Bhavyananda*

Before we begin a detailed study of the practice and theory of meditation we must consider the context in which this pursuit is to take place. Success in meditation is closely related to peaceful living. For meditation to be fruitful, the mind must be calm, and if the mind is to be calm we must conduct our normal life and activities in a peaceful way.

A prayerful attitude in relation to work is most helpful; whatever activity we may be involved in, we must practise awareness of the Divine Presence in every situation. You may say that this is difficult to do in the midst of occupations which require our full attention. Granted, but it is also a fact that as soon as a preoccupying activity is completed, we can return our mind to the Presence of God. And if we are honest we will discover that many tasks do not require the full attention which we give them, thereby wasting much of our time. Just before and after sleep; while engaged in manual work, such as serving or cleaning; attending to some of our bodily needs—all these are times which we could transform into a kind of conscious prayer and remembrance of God. Introducing the act of remembering God into our daily occupations helps to prevent many a distracting thought seeking entrance to our mind. Many useless and sometimes damaging desires come up which can be easily stifled thereby.

By these methods the mind becomes tuned to the meditative mood; when we sit for the practice of meditation at the appointed hours, it easily becomes stilled and concentrated. Disturbance from outside (in the form of sense-perceptions) or from inside (from the sub-conscious) can be easily turned aside.

Thus may a regulated, deliberately planned, daily routine assist us in improving our interior life. One of the Desert Fathers records his reflections on the subject as follows: "The Science of Sciences and the Art of Arts is the capacity to master harmful thoughts. The method and remedy against them is to watch with God's help for appearance of their suggestion and always to keep the thought pure. Just as we protect our physical eye, watching sharply for anything which might injure it and not letting even a speck of dust come near it." For attaining concentrated meditation on God, unrelenting watch over our daily thought-habits is essential—over our words, actions, thoughts, character and heart. This is what Shri Krishna tells us in Chapter VI of the *Bhagavad-Gita*:

"By such constant and steadfast application a person subdues the mind and attains the peace that resides in Me, the peace that passeth understanding.

"Yoga is not for him who eats too much nor for him who eats too little. It is not for him who sleeps too much or too little. For him who is temperate in food and recreation, temperate in his exertion at work, and temperate in sleep, yoga puts an end to all sorrows." (vs. 16-17).

Those who have been practising meditation are surely aware of how much effort has to be put into the process. It is the nature of the mind to flit from one perception to another, and it is truly difficult to place it where one wants it and to keep it restrained. Whether we care to admit it or not, the condition of the mind depends much upon the condition of the body. It will be no exaggeration to say that unless the latter is kept in a healthy and manageable condition, to steady the mind will be virtually impossible.

In the above verses we are told how to deal with the physical side of our organism so as to keep it in reasonably good shape. Food is essential for the upkeep of the body, but if the quantity is too much, or the quality too rich, our blood and energies will be kept at the stomach level only. Concentration of the blood supply at the stomach level drains it away from the brain and

makes it dull. Over-eating and steady mental effort are poor companions. On the other hand, meditation is not possible for a starving man, and an undernourished brain can never make the fine discriminations required for spiritual life. Swami Vivekananda used to say, "Religion is not for empty-stomachs; first food and then religion. To the hungry, God comes in the form of food." Buddha, after passing through severe austerities, adopted and taught a moderate path as regards food. With respect to sleep, too much makes one dull and indulgent. On the other hand, too much of keeping vigil may cause us to be sleepy throughout the day, endangering our work; or peevish and a source of irritation to others. Keeping regular hours of sleep reinvigorates and gives rest to the brain. Not only regulated food and sleep, but regulated recreation and work have their place in our normal everyday life; they are especially helpful in the pursuit of meditation, with which we aim to make spiritual progress. We must take advantage of all these aids and at the same time avoid all hindering obstacles.

One who sits for meditation with such preparation of body and mind naturally gets his mind quickly calm and steady. Undistracted meditation becomes easy and natural. "Like the flame of a candle, undisturbed by any breeze," the *Gita* tells us in another place. The example has a special significance here. Mind, when concentrated on God, is intrinsically luminous. It is in that light that one perceives the all-pervading Reality. It is the Light of Knowledge: steady, bright and one-pointed.

Of what avail are prayer and *japa* (repetition of a holy name) in implementing our life of meditation? For those who believe in God both of these are very effective means of achieving mental concentration and experiencing the Divine Awareness. Prayer need not always take a formal expression; one can talk to God in a most direct way, opening one's heart to Him as one would to a trusted friend. With no reservations and with no receptive barriers, one should converse with his Lord. Prayers to Him should be direct and issuing from the heart.



Jesus told his disciples that men ought always to pray. He himself was always in prayer. We often forget this. Prayer, for any spiritually-minded person, is no part-time occupation. For a man who has faith in God, all activities are prayers of a sort—walking, sitting, working, eating, playing. Such a man lives, like Brother Lawrence, in the presence of God, and his actions are offerings of prayer unto Him. In Christianity, various *mantras*, holy names and words, are used for *japa*. The name of Jesus itself is a *mantra*. The now familiar “Jesus Prayer” of the Eastern Church, “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me,” is another. St. Francis used to sit up all night, saying, “My God and my All, my God and my All,” in ecstasy. Jesus constantly remembered his Heavenly Father. Without taking God’s name—*Abba*, Father—he did not initiate undertakings. *Abba* was his last prayer at Gethsemane, his last word on the Cross. Repetition of a *mantra* should also be especially practised at fixed times by all spiritual aspirants.

In any system of meditation, prayer and *japa* have a very important part to play. Of course some persons may be able to concentrate their minds on the higher Self, even without *japa*, as Patanjali<sup>1</sup> tells us. Repetition of the holy name seems, however, to be a more suitable practice for many persons. Such aspirants, after preliminary preparations for meditation, can start with *japa* which is slightly sounded—a whisper. Later it will refine itself into a repetition done silently in the mind. As a result of continuous practice of the *mantra*, the mind becomes steady and concentrated, and ultimately we feel the presence of God. In that state there is only an awareness; no more self-effort in the form of concentration or *japa* is possible. One simply experiences the peace and joy of awareness of God. There will be then no consciousness of time or place. So we see what depth of spiritual experience can be reached by *japa*. Shri Krishna tells us “*yajnanam japayajno’smi*”, “of the sacrifices I am that of *japa*.”

*Japa* occupies an important place in the Vedantic tradition as well as in the Yoga system. A *mantra* is a holy name received either in vision or as the result of God-realization. Seers who

have had such experiences are known as *mantra drashta*, literally, seers of *mantras*. Having obtained these *mantras* they used them effectively in their lives, and passed them on to their disciples. These in turn transmitted them to succeeding generations. Thus these *mantras*, having become potent with long usage, have acted as the source of deep experiences to aspirants in the past and present. No wonder we call them sacred. These *mantras* give direct access to God, rather as if we were to dial a person's telephone number. Those who take to this type of spiritual exercise find ample proof of this in their lives. When the word is presented by a competent teacher to a qualified student, a certain power passes into the latter, a power which is tangible and effective and about which (though it is personal and private) there is nothing mysterious.

Prayer—in which can be included reading, repeating and dwelling upon hymns and scriptures containing noble and elevating thoughts—helps very much to prepare our minds for *japa* and meditation. We find that in every religion prayers form a fundamental part of the literature. As an aspirant grows spiritually, a prayerful attitude naturally develops in him, even if his outlook is basically monistic. So long as a man is aware of his human limitations, he cannot but pray to and worship a Personal God. Very few can feel strong and independent at *all* times. He is the only Power on whom we can unfailingly depend at every step; whenever we feel weak, God is the ready source of strength. In moments of severe testing and turmoil, which no human being can altogether escape, God is the One Being to whom we can and should look for support.

But in our happy days, too, we are to offer our love and devotion to Him. He is our fair-weather Friend, as well. An Indian psalmist sings, "O Mother, though I keep on forgetting You, You never forget me even once."

Repeated and systematic practice is therefore necessary to calm the mind, which is very much accustomed to being propelled outwards. We find it difficult to resist this tendency, but we have to persist in spite of failures; success comes to the



courageous and persistent. "Purity, patience and perseverance," says Swami Vivekananda, "alone lead to success." "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty." Our aim should be to combine positive progress, in the form of depth of experience, with holding action in the form of regularity and non-procrastination. Most of us, as aspirants, believe that religious disciplines deepen and enrich our interior life. We set aside a part of the day for reading, meditating and devotional exercises. But we must occasionally assess our progress in order to take note of the divergence between what we are and what we would like to be; then we are to make more strenuous effort. Our mental activities need to be watched and directed diligently until, getting established in this habit, we become conscious of the process in the midst of our normal work, and take delight in it. In this way we may reach a creative pitch in our interior life where everything around us seems to move to our spiritual advantage. Somehow we meet the proper people, get suitable work, and find time for intense spiritual practice. Then a state of mental concentration becomes natural.

Although the Vedanta philosophy culminates in the doctrine of non-duality, the concept of a Personal God is very much in evidence in the Vedas. The *bhakti*-ideal is fully worked out by the Puranas and other later literature, and by the eminent historical figures we know as Divine Incarnations. The Hindu, being pre-eminently spiritual in his treatment of everything, raises also the *bhakti*-approach to the level of the Infinite, and makes it all-embracing. As a result he is able to sing the glories of the Atman and love of God with the same ecstasy. Says the *Amritabindu Upanishad*, "In Him reside all beings, and He resides in all beings as their supporter. That all-pervading Deity am I (i.e., the Atman)." Hindu prayers are usually sweet and devotional. In this tradition there is ample evidence that by prayer, song and symbol, properly used to advantage, aspirants can be lifted to the highest ecstasy, indeed to *samadhi*. Again in the *Gita*, Sixth Chapter, we read:

"That in which the mind, restrained by the practice of

concentration, rests quiescent; that in which, seeing the Self through the self, one rejoices in one's own Self; that in which one knows the boundless joy beyond the reach of the senses, grasped only by the understanding; that in which being established, one never departs from Reality; that on gaining which, one thinks there is no greater gain, and wherein established one is not moved even by the heaviest of sorrows: let that be known as yoga, severance from the contact of pain. It is to be practised with perseverance with an undaunted mind." (vs. 20-23)

The passage reminds me of a story which comes down to us from the era of Shri Chaitanya's disciples. There was an indigent brahmin whose wife was constantly nagging him to find more money for the household. She wanted better cloth, more food, the roof repaired etc. But this pious man was just not able to find any way in which he could scrape up more income. One day they noticed that a holy man of some repute had come into the village, and was living nearby, where people sometimes came to him for one reason or another. "Why don't you go and ask that saint to give you something to make us prosper? He must have some yoga powers or something, and other people are going there . . ." urged his wife.

"Oh, how can I do that?" said her husband, his head beginning to hang in shame. "A *sadhu* should be approached for gifts of wisdom, devotion of heart, and the like." But his wife kept after him, till at last one day the brahmin lost sufficient pride to go and seat himself beside the *sadhu*. For some time he could not open his mouth.

"Yes, friend," said the holy man at last, "what is it you have come for? You must have some request in mind, no doubt."

"Sir," said the brahmin, "my wife believes that you are a worker of miracles. Tell us, do you not have one of those magic touchstones, owning which a man can change all he possesses into gold? I have come to beg that of you." And he bit his lip.

"Oh," replied the other, "is that all? Why, I threw away one of those yesterday; it is just in the ditch over there. Perhaps you can go and pick it up." Sure enough, the poor man, searching in



the ditch discovered an oddly shaped and coloured stone, which he rightly judged to be the touchstone. Sitting down again beside the saint he gazed at it wonderingly. Then he studied the saint and pondered awhile. "You threw this away!" he exclaimed. "But then you must have something which is more valuable. Give me that." "I have indeed," replied the other, "and that is the holy Name. I will give it to you; but as your wife still has some desires, she is not ready; so go to her and give her the touchstone." The brahmin did as he was bid, renounced his home and came back to learn the pursuit of Pure Gold.

"Severance from the contact of pain." What does it precisely mean? That the yogi is callous and indifferent? No. He does not experience pain because of the preoccupation of his mind elsewhere. His reactions to impulses from the outside world, as well as the "inside world" of his own organism, are now very much controlled. His purified calm mind is busy perceiving his real nature, i.e., joy. This joy is independent of the outside world. It is intrinsic joy and delight, and because it is supersensuous and transcendent, it remains steady and unvarying. This state could well be called a luminous awareness of unconditioned joy. Such is the essence of the yogi's real nature. He has turned his vision inward, and is in a state of superconscious cognition and bliss.

This joy is rightly conceived by Vedanta to be the cognition of that very Self which is described as *Sat-chit-ananda*, Pure Being, Consciousness, Bliss. What can be more joyful than partaking of and perceiving one's own divine nature? What work can be greater or more important than experiencing this joy, free from the pangs of pain—or pleasure—of this phenomenal world?

On reaching that state, we are told, we shall clearly see that there was nothing in this world worth pursuing. While we have not yet known the dawn of that awareness, many things, many "causes" in life, appear to be worthy of our pursuit. So long as we feel this way we must go on with our search; but let us not get stuck at the lower levels of satisfaction; let us "move on" as Shri

Ramakrishna used to urge his disciples. Like the monk in the story of the touchstone, we gradually put all our faith into that which is of highest value. If anyone asks us, "What is it that you have obtained, that you can throw away these valuable objects?", let us be able to give an unequivocal response. When we are still on the path, joys and sorrows do continue to affect us; but once we understand the nature of the world and our goal in it, we can come more often and more easily into the state of true stability. Even while struggling we have the advantage of knowing where we are going. Later we reach the stage where nothing can disturb or upset us. This must be our aim.

In the pages which follow, senior members of the Ramakrishna Order have given many suggestions and instructions designed to help us reach that state. Their guidance is based on experience with the struggles of aspirants who came to them. It is our hope that the ever-widening circle of those who are attracted to the practice of meditation will find these clear teachings a compass and a beacon-light.

<sup>1</sup>*Yoga aphorisms*, I. 36 ff.

## *Chapter One*

# LIVING THE MATURE WAY

*Swami Adiswarananda*

### **Life and Its Problems**

Life is a paradox. The things of the world are not what they appear to be. What we want we do not get; what we get we cannot possess; what we possess we cannot enjoy; what we enjoy does not give us permanent satisfaction and even when we think the satisfaction is permanent, it proves to be boring. Every feeling of happiness is followed by a haunting sense of fear and anxiety and this seems to be a universal feature. The healthy have the fear of disease, the wealthy of thieves and robbers, the beautiful of old age, the socially prominent of dishonour, the learned of rivals and the virtuous of slander. The human individual is born crying, lives complaining and dies disappointed. As a general rule, the young are optimistic and live in dreams of the future; while the old, having lived long, become pessimistic and, as Swami Vivekananda has said, "they chew the cud". The agonies of life far outweigh its pleasures and promises. Small wonder, then, that for the vast majority life is a series of crises and confrontations, anxieties and disappointments. What, then, is the way? Where should one seek the solace of life?

Unable to cope with the problems of life, many give in to despondency and often desperation. Some maintain that the problems of life come from the external world and try to eradicate their cause by material means, but with no success. Some wait in vain for a millennium to come, when there will be only happiness and no misery. Others consider the problems of life as unresolvable and look forward to eternal happiness in heaven after death, and still others regard the problems as



predestined and blame their fate. Most feel perplexed and helpless and do not know what to do. It is said that once a young man, unable to decide whether or not to marry, asked Socrates for advice, and Socrates is reported to have said to him: "Well, young man, marry if you like. If your wife turns out to be a good woman, you will be happy in life; and if she proves to be otherwise, you will be a philosopher like me!" To find a decisive solution to the problems of life has been the endeavour of all philosophies, whether secular or sacred. While the secular philosophies consider all human problems from an existential point of view and offer material or psychological solutions for them, the conventional religious traditions often look upon these problems from an other-worldly perspective and suggest solutions that are transcendental. Life, on the other hand, defies any such polarization and its problems demand solutions that are real and practical and not merely philosophical.

### **The Vedantic View**

Cessation of miseries is one of the major topics of Vedānta. The problems of life, according to Vedānta, cannot be called purely objective phenomena, nor can they be indicated as wholly subjective in nature. They are not due to change in time or circumstances, nor are they inflicted upon us by an inscrutable Providence. We cannot say that our will is free, nor can we, at the same time, say that it is not free. If everything were predestined, there would be no meaning of life. If, on the other hand, our will were totally free, we would not complain about our sufferings. Good and evil, Vedānta points out, are not things but feelings. Happiness and misery are two different conditions of the same mind. The world is neither good nor evil; it is perceived as good or evil because of the value judgements that are made of it by individual minds due to their conditions. It follows that the world of good and evil experienced by each individual is not outside but inside his mind. Conditioning of the mind creates an inner disposition and is due to the cumulative effect of past living. To quote the words of Swami



Vivekananda: "We get only that for which we are fitted. Let us give up our pride and understand this: that misery is never undeserved. There never has been a blow undeserved; there never has been an evil for which I did not pave the way with my own hands. We ought to know that. Analyse yourselves and you will find that every blow you have received came to you because you prepared yourselves for it. You did half and the external world did the other half: that is how the blow came. That will sober us down. At the same time, from this very analysis will come a note of hope, and the note of hope is this: 'I have no control over the external world; but that which is in me and nearer unto me, my own world, is under my control. If the two together are required to make a failure, if the two together are necessary to give me a blow, I will not contribute the one which is in my control—and how then can the blow come? If I get real control of myself, the blow will never come'."¹

The conditioning of wrong living cannot be escaped in any way, nor can it be ignored. No one can run away from life. Change of place or environment does not help, because wherever we go, we carry our own mind. An ideal environment is not something that can be given to us: it is made by our own effort. The attempt to go back to the past is no solution, for none can go back in time. The effects of wrong living can be corrected only by right living. The solution to the problems of suffering, according to Vedanta, must be found "here" and not "hereafter". Such problems cannot be solved by readjustment after death, because any solution, in order to be meaningful, must be in the context of the problem. Furthermore, salvation of the pious after death is a matter of belief and cannot be verified in life. The conditions on the two sides of the grave are different, and the dead never come back to tell us about the life hereafter. Vedanta believes that salvation is liberation. It is not going to some other realm from where we are, or acquiring something which we do not have. The core of Vedantic liberation is Self-knowledge. It is seeing one's Self in all and all in one's own Self. Self-knowledge comes in the wake of self-



purification. Another name for—self-purification is deconditioning of the mind. Deconditioning of the mind cannot be attained by anyone but ourselves; there is no vicarious solution for a problem which is the result of self-indulgence.

### **The Way of Mature Living**

Vedanta does not offer any easy windfall, or miraculous solution to the problems of life. It exhorts us to face the realities of life by living in a mature way. Such mature living is marked by the following characteristics:

(i) Mature living is goal-oriented and is, therefore, integrated. Most individuals have short-term goals—professional, educational, economic—but have no goal for their whole life. Not only that, but their short-term goals are often found to be in conflict with one another. This indicates the need for one goal with which all other goals can be integrated and harmonized. Vedanta signifies this goal as liberation through Self-knowledge. Vedanta speaks of the four values of life—*dharma*, or moral perfection; *artha*, or worldly attainment; *kama*, or fulfilment of legitimate desires; and *moksha*, or liberation. The first three values become meaningful only when they are cherished for the sake of the fourth. The fulfilment of desires and worldly attainment, unless they are guided by *dharma* and are for the sake of liberation, only increase greed and lust for power. Aesthetic perfection, when not inspired by the desire for liberation, degenerates into sensuality. Knowledge of science and technology, when not dedicated to the pursuit of Self-knowledge, becomes a dangerous weapon in the hands of man.

(ii) Mature living means living with a spirit of dispassion. Dispassion enables one to view things in their proper perspective. For those who are ignorant, all things are real and permanent. The ignorant take everything for granted. They love life and hate death; they cling to the pleasurable and shrink

from the painful. In contrast, mature individuals accept all pairs of opposites because they know that there cannot be good without evil, pleasure without pain, and life without death. Dispassion is neither optimism nor pessimism. To be always optimistic is to be a visionary. On the other hand, to be always pessimistic is to be negative and morbid. Dispassion is that attitude which makes a distinction between the immediate and the ultimate values of life. Dispassion endows one with inner freedom, and without inner freedom there is no enjoyment of life.

(iii) Mature living is acting in the present. Brooding over past mistakes and failures cannot help us, nor can dreaming about the future. Our present has been determined by our past living and our future depends on our present. We must act in the living present.

(iv) Mature living is spiritually creative living. Life is action and there can be no action without tension. Our actions are channels for our self-expression, and our life demands self-expression. Where there is no self-expression, there is no inner nourishment and, consequently, no meaning of life. Most individuals are unable to act; they only react. Everything they do, say, or think is either compulsive or impulsive. Their actions, not being free, cease to be creative and expressive. Creative action is free from inner constraints, and therefore efficient and spontaneous. Self-expression, however, necessitates the practice of self-control.

(v) The watchword of mature living is self-endeavour, not self-pity. Nothing happens by chance. We get what we deserve. We make and unmake our destiny by our own actions, and we enjoy or suffer according to our just deserts. The peace that is not earned by us does not belong to us. One who has no "here" has no "hereafter". There is no peace for those who are escapists or opportunists.



(vi) Mature living calls for maturity of the ego. There is no life without "I"-consciousness. Modern psychology stresses the need for a strong ego in order to resolve the crises of life. Vedanta agrees with this view, but contends that the ego in order to be strong must mature. The *Bhagavad Gita* mentions three types of ego: *tamasika*, the undeveloped; *rajasika*, the inflated; and *sattvika*, the mature. These three types of ego indicate three ways of living—the immature, the perverted, and the healthy. The *tamasika* ego, since it is immature and undeveloped, is always impulsive and defensive, self-incriminating, and pessimistic. An individual with *tamasika* ego has no self identity, no self image. He is only a reflection of what others think of him. He is incapable of self-assertion and self-endeavour. An individual with a *rajasika* ego is narcissistic; he is fascinated by his own image. He is always insecure, and so is self-aggrandizing and aggressive. Alienated from everyone and everything, he lives in a world that is hostile and harassing. He is never at peace with himself, nor can he be at peace with anyone or anything. In contrast to the *tamasika* and *rajasika* egos, the *sattvika* ego symbolizes maturity. An individual endowed with a *sattvika* ego is responsible, integrated, discriminative, and neither defensive nor aggressive. The *sattvika* ego is strong and therefore humble, mature and therefore inconspicuous. Certain of its self-identity, it does not seek to bask in the limelight of others. Being resilient, it is able to adjust to the needs of circumstances; being wise, it is anxious to learn and add to its wisdom. Maturity of ego cannot be given to us, nor can it be hastened or scheduled. It is an organic maturity and one has to grow into this by mature living.

(vii) Mature living is marked by a rhythm—the rhythm of withdrawal and response, contemplation and action, attachment and detachment. Where there is no withdrawal in contemplation, there cannot be any effective response to the duties of life. This is also the rhythm of Nature. After the hard work of a full day, Nature forces us to withdraw for rest, but this



is only a physical withdrawal. Even though the body gets rest in sleep, the mind remains active; therefore the withdrawal of the mind through detachment is very necessary. The two aspects of the rhythm represent our "being" and "becoming". "Being" indicates the need of Self-realization, while "becoming" stands for self-expression. Where there is no "being" there cannot be any "becoming", for there is no self-expression without Self-realization.

Mature living is living with the inspiration of yoga. Yoga is not the performance of some special set of activities or esoteric rituals. That which makes for yoga is the sincerity of the motive of the aspirant. When God becomes the goal of life and all our hopes and aspirations are subordinated to that goal, it becomes yoga. Where yoga is the way of life everything becomes sacred. Our work becomes worship. All our thoughts, words, and actions become offerings of oblations in the fire of Self-knowledge. Yoga is the very basis of inner peace and harmony. Therefore there is no alternative to yoga, for there is no substitute for inner peace and harmony. Life without yoga is like a ship without a rudder that drifts aimlessly. The *Isa Upanishad* points out: "All this—whatever exists in this changing universe—should be covered by the Lord. Protect the Self by renunciation."<sup>2</sup> All our worldly possessions and aspirations, our gifts and attainments, whether they are physical or mental, moral or intellectual, never contribute to peace or happiness unless they are used for the practice of yoga. The consummation of all yoga is Self-realization, which is freedom resulting from inner maturity. The liberated soul is also known as a free soul, and the free soul is not free from anything; he is free in the midst of everything, and he is free because he has evolved into supreme maturity.

Mature living is something that can be learned only by living and not just by hearing or reading about it. The foundation of mature living is manliness that is ready to take risks, make mistakes, and learn. Manliness is the *sine qua non* of all virtue and

wisdom, and manliness always precedes godliness.

<sup>1</sup>*Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, pp. 805-6, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, New York, 1953.

<sup>2</sup>*The Upanishads*, Volume I, p.201, translated by Swami Nikhilananda, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, New York, 1975.



## Chapter Two

# BEFORE YOU SIT IN MEDITATION

*Swami Ashokananda*

I believe that through meditation, which is the uninterrupted flow of the same thought of God, one can easily attain the Highest, for the mind eventually succumbs to a thought to which it is subjected uninterruptedly for a long time. If we continue to imbue the mind with a certain kind of consciousness—whatever may be the condition of mind in the beginning, whether spiritual or not, whether filled with love for God or with restless desires—in course of time the desired change will take place.

Shri Ramakrishna laid much stress on this fact. It took me a long time to comprehend one of his teachings on this subject, but when I understood it—and I hope I have understood it—I found great promise and assurance therein. He used to say that the mind is like a laundered cloth which takes the colour of the dye in which it is dipped. At first I thought he meant that the mind must be made absolutely pure before it is plunged into the thought of God to take His colour. There was nothing particularly encouraging in this, because the great problem of almost all spiritual aspirants is the attainment of purity of mind. Such purification is three-fourths of the battle; for when it is fully accomplished, spiritual realization comes spontaneously. But as I pondered over Shri Ramakrishna's simile, I began to understand it differently. In likening the mind to a laundered cloth, he spoke of the average mind, the mind which is so crowded with worldly and contradictory thoughts and feelings, and which is so averse to the thought of God. It was not the purified mind that he likened to a laundered cloth, but the mind in whatever condition it may be. I saw he meant that even this

average mind, if dipped in the thought of God, would take on spiritual colour

Here is a psychological truth, wonderfully encouraging and helpful but often forgotten by spiritual aspirants. Once a man came to Shri Ramakrishna, saying, "I cannot control my mind—I don't know how". The Master, astonished, said, "Why do you not practise *abhyasa-yoga*?" Bringing the mind back again and again to the thought of God—that is what *abhyasa-yoga* means. This practice is particularly commended in the *Bhagavad-Gita*. Does it matter very much if the mind wanders in the beginning, so long as you bring it back to Him? If we could remember this, half the battle would be already won, but unfortunately we often do not, and then we think of other things and completely forget the spiritual quest. Such being the case, I may profitably discuss certain points concerned with the means of self-control and meditation.

What is the condition of mind suitable for meditation? It is known to all of you, I think, as quietness. This is not a forced calmness, but a calmness resulting from the cessation of most of the strong desires. The things which disturb the mind, whether rising from within or coming from without, are connected with our secret, basic desires. We are always trying to realize certain ends. Though we strive desperately, we often fail, and failure exasperates the mind. Even when success is ours, there are strange results. Because the objects of our desires sometimes elude us while we are enjoying them, we feel disappointed and cheated; and when we are not thus frustrated, we become attached to the objects of enjoyment, in which case, since enjoyment cannot be continually intensified, satiety follows. All these reactions keep the mind continually restless, whether pleasantly or unpleasantly. Thus we find that the thoughts which do not allow our mind to dwell on the Presence of God are connected with the objects of our desires; and that only when we succeed in ridding ourselves of our predominant desires does the mind become comparatively quiet.



We call this state of relative calmness the beginning of *pratyahara* (withdrawal of the mind), a condition in which the mind, though sometimes restless, is at other times quiet—restless when it comes in contact with the objects of desire, but otherwise fairly quiet. This is a very favourable state. If you find that your mind is naturally quiet when you are not in actual contact with disturbing things, that you like to be alone and that you have a feeling of serenity, recognize this condition as most desirable. In this condition you should try your best to practise meditation; you should never neglect it. The mind is a very changeable entity. Do not think that any desired condition will continue to exist simply because you have once reached it. Something may arise from within or come from without to distract you, and it may sometimes take five or even ten years for the mind to quieten down again, just as the sea takes days to regain calmness after a storm.

I do not mean that we shall never be absolutely safe. Undoubtedly there is a mental condition in which one need have no fear at all, but that is a very high state. When a person has reached that one-pointed state he has burned his bridges behind him: he has reached a condition in which the things of this world can no longer attract him; his mind will never hark back to the world he has left behind. He is secure.

Suppose we have reached the state in which the mind, though at times restless, is at other times quiet. What shall we do then, if we want to succeed in meditation?

(1) We must at the beginning make a firm resolution to be very regular in our practice. We always manage to attend to our urgent bodily needs whatever may be going on; we should be equally faithful to the practice of meditation. Meditation should be as much a part of life as breathing. In my country, when a person is very busy he says, "I have no time to breathe". Actually, however, he does breathe. And so it should be with meditation. Though at first the desire to practise it may appear artificial, make up your mind; say to yourself, "I must meditate".



Shri Ramakrishna often praised the Muslims for their punctuality in prayer. Wherever a Muslim may be, when the time for prayer comes he stops everything, washes his hands and face, and then, spreading his rug even by a roadside if necessary, prays for at least fifteen minutes. Never does he fail to do this. There is no justification for anyone to say that he has no time to meditate. Extraordinary occasions may arise when one actually has not the time. But to say, "I am too busy to find time for it", or "I am so tired in the evening that it is impossible to meditate", is mere evasion. Nothing prevents the one who thus rationalizes from saving some of his energy for the evening. But he spends it all in the daytime doing other things—sometimes actually harmful things—and when evening comes, he gives himself false justification for failing to meditate. Ask him about it and he will say, "I need more sleep; I am tired. When I get up I must hurry to the office—where is the time?"

We have a song about a man who, after spending all his life foolishly, finally realized his mistake and said, "I had time for everything else, O Lord, but I did not have time to think of Thee!" Notice this peculiarity of the human mind: there is a time and a place for everything else in our life, but we do not have even fifteen minutes daily for meditation! If you tell me you have no time or energy do you think I shall believe you? I shall say you are deceiving yourself. Where there's a will there's a way. If you are determined, you can always find time to meditate.

Here I should like to make a suggestion, for I know that discouragement comes. Sometimes in meditation the mind behaves wonderfully; it becomes calm and concentrated easily, and you are encouraged. But if at other times it behaves badly, refuses to quieten down, and is restless with all kinds of thoughts, you may be tempted to say, "No use for me to meditate. I try, but reach nowhere." I want to tell you this: unless you are born with wonderful qualities of mind and in a very advanced state of spiritual development, you are subject, like every other man who has tried to become spiritual, to these



fluctuations of consciousness. Do not let them discourage you, and do not think you are not fit to meditate when your mind is not sufficiently spiritual. Some have asked, "How can I approach God with a low state of mind?" If you were cold, would you say, "I am cold, so let me get warm before approaching the fire"? Or would you say, "I am cold and therefore the first thing to do is to go to the fire and warm myself"? If you feel yourself lacking in spirituality, that is the time of all times to think of God.

Do not let your mind mislead you. The mind can trick you in many different ways: sometimes it will tempt directly, and again it will mislead in the very name of religion. This reluctance to meditate because you are "not spiritual enough" is a trick the mind plays on you. Whatever your mental condition, even if your mind be filled with low thoughts, try to think about God. Of course, you may not be able to think about Him or meditate on Him as you would wish, but what does it matter? Keep trying. A vicious horse kicks, rears and attempts to throw the rider, but if the rider manages to stay firmly in the saddle, the horse quietens down, knowing it has found its master. The mind behaves in the same way. It will try to dislodge you, but upon finding that you cannot be shaken off, it will become your slave. That is the secret of the mind, so do not bother about its condition. Make the determination to ride it, and this determination, which implies concentration, is itself a victory.

(2) Next, you must have a fixed time for meditation. In my opinion a person should meditate not less than twice a day. If you cannot meditate twice, meditate at least once, either in the morning or in the evening.

In India we think there are four auspicious hours for meditation: early morning—at least an hour before sunrise, while it is still dark—is a very good time. Of this, more later. The second auspicious hour is noon. I do not know whether any special advantage can be derived from it in the city, but undoubtedly in villages, especially in a tropical country, all is



hushed at this time and nature seems to stand still. It is so hot that even birds are silent and hide themselves among the leaves of the trees. People are quiet—often they rest at that time—and there is a definite lull; at least I used to feel it in my country, where many use the noon hour for meditation and worship.

The third auspicious time for meditation is early evening. In this country it is unfortunately difficult to meditate then, because it is usually the dinner hour. Yet evening is certainly one of the best times in which to meditate. If you can, you may practise meditation shortly before dinner, but it is not advisable to meditate immediately thereafter, as digestion may be impaired and your health affected.

The fourth hour is midnight. In this part of the world it is not very quiet even at twelve o'clock; yet I think one does find a certain stillness. Where it is fairly quiet, midnight is wonderfully suitable. As a matter of fact, many believe that midnight is the best of all hours for meditation.

Morning meditation has a certain advantage over evening meditation, in that the mind is quiet when you waken from the night's rest. All the impressions of the preceding day are erased, as if someone had come after school and wiped the black-board clean. Then too, nature is quiet in the early morning and the city is not yet fully awake and stirring. Consequently, you find it easier to quiet the mind. There is another advantage: by meditating before the day has begun you give a spiritual impetus and direction to the mind. Though it may tend to lose some of the spiritual strength and enthusiasm as the day progresses, these will nevertheless remain for many hours and sustain you through most of the day.

I should mention here that some may find meditation more successful in the evening than in the morning. There are those who "wake up" gradually as the day advances. In the morning they are only half-awake, but towards evening wide awake with clear, sharp minds behaving wonderfully. Such persons undoubtedly will find evening or night meditation more successful.



If you cannot avail yourself of any of these hours which are especially suitable for meditation, you should choose the one most convenient to you and make every effort to stick to it. The observance of regular hours of meditation is very important, because the mind functions according to habit. If it is made to think and feel in a certain way at a given time for many days consecutively, it will spontaneously think and feel in the same way whenever that time arrives. If we meditate on God at a specified hour, whenever that hour approaches, our mind, without any effort on our part, will be filled with the consciousness of God. This is no mean advantage to derive from regularity of practice.

(3) Just as you should have regular hours of meditation, so should you have a fixed place in which to meditate. That is one great advantage of temples and churches. Since such places are used for thinking of God, the very air in them becomes charged with His presence and the feeling of purity. You are uplifted merely by going there.

An atmosphere similar to that of a temple or church can be created even in a corner of your own room. For wherever an intense thought is held uninterruptedly, the place becomes charged with the quality of it. Probably this is because the material atmosphere and surroundings are connected with the body, which vibrates in accordance with the thoughts of the mind. If our thoughts are pure, our bodies likewise attain to a purity which may be called a spiritual vibration; and naturally, with such a change in the body, the outside atmosphere is also changed. Thus the fixed place where you meditate will become charged with energy; it will be so permeated with a spiritual quality that your mind will be filled with the thought of meditation as soon as you come to that place. It will be quietened as if by a magic touch, and you will be conscious of a palpable Presence. What a great advantage! You can indeed perform this seeming miracle through the one practice of keeping apart a certain place consecrated to thoughts of God.

(4) When we measure the strength of the subtle enemies



which hide in our minds—the passions, impulses, greeds and desires—these devices that I have prescribed seem to provide a very frail protection. I admit this. When I say “hide”, I mean that even the very best of us have not completely escaped their influence. It is said that one is not wholly free of them until he has actually touched the feet of God.

Just as in winter the garden is cleared of weeds and old growth but with the first rain of spring, the tiny seeds left lying in the earth sprout to cover it with green, even so, many subtle thoughts, impressions and desires lie hidden in our minds, waiting to spring up at the first opportunity. Therefore we must be very careful. We know that all these wrong impulses are in our minds and that they would easily cover our whole consciousness if we did not restrain them. Our problem is to keep a great part of our mind—and by degrees a greater and yet greater part of it—free from the domination of wrong impulses and desires, so that with the mind thus freed we can think about God.

In the meantime, what should we do to conquer our desires and adverse impulses? Sometimes they succumb to direct attack, but a flank attack is usually better. Fighting a state of mind directly in order to conquer it can do more harm than good, for thereby the mind often becomes more and more entangled. The wiser course is not to allow oneself to dwell on the condition of mind to be eradicated. Remember this psychological fact: the more you dwell on a mental condition, the more it is strengthened.

There is a story of a monk who used to sit under a roadside tree to pray and meditate. A woman of ill repute often passed by, and he would say to her, “You should give up your evil ways and try to be good. If you do not, terrible things will happen to you after death”. Every time the monk saw the woman, he admonished her similarly. In course of time they both died, and the messengers of death came to claim their spirits. It is said that a bright messenger brings a golden chariot to carry a good person to heaven, whereas a dark messenger comes when an



## *Meditation*

evil person dies. It happened that the dark messenger came for the monk and the celestial messenger for the woman.

The monk was astonished. "I think there has been a mistake," he said, "No." answered the messenger, "there has been no mistake. All is quite right." "How can that be?" asked the monk. The messenger replied gravely, "Though seeming to meditate, you were all the while thinking of the woman and her evil deeds. Did not your mind dwell continually on evil? But the woman asked God for help, saying, 'Lord, I am weak. Save me!' Did not her mind dwell on God more than yours?" The monk could make no answer.

This may be an extreme illustration, but it contains a deep psychological truth. It points to a fundamental fact concerning mental action, a fact that you can utilize in your own struggle for self-conquest. When the mind is allowed to dwell on some undesirable quality, it certainly creates a new impression that is many times stronger than the original one. Further recognition of this quality will only make it stronger and stronger until it may even become a complex.

I am not saying that you should not restrain your mind, that you should let it be uncontrolled, or as it is called, "natural". Nor do I mean that you should ignore your weakness. But truly it is often safer not to grapple with these directly. The better strategy is to train the mind to dwell on a new level. First divert it from the thought of your weakness to some innocent and pleasing subject; then lift it by degrees to a higher consciousness. This method of self-restraint does not repress the mind, but rather lifts it from dangerous associations by substituting desirable for undesirable thoughts.

If at present you have some serious fault that seems almost impossible to eradicate, you must have lent it strength and support by thinking of it and indulging in it. Take away that support, and the fault will become weak and will finally die through lack of nourishment. I do not say that this is easy to do, but with practice you can form the habit, and it is a sure way of making spiritual progress. After starving your undesirable



thoughts for some time, you will probably find that, while many of them have died, some have remained. Do not be too concerned. Let them remain, so long as they do not gain strength. Keep them cornered, and eventually they also will die.

(5) Bad company is one of the most potent causes of mental conflict and disturbance. It would be very well to mix with all kinds of people if we could remain unaffected by their company, but this rarely happens. I do not know of anyone who can do it. Right contacts and associations are therefore very important in spiritual life. If you share the company of impure persons and are in frequent contact with wrong things, you will be unable to keep under control the thoughts you are trying to check; they will grow and will finally overcome your mind completely.

(6) A certain amount of asceticism is absolutely necessary for spiritual progress. Some of you, not eager to meditate, may say, "We shall leave that for our next life," or "We shall take it up a few years hence". Many think that youth is the time to enjoy life, that it is well enough to practise religion after beginning to grow old. In other words, when the world has turned sour, they will go to church wearing a long face and think they have religion. That is not and cannot be religion.

What do we bring to God in such a case? A worn-out body and a worn-out mind, scarred through and through. Do you think He is pleased with these? We do not take worm-eaten fruits or wilted flowers to His altar, but perfect offerings. In the same way, we should give Him the best of ourselves. The offering of a fresh and pure mind pleases Him most. Those who think religion is exclusively for the old make a profound mistake. The young especially should try to be spiritual, for if religious life begins early and the practices I have mentioned are undertaken while the mind is still fresh and pure, then by keeping a close watch over the mind one can keep it unspoiled. Under no circumstances should we allow the mind to become affected by the world. Youth is the propitious time for setting to work.



Shri Ramakrishna once said to a young college student: "When a man makes a brick, he puts his trade mark on it while it is still soft. Then, when the brick is dried in the sun and baked in the kiln, the mark becomes permanent. Even so, if you can put the imprint of God on your mind while it is soft, that imprint can never be effaced, but will remain forever."

Practise asceticism—the more the better; and this does not mean making wry faces as if you have bitten into a sour apple. Practising asceticism should give a pleasure similar to that of riding a spirited horse. Gain the strength to control the forces of your body and mind so that you are not dominated by them. This asceticism is necessary, for without it meditation is impossible.

(7) All the things I have discussed so far are important preliminaries; they should be practised each day of our lives and not merely at the beginning of our spiritual quest. He who practises them rightly can at will withdraw his mind completely, because he has gained tremendous control over it. But until you have been fully established in these practices, many of you may find that during meditation the mind takes some time to reach a state of quietude. This fact should be given careful consideration. If you rush about doing and thinking many things before meditation, what success can you expect?

For some time prior to meditation you should try to be quiet and to feel that you are unrelated to the world, that you have nothing to do with it. As husband, wife, mother, father, child and so on, you have many duties, and there are a thousand things demanding your attention. When approaching God, do you know what you should do? You should go to Him as though the world had never existed for you, as if you had no husband, wife, parents, friends, country—nothing at all. This would be the right feeling in the hour of meditation.

Approach meditation with the feeling of eternity. Who succeeds best in meditation? He who at the time of meditation can feel absolutely unrelated. Do you understand what that means? Try to imagine what eternity is. It is beyond time and



consequently beyond all phenomena; it is a condition—if we may call it so—in which none of these relative things exist. When seeking to think of the eternal Lord, you are making an effort for the time being to go beyond all relationships. You must say, “I have no body, no mind. Time and space have disappeared. The whole universe has vanished. God alone is.” Then only will the mind have that subtle perception which will enable it to feel God’s gracious presence. Thus, before you enter the place of meditation, you must leave everything relative outside.

In our monasteries the monks who are very strict do not allow visitors to speak of their wives, husbands or children, or about worldly things, however important. It is not that they discountenance a person’s doing his duty, but that they know that the mind in order to be spiritual must partake of the character of the eternal. There must indeed be some time during the day when you feel absolutely unrelated—because to be so is your true nature. Though you seem to be related to people, you know these relationships are impermanent. Your true nature is unrelated, and it is in the unrelated condition that you must enter into meditation.

(8) By fulfilling the conditions which I have specified, real and appreciable spiritual progress can be made. But here I must tell you that all spiritual practices, including meditation, depend upon one thing: a great yearning for Truth. Have you that yearning? You may say, “I do not feel it. What then, is the use of meditation?” But is it impossible to create that feeling? The mind’s appetite for God can be stimulated deliberately. When by whatever means the mind is made to yearn for Him, the feeling is no less real than if it had come spontaneously. If you wait for time to bring a natural longing, it may never come. Since this longing is essential, create it. At first your mind will fluctuate. But do not be discouraged by these unstable moods of the mind, and above all do not let yourself be defeated.

Suppose that you are a boy and that another boy in the neighbourhood always tries to browbeat you. He has no right to



do it, and you know him to be actually a coward. What is the proper course to take? Will you submit to the bully, thinking that you are naturally weak and that to fight him is useless? No, you will deliberately call up the feeling of manliness within you. You will say to yourself, "I refuse to be bullied by him." The next time you confront him, that feeling may partially decline, but you will nevertheless manage to look him in the eye, and you will eventually be brave enough to challenge him. You will have become manly, and you will say, "This is my true nature; I am really strong!"

We are acting similarly at every moment. In acquiring a skill or gaining knowledge in school or college, we succeed by repeated effort. At first, what we are trying to acquire is not natural to us, but once mastered, it appears an essential part of ourselves. This is even more true in spiritual life, and we must exert ourselves accordingly. At first everything seems difficult, and you say, "What actually is my nature? Maybe I am just not religious. Perhaps I am not destined to be spiritual". There were times when I too thought the same. I would consider a certain obstruction too great for me and its removal an impossibility. Then I would remind myself that I was not really the body and mind, but the spirit; that the realization of my spiritual self was my destiny. I knew that if I did not conquer the obstruction then, I was just postponing the task for the future. Why not act at once and finish it? I can truly say, my good fortune lay in holding to this thought. True, I was sometimes tempted to give up the struggle, but then I would think, "I cannot escape my spiritual destiny. Let me therefore realize it now!"

Great longing and faith are very important in the practice of meditation, for without intense desire for God and faith in Him meditation proves half-hearted and sterile. Where there is no interest in what you are doing, it becomes a mere formality, and effort is soon abandoned.

If you believe in a personal God, pray to Him. By "personal God" I do not mean God with a body, but God with self-

consciousness, who is our Father, Mother, Friend and Lord, who is the all-pervading Creator of the universe. He listens when we pray to Him; we can approach Him in full confidence, just as children approach their parents. Believing in a personal God and loving Him will make it very easy for you to meditate. Dwell on the thought of Him more and more. Do things for Him. Success in spiritual life lies in concentrating every thought, every feeling, every ounce of energy on God.

(9) How will you do it? When you speak, speak of God. When you walk, go to His temple. When you work with your hands, do something in His service. Every function of body and mind must somehow be directed towards Him. If you have to go to an office instead of a temple, make your office the temple of God! If your work is honest it can be done. If it is dishonest, change that work. If changing means even facing starvation, then face it!

Courage!—that is always necessary. Do not forget this: He who created the world is still behind it and will never let us starve. If we really want the Truth and hence are willing to discard whatever is wrong and untrue, we shall never lose by following the Truth. It is not that things will happen just as we wish, but they will happen with a minimum of suffering and a maximum of benefit.

If your occupation is honest, you can certainly conceive it as a work for God. Whether you are at a desk or doing housework, whatever the nature of your work, meditate on God. Offer to Him what you have done through the day, though it was apparently done for your employer. Have you typed twenty letters and taken them to him? Let him sign them, but afterwards close your eyes and offer all to the Lord. You will thus give a new turn to your thoughts. Yes, it is a different way of doing things. It may appear a little unusual at first, but undertake it anyhow. Little by little a deeper meaning will be revealed, and you will find that this practice is not what you originally thought it to be; it will become tremendously effective.

In this way, whenever we do anything for others or for



ourselves, we may think we are doing it for the Lord. Everything in life can then be converted into spiritual activity. There may be some who are able, consciously and deliberately, to do things directly for God. How fortunate they are! That is why people perform elaborate worship. That is why they grow flowers and offer them on the altar, why they burn incense and light candles. Perhaps you do not like such practices? But how else would you spend the hours of the day? Don't you see that time and energy are wasted by serving the little self? Would it not be better to offer to Him whatever you do? Out of this feeling has come ritualism. Out of this feeling temples, where people bring offerings for worship, have been built all over the world.

However, I am not insisting that all should practise ritualism. Each must worship according to his spiritual temperament. But in some manner you will have to discover how to bring your own thoughts, emotions and actions to the service of the Lord. The more you do it, the closer you will be to Him. Then, when you sit in meditation, everything else will be forgotten, and God alone will fill your heart.

(10) Perhaps you are accustomed to convince yourself of the reality of spiritual truths by means of reasoning. But until you have experienced these truths yourself, let me say that the greatest blessing would be for you to meet one who has realized them. The proof of spiritual truths does not lie in reason, argument or any kind of outward demonstration. Their proof lies in the sincere conviction carried by the words of a man who has realized what he expresses. Though others may disagree, I think that this is the one objective proof on which one can rely.

If such an illumined person were to say to me, "My son, you are not really this body and mind; spirit is your true nature, the immortal and eternal being is the real you. Passing things do not belong to you. Try to penetrate the depths, try to realize your true Self," I should be forced to accept and to act upon his words. As he spoke, something in his voice would sink deep into my heart; I should not be able to resist it. How I wish you could all find someone from whose lips such words would fall! You



would not then be able to doubt or ignore them, and conviction of your true nature and glorious goal would grow within you. For a time, failure might cause you to despair, but eventually you would say, "All right, let me try again". And you would win.

I have now told you what should be done preparatory to meditation. Your mind can be drawn ever closer to God by undertaking all the various measures I have enumerated. In conclusion, let me stress a few points: Do whatever work is required of you, but direct it to the Lord; then your mind will not be disturbed. Be unrelated. Identify yourself with eternity, then meditation will be very easy. Do not let your mind wander, or worldly thoughts will enter and cloud it—this should never be permitted. Before you sit in meditation, think of the things I have suggested.

When nothing extraneous enters your mind, it will grow calm. Then, in the temple of your heart, you will begin to see the shining face of the Lord. Meditating upon it, you will find it more and more beautiful, and plunged in its infinite beauty, you will forget all else. You will at last be wholly absorbed in Him.

## Chapter Three

# THE YOGA OF CONCENTRATION

*Swami Ghanananda*

The Vedas speak of *shravana*, hearing the truth, preferably through the living voice, not simply through books; secondly, *manana*, reflecting upon the truth; and thirdly, *nididhyasana*, which is meditation. Meditation is only an intense form of thought upon God. Of course, one can meditate on many subjects, say geometry, nuclear fission, science and so on; but here we always use this word *nididhyasana* for intense thought upon God.

Now, you find that in all religions, the attempt is made to converge the mind on God, on Reality. When a man thinks about something, he approaches the object of his thought; then comes the stage when the object enters his heart, his mind and his very soul; and thirdly, perhaps he reaches a certain sense of identity with the object. All these are applicable also to spiritual contemplation. First, there is the stage at which we feel God is close to us and we are close to God; then comes the second stage in which we feel that God is in us and we are in God; and very few come to the final stage, as it is called, the summit of spiritual thinking and experience, the very peak of it, namely, God is I, and I am God. In this sense of identity, man completely forgets the body. He forgets that he is a living thing, an entity, and is merged in pure Being. In other words, it is man's uttermost humility that brings about this state of union with God.

We often hear the complaint from those who have tried meditation, that after some minutes the mind begins to wander. They sit for meditation and then find that after eight or ten minutes the mind begins to wander. They are not able to sit still and, since the body is disturbed, the mind is disturbed too.



Then the aspirant leaves the seat of meditation saying that he is not able to concentrate. There are certain preliminaries which you should observe before practising meditation, and if you miss them, you often cannot concentrate. Patanjali, a great scientist in Yoga, who in my opinion was a contemporary of Buddha, has given us a number of instructions which are preliminary to concentration. They are included in the eight steps which constitute the course of training called Raja Yoga.

The first step is *yama*, which consists of the practices of non-injury, truthfulness, non-stealing, chastity and non-receiving of gifts. The idea behind the last practice is that the mind of the person who receives gifts is acted on by the mind of the giver. Receiving gifts is apt to destroy the aspirant's independence by putting him under obligation to the giver. Patanjali is here, as elsewhere, stating the science of the matter. Whether all the conditions for the successful practice of Raja Yoga can be carried out, depends on the circumstances and capacity of the aspirant. Gifts that are tokens of genuine affection can, generally speaking, be regarded as more or less harmless.

The second step is *niyama*, consisting of the practices of cleanliness of body and purity of mind, contentment, austerity without going to extremes or weakening the body and mind, study of spiritual wisdom, and devotion to God. Contentment means contented acceptance of one's lot in life, untroubled by envy or restlessness. It does not mean that one should be contented with the lot of people who are in unfortunate circumstances.

Then comes *asana* or posture. In this country Yoga is largely identified with those exercises that are known as Hatha Yoga. Patanjali speaks only of a posture which is easy yet firm. From that single and simple direction of his were elaborated a number of exercises which people began to practise in India, and these have now gone all over the world. Patanjali was concerned only with the posture for meditation. It should be easy and steady, so that you can sit and meditate for at least



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half-an-hour in the beginning, and later on for 45 minutes or more. You should try to sit up for meditation once in the morning and once in the evening, before taking food. After eating a substantial meal, two or more hours should elapse before attempting meditation. When sitting, the spinal column should be straight and the head erect. Muscular tenseness must be avoided. If you are not accustomed to sit cross-legged on the floor, you should sit in a chair, tucking the feet under the chair to facilitate an erect posture.

A very senior monk of the Order to which I have the privilege of belonging used to say that if you practise truthfulness and repeat a spiritual formula—which we call a *mantra*—that will be sufficient. But I should add that he took chastity for granted.

After *asana* comes *pranayama*. Now *pranayama* enables us to control *prana*, which is the vital energy in the system. It is one and the same energy that makes the earth move, the lungs work, and the heart beat. There is one cosmic energy: in our bodies and minds are found individual manifestations of it. This energy is not different in different individuals, any more than the electric current in one electric lamp is different from the current in another.

Now what Yoga aims to teach man is to control this vital energy in the system. Therefore *pranayama* is not control of breath, but control of *prana*, the energy which vitalizes the body. When *prana* leaves the system, the heart ceases to function, the lungs stop working, and the man is said to die. Here you say, "He gave up the ghost", but our idea is that the ghost gives him up, that is to say, the psychic or subtle body of man gives up the gross, physical body. *Pranayama*, if practised at all, must be practised along the right lines. It is better to learn it from a teacher than to practise merely after reading books.

*Pratyahara* follows *pranayama*. *Pratyahara* simply means gathering in the forces of the mind, which have been scattered. Suppose you buy a packet of mustard seeds from the grocer and break it; or the packet breaks by mistake and the seeds are scattered. How will you collect up the seeds? You must sweep



them together and pick them up, perhaps one by one. This is the usual condition of the minds of adult people. In the case of a young boy, his heart and mind are concentrated upon what he tries to do; but the man who settles down and marries gives half his heart and mind to his wife, and keeps the other half to move about. When a child is born, another portion of his heart and mind goes to the child, and so on. Then there is the bank account to be kept: the balance must be all right. He must have a good reputation among his fellows. Thus his energy is dissipated and mind distracted. How can he switch his mind onto God? He finds it very difficult. There are two forces that act upon the mind of man, one takes the mind away from its centre, and the other draws it in. Drawing the mind in is *pratyahara* and this is what the beginner tries to do when he sits for meditation.

*Dharana*, the sixth step, is fixing the mind upon one spot. If God is the object of meditation, then *dharana* is concentrating on God, thinking of Him as the Creator of the universe. In Yoga we say that the object of meditation should be conceived as within man. No doubt there is great benefit to be derived by meditating on God, even conceived as outside man, but He should be thought of as within—that is the emphasis in Yoga. Jesus asks us to pray to the Father in heaven, as though heaven were in a place apart from us; but His higher teaching is, "The kingdom of heaven is within you". In Browning's poem, "Pippa Passes", Pippa sings, "God's in His heaven, all's right with the world", but I am afraid that though God is in His heaven, there is much that is wrong with the world. That is because God has not entered into the hearts of these four billion people. If He were to enter into the heart of man, man would be transformed. That would be Yoga.

Suppose a man meditates on Jesus Christ or thinks with great devotion and faith of Mary, the Mother of Christ. In meditation proper, as understood in Yoga, there is little use in thinking of their outward persons and of the historical events in the lives of Christ and Mary. The aspirant must penetrate behind all that.



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His mind has to be focused on one point. There is no use in thinking of anything of this world; all that can come later. When a man sinks deep into himself, trying to arrive at the very essence of his being, which we call the Atman, the Self, he cannot think of other things.

Yogic exercises are good, but not sufficient. Yoga says that you should think of God or Reality or whatever it is that you concentrate on, as internal, as within yourself. In this connection they speak of the seven centres of consciousness. One should meditate at the heart centre, as it is called. By this is meant not the physiological heart, but the psychic or mystical heart, which is about an inch above the pit of the stomach and in the interior of the body. There one seats the object of meditation, whether it be an Incarnation of God, or a great Teacher, or a conception or symbol of God. This will transform the mind. When the mind moves about the three centres below the heart, it is not benefited. The heart centre is the starting-point for spiritual thought.

Sometimes people say that when they think of God, the mind moves upward. That is good, but it should come naturally and as the result of practice; not by merely having the idea that one can meditate at a point between the eyebrows. If you succeed in meditation at the heart centre, then the other centres will reveal themselves to you in due course. You may plant a rose, but you cannot push it into bloom. Similarly, you should not try to force things in meditation.

The heart centre is extremely important. There is said to be a lotus flower with eight red petals, in the heart centre. Before meditation it is in the form of a bud with the petals closed and drooping; but at the time of meditation the lotus stands erect and blooms. We imagine that the lotus is blooming, and in that is the sun. Within the sun is the moon. Within the moon is fire. Within the fire we seat the object of meditation. If, for instance, Krishna is our Chosen Ideal, we think of Him seated within the fire. When the sun is placed within the lotus the petals are not burnt, for both the sun and the lotus are mystical.



In the beginning, in the initial stages, of spiritual effort, it is advisable to think of Divinity as possessing form. First comes the thought of God with form; He is often thought of in the form of a human being. Later comes meditation on God without form but with attributes; and finally comes meditation on the formless, attributeless Absolute Being, or Pure Consciousness. This is the way—by stages. These are the three levels of spiritual life and experience, and they are for everyone. One thinks of a Divine form in the interior of one's being, in one's heart, and persists until it is directly experienced.

The formful and the formless aspects of God are like the obverse and reverse of one and the same coin. If you say that you want a coin with only the image of the Queen and not the design on the other side, you will not even have the side with the Queen, because you cannot have a coin with only one side. Formless God is the basis of God with form. The illustration of the ocean is useful. As the ocean, water has, roughly speaking, no form; but as waves, the water has form—the form of the waves. The great Teachers are like waves on the bosom of the ocean. Such Teachers are very few. All that we have of religion and philosophy, all the ideas, teachings, and principles that have come down to us from time immemorial, can be traced to perhaps half-a-dozen such Teachers; in the West, Jesus Christ; in India, Krishna and certain others; and then there are Moses, Buddha, and let us say, Confucius; altogether very few. You can count them almost on the fingers of one hand. Think of them, and at once you think of their principles.

One may start with God with form; but there are a few strong-minded people who can start with no form. Generally they think of God with attributes. And how do you think of the attributes of God? It is difficult to do so without having the idea that God is a person come into it somehow. So we say it is good to start with a form; nothing wrong in it: but proceed higher and attain to formlessness. Gradually the mind which has been moving over the external universe, is brought to a point, and deepened by meditation with faith. By months and years of



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- meditation you acquire the power to meditate upon what is called primal energy, the primal energy that projects this universe. The ego is then in communion with this primal energy which is the power of God.

After years of practice, one attempts to forget the ego, to forget the individuality. Eventually the ego will be transcended. The ego is not destroyed, but transcended. Ego-consciousness does not exist in Pure Being, to which the Yogi attains. It is not enough to think of God as Unity. Unity implies its contrary, duality. You cannot describe it; therefore the least inaccurate way of describing God the Absolute is to say what It is not. In Sanskrit we say "*neti, neti*", which means that God is "not this, not this"

After *dharana* comes *dhyana*. They constitute meditation. *Dhyana* is very difficult, for it is next door only to the super-conscious state, *samadhi*—the Light that illumines man, the Peace that passes all understanding. That is the highest.

Now *dhyana*, meditation, has been likened to the pouring of oil from one vessel to another without a break. The mind must flow towards the object of meditation without a single break for 24 minutes. When you succeed in that, then you are said to have attained one *samadhi*. We had a teacher in the last century: he passed away in 1886. He used to say that it is very difficult to remain in this state for more than 21 days: if a man remains in it for more than 21 days, then his body falls. But he himself was able to remain in this state for six months at a time, a marvellous feat. The ego is not functioning then.

The final step of Yoga, then, following deep meditation, is *samadhi*, which is superconsciousness. There are two types of *samadhi*: one, in which there is content of consciousness. God Himself is the content and you are communing with Him. There is another super-consciousness, in which consciousness is contentless: that is Pure Being, Pure Consciousness. You cannot describe it.

The subconscious must be gradually purified, and for that the practice of a *mantra* is very useful. A *mantra* sinks from the



level of the conscious plane into the subconscious, and there it works. You do not know how it works. The *mantra* should be uttered, say, a thousand times, morning and evening, and then you should try to meditate. Repetition of the *mantra* prepares the mind for meditation. The more you utter it the better. When you go to bed, repeat it a hundred times and then sleep with your head on the lap of God. He is your mother and He is your father. There is nothing wrong in thinking of Him as mother, we generally do, because mother is nearer to us than father. Father will pinch our ear if we make a mistake, but mother may not.

When you think in this way and practise a *mantra* at the time of going to bed, after some time you will find that you wake up in the morning with the utterance of that *mantra*. The thought that was uppermost, that was the last when you went to bed, comes up first in the morning. Why does this happen? It is because the *mantra* was working in the subconscious during the night: it rises to the conscious level of the mind when you wake up. The *mantra*

moves through and purifies the subconscious. It gradually transforms a man.

Yoga is the Sanskrit word meaning to join or to yoke. The word has at least seventeen subsidiary meanings, according to the dictionary. The primary meaning, however, has always been the same, namely, Yoga is communion with God. Yoga is a science. It is applied psychology. Not only is it the means to achieve the purpose of life, but it enables one to do anything one does, even in the world, with great energy and with great benefit to other people.



## *Chapter Four*

# LESSONS IN MEDITATION

*Swami Gnaneswarananda*

### **Relaxation**

From the very dawn of Indian history the Indo-Aryans gave a great deal of importance to the culture and development of the inner faculties of human life. As a result of long experience and experiment, they developed a special system of exercise for increasing the strength, purity and power of these faculties. Having established a fundamental theory that the human body is divided into different layers of being, they discovered various methods of feeding, resting and revitalizing them.

The physical body is an outer shell or covering for the inner body, which contains all the powers and potentialities of perfection. If the physical body needs food, rest, exercise, and also certain favourable conditions of living for its growth and upkeep, so does the subtle. What provision have we made for the development, for the exercise, rest and revitalization of the inner body, including its leader, the mind? It is a matter of deep regret that while we are busy improving the condition of our physical body we are almost starving to death the inner, which, if nourished and nurtured with care, could produce the most wonderful results, on the material as well as the spiritual plane.

The science of meditation was developed in India for the purpose of supplying the mind with the necessary nourishment, for giving it proper exercise and relaxation, and also for furnishing it with the necessary conditions for growth. Therefore, meditation can very well be defined as the science of supplying the mind with the favourable environment necessary for the manifestation of its highest potential—which is perfection.



Let us try to understand this analogy. In receiving the food for our physical body the natural law is, that in the course of metabolism we undergo a process of disbursement and waste which must be replenished by drawing in a supply from some sources of nature. We eat because we need certain elements and ingredients which we have spent in the course of our work. But the food we eat is not the only kind we supply to the physical body. The five senses also are drawing in food for its nourishment and development. In the selection of food we know we have to be very careful as there can be harmful as well as beneficial foods. For the replenishment of our mental energy also, we draw in naturally from various external sources. There is a special process of meditation which gives us the power of putting ourselves in constant touch with these subtle sources from which we can so lavishly draw our spiritual food, without incurring any expenditure. We shall discuss this process of meditation later. It will be sufficient to note here that all the consideration we give to selecting our physical food must also be applied to obtaining spiritual nourishment.

The next item is to give the mind its necessary exercise. We all know that by lack of exercise our muscles and nerves degenerate and deteriorate; whereas by regular exercise they can be developed to an almost infinite degree and amount of strength and efficiency. It has been demonstrated by many athletes and men of unusual physical strength that by proper exercise the power of the muscles and other physical faculties can be developed to any degree of efficiency. The story is told about a farmer who used to carry a little pet calf across a stream. This he did every day. The calf gradually grew up, but the farmer continued to carry it without being conscious of its physical development. When his attention was drawn to the fact, he realized that it was a full-grown bull he had been carrying so easily! Although a story, this illustrates how by gradual exercise one can develop the muscular power to an unbelievable degree.

In India I have seen wonderful feats of physical strength. I



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knew a man who could stop, by means of ropes two automobiles going at full speed. This same man could hold an elephant on a small platform placed across his chest. I had the occasion to question him about the development of his Herculean strength and received the most convincing answer. He said that it was by regular practice and by constant visualization of a very definite mental picture of his ideal of growth that he came to attain such phenomenal strength. Then in a very simple way, without any vanity or pride, he added that he would be satisfied when he would be able to stop, as easily, the "Punjab Mail", the fastest train in India at that time.

It requires no proof to demonstrate the fact that by means of exercise we can develop the strength of our physical body to an inconceivable extent. However, what we do not realize, perhaps, is that the same is true regarding the development of our mental faculties. Through lack of exercise our spiritual and mental powers have pitifully degenerated. Consequently, we have lost control over our body; we have lost our memory; we have lost the power of discrimination, foresight and many other subtle manifestations of mental power. But since these faculties have been exercised, and cultured by many to an amazing degree of proficiency, it proves the fact that anyone can do so, by regular, scientific exercise.

I have seen people who had cultured their power of concentration to such an extent that they could read any book, page by page, at a single glance. The psychology behind this is not very difficult to understand. We know that when a child learns to read he does so letter by letter. He must spell each word before he comprehends its meaning. As he grows up, he can read word for word. When he advances further he can even read a whole sentence at a glance. Developing the same faculty still more, a whole thought or a paragraph can be read at a glance. By developing the focus of the mind a whole page can be read as easily as the sentence or paragraph.

Very often certain problems present themselves to us in our lives. Because we do not know how to bring the mind to a state

of poise we cannot arrive at any definite and constructive decision. But a concentrated mind can probe with ease into the deepest problem and find a solution which would be impossible for a disturbed mind even to apprehend. The culture and attainment of a concentrated condition of the mind is absolutely necessary for every person, no matter what he or she wants to achieve in life.

A mind unclutured and uneducated in meditation and concentration fails to understand clearly the benefits or disadvantages of certain surroundings, whereas, a meditative mind can at once accommodate to and make the best use of any environment in which it is placed. If a need for change should arise such a mind knows unmistakably the practical, mental and spiritual process necessary for making it.

Of utmost importance is the need for giving complete rest and relaxation to the mind. Mother Nature has arranged for a wonderful process of rest for the physical body by raising that "blessed barrier between day and day". But the poor overburdened mind seldom gets any rest, even during sleep. It must be allowed to recuperate by a definite method of meditation. When we do not get sufficient sleep for a few days we know how miserable we feel. But, the fact is, the poor mind is kept practically without any sleep, rest or recuperation from the very day it came into existence until the end of life! No wonder that it has become weakened and has lost its vitality. Undoubtedly, it has a wonderful power of resistance; otherwise, it would have been demolished by the cruel and relentless treatment to which it is constantly subjected.

There is a definite method of meditation to give the mind its much needed recess of rest and relaxation which we shall presently discuss. Very often we think that a change of occupation brings relaxation to the mind. We may think we are relaxing but the fact is, we are not. What we usually do is this: we put aside strenuous and tiresome occupations of the mind for something new, of a lighter type. But this cannot be considered proper relaxation. Real relaxation of the mind can



only be had by completely unharnessing it from the task of dragging along any physical, intellectual, or emotional burden. Only when the mind is completely free, when it is not controlled, manipulated, or used by any other function, does it enjoy freedom and rest. This state of the mind can only be attained by a special process of meditation and concentration.

The sense of fatigue, disgust or depression of the mind comes only because of a psychological confusion under which we are labouring every moment. This confusion is caused by the miscomprehension of the subject and the object—the “I” and the “not-I”. It is the “not-I” which is active, which is doing everything, and which is moving to and fro in this world of phenomena. The real “I” is the witness; it is the illuminator. It takes no active part in any of the functions, either of the body or of the mind, save and except illuminating them by means of its innate radiance. The moment we are able to distinguish in consciousness between the “I” and the “not-I”, the “I” or the subject at once experiences release, rest and tranquillity. This surprising fact needs particular emphasis. Is it not rather strange that, although we know we *possess* a body and a mind, for all practical purposes we *think that we are* the body and the mind? The simple logic to be applied is this: if we say, I have a body and a mind, the relationship between my “self” and the body and the mind is one of *possessor and possessed*. The body and mind are the objects possessed by the possessor, which is the real “I”. Why then, is there this meaningless confusion between the possessor and the possessed? Do we not, in our practical life, always take the possessed for the possessor? Is not our ordinary consciousness of the ‘I’ identical with the body and mind? Where has the possessor gone? In fact, the real “I” is not recognized at all. As soon as we discover, and put the real “I” on its eternal throne of glory, we experience wonderful rest, relaxation, and complete unharnessing of the mind, no matter what the physical system might be doing. As soon as we realize the independent existence of that higher “I”, we enjoy the most intense degree of rest even in the midst of the most intense



activity.

The philosophy behind the practice of relaxation is to experience by means of our meditation the peaceful and all-perfect nature of the higher Self. Its real nature has been very beautifully described in one of the Upanishads, by a very suggestive and deep simile, the tree of life.

Human life has been compared to a gigantic tree which sends its roots deep down into the unfathomable bottom of the Unknown. It is nurtured and nourished by the sap of that unknown Infinite, which is Brahman. Its strong trunk is the trunk of karma, which has been attained, accumulated, through a succession of incarnations. The whole tree is held firm by that trunk. In the shape of its different aptitudes and inclinations it sends out many branches in every direction. These branches produce innumerable twigs, buds, leaves, flowers and fruit, representing the results of the impressions and experiences through which human life is advancing. The leaves appear in due time. They develop, attain maturity, remain on the tree for awhile, and finally, having made their contribution for the upkeep of the tree, they drop off, making room for other leaves to grow.

In much the same way, our experiences appear, remain for awhile, mature and then drop off. But when they drop off they do not vanish altogether. They leave their share of experience for the growth of the "tree". As in the case of the tree so in human life, flowers appear and gradually develop into fruit. Fruits in their maturity drop off, having left their contribution towards the development of the tree. The "flowers and fruit" are the results of our actions, good, bad, and indifferent. They appear, remain for awhile, and then drop off, contributing to the store-house of our *samskaras*.

Seated at the top of this tree of life, but not supported by or depending upon it, is a Bird, self-poised, self-illuminated and self-contained. It is always blissful, always cheerful. It never depends upon anything for its existence, happiness, or knowledge. It is radiating brilliance, effulgence; and the tree



beneath is illumined by that heavenly light. This Bird never leaves its throne of glory at the top of the tree, for it has no desire, no wants. It has everything.

There is another bird, very similar in appearance, which occupies the body of the tree. It has no fixed place of its own. It is moving constantly and hopping from branch to branch. It is always hungry and restless. Oh, the greed of this bird! The more it eats the more hungry it seems to be. Every moment it spent in finding and tasting new fruit. When it tastes a sweet one it experiences a temporary feeling of joy and happiness. But immediately that sense of satisfaction is gone, it is hungry again. It seizes another fruit which perhaps is bitter. Then it receives a shock and, looking around, it catches a glimpse of the beauty and radiance of the self-effulgent Bird above. It feels a great attraction and aspires after it. But, in the next moment, it forgets and darts after another fruit.

While moving in search of fruit the restless bird, being attracted unknowingly and imperceptibly by the other Bird, is slowly moving towards it in the form of a spiral. When a sense of satiety and satisfaction finally comes, the bird begins to feel disinclined to go round and round in search of fruit. Sometimes it takes a direct flight towards the higher Bird and reaches it quickly. But more often the process of approach towards the higher one takes place rather slowly and gradually, until, eventually, the lower bird comes very near the higher one, whose radiance and poise are reflected very distinctly on its personality. Finally, it is absorbed into the upper Bird and loses its separate existence. It realizes that the lower bird was only a shadow of itself! All is *maya*! The only reality is the higher Bird, which took no active part in the process of the growth and development of the tree of life.

Our real Self is the higher Bird. The lower bird, or our physical and mental systems, is just the shadow of the higher one. The exercise of relaxation consists in putting oneself in the position of the top Bird.



### **First Exercise**

Sit anywhere, in any posture, absorbed in your own thought, and hold your consciousness on the illumined Bird. Know that you are the Witness Self. Affirm inwardly, "I am not the body or the mind. They are mine. My real "I" is neither the physical body nor the mind. I am always separate, ever independent, and eternally free from this body. I am the Witness; I am watching every sensation, which is appearing and disappearing on the physical plane, without in any way taking part in the process. I am eternally blissful, self-contained, self-illumined, and self-existent. I am Perfection Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, and Bliss Absolute. I am That! I am that illumined Bird, the ever-perfect Atman!"

Making this affirmation and holding your consciousness firmly on the plane of the top Bird, allow the mind to wander freely to any thought. Do not try to check it. Let it eat all the fruit it wants. Upon realizing that it is constantly being watched by the higher Self, it will become more and more restful, and the yearning will awaken within it to go to its home, which is the position of the upper Bird.

This exercise should be practised as frequently as possible. Whenever you have a little time to spare visualize this picture. Repeat this *mantra* to yourself: I AM THAT—remembering, in the form of a vivid picture, the whole idea contained in the metaphor of the tree of life. Practise it so that the very mention of these words—I AM THAT—at once puts you in the position of the upper Bird. While riding to office, sitting in your home or in an open park, while reclining at home after a busy day, in fact during any of those intervals which you naturally enjoy between your busy moments enter into this thought. It will give you a wonderful sense of relaxation and of peace. Practise this as often as you can. Gradually, try to incorporate the truth into your system so that you do not have to give any conscious thought to the exercise, and it will become as natural to you as the breath of your nostrils.



### Drawing from the Infinite Source of Supply

The unique, vital, and most practical theory of Yoga philosophy is that man has come on earth holding as his birthright possession over an infinite source of supply within himself, for the attainment of absolute perfection. This theory has been applied not only in the realm of spiritual unfoldment. Many yogis have demonstrated the fact that even all our physical supplies, such as food, air, water, and the like, can also be drawn from our own internal nature.

A very interesting story is told about the sage who discovered this special knowledge of drawing nourishment from the infinite source of supply, even for the physical system.

This sage was reared from early infancy in one of the forest retreats. The only people he had ever seen were the monks who lived in the monastery. He grew up to be a brilliant scholar and his teacher expected that his young disciple would become one of the most prominent of the *rishis* (sages) and perhaps contribute something unique towards the fund of human knowledge and advancement. However, the teacher noticed one particular shortcoming in the young man. He was proficient in all the different branches of philosophy and was highly advanced in the practice of Yoga; but in the understanding of human nature he was more or less ignorant, because all of his knowledge about the world came from books. He had never had any opportunity of contacting people outside the monastery.

Every morning it was the custom of the monks to send someone from the monastery to the neighbouring village to get a supply of prepared food, sufficient to last them for the whole day. One morning the teacher asked this young man to go the village for the food. It was the first time he was going out of the monastery and the young ascetic looked forward to this new experience. He walked out of the forest and entered the village. For the first time in his life he found men who were very different from those he had known. He talked to some of them and was very interested in what they had to say. As he had been

directed by his teacher, he knocked at the door of the first house he saw. The door was opened by a young girl. She stood there with the food, ready to offer it to the monk. But he was so surprised to see, for the first time in his life, a person other than a man that he looked with wonder and amazement at her. This seemed to embarrass the young girl, who turned away. The monk asked her to wait. He said he wanted to ask her some questions. Why did she look as she did; why were there so many differences in her features from those of men, and many other questions which the young girl could not possibly answer. She said, "Please wait. I shall call my mother. She will answer your questions."

As soon as she saw the young monk the mother realized the situation. She understood that it was the first time the monk had seen a woman. With the tender care of a mother she explained everything the young monk asked her. She told him that woman was intended to be the mother of the race and this was the primary and most important mission of her life. For that reason, God created her in such a way that every faculty, every limb of her body, developed towards the fulfilment of that great mission. She pointed out that, if woman looks tender it is because such tenderness would be necessary for raising the child. If her voice is sweet and soft, it is because she is to contribute these soothing qualities to the future generation. She also emphasized the fact that nature makes such provision that when the child is born it receives a bountiful supply of food, which is stored up in the body of the mother long before the arrival of the baby.

The young monk was very much impressed with this knowledge, which his books had not taught him. He was amazed, and said, "Do you mean to say that long before I was born my God made it a point to see that my food was stored up in the body of my mother?" The lady answered in the affirmative. This seemed to overwhelm the young monk. He rose to go. The lady reminded him to take the food which he had



come for, but he shook his head, indignantly. "No more of that superstition," he said, "I am through with it!"

The young monk returned to the monastery. When he was asked about the food, he replied in the form of a few wonderful verses, reprimanding the teacher for his negligence in not teaching him the truth that the God who sent him into the world was so kind and considerate that he had even made provision for his food, in the person of his mother. He asked, "Do you think that God has died or has been unmindful of His business, that He neglected to make further provision for my sustenance when I grew up? It is now my strongest conviction that everything, physical, mental, as well as spiritual, that I may ever stand in need of, must have been supplied to me by my God. I will discover and teach the world how to get in touch with that infinite Source of supply!"

Tradition ascribes the discovery of this truth to this particular *rishi*. Apart from this legend, it has, in fact, been established on the ground of reason and experiment that a man can draw all his supply from within. Indian Yogis have remained buried under the earth for long periods of time. Even recently, there have been many amazing demonstrations of "miraculous" phenomena by persons who, by assuming certain postures or manipulating some of their functions and organs, placed their bodies in such a condition that they had no need of any food, air, or water. In fact, they raised themselves above all demands of nature.

Various practices have been taught by the yogis for the revitalization and replenishment of the mental and spiritual, as well as the physical, systems. In the first place, we shall discuss the process of drawing our spiritual food from the spiritual source of nature, just as we procure our physical food from the physical.

Vibrations raised in the thought atmosphere by any individual are never lost. They remain in a very subtle state of existence, always ready to rush into an individual consciousness



whenever a special affinity is established. A very suggestive illustration may be given to explain this. After tuning a stringed instrument to a particular pitch, strike the corresponding note on the piano. You will notice that whenever this particular note on the piano is sounded it creates a corresponding vibration in the stringed instrument, although it may be placed at some distance from the piano. But other notes, high or low, which you may sound on the piano will not have any effect on the instrument.

Similarly, when one tunes the lute of one's consciousness to a certain pitch it at once draws to itself corresponding thought-vibrations, present in the thought-atmosphere. The thought-vibrations of Buddha, Christ, and all the prophets, saints and sages, are present in the thought-atmosphere. So are the thought-vibrations of others. So we have to be particularly careful to contact desirable ones and avoid undesirable ones. Therefore, it is necessary to learn the science of spiritual hygiene, in order to keep above the infection of undesirable thoughts and to open ourselves to the benign influence of elevating thoughts.

A special exercise of Yoga is to be practised for that purpose. In order to put ourselves in touch with positive and purifying thought-vibrations some adjustments must be made in the individual consciousness, to establish its connection with the main current of supply. For instance, here is an electric light and on the wall is a switch. If I push that particular it will establish connection with this bulb and the current of electricity. By handling that particular switch alone, can I establish the connection. I might be pressing every spot on the wall, but until I press the right switch I will get no light from this bulb. Likewise, to connect our individual thoughts with those of the powerful spiritual dynamo a special switch, let us say, located at a particular spot in the human body, must be properly used. In Yoga the lotus is a symbol used to designate certain places, or 'switches', in the spine. These are not, of course, to be thought of as real lotuses. It is symbolic.



### **Second Meditation Exercise**

Within the brain, corresponding to the place between the eyebrows, visualize the luminous symbol of a white lotus having two petals surrounding a disc. The lotus is turned upwards. It is in full bloom. The symbol of the full moon is lying on the disc and it emanates rays of pure, white light. Sit erect and meditate on that white lotus, visualizing clearly and distinctly those darting rays emanating from the symbol of the full moon. Feel that through the medium of those rays all the thought-vibrations set in motion and stored in the thought-atmosphere by all the great spiritual men and women of the world are rushing into you. Feel that every atom of your being is being surcharged with those vibrations.

Make the following affirmation: "I am drawing in from the thought-atmosphere thoughts that are uplifting, purifying and strengthening. All the thought-treasures accumulated by the prophets, sages, and masters, are mine. Within my consciousness are all the thought-powers of all the prophets of the world, belonging to every age and race, every nationality and religion."

After meditating in this manner for at least ten minutes, do the second part of this exercise (Exercise No. 3 below) for revitalizing your physical and mental systems. The theory with regard to the second part of the practice is, that this physical body of ours is constituted of the combination of the five elements, earth, water, fire, air, ether. There are certain qualities and powers inherent in each one of these cosmic forces. By establishing our connection with these elemental forces we can draw our supply from the storehouse of the cosmic. Here, again, special 'switches' put us in connection with one or the other of these different cosmic sources. These connections are established by controlling and concentrating upon certain centres within our body. These centres have been described as lotuses, but do not think of them as having physical lotuses in them. The lotus, as I mentioned, is a mystic symbol, and the yogis have used this symbol for ages.



### **Third Meditation Exercise**

Sit straight and erect, with the back, neck and head in a straight line. Visualize, within the base of the spine, a red lotus having four petals, surrounding a disc. The lotus is fully open and radiant in colour and beauty. The lotus is turned upwards. On the disc there is the symbol of an equilateral triangle, the apex of which points towards your back. Visualize this triangle made of lucid and brilliant white light, on the background of the red disc of the lotus. It is sending forth luminous rays all around which form the medium of communication for the powers and strength of Cosmic Earth. Feel that you are recharging and revitalizing your whole system with the qualities of Mother Earth.

Repeat mentally, with joy and happiness, the following affirmation: "I am awakening the qualities of firmness, steadiness, and fixity in my system, from Mother Earth. Arise, O Cosmic Mother! Fill me with thy spirit! Thou holdest on thy bosom mountains, oceans, and plains. Hold me firm so that I may not swerve from my purpose of attaining absolute perfection. I am firmly fixed in my health, purpose, will, and spiritual ideal. No force on earth can ever dare to shake me. I am as strong, firm, and steady as Mother Earth."

Next, visualize a second lotus within the spine, corresponding to the place of the generative organ. This lotus has six petals of vermilion colour, surrounding a disc. On the disc there is a symbol of the crescent moon, white in colour, sending forth shooting rays. The curve of the crescent is pointed backwards. Feel that through those rays the vitalizing and rejuvenating influences from Cosmic Water are flowing within you.

Make the following affirmation: "Awake, arise, O thou Friend of all! Fill my system with thy power and qualities! I am drawing within myself the virtues of modesty, humility, and accommodativeness from Cosmic Water. I am not vain or proud. I am least of all; I am the servant of all. It is my privilege to be able to render any service to any being. As water is able to



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accommodate itself to any environment, taking upon itself the fullest share of qualities of same, without losing an iota of its own intrinsic nature; likewise. I am so constituted that I can adjust myself to the advantages and disadvantages of all circumstances, retaining always the fullest degree and measure of my own intrinsic perfection. I am as soft, fluid, supple, and accommodative as Cosmic Water."

Visualize another lotus within the spine, corresponding to the place of the navel. It is scarlet in colour, having ten petals surrounding a disc. On the scarlet background of the disc is the symbol of another triangle, the apex pointing towards the front of the body. This triangle, made of brilliant, but soft, white light, is the symbol of Cosmic Fire. As in the previous exercises, suggest to your mind the idea that the shooting rays from this symbol of the triangle are the medium through which you are drawing in the cosmic qualities of Elemental Fire.

Make the following affirmation: "Arise, awake, O ancient Power, and charge my system with thy force. I am expressing, from the source of Cosmic Fire, the qualities of vitality, purity, and the power to purify others. Just as fire overcomes all obstacles, comes forth victorious and cannot be suppressed; likewise, my intrinsic perfection is coming to the forefront of my being, overcoming all obstacles. All infections, contacts and contaminations are burnt out by the fire of my spirit. I am ever-pure, always effulgent, and as eternally powerful as Cosmic Fire. I can purify the whole world by the touch of the fire within me."

Again visualize a lotus within the spine, corresponding to the place of the heart. It is blue in colour and has twelve petals surrounding a disc. There is the figure of two reverse triangles, or a six-pointed star, lying on the disc. The symbol is made of brilliant, but soft, white and it is shooting forth rays all around. These rays are the medium of contact between the individual consciousness and the power of Cosmic Air. Fill yourself with the idea that every atom of your body is being surcharged with the qualities of Cosmic Air.



Make the following affirmation: "Come, oh Brother, come! Give me the touch of thy freedom! Arise, awake within me in thy full vigour and expression. I am as free as air. Just as air goeth where it listeth, without being in any way attached or confined to, or possessed by, anything; likewise, I feel not being attached to anything in this world. I am free—ready to attach and ready to detach—like air. I am flowing freely, without any obstruction, cheerfully carrying the message of happiness, fuller life, and revitalization wherever I go. I am the soul of Cosmic Air."

Next, visualize another lotus within the spinal column, corresponding to the place of the neck. It is grey in colour and has sixteen petals surrounding a disc. On the disc is the symbol of a luminous white circle. From this circle of light rays are emanating all around, forming the medium of contact between you and the force of Cosmic Ether. Meditate on the vital force entering into your system, filling every pore of your being.

Make the following affirmation: "Awake, arise, in thy mighty glory, thou all-pervading, eternal and universal Substance! Fill me with thy radiance, limitlessness and universality. I am as limitless and universal as Cosmic Ether. I am the basic principle underlying everything, from the highest angels, gods and demi-gods down to the lowliest of creatures that crawl on the earth. I am the soul of all. I am in everything, everything is in me. I am in the rich, I am in the poor. I am in the powerful. I am in the meek. I am in the wise, I am in the ignorant, I am in the beautiful, I am in the ugly. Everywhere, in everything, I am the essence of existence. Finding myself everywhere, how can I be narrow or limited in my understanding; how can I hate anything? I am intoxicated with the drink of universal love, toleration and understanding. I am the spirit of Cosmic Ether."

Do these exercise at least twice a day and gradually a special unfoldment will take place in you. If you can persist in continuing your exercises unobstructed for about a year you will find that you have developed wonderful qualities in your personality. You will always have a sense of deep satisfaction



which will place you above all feelings of want or imperfection. In fact, your mind will become a kingdom to you. The bliss arising out of the fulfilment of your spiritual ideal cannot in any way be compared with the attainment of any worldly thing which you might desire. The nature of all worldly things is to perish. You cannot own any treasure for eternity. The possession of worldly treasures only multiplies the desire for possessing more. For that reason, if you think that by learning to draw from the infinite source of supply you will attract or possess material wealth, it will only create more disturbance and want than ever. No earthly possession can make a person satisfied. It is possession of spiritual understanding which gives you 'ownership' over everything.

Once an Emperor met a yogi. He took him to his palace. He told him that he had fabulous wealth, he had everything he wanted. He asked the ascetic to come with him to his chapel for prayers. The yogi and the Emperor began to pray. But the Emperor, in the course of his prayer, begged God for more wealth, more power, more territory, longer life, and so on and so forth. Even before the prayers were over the holy man rose to leave. The Emperor stopped and asked him why he was leaving. The holy man said, "I have made a mistake. I thought I came to visit the Emperor. I did not have any idea that I was keeping company with the meanest beggar I have ever seen. I have known beggars who begged for a piece of cloth or a morsel of bread. But here I have discovered the meanest of them all! One, whose wants are so great that he has submitted a whole list of his desires to his God!" The Emperor was shamed and, realizing his mistake, embraced the life of real spirituality.

Let us always bear in mind that the greatest supply that we can draw upon is for the unfoldment of our spiritual perfection, attaining which we may enjoy infinite bliss and eternal life.

### **Posture and Breathing**

Before we take up for discussion our study of the direction, time, place, posture and breathing in meditation, I should like to



draw your special attention to one fact. All directions are God's directions. All places are God's places. God is everywhere; Truth is everywhere. So by sitting in one particular place or direction alone, no extra spirituality is to be gained. Many people think that just by sitting in a special posture, or breathing in a certain way, they will become perfect. But, perfection can never be gained by any mechanical means. Nevertheless, in the beginning, we can derive much benefit from these external conditions; observing them as mere accessories. While a beginner should avail himself of all favourable currents and conditions of the environment, yet with higher unfoldment he gradually becomes free from all external conditions. Freedom is our goal, not slavery to time, space or conditions.

When a little tree is planted by the roadside, it should be protected by a defensive hedge built around it. In no way does the fence, itself, contribute towards the growth and development of the plant. In fact, it is a hindrance to the growth of the tree. However, to protect it from the onslaught of disturbing elements, the fence must be maintained until the seedling grows into a strong tree.

All accessory measures that are taught for the practice of meditation are to be considered as the fence around the little plant of our spirituality. When the tree grows up, the fence should be taken away. Churches, rituals, teachers, books, food, regulations, and the like, can protect our spiritual plant for some time, but after it grows up the barbed-wire fence of our rituals may kill the tree itself! Follow observances with reason and discrimination, but do not let them cripple your manhood. Do not be a slave to anything.

With regard to the topic of direction, there is a very beautiful incident which is recorded as having happened in the life of Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion. He once went to a very famous temple. Everyone was sitting facing the image, except Guru Nanak, who was meditating with his back to it. A temple priest pushed him rudely and asked why he was sitting



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in the wrong direction. Calmly the Guru answered, "I do not know which is the right direction. Will you please direct me to it?" The priest pointed to the image and said, "Why, don't you see that the Deity is there?" The Guru smiled and pointing away from the shrine said, "I find Him there, as well. In fact, I find Him everywhere. Can you show me a place where the Deity is not? Do you mean to say that only this stone idol, this image, is the Deity? It is not!" For Guru Nanak, every direction was the right direction.

However, we are just beginning, so we should observe certain regulations. When you sit for meditation, where possible face the east. The earth's daily rotation is from the west to the east. So, facing east we face the direction of the motion. It is similar to riding in a train or a car and facing the direction in which it is moving. Many people, as you know, become sick while riding backwards. It has been observed that during the time of meditation one's nerves become very sensitive and the slightest discomfort creates a strong disturbance in the system. At other times we may not be so sensitive to the current, but during the time of meditation, when we are trying to bring all our faculties into a state of poise and equilibrium, this cross-current is deeply felt.

It will not be out of place to mention here another fact. When we sleep our nerves should attain a state of perfect equilibrium. At that time, also, the slightest disturbance creates unrest and irritation. Therefore, it is always beneficial to sleep with the head either east or south, looking west or north. Many cases of insomnia have been cured by a simple rearrangement of the bed, which placed the head in the proper direction. Also, if you cannot face east while meditating, face the north. The reason for facing the north is because of the magnetic polar current which is flowing from the south pole to the north. By facing north we face the direction of the current, and in sleeping, keeping our head to the south, the current passes over us from the head towards our feet. Here, a slight difference should be observed from the west-east motion. In the case of the earth's



rotation it is we who are moving with the earth. Whereas, in the case of the polar current we are, more or less, stationary and the current is flowing over us. Therefore, in sleeping it is proper to place the head towards the direction from which the current is flowing. And in meditation, to face the direction of the current, that is north.

Next, let us consider the question of time. By experiment and by their keen observation of nature, the yogis found that there were four periods during a day of twenty-four hours when nature enters into a short period of rest, when everything in nature spontaneously tends towards poise and tranquillity. Even birds, beasts and trees seem to enjoy an interval of calm during these periods. These four periods are called *sandhis*, or junctions, and they last for forty-five minutes each time, beginning twenty-two and one-half minutes before and lasting the same time after each one of these junctions. The first period is at sunrise, the second at noon, when the sun passes the meridian. The third is at sunset, and the fourth at midnight, when the sun passes the other meridian.

A student of Yoga should arrange his affairs and habits so as to avail himself of at least two, if not all, of those favourable periods for meditation. Besides the cosmic aspect, there is another reason why these four periods have been found very favourable for meditation, especially in India. From time immemorial it has been the custom of almost all grown-up people, men and women, to remember God, or their highest ideal, and enjoy a short period of silent contemplation during these times. All the yogis and students of meditation do their practices during these four periods. So, in India, a very potent spiritual influence is distinctly felt during these times of the day.

When I was living in Benares, as a young monk, there were times when, for some reason or other, I did not feel like following my daily routine of meditation. But I always had the privilege of being awakened early in the morning by a very powerful living alarm bell, calling me to arise and coaxing me to begin my morning meditation. About an hour before sunrise a



man would pass by the road near the ashrama, singing a beautiful song. The words still ring in my ears: "Wake up, wake up, O man! Is this the time to stay in bed? Get up, look around, and see that Nature is already wide-awake. The birds have begun to sing in praise of the Lord. The trees and flowers are looking up in admiration at the Divine! Only you, man, who claim to be the best of creation, remain in bed, wasting your time and life in laziness! Are you not ashamed?"

The words of that song, which that invisible singer would always send me as a special message, it seemed, never failed to rouse my spiritual consciousness whenever I felt the influence of *tamas*, or sleepiness and laziness, getting the better of me. I offer my tribute of gratitude and thankfulness to that man, who was to me a heavenly voice, without a form.

There were many other times, when I walked along the banks of the Ganges in the city of Benares and found thousands upon thousands of people at the time of sunset sitting quietly, absorbed in meditation. Even if I did not particularly feel like meditating the very potent influence of the atmosphere compelled me to find a spot where I could sit quietly in meditation.

Every serious student of Yoga knows how subtle thought-vibrations influence the mind favourably for the practice of meditation. However, if you cannot, for some reason, avail yourself of any of these four opportune periods, adjust your time for meditation so that there will be the least disturbance for you, and keep that time regularly every day. You will be able to create an atmosphere around you, by your steady practice, and will be drawn by the influence of association to do your practices.

You may have noticed that if you are in the habit of winding your watch every morning at eight o'clock, say, and if you become unmindful but suddenly remember that it is time to wind it, you look at the watch and find that it is exactly eight o'clock. This happens to everyone who keeps regular time for any work. One who rises early every morning does not need an



alarm clock, because his very system serves the same purpose. In the case of your meditation, keep your time regularly every day, and the time will keep you steady in your practice.

Now, about the value of place. It must have been the experience of many of you that when you are surrounded by magnificent scenery in nature you spontaneously feel like soaring into the infinite. All worldly consciousness seems to vanish before the influence of such grandeur in nature. Those are the places naturally suited for meditation. Meditation should be practised, if possible, in the open air. One should look out into the distance and send one's thoughts into the vastness of space, rising above limitations of all kinds. Look into the vast expanse of space, sitting beside the sea, or on a mountain, or near a river, or some other place where you can extend your vision far, far away. You will find that gradually a feeling of vacancy will occupy your consciousness. All of your worries, petty thoughts, and limited ideas will gradually vanish, and you will naturally enter into a state of meditation.

However, it is difficult, I know, for many to avail themselves of such wonderful surroundings for their daily meditations. But, during the summer, when you are out of the city with all its bustle and excitement, make it a point to enjoy such natural meditation, influenced by the spell and soothing fascination of Mother Nature. You can do this at least for a few days during your vacation. The memory of that will abide with you and help you throughout the year.

The alternative to beautiful natural scenery is to reserve a special room, if you are able to do so. Otherwise, keep a corner of a room for the sole purpose of meditation. Do not use that room, or the corner you have set aside, for any other purpose except meditation. Keep it clean, and in your own way try to associate a feeling of sanctity and purity with it. If you have a special liking for any pictures or symbols which you consider to be holy, put them there. If you have any association of holiness with any kind of incense or perfume, burn your incense or spread your perfume in that place. If you have any special



appreciation of purity and holiness in flowers, put flowers in that room. When you want to go to your little shrine you will feel a sense of hesitation to enter your sanctum if you are not physically and mentally clean. That hesitation will gradually exercise such a potent influence on your mind that the very remembrance of that spot will be an effective warning for you and will gradually help to eliminate all narrow and unclean thoughts from your consciousness. When you go to your sanctum for meditation you will find that the powerful atmosphere of that place will fill your whole being, and you will feel very much uplifted. In fact, this is the psychological reason why churches, shrines and chapels came into existence. The real benefit, of course, in having an external chapel is to be able, gradually, to convert one's own body and mind into a chapel, the finest chapel, or living temple, of God.

However, may I remind you that this is only an accessory means. It is like the fence to be placed around the little tree until it grows. So, do not remain confined to a small chapel. Do not be corner-bound. Every place is God's place. Every spot is a holy spot. Before we learn to swim skilfully we cannot take the risk of going into deep water. In order to be able to practise without any hindrance, when we are beginners, we select a convenient corner. But we must not remain there all our lives.

The subject of posture has been discussed very elaborately in one of the systems of Yoga, called Hatha Yoga. But the postures and poses taught in that system are not essential for the practice of concentration and meditation. We shall now discuss only the principal postures involved in the practice of meditation.

Sit straight and erect on a chair, neither too high nor too low, neither too soft nor too hard. Or, sit on the floor on a cushion, if you prefer to do so. Keep your spine straight, with waist, back and neck in the same straight line. Keep the head upright, the eyes half closed, and look without any strain, mentally as it were, to the spot between the eyebrows. From many angles, this straight and upright posture of the body is necessary for meditation. One of the most obvious reasons is that it keeps the



different organs in their right positions allowing them to function correctly without creating any extra burden on the system. Needless to say, this posture is very beneficial for the health and general well-being of the physical system. Meditation becomes easier of attainment if the physical body is not creating any hindrance. In meditation we have to forget the body. We cannot do so if the body causes us any concern.

The spiritual benefit of sitting in this posture is: whenever we try to uplift or raise our thoughts an upward current, starting from the base of the spine, rushes upwards towards the brain centres. This current finds an unobstructed passage through the spine only when it is in a straight upright position. The slightest hindrance has the tendency of forcing the current down, which causes a reaction in the system.

Whenever we get over some mood of depression, dejection or sorrow, we at once straighten up, as the first expression of our changed mental state. The simple reason is that, having thrown off the depression, the current within the spine compels us to assume an upright posture; it forces its way upwards. It follows, that when you hold and maintain the correct posture you can keep the mind above depressing thoughts.

If you prefer to sit on the floor I shall describe one or two postures that have some extra advantage over sitting on a chair. Before I do so, however, let me remind you that you may find it rather difficult and troublesome, and more harmful than helpful. You are not accustomed to sitting on the floor, so the joints of your legs are not very supple. Just because I have told you that there are some extra advantages to be gained by sitting on the floor, do not strive against your hereditary habit. We Hindus are taught from our childhood to sit on the floor. Our bones, muscles and joints are formed in such a way that we find it rather more difficult to sit straight on a chair, with the feet hanging down. I find it so, but if I sit on the floor, cross-legged, I can sit for hours without even for a moment bending my body.

If you are able to sit on the floor try to do so in the famous lotus posture, or *padmasana*. Put your right foot on your left



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thigh, and your left foot on the right thigh, with the soles of the feet upwards. Your feet, thus held on the thighs, create an angular force which at first presses your knee and then presses your waist forward, so that your spine is locked straight up. If you sit in that posture you will find it inconvenient to bend. The posture holds you in the correct position for meditation.<sup>1</sup>

Another posture is called *svastikasana*. Instead of putting the feet on the thighs, tuck them in the hollows inside the knee joints, between the leg and the thigh. Put your right toes inside your left knee pit. With the left hand hold the left toes, and, slipping the other hand under the right leg, draw the left toes into the right knee pit. Lay your palms on your lap, the right one over the left, with the palms facing up. This posture, also, like the *padmasana*, has the benefit of creating a pressure which keeps the spine perfectly straight. The word *svastikasana* means the posture for peace and success. *Padma* means lotus.

However, it should be very clearly understood that perfection can never be attained by sitting on the floor, or by sitting in any posture, for that matter. It is your *mind* which you must bring under control by regular practice and right living. As accessory means, right posture and such other exercises should be practised. And if you find it difficult to sit on the floor, sit on a chair by all means. Do not be carried away by curiosity or the vanity of doing something which others may not be able to do.

Next we take up the practice of breathing. Breathing is the clearest index of our inner consciousness. By watching a person's breathing it can very easily be discovered what the nature of his consciousness is. A person whose breath is audible to others, whose breathing is heavy, coarse, rough or shallow, is of a crude mentality. A certain kind of short breathing is a sign of short life.

The truth is that any disturbance of the mind is at once signalized by the disturbance of our breathing. When we are upset, angry, or under the influence of any passion, we find that

our breathing has become shallow and irregular. The reverse is the sign of poise and tranquility. by making the breath flow deeply and regularly, we can easily control the disturbed condition.

The science of right breathing is taught as an accessory means for the practice of meditation. The following is the most fundamental, vital and essential breathing exercise which a student of meditation must practise every day.

<sup>1</sup> From what is said here about posture it might seem, to the beginner, that if one does sit on the floor for meditation, one should sit in *padmasana* or *svastikasana*. The Swami was taking *sukhasana* for granted. It is the posture that will suit most Westerners, since the other two are difficult. *Sukhasana* is what is normally understood by the words "sitting cross-legged"; that is to say, the upper, outer parts of the feet rest on the floor. *Padmasana* is a counsel of perfection.—Eds

### First Breathing Exercise

Breathe in deeply, exercising the entire power of the lungs, and without making any sound. Then, without holding the breath, exhale as gently and slowly as the breath was taken in, maintaining the same rhythm.

Rhythm has a good deal to do with the welfare and advancement of our physical, emotional, and spiritual life. Anything done in rhythm has a soothing and restful effect on the system; whereas, breaking of rhythm at once creates chaos and confusion. For that reason, the metronome of breathing should not be allowed to become disturbed. By breathing deeply and rhythmically we can get rid of many physical and mental disturbances.

The science of breathing has been studied and experimented upon very minutely by the Hindu Yogis. They have gone so far as to find out different breathing exercises suitable for the success and right enjoyment of all our human activities. The five human organs of action, namely, speech, manipulation, locomotion, elimination and propagation, can be effectively regulated and controlled, say the yogis, by the practice of different kinds of breathing.



## Second Breathing Exercise

Sit in the correct posture, as previously discussed. Close your right nostril with the thumb of your right hand and draw in the breath, slowly and gently, through the left nostril. Count four times on the fingers of the left hand as you do this. Use the word 'Om' pronounced A-u-m, as the unit. That is, four Oms for this part of the exercise. Then, close the left nostril also, with the ring and middle fingers of the right hand. Hold the breath, with both nostrils closed, counting Om sixteen times on the fingers of the left hand. Release the right nostril and breathe out slowly and gently, counting Om eight times.

Again, without any interval, reverse the exercise, breathing in first through the right nostril, holding the two, and then releasing the breath through the left nostril. The counting of the Oms is the same, four, sixteen, eight. This is a complete *pranayama*. Continue this exercise, alternating from one nostril to the other. Do this exercise about three times, twice a day. If you wish to increase the duration do so at the ratio of 4-16-8. That is, for instance, 6-24-12. However, one should increase this slowly so that no strain is felt.<sup>1</sup>

I have mentioned before, the current that rises in the spine. The channel in the spine is called the *sushumna*. There are two currents on either side of this, known as the *ida* (pronounced "eeda") and the *pingala*. These will be fully discussed later on. In doing the breathing exercise just described, make a strong suggestion to yourself while you are holding the breath, with both nostrils closed, that the energy (not the breath) that you are holding has been pushed down to the base of the spine where the three currents of *ida*, *pingala*, and *sushumna* meet. Feel that there, at the base of the *sushumna*, the energy is pressing hard in order to open this canal, which has been closed, or blocked up. Practise this *pranayama* especially before your fourth meditation, if you are practising at the four junctions which we have already discussed. Try to practise it twice a day before your meditation.



<sup>1</sup> It is unwise to exceed the number of *pranayamas* mentioned by the Swami, or to proceed to a higher count than the basic one mentioned by him, without expert guidance. The reason for this customary warning is often doubted: it is that *pranayama* artificially rouses energy latent in the system. If the aspirant is not sufficiently developed to control this energy it may, in some cases and under certain conditions, play havoc with him, mentally, morally or physically. Lest it should be thought that one is losing something by not practising *pranayama* (in the sense of breathing exercises), it should be noted that all spiritual disciplines lead to spontaneous *pranayama* (in the full sense of control of the *prana*, or energy, operating at the psychical and physical levels), and to the rousing of latent spiritual energy; but they do it in a safe and natural, though more gradual, way.—*Eds.*

### Third Breathing Exercise

The following exercise has been praised by the yogis as one which brings great attractiveness of personality, a spirit of universal friendliness, cheerfulness of disposition, physical beauty, sweetness of voice and longevity. The exercise is very simple and can be done at any time.

Put your lips in the position of whistling. Then draw in the breath slowly, to the full extent of your lung capacity. Close the lips, swallow, and then gradually exhale through both nostrils, keeping the mouth closed. This exercise may be done as many times during the day as it suits you. When you are out in the open it is of great benefit. It also gives you the power of keeping your spirit above depression, dejection, sorrow, discouragement and complexes of all kinds.

Of course, there are many details in the study of breath control which I have not gone into. But I should like to remind you again that there are details in everything. When the fundamental principle is grasped one can adjust oneself according to the environment he finds himself in. In general, the most vital and beneficial exercise of breathing is to make your breathing deep and rhythmical. When that has been accomplished, meditation will be very easy and will proceed without much disturbance. Our object is not to be able to breathe in different fashions, but to be able to calm the mind and the body so that they do not interfere with our main objective, which is meditation.



### Awakening of the Kundalini

Before we take up the discussion of the *kundalini*, I should like to tell you something about the philosophy on which these meditations are based.

The entire teachings of the six schools of Hindu philosophy are summed up in one sentence: "Each soul is potentially divine; the goal is to manifest that divinity within, by controlling nature, external and internal" (Vivekananda). It is the final conclusion of all the different schools of Hindu philosophy, as well as the different systems of occult sciences, that whatever we want to attain in our life is contained within us. The infinite source of supply, not only of spiritual states but also of material things, is within us. If only we could know how to put ourselves in touch with that eternal source we would not stand in need of anything in life. All our needs, all our demands, hopes and aspirations, could be fulfilled from within.

With this philosophy as their basic principle the different schools of Yoga found out ways and means for the awakening of that divinity within. It is not a question of acquisition; it is not a question of the attainment of something which you do not possess, but it is one of awakening or *unfoldment*, that has been discussed by all the different schools of philosophy and experimented upon by the different systems of Yoga. So I would ask you to remember this definite conclusion, that the highest state of perfection which you want to attain is lying within you, just as the potentialities of the growth of the gigantic tree are contained within the little seed. Whatever we want to attain in the state of our full growth is already contained within us in the form of a very subtle potentiality. The question is how to bring this potential seed of perfection into the state of manifestation. Here comes the special method of Yoga which we are now considering and which is embodied in the Tantra philosophy.

I shall try to give you a very brief account of this philosophy. Many of you are acquainted with the name of Patanjali, the great authority on Raja Yoga. It is believed that he lived after Buddha and before Christ, probably somewhere between the



3rd and the 5th centuries B.C. In his Aphorisms we find just an incidental reference to the processes involved in the Tantra system of Yoga. But coming to a much later period, about 600 or 700 A.D., we find that a distinct school of mysticism had been developed, called the Tantra school of philosophy. The word "Tantra" means "rules to govern" The Tantra has a vast literature. There are sixty-four books bearing the general title "Tantra" and dealing with the same line of thinking. We do not know who the founder of this system was. By going through the Tantra texts, carefully and critically, one is convinced of the fact that this esoteric school of practical philosophy existed even in Vedic times and was handed down uninterruptedly throughout the ages. Some of the Tantric texts date from the time of the Brahmanical revival, after the decay and downfall of Buddhism. In many of the later Tantras there is evidence of a distinct attempt to re-establish the Vedic and Upanishadic religions that had fallen into disuse owing to the ascendancy of Buddhism, which had swayed the whole of India from one corner to the other.

We might briefly compare the Tantra philosophy with other systems. The ultimate Reality, which is called Brahman by the Vedantists and Purusha by the Samkhyas, is called Shiva by the Tantrics. According to Vedanta, the power of Brahman, by which Brahman manifests the universe (or appears to), is *maya*. In the Samkhya philosophy it is known as *prakriti* and in the Tantras it is called Shakti, or power. The object of the Tantrics is to experience the unity of Shakti and Shiva, the ultimate Reality, or to achieve the unitary experience of existence. The Tantrics believe that it is by the power of Shakti that they are able to realize Shiva. They do not, therefore, try to negate the creative power, as the Vedantists do, but, rather, to worship it and through it to reach Shiva, the state of Absolute consciousness. Shakti is called the Divine Mother of the universe. The teachings of the Tantras have permeated the ancient Hindu religion (Brahmanism) and it is especially prevalent in the north-eastern part of India.



The system of the Tantras, being an esoteric system of Yoga, always had a tinge of mystery and secrecy about it, and it was greatly misunderstood, even in India. When anything is secret the human mind always imagines something destructive, rather than constructive, about it. This is a weakness of the mind. People in general never knew very much about the contents of the texts of the Tantras, which were written in a sort of code language. As India will ever remain grateful to Max Müller for his work on the Vedic texts, so will the name of Sir John Woodroffe, who was once Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court, always be cherished in India with honour for his monumental work of bringing out the worm-eaten, palm-leaf manuscripts of the Tantras. He collected all the available manuscripts, engaged several Hindu scholars to decipher the hidden meaning of the texts, and then had them translated, edited and printed in English. It was a work of devotion to the ideals taught by the Tantra philosophy, which he held in very high esteem. Sir John Woodroffe, who wrote under the pseudonym of Arthur Avalon, contributed several well-known books on the Tantra philosophy.

As I mentioned before, the fundamental and essential truth accepted by all the different branches of Hindu philosophy and Yoga, including the Tantra, is that man is potentially divine and that religion and Yoga consist in finding out ways and means which, when properly followed, bring that potential perfection into full manifestation. As the result, Hindu *rishis* discovered and taught several methods of procedure, each of which is called a yoga.

By means of their observation and experiment the *rishis* of the Tantra school discovered that the potentiality of perfection lies within man in the form of a very subtle spiritual germ, or seed. The ancients used to think and talk in terms of beautiful similes, metaphors, and deep and suggestive figures of speech. Accepting the metaphor of a sleeping serpent, they described this "germ" of potential perfection by the word, *kundalini*. The etymological meaning of the word is, "the coiled-up one".



When a serpent is in a state of inertia or long rest it coils itself up and remains in the form of a bundle. It appears then that there is no life in the serpent. But are we to understand that the powerful serpent is dead? No, it will awaken and will rise up again. That is the state of its full expression; the previous condition was its potential, latent, unexpressed state. So, the technical term, *kundalini shakti*, which has been translated by many as "the serpent power", is only a metaphorical expression. In our modern language it could very well be translated by the scientific expression, potential power. When this philosophy was established, humanity had not yet developed the facility of scientific expressions. The idea contained in the modern word "potentiality" was expressed in a symbolic manner. To my mind there could not be any more poetic or any more beautiful symbolism than the coiled-up state of a sleeping serpent to denote the idea contained in our modern term, potentiality.

However, the use of the words "serpent power" in translating this expression is responsible for the many ridiculous misconceptions concerning it. Many people are entirely misinformed about the theory. They think that it is a dangerous process. It seems that some people even think the *kundalini* is the sleeping monster of the fairy tales! I should like to make this point absolutely clear, that there is no danger in awakening our potential perfection. In fact, it is a pity that we do not know how to do so. Gods we are! But by allowing our divinity to sleep for eternity we have become mere worms of the earth.

According to this system of philosophy and Yoga there is a centre at the base of the spine where this potential energy, or *kundalini*, lies dormant. The theory is, that all the different forms of energy that we conserve or manifest in our lives travel through three special channels called *nadis*, which are located within the spine. Through the middle of the spine, from the base all the way straight up to the brain centres, runs the *sushumna*, the subtlest and the most important of the three. Encircling this middle one, in the form of a figure eight, are the two others. The

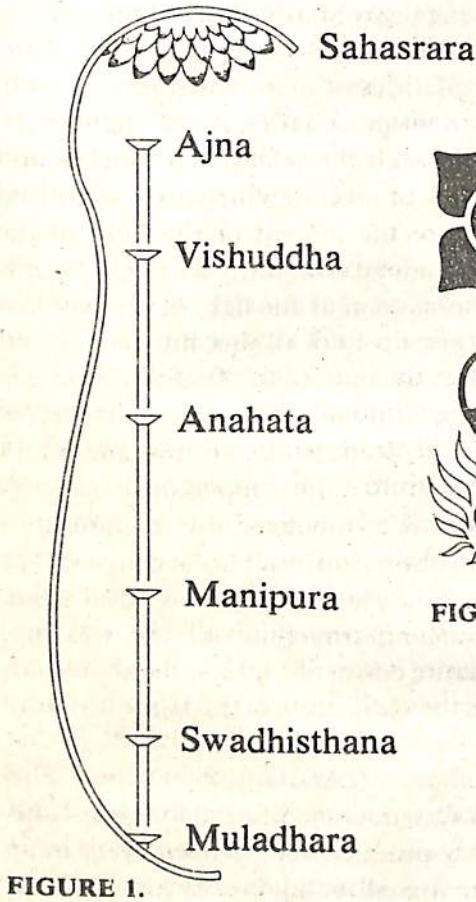


left-hand side of this figure eight, including the top cross-section to the right, is called *ida*. The opposite half is called *pingala*.

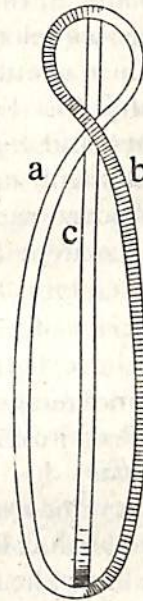
These three channels meet thrice, at the base of the spine, at the neck, and at the place between the eyebrows. At the base, the channel of the *ida* and the *pingala* joins with another passage, the *sushumna*; whereas, at the other two junctions the currents cross without admitting any passage through one another. (See Figure 3). In the average person the passage through the *sushumna* is entirely blocked. The energy runs only through the *ida* and the *pingala*, in the form of the figure eight. The matter which blocks the upward passage of the *sushumna* is the dormant state of the *kundalini*. In fact, it should not be called "matter"; it is a very subtle form of potential energy. At the base, the channel of the *ida* and the *pingala* may be compared to a U-shaped tube having a third channel in the middle, meeting the U at the curve. Imagine that some sediment has blocked the passage through the middle, leaving only the U-shaped conduit open. That is the condition of the average person, so far as the opening of this passage is concerned. This "sediment", or spiritual substance which blocks the passage of the *sushumna*, is the undeveloped state of our spirituality. The endeavour of the yogi is to open the middle channel by means of certain practices in breathing and meditation.

We discussed the special breathing exercise (No. 2) for opening the *sushumna* in the previous talk. That exercise has been prescribed for the awakening of the *kundalini*. As soon as the *kundalini* is stirred up, something like a combustion takes place which generates, in a very subtle spiritual sense, heat and light at the base of the *sushumna*. With the awakening of the *kundalini* the yogi actually feels a unique and soothing heat and light at the base of his spine. The awakened *kundalini* is then made to travel upwards by means of a highly symbolic form of meditation which unfolds higher and higher spiritual qualities in man.

This process of unfolding the higher qualities of man has been beautifully symbolized with the help of a very poetic and



- a. Ida
- b. Pingala
- c. Sushumna





significant metaphor; that is, the blooming of the lotus flower. After the lotus blooms it remains fresh on its stalk for a long time; but every evening as the sun goes down it closes and droops. Again, with the rising of the sun the next morning it straightens up and gradually manifests full bloom and beauty again. This beautiful and suggestive natural phenomenon was studied by the sages and accepted as a unique symbol of the unfolding of the spiritual qualities of man, with the advent of the light of understanding in his personality. As this light of the *kundalini* travels upwards through the *sushumna* it touches and illumines the different centres, or *chakras*, which are symbolized in the form of lotuses. Before the advent of the light of the *kundalini* all these lotuses remained drooping, so to say, heads down, wilted and faded. But as soon as the light of the *kundalini* touches a lotus it straightens up and attains full bloom and beauty. (See Figure 2.) Thus, the light of the *kundalini* proceeds higher and higher, bringing "into bloom" various stages of unfoldment in man, until it transcends all the planes of consciousness and enters into the superconscious, or transcendental, plane. This is symbolized by a thousand-petalled lotus located in the brain centres. This is conceived as an ocean of infinite Light, Knowledge, Existence, and Bliss. The little light of the *kundalini*, travelling all the way up, becomes merged in that infinite ocean of Light in the thousand-petalled lotus, which marks the realization of the highest state of *samadhi*.

Allow me to digress for a moment. As many of you know, Shri Ramakrishna followed this system of meditation for some time. You know, he followed every practice and realized every main religion to prove that they are all valid means for attaining spiritual perfection. He often described his experiences to his disciples. Regarding this practice of meditation he described how the *kundalini* made its way upwards. He said that sometimes he felt the upward current was like the movement of a bird, hopping from one centre to another. Sometimes it was like the movement of a fish in water, and at other times like the



swinging of a monkey from branch to branch of a tree. By practising all the different paths Shri Ramakrishna brought out their essentials and cleansed them of their dross. The Tantra system of Yoga had fallen into disrepute, owing to the weakness of those who taught and practised it. Shri Ramakrishna vindicated this system of meditation and set it up again in its rightful place as a pure and noble form of spiritual practice. He proved, by following it himself, that one could reach the highest spiritual goal through these practices of meditation.

Now I shall give you the exercise for bringing forth the potential perfection within.

#### **Fourth Meditation Exercise**

Sit on your regular meditation seat, in the correct posture, as previously discussed. Then slowly and gently do the breathing exercise as described under Breathing Exercise No. 2. At the same time visualize a luminous channel running all the way from the base of the spine to the brain centres. Feel that by means of your breathing exercise, and by the power of your thought, the passage at the bottom of this channel has been cleared and a constant stream of spiritual energy is running into it from the U-shaped conduit, formed by the junction of the *ida* and the *pingala*. This inrush of the current has awakened the *kundalini*, which has taken the form of a small, white, lucid, but soft and soothing, light, like the flame of a candle. This light is slowly travelling upwards through the channel of the *sushumna*.

It touches and illumines the first centre, symbolized by a lotus but located at the place within the *sushumna* a little higher than the base. This centre is called the *muladhara*. As soon as the light touches it, the drooping lotus bud straightens up and opens, showing its beautiful four petals in brilliant red. There is a disc inside which is also of the same colour (See Figure 2.).

Next, visualize the light of the *kundalini* travelling further up, slowly and gently, until it comes to the next centre located within the *sushumna*, corresponding to the place of the genital organ. This centre is known as the *svadhisthana*. The wilted and



drooping lotus bud of this centre is touched and illumined by the light. The bud opens; showing its six petals around the disc in vermilion colour.

Leaving this lotus, proceed upwards with the light of the *kundalini*. It ascends to the next centre which is located at the place corresponding to the navel. The *manipura*, which is the name of this centre, has a lotus of ten petals, scarlet in colour, and a disc of the same hue. The light of the *kundalini* makes the wilted bud stand upright on its stem, healthy, bright and beautiful.

The light of the *kundalini* travels further up and reaches the region corresponding to the place of the heart. There, it touches and illumines the next lotus bud, and brings it into a state of perfect health, bloom and beauty. The twelve-petalled *anahata*<sup>1</sup> is unfolded in brilliant blue, manifesting wonderful spiritual qualities in the personality of the yogi.

Farther up travels the light. It comes to the region of the *vishuddha*, located in the place corresponding to the neck. Again, the drooping lotus bud is touched and illumined by the light of the *kundalini*. Slowly and gently it stands up on its stem and attains full bloom. The open lotus shows sixteen beautiful petals, and the disc is light grey in colour. With the unfoldment of this plane of consciousness, marvellous spiritual qualities are manifested in the personality of the yogi. The whole system is surcharged and saturated with the joy of the unfoldment of this mystic centre.

Higher travels the light. It comes to the region corresponding to the place between the eyebrows. The *ajna* unfolds by the touch of the divine light of the *kundalini*. The wilted bud stands up. It opens, sending out a radiance of wonderful light. The beautiful white colour of this two-petalled lotus is distinctly visible in this centre, and the effulgent light emanating from it stands in the form of a beautiful aura around the head.

With the unfoldment of this state of consciousness, the yogi feels the supreme bliss of divine understanding and penetration into the deep mysteries of the universe. He stands face to face



with the truth. There is nothing which he does not know. His whole being is illuminated with the light of knowledge. He is the divine manifestation of Absolute Knowledge, in flesh and blood. It gives him a wonderful sense of joy to realize his unity with the All-knowing One. But still there is a little distinction. The subject-and-object consciousness still remains; the yogi knows the truth but he is still distinct from it. The truth is his "object" of perception, and he is the "subject" of it.

The light of the *kundalini* travels still higher and leaves the channel of the *sushumna*. In the brain centre is the place of the *sahasrara*, or the thousand-petalled lotus, which is the symbol of the transcendental state of Absolute Existence, Knowledge, and Bliss. Visualize the transcendental state in the form of an ocean of light, brilliant and effulgent, but cool, soothing and peaceful. As soon as the little light of the *kundalini* leaves the channel of the *sushumna* it enters into this ocean of light. Just as a little drop of water falling into the waters of the infinite ocean becomes one with and inseparable from the ocean; likewise, the finite light of the *kundalini* becomes one with the infinite Light of absolute Existence, Knowledge and Bliss.

When you reach this point in your meditation, feel that your little "I", your small ego, your limited personality, has transcended all its limits. You have no body, no mind, no friend or foe. You are the Absolute principle. You have no birth, no disease, no death; no happiness, no suffering, no pain. You are beyond all pairs of opposites. You are Infinite Existence, Knowledge and Bliss.

Make the following affirmation:

"I am neither the body nor the mind. I am that infinite and universal principle. I have no friend or foe. I have no pleasure or pain. I am that absolute, changeless, deathless, eternal and infinite Truth. I am above all pairs of opposites. Nothing can touch me. Nothing else exists. I am the All, the All is in me. I am That. I am That."

Remain in this state of consciousness as long as you can. Then take up the final meditation, which will be discussed in



the next talk. Meantime, I should like to explain the significance of the different *chakras*, or centres.

As I mentioned earlier, the lotuses we have been speaking of are symbolic. Do not, for a moment, think that I am talking of the lotus in any tangible form. These symbols of lotuses stand for the different stages through which the soul passes on its journey towards infinite Perfection. These *chakras*, or lotus centres are, therefore, different *stages of consciousness*. The first one, *muladhara*, meaning the basic receptacle, is the place (symbolically speaking) where all our past *samskaras* or experiences rest. It is the place where the crystallized *karma* of all our previous incarnations is lying, in a potential state. If one can gain absolute control over this centre he will be able to remember everything concerning his previous lives.

The second centre, or the *svadhisthana*, which means the home of the lower self, is the fountainhead of all our animal forces, which can be spiritualized and used for our best advantage by gaining absolute control over this centre.

The third centre, the *manipura*, which literally means the city of jewels, marks the climax of all material enjoyment, power, name, fame, health, physical beauty and prosperity; in fact, everything one can think of attaining in this world, with the knowledge of its spiritual value. One must be convinced that worldly things cannot bring any satisfaction to the soul. Examining their value, one must throw them away like lumps of dirt, and rise higher.

Every student should carefully note that until he has transcended the *manipura*, a natural downward current is trying to press the light of the *kundalini* to the base again. So, up to this centre the work of the yogi is more or less uphill. He is not secure until he is able to rise above this centre. There is every possibility of his getting attached to certain phenomena which might appear before him in very alluring forms, throwing him down to a state of pitiful darkness. For that reason, the yogi must keep ablaze the torch of discrimination until he rises above *manipura*. However, as soon as the spiritual current



reaches the next centre, the *anahata*, there is a natural upward current in his favour. The yogi is comparatively safe at this stage.

The *anahata* means the uncaused or the unagitated. As soon as he comes to this stage of unfoldment man becomes highly spiritual. He carries a message of love, friendship, helpfulness, forgiveness, peace and fellowship to all beings. His love and goodness do not depend upon any objective condition of return or reciprocity. It is his nature to be good, since he is all love. The sun cannot shed darkness, nor does it want any return from the objects it illumines. The unfoldment of this state is, therefore, called the unagitated, or the uncaused. In all kinds of physical manifestation there is a stimulus or agitation which causes the expression in the subject. But, in the case of this person, his love, benevolence and friendship flow ceaselessly, without being caused by anything. He is love and goodness "in flesh and blood", and radiates them spontaneously wherever he is. His personality is attractive and fascinating. With the opening of the lotus of the heart, man expresses the love of God, the love of man, and the love of his self, all three in one, everywhere and for everything.

The *vishuddha*, which means extremely pure, brings into manifestation in the personality of the yogi pure beauty, pure goodness and pure truth. He becomes an artist of the highest order. Everything that comes from him creates beauty and goodness. In short, he has become the joy and beauty of the world around him.

The *ajna*, which means the "all-knowing", is the stage when the yogi unfolds absolute knowledge. There is nothing in this universe or elsewhere, in the present, past or future, which he does not know. There is absolutely no limit to his understanding. Knowledge is satisfaction; knowledge is freedom; knowledge is bliss. Therefore, the yogi enjoys absolute freedom, satisfaction and bliss in this state of unfoldment. But there is still a little limitation which he must surpass. He knows everything, just as one knows things that are locked up within a



glass case. You see everything but you cannot touch it. You know everything at this stage of consciousness but you *are* not "that", as yet.

In the final state, which is called the *sahasrara*, that little distinction between the Self and the not-Self vanishes. The little drop of water is merged in the ocean, and becomes one and inseparable from it. This is the state known as *nirvikalpa samadhi*, to describe which all language fails. This is the experience which has never become "second-hand". This state has been described by Shri Ramakrishna in a very beautiful poetic simile:

"A little salt doll once wanted to fathom the depth of the ocean. It went down to the water's edge, stepped in, and, being dissolved in the water of the ocean, it melted away, becoming one with the ocean and inseparable from it. It could never come back to tell its story!"

Your little self, your mortal, limited individuality, expands to infinity, expresses the All and becomes one with the Absolute. You go beyond time, space, and causation. You assert your divine nature, your pristine glory, your infinite bliss. This is known as the complete awakening of the *kundalini*. Everything that you then experience—the unspeakable beatitude of *satchitananda*, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute—was fundamentally contained in your nature. It unfolded, gradually, through the different stages, and finally reaped its richest harvest in the *sahasrara*.

Without any doubt, hesitation, or fear, but in a cheerful and a happy state of mind, a student should practise this meditation at least twice each day. Even during his other occupations, he is required to keep an undercurrent of spiritual memory strong within himself. Practising in this way for about two years, the *yogi* realizes a wonderful change in his whole personality. Then, gradually, he may select one of the three upper lotuses as his favourite. He may manifest himself mostly through the *anahata*, the *vishuddha*, or the *ajna*. He may come to such an understanding that at will he can command the unfoldment of



any one of these three to make his expression or actions manifest the predominance either of wisdom, beauty or love. At times, the yogi wishes to manifest the power of wisdom in some of his endeavours. If he can hold his consciousness on the plane of the *ajna* all his expressions will manifest the force of wisdom. He will fascinate and control the whole world by the spell of his brilliant understanding. If he controls the *vishuddha*, his manifestations will excel in the creation of artistic beauty. Whatever he does will express itself in the form of the most exquisite art. When he holds his consciousness at the *anahata*, he spreads the charm of pure love all around him.

To begin with, do not meditate long on the three lower centres, but go through them slowly without stopping. After practising for about two years one does not have to go through every step of the process, but can place his consciousness on any one of the higher three centres, and gradually ascend to the *sahasrara*. But a beginner must follow the entire process regularly, twice a day, from beginning to end for a period of at least two years. And, remember, it is not dangerous to arouse the *kundalini*. In fact, until it is aroused man is just like any bird or beast. Animals also eat, drink, sleep and beget. If such is the only symbol and sign of life what distinction is there between a brute and a human being? There is only the degree of the awakening of that potential power that distinguishes a man from a beast. To the extent and degree that a man's *kundalini* has been awakened, he is higher than other species. The more one rises in the unfoldment of that inner state of potentiality, the wiser, the holier and the stronger than the rest he is. So do not, for a moment, cherish the misconception that it is dangerous to arouse the *kundalini*, or the latent spiritual power within yourself.

Everything that you experience in the highest state of spiritual unfoldment is contained within you. It is by practice, and constant practice, that these states are reached. The secret lies in your practice alone. Unless and until one experiences these steps and stages there is no way of verifying the truth.



## Meditation

There is abounding beauty and incessant bliss on the way, so begin your practices without any hesitation. Begin now. If we do not attain to this highest state, pity on us all, for the human incarnation is the only state of existence where we have the power to bring into manifestation this absolute perfection.

Do not try to mystify anything; do not try to create any haze around this philosophy. If there is a little doubt in your mind, do not hesitate, but go on with your practice. All doubts will vanish as you proceed. Your practice is the only means which will finally convince you of the truth.

<sup>1</sup>When instructing Uddhava in how to meditate (see *Last Message of Shri Krishna*, translated by Swami Madhavananda), Shri Krishna says that the deity—the object of meditation—should be thought of as seated in the lotus of the heart, which has eight petals. This lotus is not the *anahata chakra* of twelve petals mentioned by Swami Gnaneswarananda, but a lotus known as the *anandakanda* (see *Mahanirvana Tantra*, 5.5.132; translated by Sir John Woodroffe under the title *Tantra of the Great Liberation*). The eight-petaled *anandakanda* lotus, red in colour, is below the pericarp of the twelve-petalled *anahata*. Here, according to the *Tantra* just cited, the Chosen Deity is to be meditated upon and mentally worshipped. It would seem that Shri Krishna refers to the *ananda-kanda*. The eight petals, we have been told, symbolize the eight occult powers.

Sir John Woodroffe (Arthur Avalon) translates an authoritative description of the *chakras* in his book, *The Serpent Power*. In distinction from what the Swami says in this chapter, the *manipura*, Woodroffe says, is of the colour of a rain-cloud; the *anahata*, of the colour of the *bandhuka* flower (i.e., scarlet); and the *vishuddha* is smoky purple. There is some variation in the detailed descriptions of the *chakras*, and thus the Swami's account is slightly at variance with that given in the *Tantras* translated by Sir John Woodroffe.—Eds.

## Good Will to All

The maxim of the Hindu view of life was always: "For the good of all, for the gain of all". Consequently, the success of every activity of human life was considered from the highest utilitarian standard, as to how much good it brought to all, instead of to the doer alone. The utilitarian standard of ethics which we discuss in the present age had its origin in remote times. Then it was understood in a much broader sense, including all beings within its scope. It was carried to such an extreme by the early Hindus that the standard was applied even in the matter of cooking food. If food was cooked only for an



individual person or family it was considered impure. A portion of the food was to be set apart, to be distributed (sometimes symbolically) to the five great worlds from whom so much benefit is received for our existence.

These great benefactors are: the world of the unseen *devas*, or gods, and higher beings who are supposed to have some control over human welfare; the world of the *rishis*, or the seers of truth, from whom we have inherited all ancient knowledge and wisdom; the world of the *pitris*, or the departed forefathers, whose names we bear and whose prestige, honour and dignity we inherit; the human world; the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms.

If you were the only human being on this earth, what kind of a life could you lead? You would be no better than a cave-man or a savage forest-dweller. So, we owe a heavy debt to the world at large, and daily we should pay homage and reverence to all, in token of our appreciation. Therefore, in doing any action we should consider how much benefit it brings to all. If an act of piety, a religious exercise, or spiritual practice, brings benefit only to the agent, it is to be considered selfish, and for that matter it is no longer spiritual. On the other hand, any endeavour which brings benefit to many, whatever may be the nature of the act, has always been considered spiritual. According to that standard of cosmic utility, even one's religious practice should be performed in such a spirit that the results may be shared by all beings. In India, at the conclusion of any spiritual practice or religious ceremony, a special ritual is performed which sends the fruits of the action to all directions in the universe, so that all creatures may derive benefit from the good act. Even after going through all the different steps in the time-honoured procedure of meditation the concluding process must be a *renunciation of the fruits of the exercise*. The yogi does not want any personal benefit from the practice of his meditation. If any benefit is to be derived, let it go for the advancement, the happiness and prosperity of all.



Those people who believe in a personal God, or who meditate on the form of a Deity, offer the fruits of their meditation to God, with the words: "Thou art the soul and the basic reality of every being that is, was, or will be. By offering the fruits of my meditation to Thee, I offer them to all. May it please Thee to grant peace, purity, goodness and prosperity to all beings in the universe."

Those of a philosophic bent of mind, who do not care for a personal ideal but consider themselves as the fountain-head of all good thoughts, meditate on the idea that from their consciousness constant streams of uplifting thoughts are pouring out all around on the visible and the invisible universe, reaching the hearts of all beings. Under all circumstances, we must renounce all expectation of results from our practice of meditation. If any results are to come, let them be shared by all.

When we act for others we manifest our inner spiritual perfection in a more pronounced way. When we *give* we are great spiritually. When we *beg*, no matter what it is for, we always become small. The ocean of our spiritual perfection "dwindles down into a mere drop" at the very idea of begging. Suppose, because of poverty, a self-respecting person has gone down into a state of extreme hunger and suffering. I doubt if he could approach the door of a rich person to ask for food. But, if he finds another at the point of death from starvation, he can very well beg for food for the man, without feeling humiliated at all. In fact, a great spiritual strength and power will be manifest in his personality in the realization that he is *giving*. Simply by the force of his love and sympathy he will be able to inspire others to come forward to render the necessary material assistance.

If we give these facts some thought we shall easily convince ourselves that whatever we do for our own benefit undermines our spiritual strength. In a very subtle way it makes us feel small and humiliated. But whatever we do for the benefit of others at once kindles the spirit of universality and spiritual strength within us. Therefore, if our meditation and spiritual practices



are done only for our own benefit, in the last analysis we do not gain much. If they are performed with the intention of serving others, the little drop of our spirituality multiplies into the ocean.

It is absolutely necessary to develop an altruistic attitude regarding your meditation. Do not look forward to any results—how much progress you have made in the course of a few months or years, what you have gained, and how much more there is to come to you. If we always keep a part of our mind engaged in the calculation of our gain and loss in our meditation, it can at best be a business enterprise, but not a spiritual practice, not a method of spiritual unfoldment. A student should forget all about results.

It has been my unshakeable conviction that the greatest amount and degree of service that one can render can only be in the realm of thought. There is a common saying that “thoughts are things”. In my estimation, thoughts are even more potent, substantial and permanent than mere things. If you give a coin or a car to another it will be spent, lost, exhausted or worn out before long. But if you can give your genuine good thoughts to him it brings more benefit than anything else. Owing to our gross and materialistic impatience, we fail to appreciate the value of thoughts. With higher unfoldment we come to understand that we can help the world more by creating spiritual vibrations of thought, than by offering any material thing.

Very often we come in contact with people who need help. It is not possible for us no matter how affluent we may be, to supply the material needs of all those persons. Because of this a spiritual-minded person feels some disturbance in his mind, and that disturbance hampers his progress. As a remedy for the disturbances that arise because of the sufferings of others, this special exercise should be practised: raise a very powerful thought-vibration during every meditation, sending out a current of love and goodwill for all beings.



In the first place, you will find that at least the worry you used to feel because of the sufferings of others will be gone. You will enjoy a more calm and peaceful state of mind. Secondly, viewing the matter from an objective angle, it can be established that those needy persons actually get the help which you send them in the form of your good thoughts. Many people raise the objection that by sending out a good thought for a hungry person you might solve your own problem. You might feel calm and peaceful yourself, but does the hungry person get that piece of bread he needs so badly? With all the emphasis at my command I insist that, in bringing the much-needed material relief as well, such thought-vibrations are far more potent than mere material assistance. It is one of my strongest convictions that even a hungry man does not suffer so much from the want of a piece of bread as he does from the lack of a spiritual state of consciousness which would place him far above all sufferings. This consciousness undoubtedly receives some unfoldment from the sincere good thoughts of a spiritual benefactor. Moreover, it has been found that the powerful thoughts of a spiritual person are caught by others having the material resources and they feel the urge to supply the material need. The goodwill of the yogis and other spiritually-advanced persons is contacted imperceptibly by people who are in a position to help the poor and the needy.

Of course such a practice is beneficial subjectively as well, and from one standpoint, the subjective benefit is to be considered the most important of all. I do not know if, in the future history of the world, a time will ever come when, objectively, all needs, sufferings and sorrows will be abolished. Probably they will remain as long as creation lasts. But any person can get out of the consciousness of suffering by means of higher spiritual understanding. The remedy will always be a subjective one. If we can rise above the consciousness of suffering, subjectively, and help others to do the same, we shall be solving the deepest problem of the world.

I am reminded of a very beautiful incident recorded in the life



of the great American, Abraham Lincoln. The story is told that one day he was out on horseback with some of his army chiefs. Looking ahead on the road he saw a little insect lying on its back and trying very hard to get on its feet again. Hearing the sound of the horses' hoofs the helpless little insect became almost frantic. It was in a desperate and terrible frenzy. Lincoln saw this and at once stopped. He got down from his horse, took the little creature in his hands, set it on its feet again in a safe place off the road, and mounted his horse. One of the army chiefs asked him, "What is the meaning of doing that?" With a smile Lincoln replied, "Now I *feel* very much better".

This is the real spiritual benefit which one derives from service of any kind. One *feels much better* subjectively. Whatever we give without hope of return comes back to us multiplied a thousandfold. I do not mean to say that we should send out our goodwill to the universe with the hope of getting it back a thousandfold, because that, again, would only be begging. When one performs any good act, only because he cannot help it, never thinking about the returns, it brings very rich results for his happiness and spiritual advancement.

Psychologically speaking, such an attitude of looking forward to results makes a person impatient and very easily irritable. We should consider our practice as its own benefit. Instead of thinking of it as a means to an end, consider it as the end itself. Of course, those who practise for the attainment of results do attain them. But as soon as they get interested in certain powers or some psychic phenomena they lose all excellence of character. Eventually, they find themselves in a deplorable and utterly mean and degraded condition.

A student of Yoga must banish from his heart the idea of gaining, by his practice of Yoga, power or proficiency in any material realm whatsoever. In the course of practice certain phenomena of a supernatural nature may appear to him, but when one stops there all further progress is barred. These phenomena or powers should be considered as so many milestones by the side of the highway of spiritual progress. A



## *Meditation*

traveller, speeding by, looks at them and realizes that he is making good progress towards his goal. But if he stops at every milestone, fusses around and jumps with joy at his great achievement, it will be impossible for him to proceed. So, don't stop! Don't try to show off. Don't be vain, and don't talk about your unusual experiences.

May I remind you, do your practice without hope of return from any quarter, without even thinking of what you are gaining from it. Do it for the good of the many, for the benefit of the many. Do it to *feel* good. Then you will miss it if you do not practise. Make your spiritual exercises the very breath of your nostrils.

### **Fifth Meditation Exercise**

After performing the other steps of your meditation always close your exercises with the following:

Hold your consciousness at the centre corresponding to the place of the eyebrows. Visualize the two-petalled, white lotus. Feel your unity with the cosmic principle of Ether. Visualize, from the disc of that lotus, a fountain of light issuing forth. It is effulgent, pouring out all over the universe, and vitalizing every being with your spiritual thoughts and the living force of your love, goodwill and fellowship. Make this affirmation:

‘I am one with this universe. Cosmic consciousness is being stirred up by the vibration of my spiritual thoughts. They are immensely powerful, sure and effective. I wish everything good and uplifting for all beings. Let all beings be happy. Let peace, knowledge truth and love find expression through every atom in the universe. Let the commonwealth of truth be established on earth. Peace, peace, peace be unto all beings.’

### **Closing Meditation**

Let all nature, both internal and external, be surcharged and saturated with the cosmic vibration of universal peace, love and friendship. Let the winds blow in all directions carrying from us

the message of faith and understanding to all beings in the universe. Let the rivers flow, singing to all the sweetest melody of universal tolerance and acceptance. Let the sun overhead bathe us with the light of appreciation and service. Let evenings and dawns, earth and sky, mountains and forests, beasts and birds, be filled and inspired with the sacred feeling of brotherhood. Let every breath that flows from us create a strong current of universal and divine service for all beings.

Peace be unto us and all beings in the universe.

*Om Tat Sat*



## Chapter Five

# THE SCIENCE OF MANTRA OR THE SACRED WORD

*Swami Ghanananda*

### 1. The Practice

All religious disciplines are calculated to give man the necessary concentration on the Divine and ultimately take him to the goal. They cleanse and intensify the faculties of his mind—knowing, feeling and willing—and help him to throw himself into his spiritual pursuit with great ardour. When this takes place, he finds his concentration becomes deeper and deeper until he is able to focus his undivided mind on the Divine.

The spiritual disciplines which a seeker must undergo in aspiring to realize God fall under three headings: the disciplines of the yoga of Knowledge, those of the yoga of Devotion and those of the yoga of Right Activity, according as to whether his tastes and tendencies are predominantly intellectual, emotional or volitional. Every yoga has its own methodology, its own way of classifying the spiritual disciplines by indicating the different steps in an ascending order of intensity and ardour, which lead to the experience of the goal—either God with attributes, or God the Absolute, the Pure Consciousness beyond the ego and the universe—but all the yogas accept and teach the value of *mantra* (the sacred word).

The Upanishads in speaking of (1) hearing the truth from the living voice of a qualified teacher, (2) pondering over the truth, and (3) meditating on the truth with a view to realizing it, indicate the three broad stages of approach to the divine goal, the second representing a higher stage than the preceding one,



and the third representing a higher stage than the second; but these Upanishads also glorify the *mantra*. Vedantic teachers discuss the four preliminary spiritual disciplines necessary for all followers of the yoga of Knowledge, namely (1) discrimination between the Real and the unreal, (2) cultivation of six virtues such as control of mind, control of senses etc., (3) relinquishment of all desires to enjoy the fruits of action in this world or a heavenly world, and (4) desire for illumination and freedom from the shackles of mind and its desires; but all such teachers also accept the utility of the *mantra*.

Ramanuja, Madhva and other teachers classify the preliminary requisites for spiritual practices differently, and their approaches to the goal are different, but they all uphold the value power of the *mantra*. The *mantra* is glorified not only by the Vedas but also by all the Agamas (the Tantric and other later scriptures). Whereas the Vedas preach the Vedic *mantras*, the Agamas uphold the greatness of the Agamic *mantras*.

A *mantra* is a sacred word or words. It is a mystic sound-symbol of God, and is defined as that by meditating on which a person acquires freedom from sin, enjoyment of heaven and liberation, and by the aid of which he attains the four aims of life (*chaturvarga*).<sup>1</sup> "Mantra is so called because it is achieved by mental process." *Man* of *mantra* is the first syllable of *manana* (thinking) and *tra* is the first syllable of *trana* (liberation from the bondages of the phenomenal world). By combining these syllables the word *mantra* is said to be formed, it being that which "calls forth" (*amantrana*) the four aims of life. It was not invented but discovered in ancient India by the *rishis*, the men of God, in a state of superconsciousness. It was not coined like the words of a language, but arrived at in the course of their spiritual flights by the teachers of the Indo-Aryan fold. In course of time the Indo-Aryans evolved a science of *mantras*, and the science developed through the centuries, though it began in very ancient times. *Mantras* have deeply moulded the spiritual thought and life of India. They have also influenced several countries outside India, particularly Eastern countries,



and many people of the West.

<sup>1</sup> The four aims of life are *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*. *Dharma* is the ethical and spiritual basis of life and in its light should one earn *artha* (wealth) and seek the fulfilment of desires (*kama*). A life thus lived in the light of *dharma* will lead to *moksha* (Liberation).

### Types of Mantras

*Mantras* are letters arranged in a definitive sequence of sounds of which the letters are the representative signs. A devata is a certain aspect or form of the Godhead, which a devotee invokes. As the Godhead has many aspects, there are many devatas and there are many *mantras*. The *mantra* of any one of them is that letter or combination of letters which reveals that devata to the consciousness of the devotee who has evoked Him or Her by the power of his spiritual practices. The form of the particular Deity so evoked, therefore, appears out of the particular *mantra*.

*Mantra* also means "that which protects". It serves as a subtle means of protecting man from physical, mental, moral and spiritual dangers. It can protect not only the individual but also the community. In times of fear from pestilential diseases or alarm caused by impending natural cataclysms, a whole village or town sits and invokes divine aid by repeating a *mantra*. You may be surprised to know how often this is successful. It is customary in India to dedicate the family to its tutelary Deity: a room is set apart for worship and becomes a domestic sanctum. It is here that the members of the family, young and old, gather for daily prayers and meditation, as well as for appealing to the Deity for mercy and succour in times of distress or danger. In a similar manner a whole street, a whole village, a whole town is dedicated to its own particular Deity, who is some aspect of the Godhead. In all cases the Deity is invoked according to injunctions, but no worship can be done without repeating the particular *mantra* intended to make His spiritual power manifest. Different aspects of the Godhead have different *mantras*.

Sound precedes the manifestation of form in creation. Since from certain sounds certain forms evolve, every sound is responsible for a particular form. Take a tuning fork and strike



it near a cardboard on which fine particles of sand have been spread thinly: the sand particles can be seen arranging themselves in different patterns or geometrical figures. So *mantras* are vibrations, and as such possess both constructive and destructive power. There are constructive, helpful *mantras* and also destructive, harmful ones. Some are conducive to health, mental concentration and moral well-being; others harm the body, confound the mind, and degrade moral life. The Vedas as a rule deal with holy and auspicious ones, although the *mantras* of sorcery and witchcraft can be found in portions of the *Atharva Veda*.

We are therefore concerned with those great and spiritualizing *mantras* that gave illumination and peace in the past and can give them even today—those elevating and ennobling ones which purify body and mind. These are to be learnt from the teacher who knows them. Repetition of a *mantra* has always been emphasized by the Indo-Aryan teachers because of its spiritual value and its power to give us the concentration required for meditation.

Every *mantra* has, as we said, a corresponding Deity and this is called its presiding Deity. The *mantra* is the body of that Deity, a particular sound-body of Consciousness—not simply an idea conveyed to or understood by the mind of man, not merely a concatenation of letters carrying a face value of a particular meaning, nor apparently no meaning at all (as in the case of *hija mantras*).<sup>1</sup> *Mantras* are, in fact, intoned and uttered in the proper manner according to letter and rhythm. That is why they cease to be such when translated, for although the idea may be conveyed to the intellect, the power is not expressed. The *mantra* is a veritable mass of radiant energy (*tejas*). It is the Supreme Truth, Brahman Itself, in sound-body. It is without decay. It is not like a teaching or saying of the great ones which conveys advice or counsel, nor a prayer which may be expressed in the words chosen by the man who prays: it awakens superhuman power and ultimately leads man to Divine Consciousness.

It is claimed that these *mantras*, like the later Upanishads,



were revealed to the *rishis* or men of God in a type of superconscious state in which the ego is retained—a state in which they saw the *mantras* in a flash of light, or heard them. Be that as it may, they are expressions of high spiritual truths and possess great efficacy.

<sup>1</sup> Sir John Woodroffe.

### The Inner Mantra

A *mantra* as uttered consists of sacred sounds and therefore can be given audible expression, which is its gross aspect. But it also has a subtle aspect which can be heard only by the mental ear. Only when sound is between certain degrees of vibration can it be heard. It is inaudible to us above and below a certain pitch; but the sound exists nevertheless and can be heard by certain beings. So also with *mantras*: there is a subtle state of the *mantra* which can be heard only through proper training and disciplines. What men hear are only the gross sounds. *Mantras* were first taught by those who had heard them in their subtle state and to whom their meaning had been revealed. In this subtle aspect they have been existing eternally, but like the “music of the spheres” this subtle aspect was not heard by all—not even by those with the keenest hearing—but could be heard only by those with keen minds, that is to say, the mental ears. It was the *rishis* who struggled and practised disciplines intensely for many years who heard them, or *saw* them and hence were called Seers. They saw them in an exalted spiritual state, a high state of consciousness; but when they returned to normal consciousness, they remembered the *mantras* and taught them to their disciples, exhorting them to practise repetition of them, so that they too could reach that exalted spiritual state in which the *mantras* were seen or heard. The journey of those who are taught to practise repetition of a *mantra* in quest of God is like the journey of a man born in the interior of a country, and desirous of seeing the sea: he is given a sea-shell, and told to travel in a certain direction until he comes to a place where sand is strewn with such shells. Then he reaches a vast expanse of



water and is able to recognize it as the object of his search.

### **Meditation and Contemplation**

Spiritual truths are better learnt from the living voice than from books. The student has then to reflect on the truths, until he is ripe for meditation. It is meditation that enables him to realize and experience the Truth. Before one has access to the living voice of the teacher, one may learn spiritual truths from books. One may also reflect. But in meditation there is no reflection, no discrimination between the Real and the unreal as a deliberate practice, no intellectual cogitation. All these come within the realm of thought. Discrimination and reflection are good and necessary inasmuch as they prepare the mind for meditation, but they are different from meditation.

Even contemplation as known to Christian theology and practice is only a preparation for meditation; it is by no means identical with it. Contemplation may be likened to the buzzing of a bee about the petals of a flower to which it is attracted by its colour: it is preparing to drink the honey, but has not begun to drink it. The actual drinking of honey corresponds to meditation. When an orthodox Christian thinks of the nativity, life, austerities, illumination, ministry, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, he contemplates on them; but he can be said to meditate on Jesus only when his heart is riveted to the Divine Heart, gets caught in the Heart of God—or lets God enter his heart—and remains there for some time.

Now meditation is a vital means to success in one's spiritual life, whether one's main path be Selfless and Dedicated Work, Devotion, Discrimination and Knowledge, or Psychic and Psychological Control. Meditation being extremely difficult, the ancient teachers, on whom we can rely, gave *mantras* to their disciples to help them to purify and concentrate their minds, thereby preparing them for meditation.

*Mantras* are usually classified as Vedic and Agamic. But to whatever class they may belong Om is the highest of them all. Om is the one word which is considered to be the essence of all



the Vedas, and the one symbol sacred and common not only to the followers of the Vedas, who are known as Hindus, but also the Jains, the Buddhists and the Zoroastrians. It was the greatest discovery by the ancient Indo-Aryans in the science of meditation. It was first taught in ancient Vedic times, but it is not a word of the Sanskrit or any other language. It is a sacred sound, a symbol in the most direct sense: it is the highest possible symbol of the Infinite, the nearest possible approach to the Absolute, called Brahman in the Upanishads, which has been the dream and goal of the Hindus all these millenia.

### Repetition of the Mantra

*Japa* means the repetition of a *mantra* with devotion and faith after the preliminaries have been gone through. These consist in cleaning the body and wearing clean clothes for the purpose of doing *japa*. The Hindu, living in a tropical climate, bathes at least once a day and then wears clean dry clothes set apart for use before *japa*. If one cannot have a regular bath on any day, one should thoroughly clean oneself. Clothes used for going out, travelling and other purposes should not be put on, but clothes set apart for spiritual practices. A seat such as a small carpet should be kept ready in the meditation room, which should be used only for spiritual disciplines. A spiritual atmosphere can be fostered in the room by burning incense and keeping flowers there. The aspirant takes his seat in a comfortable but erect position, keeping head, neck and chest in a straight line, and quiets his mind. He may or may not do *pranayama* for a few minutes, but he salutes his guru before repeating the *mantra*.

Whatever spiritual disciplines a follower of Vedanta may practise, he seeks a guru and receives from him the *mantra*. He practises it every day of his life until the goal of Illumination is attained.

A *mantra* or spiritual formula is received from one's guru at the time of what is known as initiation. The guru should be one who is a perfected soul or at least an advanced *sadhaka* (one who has been practising spiritual disciplines). The disciple can



recognize such a person by association, if not quickly by intuition. Such a guru accepts his disciple, and goes into a high spiritual mood at the time of initiation. The Divine in him then acts, and the *mantra* given to the disciple is imparted by the Divine in him. This Divine element is the real guru—not his human aspect—and the disciple reverently looks upon the guru as one with the Divine, just as the guru affectionately looks upon his disciple as a young earnest soul aspiring to rise on the ladder of spiritual progress.

It is but natural that the seeker thinks of his guru for a while before doing *japa* of the *mantra*. The science of meditation gives the instruction that he should first meditate in his head on the guru for a short while. He should then merge the guru in his *ishtha* (Chosen Ideal) seated in his heart, and begin repeating the *mantra*. Repetition should be silent, but the lips may or may not move. During repetition the aspirant often visualizes his Chosen Ideal vividly, but he should continue repeating the *mantra* a number of times, say a thousand, as such repetition prepares the mind for deeper and deeper meditation. When the repetition is over, he should practise meditation which may have been induced even during repetition.

When an aspirant goes on repeating his *mantra*, he attains in course of time great *sadhana-shakti* (spiritual power arising from his practices) which should be united with *mantra-shakti* (the power of the *mantra*) by intense meditation and faith. It is such union that produces the result of spiritual practices. Of the two powers, the power of the *mantra* is greater, though basically they are the same.

*Japa*, truthfulness and personal purity (continence) are the three factors that contribute more than anything else to success in meditation and spiritual life. Of these factors *japa* is helpful to the practice of truthfulness, as it controls the mind and protects it from going astray. It is also essential for achieving personal purity, as it purifies both the conscious and the subconscious mind, and such purification of all the layers of the mind is the *sine qua non* of personal purity. *Mantra* can sink and work in the



subconscious: if an aspirant repeats it a few dozen times before sleeping, he will discover that when he gets up from sleep he repeats it, and that during sleep he must have been doing it unconsciously or unknown to himself.

In due course the aspirant realizes that he, his guru and his Chosen Ideal are one and the same in essence.

### **The Gayatri and Pranava (Om)**

In ancient times the Indo-Aryans worshipped Brahman as manifest in the effulgence of the sun, in the light of the eye of man, and in his heart, which was considered a centre of consciousness. The *gayatri upasana*—worship of *gayatri*—is the worship of Brahman as manifest in the light of the sun. The Indo-Aryans chose the sun as the supreme source of light and life, as without the sun all life on earth would be extinct and the whole world would be steeped in darkness. The Hindu boy who is initiated into the *gayatri mantra* is taught to direct his attention to the glorious light of the sun at dawn, noon and sunset. He is then taught to think of the life or source of the light in the sun. From this he is led to the life or source of the light of understanding in him without which he cannot see the light of the sun, nor try to comprehend the life of that light. In the final stages he is led to the meditation on the identity of the life of the light in him with the life of the light in the sun—the identity of the Pure Consciousness or Atman in him with the Pure Consciousness behind the light of the sun, that is, of the Thing-in-Itself within him with the Thing-in-Itself of the universe. This he ultimately realizes. Indeed, when he realizes the Atman or Soul in him, he finds that the realization of Its identity with Brahman or the Oversoul flashes forth intuitively, just as when a drop or sample of water in any part of the world is found on analysis to consist of oxygen and hydrogen, the knowledge of the composition of *all* water is intuitively gained.

Shri Ramakrishna used to say: "The Veda loses itself in *gayatri*, *gayatri* loses itself in *pranava* (Om), and *pranava* loses itself in *samadhi*, the superconscious state."



*Gayatri* is a very exalted Vedic prayer. Its meaning is: "Let us meditate on the glorious effulgence of that Divine Being who has created the three worlds. May He direct our understanding."<sup>1</sup>

Every time *gayatri mantra* is repeated it should be preceded by the three *vyahritis*—*bhuh*, *bhuvah* and *svah*—and these should be preceded by Om. *Bhuh* means the terrestrial or earthly region, *bhuvah* the intermediate or atmospheric region, and *svah* the celestial or heavenly region. They have been created by God, the Divine Power, Saguna Brahman, i.e. Brahman with attributes. The thought of the three regions called *lokas* (worlds) created by God leads one to the thought of God the Creator.

*Gayatri* is said to lose itself in *pranava* (Om). What is Om as a sound? Om is made up of three constituent sounds, A, U, and M (in the International Phonetic Alphabet, a, u, m—pronounced as a single syllable). These three represent the three states of consciousness known to every man, woman and child, viz. waking, dream and dreamless sleep. Indeed the three "worlds" or regions are objective realities, and are known respectively through the three normal states of consciousness—waking, dream and dreamless sleep. Thus from the thought of the three "worlds" or regions the spiritual aspirant is led to contemplation on his three states of consciousness. This change from the objective reality to subjective states of consciousness is an important process, since it constitutes a vital step in seeking the Reality within man. It will be further discussed when we go more deeply into the theoretical part of the subject.

Though Om consists of three constituent sounds, A, U, M, and each of these represents a state of consciousness, Om taken as a whole, as a single sound, is the sound-symbol of the "Fourth", which is Brahman. In its totality, then, Om is the fittest symbol of Brahman. Man in the waking state, man in the dream state and man in the sleep state are but three modes of expression of one and the same Self or Atman. Hence a sense of self-identity on the subjective side runs through all the three states of consciousness. This sense is not the Self, but gives the



clue to the possibility of man's experiencing It as Pure Consciousness, called the *turiya* or Fourth. Strictly speaking it is not a "state", since it is infinite; but it may loosely be described as the Fourth or Transcendental state.<sup>2</sup> It is this that is the Noumenon behind all phenomena. This is Brahman, the one theme of the Upanishads and the *summum bonum* of life according to Vedanta.

The soundless Om is inherent in the manifested sound Om: so also the *turiya* or Fourth is inherent in all the other three states. All manifested sounds including the sound Om are but expressions of the soundless Om which is inaudible, unmanifested and transcendent: so also the three states of waking, dream and sleep are modes of existence of the one Self.

Brahman, then, is the meaning of Om. It is to this that *gayatri* leads through meditation. So *gayatri* is said to lose itself in *pranava* or Om.

Students often ask whether they should meditate on the three syllables or constituents of Om, that is on A, U and M, in their written forms. Some enquire whether the script should be Sanskrit or English or any other language. Such meditation is not meditation on Om. Meditation on Om is meditation on its meaning—not on the sound Om, not on its constituent sounds, not on the script of any language in which Om may be written, but on the meaning of Om.

To help concentration one should repeat Om a number of times. Indeed the repetition may be done silently throughout the day and night—as constantly as possible.<sup>3</sup> Then comes an awakening, a power comes to the mind, and the mind gets deeply concentrated on the meaning of Om, which in due course is realized in a state of superconsciousness.

Om is therefore the Name of Brahman. It is the nearest possible approach as a sound-symbol to that which is beyond sound and form. It has the profoundest meaning which cannot be expressed by any other sound. It is no wonder that it has been glorified throughout the Vedas.<sup>4</sup>

It must be obvious from the foregoing description of Om and



explanation of its meaning that repetition of Om and meditation on its content are an advanced form of spiritual discipline. It is indeed very few who succeed in this form of spiritual practice. The mind must be prepared by other and easier disciplines. Further, though *gayatri* was repeated by the members of the first three classes of the Aryan fold, it was more or less confined to the brahmins of India. On account of their spirit of exclusiveness and the gradual loss of spiritualizing tendencies among the other classes, necessity was felt in course of time for other forms of spiritual disciplines. It was then that the Agamic mantras came into importance and were taught throughout the length and breadth of India.

<sup>1</sup> *Gayatri mantra* as an exercise in reasoning has been discussed by Sir John Woodroffe in his *Garland of Letters*. Vide Chapter XXX.

<sup>2</sup> *Mandukya Upanishad* and *Karika*.

<sup>3</sup> This is true also of other *mantras*.

<sup>4</sup> Vide *Taittiriya Upanishad*, I. 8, for example.

## 2. The Theory

There are six systems of Hindu philosophy, and these are known as Nyaya and Vaisheshika, Samkhya and Yoga, Purva Mimamsa and Uttara Mimamsa (Vedanta). Of these Purva Mimamsa, which is based on the ritualistic portion of the Vedas, may be called the philosophy of ritualism. The teachings of this school are embodied in the form of short aphorisms by Jaimini, their author.

Jaimini holds that the Vedas—not merely their teachings on spiritual laws and principles, but even their very words—are eternal. The words of the Vedas are uncreate, that is, the connection between a word and the object named by it, between sound and sense, is eternal. The perception of sound is doubtless momentary, but sound always is. Its non-perception is due to the absence of the union of the hearer with it. Sound ever exists, but becomes manifest when uttered by man. Says Jaimini, "Sound is eternal, because it serves to convey a meaning. The object denoted by a name always goes with the name".<sup>1</sup>



In Indian philosophy mind is considered to be subtle matter and made of *akasha*, the first of the five "elements". It must be remembered that the mental concept of an object is a modification of mind, and therefore of the same *akasha* of which mind is made. The uttered name of that object is a temporary manifestation of the eternal sound which is a permanent manifestation of the *akasha*. Hence a thought exists permanently attached to its name; the thought and the name rise together in consciousness. This is why the Hindu scriptures call manifestation mere *namarupa* (name and form)<sup>2</sup>.

The Indian philosophers considered the study of language an integral part of philosophy. Commenting on this, Max Müller observes in his *Six Systems of Indian Philosophy*:

They had evidently perceived that language is the only phenomenal form of thought, and that, as human beings possess no means of perceiving the thoughts of others, nay even their own thoughts, except in the form of words, it was the duty of a student of thought to inquire into the nature of words before he approached or analysed the nature of what we mean by thought, naked thought, nay skinned thought, as it has been truly called, when divested of its natural integuments, the word. They understood what even modern philosophers have failed to understand, that there is a difference between *Vorstellung* (presentation or precept) and *Begriff* (concept), and that true thought has to do with conceptual words only, nay, that the two, word and thought, are inseparable, and perish when separated.<sup>3</sup>

Sir Oliver Lodge points out the same truth when he says:

The connection between soul and body, or more generally between spiritual and material, has been illustrated by the connection between the meaning of a sentence and the written or spoken word conveying that meaning. The writing or the speaking may be regarded as an incarnation of the meaning, a mode of stating or exhibiting its essence. As delivered, the sentence must have time relations; it must have a beginning, a middle and an end; it may be repeated, and the same general



meaning may be expressed in other words; but the intrinsic meaning of the sentence itself need have no time relations, it may be true *always*, it may exist as an eternal "now" though it may be perceived and expressed by humanity with varying clearness from time to time.<sup>4</sup>

Patanjali modified the doctrine of the eternity of sound (*shabda*) by holding that the substance of the Veda is eternal, but not the words.

Bhartrihari (seventh century A.D.) expounded the doctrine of the *sphota*. In his *karika* called *Vakyapadiya* he says: "Those who know sound know that there are two sounds in the words we speak—one the cause of sound, and the other denoting the object".<sup>5</sup> This means that one sound exists in the mind before we utter a word, and the second is the uttered word. The potential word which is in our mind is called the *sphota*. This *sphota* is also called *Shabda-Brahman* or *Nada-Brahman*. Hiranyagarbha (the Cosmic Mind) first manifested himself as name, and then as form which is this universe. Behind this form there is the eternal inexpressible *sphota*, the essential eternal material of all ideas or names, the power through which the Lord creates the universe; the Lord first becomes conditioned as the *sphota*, and then evolves Himself out as the yet more concrete sensible universe. This *sphota* has one word as its only possible symbol, and this is *Om*.<sup>6</sup>

In the *Rig Veda*, Vagdevi—the goddess of speech, known also as Saraswati—is praised in many hymns. In the *Brahmanas* she is identified as the sole companion of Hiranyagarbha, who co-operated with him in the evolution of name and form. The *Shatapatha Brahmana* teaches "His mind entered into union with speech", and identifies her with Aditi.<sup>7</sup> As she represents the power of the *mantras*, she later became identified with the *Shakti* of the *Agamas* (known also as the *Tantras*).

When a word is uttered it conveys a meaning, and this meaning is the object or the idea denoted by the word. When someone hears a word, first it creates a mental apprehension and then the meaning flashes in the mind whether the object is



at hand or not, or if an idea is meant it is grasped by the mind.

If this is true of ordinary words, it is also true of divine words or mystic syllables. There is such a thing as the divine word which is the causal stress. This causal stress creates cosmic ideation. A spoken word is but a gross manifestation of the subtle word, and the subtle word is a manifestation of the causal word.

That God speaks the Word and the universe appears as a result of His speaking is a very ancient conception, accepted by all religions except Jainism and Buddhism which deny God. In *Genesis* we find, "God said: 'Let there be light' and there was light". The divine Word, according to the Hebrew Scriptures, possesses creative power. The word preceded creation. The Fourth Gospel begins: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." The Veda, the oldest extant scripture of the world, says: "In the beginning was Brahman; second to Him was the Word which was with Him; the word is Brahman". The Word is spoken of as second to Him, because it is first potentially in Him, and then as Power issues from Him. The Word is thus the Power of Brahman, which is one with the Possessor of Power.

The transcendental Brahman, or Pure Consciousness, is quiescent. In it there is no sound and therefore no meaning and no mental apprehension or cosmic ideation, and therefore no name or form either. In this infinite calm of Brahman a metaphysical point of stress arises, and from this issue forth the myriad forces of this universe. This energizing is the cause of the world process and of the duality of subject and object, of mind and matter. The play of Power (*shakti*) occurs in the consciousness-space (*chidakasha*) in such a manner that this space is neither effaced nor affected when the new condition appears, and this new condition is that of both transcendence and immanence. Through the operation of this Power the homogeneous Unity of Pure Consciousness becomes the diversity of the universe of subject and object: however the Unity does not cease to be such, but only involves Itself in

subject and object. This is creation which endures for a cycle, which is only a day of Brahman; afterwards dissolution takes place. In the state of dissolution there are the seeds of future manifestation of creation.

Creation is possible only through an initial movement or vibration in what we in the West call the cosmic stuff and which in Sanskrit is known as *prakṛiti*. Pure Consciousness is equated with absolute rest and absolute quiescence, but *prakṛiti* has movement and power. During the state of dissolution of the universe *prakṛiti* is in a state of equilibrium of the three *gunas* (which are both substance and quality) known as *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. When this state of equilibrium, which is often known as cosmic sleep, is over, *prakṛiti* begins to move. This movement is the first cosmic vibration in which the equilibrated energy is released, the approximate sound of this movement being the *mantra* Om. The casual stress or vibration is also known as Shabda-Brahman.

Duality with all its multifarious varieties is produced by this creation. As consciousness bifurcates into subject and object, mind and matter, these form a parallelism of common origin. Within this subject there is the Thing-in-Itself called the Atman and within the object also there is the Thing-in-Itself. Mind and matter are, therefore, mutually connected by a natural relation. Hence the co-relation between feeling and the object of feeling, perception and the object perceived. Thus sensation and its object are only two aspects of one and the same thing. When an object is perceived with the help of the senses and the mind, there arises in the mind a modification of its substance which is an exact counterpart of the object perceived. This explains why by *japa* (repetition) of *mantra* (spiritual formula); worship and meditation, the mind takes the form of the object of worship and is rendered pure for the time being through the purity and holiness of the divine object, namely the *ishtadevata* (Chosen Ideal), which is its content. By continual practice the mind thinks only of this object to the exclusion of all else, and becomes steady in its purity. This is the purpose of spiritual disciplines.



<sup>1</sup> *Mimamsa Sūtras*, i, 1.18.

<sup>2</sup> *Chhand. Up.*, vi, 1.3.

<sup>3</sup> p. 402, 1928 ed.

<sup>4</sup> *Life and Matter*, p. 115.

<sup>5</sup> i. 44.

<sup>6</sup> Swami Vivekananda, *Bhakti Yoga*.

<sup>7</sup> X. vi. 5.4.

## Mind and Matter

According to Vedānta everything is matter which is not Pure Consciousness or Spirit. When this is associated with mind and matter, it is immanent. When the Spirit is clothed with mind and matter in a living thing, say man, it becomes individualized. When it is clothed with cosmic mind and cosmic matter, it is the Cosmic Spirit.

Each of these—both the Cosmic Spirit and the individual soul—has three bodies, causal, subtle and gross. When we are awake, we are in the gross physical body. When we are in a dream state, we are said to be in the subtle body made up of thoughts and feelings. When we are in deep sleep without dream, we are said to be in the causal body which is made of individual *prakṛiti* or *māya*. Though man exists in one or the other of these bodies, the individual soul that is in them all is one and the same. The three states of waking, dream and dreamless sleep are the three modes of being of the same individual soul. In the waking state it is called *vishva*; in the dream state it is called *taijasa*; and in the sleep state it is called *prajña*.

Corresponding to these three modes of being of the individual soul, there are three modes of the Divine Being, called Virat, Hiranyagarbha and Ishvara (God). The Power of Ishvara is often termed the Power of *prakṛiti* or Power of *māya*. Thus Virat is the Cosmic Spirit whose body is the entire universe, corresponding to our physical body of which we are aware in our waking state; Hiranyagarbha is the Cosmic Spirit whose body is the mental universe, that is, subtle, made of ideas and

feelings, like those of our dream; and Ishvara as the Cosmic Spirit has for His body *prakriti* or Cosmic Nescience, corresponding to the nescience we are in when we sleep, but with this difference, that whereas we are overpowered by individual nescience, God is the controller of nescience,<sup>1</sup> which contains the seeds of future creation. These three bodies of one and the same Cosmic Spirit correspond to our gross, subtle and causal bodies in which we are said to exist when waking, dreaming and sleeping soundly. These bodies, whether they belong to the individual soul or the Cosmic Spirit, are its adjuncts (*upadhis*) which are evolved from the power of *maya* or of *prakriti*.

Mind being a manifestation of *shakti* or Power, translated to the material plane, it is as much a material as is matter itself. Mind is subtle compared to matter, and matter is a dense and gross form of the more subtle and tenuous form (known as *tanmatra*) of the Power of *prakriti* which in the ultimate analysis constitutes both mind and matter, and which is common to both.

Vedanta holds that mind is neither all-pervading nor atomic, but limited and divisible into parts, and thus can take the form of its objects. One part of the mind can attend to something and also to something else at one and the same time. It also can assume the shape of an object perceived and therefore can spread or shrink with it. It pervades our whole body whether we are awake or dreaming, and in deep dreamless sleep it is withdrawn, as is all else, into the causal body.

Matter exists in differing forms of density. Thus there is gross matter which is derived from a subtle form (*tanmatra*) of the same, which is not sensed by the gross ear or other senses but mentally apprehended by the yogi. There are subtle objects which may be perceived through the senses or the mind by one who possesses "powers", these powers being mere extensions of the normal faculty. The 100-inch telescope at Mt. Wilson revealed, it is said, one eighth of space, and the 200-inch telescope at Mt. Palomar can now reveal a quarter of



observable space. As we improve our instruments, we see more, but beyond a certain point perception takes place not through the senses but through the mind. Everything may be perceived by the mind, except the supreme Self or Spirit. This in Itself is never an object, being beyond mind and speech. The experience of objects becomes more and more subtle until the state of Supreme Experience is attained when there is neither subject nor object. Mind and speech can only hint at it.

<sup>1</sup> Also known as *maya* in Vedanta and *prakriti* in Samkhya.

### The Supreme Sound

Sound exists only where there is movement or vibration. If there is no vibration, there is no sound, and if there is no sound, there cannot be vibration.

The supreme Brahman beyond attributes and activity is beyond sound, but Ishvara (Brahman with Power) is Shabda-Brahman or the Supreme Sound. This is the causal body of sound; *shabda-tanmatra* or the principle of sound is the subtle body of sound, and *akasha* (subtle space) is the gross body of sound (apprehended only through the medium of air, the sound waves in which strike the ear). When the mind is joined to it, the sensation of sound is experienced.

*Shabda-tanmatra* or the principle of sound, is pure natural sound as apprehended by Hiranyagarbha (Cosmic Mind) and by yogis who share the experience of Hiranyagarbha.

Gross sound is either the sound represented by revealed words (Veda), or the speech of man.

Ishvara (God) directly apprehends all four kinds of sounds—Shabda-Brahman (the Supreme Sound), *shabda-tanmatra* (the subtle principle of sound), Vedic sound and human speech; Hiranyagarbha or Cosmic Mind directly apprehends the last three; *rishis* the last two; and ordinary men the last only.

Now when we deal with apprehension, meaning and sound in their cosmic and individual aspect, we shall see that on the Ishvara (God) level, that is, in so far as there is the cosmic causal body, apprehension is the Ishvara (God) Consciousness



of His own sheath of Bliss (*anandamaya*)<sup>1</sup> and the cosmic ideation whereby He projects the universe. This cosmic ideation is the Supreme Sound. It evolves into various kinds of lower sounds including *mantras*. Its approximate representation to the *rishi's* ear is "Om".

The Veda explains creation in this manner. Regarding the universe as constituted of sound in its causal sense, the Veda says, "Creation is out of the Supreme Sound". Using creation in the sense of creative ideation it says that creation is only apprehension. When it speaks in terms of the meaning of the sound, it says, "Creation is only *artha* (meaning)", i.e. the Supreme Meaning, the cosmic "stuff" or cosmic "matter" which is *prakriti-shakti*, Primal Matter-Power.

As God (Ishvara) is conscious of His causal body from which has evolved the universe, He experiences "I am all". He experiences Himself as all, whether as a whole, as generals or as particulars. He wills to be many and the elements issue from Him. The creation of these elements according to Vedanta means (1) the evolving of the *tanmatras*, which are infra-sensible, (2), their primary compounds. These primary compounds are either subtle or gross. The subtle ones are the ego, *buddhi* (determining faculty), *manas* (that part of the mind which receives the impressions from the outside world), and *chitta* (mind-stuff) the sub-conscious—which four are known as the internal organs—and the organs of action and the organs of knowledge (nerve-centres in the brain) and *pranas* (vital energies). The creation of all these implies also their *natural* names. Thus from Om, the sound representing the acoustic aspect of the tendency of potential stress to pass into kinetic stress, are evolved the *natural* names (called *bijas*, literally meaning "the seed words") of the elements—*hang*, *yang*, *rang*, *vang*, *lang*, and other *bijas* such as *hring* (the *maya bija* or *pranava* of the differentiating *shakti* or Power).

We are all aware that by using delicate instruments we may hear sounds which are not sensible to the unaided ear. An adept in yoga may hear more. As Sir John Woodroffe aptly points out,



if you were to hear the rise of sap in a tree, that sound would be the direct approximate *natural* name of that vegetable function. It is said that in a similar manner, when the *kundalini shakti* pierces the six centres, the yogi can directly apprehend the *bijas* Om, *hang*, *yang* and the rest as the passage of *shakti* gradually vitalizes the six centres. By rising to the highest plane a yogi can directly experience any or all kinds of sounds.

In the experience of Brahman or the Absolute the yogi becomes the Brahman Itself when all stress ceases and there is Peace.

Om, the sound of the first creative movement or stress of *prakriti* or *shakti* is the totality of the universe denoted by the creative impulse and also of all sounds. From Om all mantras are derived. From Om were derived all the letters and sounds. It is the approximate representation of the primordial sound.

<sup>1</sup> This corresponds to the sheath of bliss in which man is said to exist in deep dreamless sleep. It is so called because such sleep is happy. Man has five sheaths; these can also be considered as three bodies. The sheath of bliss is the same as the causal body in which he remains in deep dreamless sleep.

### Natural Names

We have already referred to the *natural* name of a moving object, say the rising sap in a tree, or in yogic language the rising of the *kundalini* power in men from the basic centre to the higher centres. A *natural* name is, therefore, the sound produced by the generating stress (*shakti* or power) or constituting forces of a thing, not as apprehended by the human ear but by the supreme and infinite ear which apprehends unconditionally sound in itself or as such, without being subject to the varying conditions of time, place or plane, or person. The *natural* name of a thing is that sound which the supreme infinite ear hears. Strictly speaking, this cannot be the *natural* name that man employs, as the latter can only approximate. In this sense even

Om is sound only approximately representing the first general stir or vibration of *shakti* or *prakriti*, but the yogi's ear can hear the exact sound: no finite tongue can utter it exactly and no finite ear can hear it perfectly.

According to the science of *mantra* what are known as *bija mantras* (seed-words or root words) approximately represent *natural* names, but when we explain their import or significance, we have to employ words which are not *natural* names at all.

*Om*, *hangsah*, *swaha*, etc., are approximate natural names of fundamental or primary sounds from the Vedas, the revealed scriptures of the Indo-Aryans. *Rang*, *hring*, *aing*, etc., are Tantrik *bijas* from the science and literature of the Tantras.

*Hangsah* represents the causal sound of the function of vital energy (*prana*) as breathing, and is called the *prana-bija*. If we watch the breathing, we shall notice that the outward breath produces the sound represented by *ha* and the indrawn breath by *sa*.

The Supreme Consciousness known as Paramashiva is changeless and enduring from the static transcendental standpoint, but from the kinetic creative aspect (Shiva-Shakti or Shiva with Power) there is a polarization in Consciousness, the poles of which are Shiva and Shakti (Consciousness and its Power). Consciousness then identifies itself with the products of its own kinetic Shakti (Power), that is, with mind as the subject of experience and with matter as its object.

The *Prapanchasara Tantra* says: "The Parabindu divides itself into two parts, of which the right is Purusha (*hang*) and the left is *visargah* (*sah*). *Hangsah* is the union of the Purusha or Consciousness with *prakriti* or matter, and the *hangsah* is the universe".

Take a Tantrik *bija* like *rang*. It is said to represent the causal stress of fire, as heard by a yogi, which in human language is



known as *rang*. The sound accompanying causal stress and the sound which issues forth from something under the action of stimuli are not the same. The latter may be heard, but the causal stress is heard as a sound only by the ear of a yogi. At the time of worship, the worshipper utters *rang* and imagines he is surrounded by a wall of fire which protects him from evil influences from outside.

What are known as *nada* and *bindu* exist in all *bijamantras*. Etymologically, *nada* means sound and is a technical term in the science of *mantra*. It is the more subtle aspect of sound (known as *shabda* in Sanskrit), as the first putting forth of *kriyashakti* (power of will). Supreme *nada* is Supreme Power. It evolves into the *nada* which is the unmanifested seed, or essence, of that which is later manifested as *shabda* (sound). It develops into what is known as *bindu* which is of the same character.

Literally the term *bindu* means a drop or a point such as the *anusvara* breathing. It is a point—not the mathematical point which has no magnitude but has position, but the diffusive with neither magnitude nor position. It is the One in which the Many was implicitly contained, Being and Non-being. Everything and Nothing. It is represented diagrammatically by the central indivisible point of the double triangle (*shatkona yantra*), regarded as the symbol of creation. Sometimes this point is set in a sphere.

*Bindu* can be conceived by man only as a point, infinitely small and subtle, into which the extended manifested universe is withdrawn. But really it is an aspect of *shakti* or consciousness.

*Bijamantras* are written with the *bindu* above and the *nada* below.

Each Devata has His or Her own *bija*. The primary *mantra* in the worship of any Deva or Devi is known as the *mula mantra* (literally meaning root *mantra*). Every letter, syllable and *mantra* is then a form of the Brahman and so is the image and so are the lines of the *yantra* and all objects in the universe. All letters are forms of *shakti* as sound-powers. The *shakti* of which they are a

manifestation is the living Energy which projects itself into the form of the universe. The *mantra* of a Devatā (Deity) is the Devata. The rhythmical vibrations of its sounds transform the worshipper by regulating the unsteady vibrations of his sheaths. Through the power of *sadhana* of the worshipper there arises the form of the Devata which the *mantra* is. The meaning of a *bija* is the Devata Itself.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For further study the reader may profitably consult *Varnamala* (Garland of Letters) by Sir John Woodroffe (Ganesh & Co., Madras), or *Vedanta for East and West*, Nov.-Dec. 1955.



## Chapter Six

# REPETITION OF THE NAME OF GOD

*Swami Bhavyananda*

Before we practice *japa* we must learn to bring harmony between our outer and inner life. A healthy body is a great gift indeed: an unhealthy body is a source of disturbance for spiritual practice. One needs to care for physical health and its functions properly. The system of *hatha* yoga exercises was formulated by the ancient Indians to meet this need.

Next is "a healthy mind in a healthy body". What do we mean by a healthy mind? Purity in thought creates a healthy mind. Also, our mind must flow in the direction of spiritual aspirations.

When we start our spiritual practices we open the physical centres of power. The awakening of these powers causes an upsurge of energy and restlessness. Some of the lower centres may become activated and cause a lot of trouble. Dealing with them causes tension and other nervous symptoms. This is a problem every spiritual aspirant has to face to a greater or lesser degree.

In spiritual practice we have to learn the art of keeping under check both our physical and mental activities. Also, we should see that both work harmoniously. As mentioned earlier, food and exercise needed for good health is to be provided for the body. A certain amount of energy, also, may be spent to serve and help others in need. Unselfish service has its spiritual reward. So far as the mind is concerned, certain attitudes which are necessary for mental health are to be practised: fearlessness, purity of motive, discrimination, charitable-mindedness, control over activities. One should study books that provide



healthy mental food such as the teaching of uprightness and so on. Side by side with this, we must bring under control the six internal enemies: *kama*—desire; *khrodha*—anger; *lobha*—greed; *moha*—delusion; *mada*—ego; *matsarya*—jealousy. These are mental reactions to things that happen to us from outside. Their control will enable us to have a peaceful mind. Then only will body and mind be relaxed and work together in harmony.

Next comes *japa*, repetition of a holy name. This repetition of a holy name itself creates harmony inside. All tensions disappear. There are people who become very tense when they sit for meditation. Their breathing is disturbed and mind agitated. Repetition of a *mantra* will restore the peace when done in the right spirit. Body and mind must be relaxed and perfectly quiet.

What is a *mantra*? It is a mystic syllable, or, it may be a divine name. These names have acquired a sanctity and potency by efficient use in the past. When a *mantra* is received by a worthy student and repeated as instructed, it creates beneficial vibrations. These may be gross sound vibrations or subtle and silent. They, in turn, quell the thought vibrations which fill our mind. Thus, *japa* is a very important aspect of meditation. It has to be practised with regularity and attention. *Japa* gradually brings all our mental activity under control. A beginner may think, this is an exaggerated claim. He is right, for a beginner who experiences disturbances of thought, naturally cannot accept such a statement.

However, one should not be in a hurry to pass judgement: one has to persist in *japa* long enough to realise its beneficial effect. Quick results are not to be expected in spiritual life. As we persist, we will be able to understand and use the subtle vibrations created to our great benefit.

In due course, our spiritual consciousness is awakened and we enter into a subtle plane of awareness. Correct practice of *japa* spreads its vibrations into subtle thought and consciousness and controls any thought that is not in tune with spiritual life. An earnest student at this stage will be able to



perceive the effect of *japa* on his own subconscious, and when one reaches this stage, even when busy with normal activity, a part of the mind will be aware of the inner vibrations of unpronounced *japa*. At no stage should one relax self-control and discipline, which help in the correct practice of *japa*. They must go together.

One may ask, is it necessary to have a guru? Can we not learn the *mantra* from a book? Yes, one can. But the effect will be different in different cases. Book knowledge is book knowledge. There is not the power of experience behind it. It lacks the dynamic power behind the *mantra* of a teacher who, by his personal experience, has infused dynamism into it. While initiating, he imparts that spiritual power to the disciple. Then there is the power of love of the guru towards the disciple. How can we ever measure the effect of that love? It is like a mother's love towards the child. When the mother prepares and serves food to the child it is one thing, but it is altogether different when we buy the same food from a stall or supermarket. Anything given with love and feeling has an uplifting effect. This is much more true of a *mantra* given by the guru. Mother gives us physical birth; the guru gives us birth into the life of the spirit. Can a book ever do this?

If we give a fair trial to the practice of *japa* we will find for ourselves how beneficial it is. Regular practice quells desires, calms the mind and opens the door to higher consciousness. Those who follow the path of *bhakti* consider repetition of a holy name to be a complete *sadhana* in itself. It leads to the highest spiritual ecstasy and the vision of God. Ramdas, a great mystic of our own times, says, "Have the glorious name of God on your lips. This is the easiest way to commune with God within you. This name can be repeated by everybody. Ramdas is telling you this from his own personal experience."

We know how difficult it is to control the mind. But this control can be easily accomplished by constantly repeating God's name. Not only is the mind controlled, it also becomes pure. For a pure mind, meditation becomes easy. We cannot

meditate always; but we can repeat a holy name anywhere. In the midst of work and daily life many disturbances and disappointments come to all. *Japa* is a wonderful means of regaining some degree of peace and tranquillity. We will discover the truth of this statement when we practise it ourselves. Gradually, the mind is filled with joy and peace. This results in a happy disposition which adds a worthwhile dimension to normal life. Life becomes sweet and meaningful.

Some may say that such a mechanical repetition has no appeal for them. Such people have to make an effort to free themselves from various prejudices and mental conceptions which they have nourished. Certain tendencies, attachments to sense pleasures and cravings, deep rooted egoistic feelings are a permanent disease we all suffer from. Naturally, repetition of a holy name does not taste sweet in the beginning. But if we practise a little discrimination, detachment and humility, and if we accept the advice of the experienced, we shall soon develop a taste for it. As joy and peace fill our hearts, we will be able to plunge into the habit of *japa*. A sense of freedom and harmony will come to us. The Divine Presence will be felt all round us in all beings. All discord and disharmony turns into concord and harmony. Divine love and bliss will envelop us.

An Indian saint says:

“Why have you given up *japa*?  
You have not given up anger  
You have not given up lies  
But you have given up Truth  
You have attached yourself to tinsel  
But thrown away a valuable gem.”

The name of God is a gem indeed: it can buy us peace and bliss. “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength,” says Jesus. To get the best results we must set our heart and soul on Him. When well established in *japa*, we will be inebriated with the sweetness of divine love, and that love will express itself in all our activities.



## Chapter Seven

# JAPA IN DIFFERENT TRADITIONS

Swami Swahananda

"*Japa* means", said Shri Ramakrishna, "repeating the Name of the Lord silently sitting in a quiet place. If one continues the repetition with concentration and devotion one is sure to be blessed with Divine visions; ultimately one is sure to have God-realization. Suppose a big log of wood is floating in the Ganges with one end attached to a chain, which is fixed on the bank. Following the chain, link by link, you may dive into the water and trace your way to it. In the same manner, if you become absorbed in the repetition of His holy Name, you will eventually realize Him."

Holy Mother, Sarada Devi said: "As the wind removes the cloud, so the Name of God destroys the cloud of worldliness."

The repetition of the Divine Name (or holy words) has been accepted by almost all Hindu sects as an important spiritual discipline. Patanjali recognizes *japa* along with thinking of its meaning as a valid method of spiritual discipline. In the Advaitic system it is accepted as preparatory to pure contemplation, so Gayatri *japa* and reciting of the Upanishads and the Mahavakyas are prescribed. The Tantras have stressed ritualistic *japa* with a seed *mantra* observing the prescribed rules. The Vaishnavas and others have stressed fervour along with *japa*.

The Name of God has its own potency. Any word which has for years been used in the spiritual practice of holy men and women, is charged with special power. As much of our thinking depends on auditory symbols, so repetition of a *mantra* helps the mind to be suffused with God. For the same reason, chanting,

singing and holy readings are efficacious.

*Japa* is of three types: audible; silent repetition but with moving of lips; and mental. It is to be performed neither very slowly, nor rapidly, but evenly. Normally *rudraksha* or *tulasi* beads are used in Hindu sects; different rosaries are used in other religions.

*Japa* is the easiest spiritual practice but should be performed regularly. The repetition of a Divine Name makes the mind gradually concentrated; deeper spiritual experiences follow. So the devotees believe that *japa* alone can bring spiritual illumination.

This spiritual practice of *japa*, or repeating over and over again God's Name, has been adopted in some form or other by all religions. In Hinduism and Buddhism, however, it is more predominant. Different sects have different *mantras* to repeat depending on tradition and language.

The Nichiren sect of Japanese Buddhism stresses especially the repetition of *mantras*. Nichiren declared that the study of the *Sad-dharma-pundarika-sutra* alone was the path of the spiritual aspirant and that the repetition of the *sutra* was the cause of liberation. The mendicants were to study the *sutra* and the householders were to repeat only the *mantra*—*Namu-Myo-Ho-Ren-Ge-Kyo* ("Glory to the *sutra* of the Lotus of Truth"). The devotees of this sect assemble and chant aloud this *sutra* as Hindus do in *kirtan*. This somewhat resembles the Vaishnava's chanting of the Lord's name. The wide popularity of the Nichiren sect is due to the simplicity of its worship and to its declaration that *japa* alone leads to the highest goal.

In Tibetan Buddhism, *japa* plays a very important part. The wheel of *japa* is well known, as also the *mantra* "*Om mani padme hung*".

In Catholicism different prayers are regularly recited. Often the members of the church bring their rosaries and recite some simple formulas from the Bible. *Hail Mary* and *Our Father* . . . are thus repeated. Nowadays, in penances, instead of thinking of sin, people are asked, while in church, to repeat a prayer



formula; the rosary must be turned a certain number of times. The long invocation of the name of the saints forms part of the preparation of the faithful for Easter. The Pope, while appearing on holy days on his famous Vatican balcony, invites the crowd to recite the "Angelus".

In the Russian Orthodox Church this system took root from the tenth century onwards. *Gospodji pomiloui* (Lord, have mercy on me) is the formula used over and over again by some followers of the Orthodox church. In a Russian book of the last century, "The Way of a Pilgrim", this has been elaborately described by a mendicant. It is the story of a Pilgrim's experiences during his travels: of his learning, practising and teaching to others the way of praying. He went to teachers to find out what it means to "pray without ceasing", as advocated in the Bible. A village teacher asked him to "pray more and pray more fervently. It is prayer which will reveal to you how it can be achieved unceasingly, but it will take some time". This is similar to the idea in the *bhakti* tradition of India that through the repetition of the Divine Name, all defects and obstacles will go and visions will follow. The Pilgrim received special encouragement from the words of the Bible, "Whatever ye shall ask the Father in My Name, He will give it to you". Through practice he found the deeper effects of the repetition of the prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me". The silent repetition became synonymous with the beating of his own heart.

In Sufism the method has been applied from early days. *Dhikr* or recollecting God and repeating His Names is the most important religious practice. It has been given more importance than the five usual prayers. The name of Allah is to be repeated with intense concentration, as often as possible, often with breath control and other practices like concentrating on the nose and other organs. Recitation may be aloud, or in a low voice, or mental. "The devotee begins", says Ghazali, "by repeating the Name. Then the tongue should cease moving and the name be repeated in the mind only. Finally, all forms should

go and only the idea remain. At this point the devôtee should lay himself open to God's mercy. The highest ecstasy is produced by *Dhikr*. The ultimate stage is to be completely absorbed in God forgetting even the act of thinking of God."

Thus we see that the practice of repeating the name of God is universal. *Japat Siddhih*, by *japa* comes success, says the well-known Sanskrit proverb. Swami Brahmananda constantly told his students: "*Japa, japa, japa!* Even while you work, practise *japa*. Keep the name of the Lord spinning in the midst of all your activities. If you can do this, all the burning of the heart will be soothed."

Everything which has praise from  
the world is unnoticed in Heaven,  
and everything which is unnoticed  
by the world is kept in Heaven.

*Hazrat Inayat Khan*



## Chapter Eight

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONSCIOUSNESS

*Swami Ritajananda*

### **The Practice: a brief description**

The word meditation does not have the same meaning in India as it does in the West. Vedanta uses an equivalent word—for there is no other word that comes closer to that idea—it is *dhyana* or *nidi-dyana*, or perhaps *upasana*.

During meditation one normally thinks of only one spiritual ideal, or of an idea close to that ideal. In *dhyana*, thought is in no way occupied with a subject, but it is directed, intensely, towards a spiritual ideal. We can understand this spiritual exercise better by reading the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali.

The goal is to obtain a spiritual experience that transcends the intellect. If, therefore, one does not believe in the possibility of reaching a higher state than the level of the intellect, meditation, within the Vedantic tradition at least, is meaningless. For the Vedantist, meditation is capable of obtaining direct contact with the Supreme. To achieve this it is necessary not only to abandon all attachment to material things, but also to all diverse thoughts. He who wishes to meditate must develop a total mastery of himself and must also feel a very strong attachment to his spiritual Ideal. The Chosen Ideal is called *ishta*.

Why is it necessary to meditate? The answer is, to seek for the Supreme; those who meditate wish to find the Supreme. Such people believe that, for them, It is the best thing that there is; It is the ultimate Goal of existence. In India It is salvation. We must also say that meditation should become intense concentration, as fine and one-pointed as possible. It is then



penetrating intuition. On the one hand there is intensity of concentration and on the other—lying at the very heart of profound meditation—there is a one-pointed and refined comprehension. When this occurs one is completely separated from ordinary life.

This practice, to begin with, is normally very difficult because our mind is used to an immense variety of thoughts and feelings. To these we may add, not only the memory of past experiences, but also those close or immediate impressions. All these make spiritual concentration difficult.

Few people consent to separate themselves from all their mental activities so that they may become absorbed in their spiritual ideal. However, for those who sincerely seek it, there does exist an effective means of purifying one's mind of all the different kinds of thoughts. This is introspection and self-analysis. By practising introspection a great deal, by carefully analyzing oneself, one can eliminate all the bad tendencies of mental activity. At first this is difficult because we are not capable of judging ourselves impartially and we accept with difficulty recognition of our faults.

Very often people do not perceive the problems involved in trying to discover their own faults; they fail to spot that habitual tendency of the mind that seeks to hide its own weaknesses. Such people veil their own vision of things, they do not realize that they see things incorrectly, that they act badly, and that their judgement of their own mental attitudes is neither clear nor exact. For the same reason, such students do not bear criticism of their own faults; if they happen to hear such reproaches they feel that their pride is wounded. This makes their exercise into introspection, through an analysis of the weakening tendencies of the mind, doubly difficult.

When a disciple agrees to follow the direction given by his master, he shows before him, not only a great humility, but a total confidence that allows him to abandon himself to him completely. For the period of time that the disciple lives with



the master, he (the student) has to overcome great difficulties because his ego is constantly being battered by his teacher. He naturally suffers because of it. But after this sort of test he understands how to study his mind objectively. At the same time he realizes that his master is really a person who has given him a "second birth"—birth into the world of the Spirit, the Self. He understands also that the gift given by his master is truly one of inestimable value. It often happens that at this moment of awareness the disciple meditates on his guru. Who but the guru is capable of awakening in the student so much of internal Light?

To undertake, independently, a real self-examination is extremely difficult. The way that is therefore adopted by many spiritual aspirants is that of concentration with the help of a *mantra*. That is to say, with a few sacred words which are considered extremely powerful through their profound meaning. Even children receive these instructions, put them into practice and continue to follow them all their lives. Those who repeat, conscientiously, *japa* (the repetition of the *mantra*), receive its benefit and find their path. Naturally, much depends on the ability to concentrate and on the student's diligence.

All the Sacred Writings of India consider the *mantra* an effective way of reaching the Supreme. The Vedas and the Upanishads have taught this path from the most ancient of times, and it is said that when this discipline is practised the Lord Himself comes to help His devotee. Here, then, internal purification is realized entirely through *japa*. Through this practice the student can even manage to put aside entirely the taste for worldly experiences.

Little by little the total transformation of the devotee's nature makes itself apparent. Shri Ramakrishna said one day, "When a king comes to visit the house of a servant, he sends in advance furniture and dishes. Thus, his servant can receive him worthily. It is the same with the devotee. Divine qualities show themselves in him."

By meditating on a *mantra*, one does not think about the



significance of the words, because the *mantra* itself is identified with one's spiritual ideal. Repeating the *mantra*, a direct contact with one's spiritual ideal is established. Thus, it is intense practice of concentration containing the deepest of feelings; it is necessary to love with all one's heart the *ishta*.

The *ishta*, the Chosen Ideal, is an aspect of the Supreme that is particularly agreeable to us: It shows Itself to our sight. We say "to our sight" because although God is infinite He or She can also be considered as having attributes. We cannot really have a vision of the Infinite. We are therefore obliged to choose the aspects or the aspect that touches most nearly our own nature. For example, some devotees are attracted by Power, others by Love and still others by Gentleness, Wisdom, etc. In choosing an *ishta*, the devotee is accepting that which is most satisfying to him; that which appeals to his thought and his love. In this way the devotee can more easily practice *dhyana*, profound meditation.

Some aspirants experience difficulty in arriving at this state. They start thinking of their Chosen Ideal by reading about Its greatness, Its grandeur. But I emphasize here that the process of meditation is not intellectual. It is neither a simple practice of concentration nor is it vague sentimentally. It is intense concentration backed by all the love that the devotee is capable of and in which he can immerse himself completely, forgetting the external world.

This could be a brief description of the practice of meditation.

### **Preparation for meditation**

If meditation is practised correctly, what do we begin to discover about ourselves? We find, not only that the weakening tendencies of the mind are exerting less of a pull than previously, not only that our general health shows an upward turn—but also that our powers of concentration are keener, and that consequently we seem to be more successful in any enterprise we undertake.

Religion, however, is not concerned with worldly success. Its



search is for That which is the basis of everything. The goal of meditation is the realization of Absolute Truth and it is this Ultimate Truth that is held by the Vedantist to be the very foundation of our being. I have read many books on the world's different religions noting their varying techniques in the practice of contemplation and meditation, and I have come to realize that the ideal is the same in all of them. Meditation is the process of raising our ordinary level of consciousness to a more exalted state.

We live by habitually identifying ourselves with body and mind; indeed, we are neither able to separate ourselves from our physical characteristics nor from our mental propensities, for, we mistakenly assume, without a body there can be no enjoyment and without thought no personality worth a mention. We feel that we are entirely at one with our thoughts. And it is here that a distinction must be made. Though subtle, the difference has to be clearly seen, for only thus do we gain control over the faculty of thought; this self-control is essential for success in meditation.

Let us try to understand meditation in relation to mind, or *antahkarana* as it is called in Vedanta. The *antahkarana* is not only our ever-active, but also our immensely strong, internal organ. It is strong because it works harder than the body; even when we are asleep it continues to work. Sometimes it is our friend, at other times our enemy. At night, when we are prevented from sleeping by varying thoughts, the *antahkarana* is an enemy; when it takes the form of lofty ideals it becomes a friend—a friend that can help us—and when this happens we become truly happy. The mind, therefore, is the principal object of our study for, if well-trained, it can help us reach our goal.

As I have mentioned previously, meditation is intense and prolonged concentration. This is to be achieved by a channelling of all the energy that we have at our disposal. In order to live we require energy—the body cannot act without it—this is common knowledge. But we should not waste our energy on things of little account or on activities that do not



enhance our dignity. A few moments of serious reflection will clearly show us that since we begin each day, and work through it, without any clear ideal in mind, so we spend a great deal of our energy on what amounts to nothing in particular. It is here that meditation can really be of help to us for it shows us not only how to gather together our energies but the process by which we may regain them and redirect them in the best possible manner. This is, no doubt, a considerable undertaking. Nevertheless our sought-for goal depends upon it. Our different energies can be compared to the water in deep gorges each emptying their torrent at different points in a lake. Once the lake is "tapped" our energies begin to flow in a single direction and a great power becomes available. The thoughtful man, who desires to attain a worthy goal for himself, undertakes a similar project.

The concern of such a man is to transcend normal vision; he seeks to attain an altogether new awareness of the world in general and a fresh understanding of himself in particular. What we think of ourselves at present is by no means the true picture. Each of us is a possessor of infinite power and abiding wisdom; deep within there is a great reservoir of Love. Would not such a discovery fully justify any difficulties we may initially face in our search for Truth?

If, at the outset, we are not gripped by a well-defined ideal then our meditations, lacking the necessary attention, will be tepid and feeble. First we must have the firm conviction that the ideal *is* attainable in this very life. We should never entertain negative thoughts such as, "I cannot . . .", "I am not able today because . . .", or "I am not strong enough, my mind wanders all the time . . .". A wandering mind at the time of meditation is a universal experience—especially today—for we live at a time when we are encouraged to think about many secular things. Many of us work in cities and in towns and so suffer the inevitable strain resulting from a constant bombardment of mass advertising. When we compare our situation with that of a yogi living apart from society, practising his meditation



exercises alone in his mountain retreat, it is no small wonder that we find concentration so difficult. Be that as it may, we should endeavour to utilize our time and energy in the best possible way. Even though we live in the world, even though we are obliged to do so many different things, this does not prevent us from having a lofty personal ideal. This must be firmly grasped by the mind.

The great masters have told us: "When you reach your goal you will be free from anguish and the doubts and problems 'that flesh is heir to'. You will not suffer from want, neither will you ever grieve for this or that." How, we may ask, is it ever possible to attain this state? Anguish, our teachers reply, does not come from outside; it manifests in your own thoughts. So if anguish is created, it must surely be possible to overcome it and this you must learn to do. It is the magic of meditation to bring before the mind's eye an entirely new vision of things.

Many of you will be more than familiar with the concept "Yoga". It is, unfortunately, a much maligned word. The commentator on the "Yoga Aphorisms" says: "Yoga is *samadhi*, and *samadhi* is intense meditation without any object consciousness. Meditation, therefore, is the means to Yoga". All the exercises that we read about in Yoga are a preparation for this contentless consciousness. We prepare our bodies so that by becoming peaceful and relaxed they may be perfect instruments in the work of the *chitta*.

The analysis of *chitta* has always interested me. It may be translated as psyche, for this is the closest word in English to designate that which lies behind all our various thoughts. It is held that the *chitta* has two forms—one when it is absolutely calm and one greatly agitated. Think of the ocean and the numerous waves that play on its surface. The *chitta* is the infinite ocean and all our various thoughts are the waves. Because of our thoughts we seem to be different one from another, but at the base of our thoughts is the ocean, the *chitta*. Each thought is a wave that rises from it and then falls back into it. Each thought, when it dies down, is replaced by another, sometimes

greater, sometimes smaller in intensity in exactly the same way as the ocean is sometimes described as being "mountains high" and at other times "placid and serene like a mill-pond".

Because of the waves coming as they do one after the other both day and night and affecting each one of us, we are never aware of our true nature. But if we stop the waves then the mind becomes like the quiet ocean and when this happens we begin to perceive very differently. This moment indicates a high state of mental development.

### **The value**

May we meditate on that adorable, resplendent

Being who has given birth to the entire universe.

May He direct our intelligence towards the Light.

*Gayatri mantra*

Though one of the oldest known, the *mantra* we have quoted above is still repeated even today in India with great concentration. For the people of India, meditation always formed a part of their religious practices; every sect was aware of its importance. In the Vedas themselves, however, we do not find much advice given concerning the actual technique of meditation. This is mainly due to the fact that during the Vedic period all instructions concerning chants, hymns, details of rituals, etc., was imparted orally.

That the practice of meditation dates far back into antiquity can be discerned from sculptures discovered by archeologists. These show figures seated erect in a meditation posture. Through this practice the ancient Hindus achieved not only a high degree of self-mastery, they also discovered a force that could influence events of the external world, a force, they found, which acted on their own bodies and the bodies of others.

In course of time, and with the development of spiritual ideas, the goal changed. Meditation began to be practised solely for the realization of God and the attainment of Joy. Today it is this ideal that inspires most seekers who undertake



## *Meditation*

the ancient art.

When the mind is turned in on itself we finally arrive at Pure Consciousness which is free from all mental and physical conditioning. This Reality the Upanishads term Atman: meditation is the technique whereby we realize that the Atman is our essential nature. Through meditation all our mental faculties are slowly mastered and once this mastery is attained we achieve realization.

Each sect in Vedanta considers meditation as the only means of reaching the goal that is taught by its particular teachers. Thus the Shaivites of Kashmir instruct their followers to meditate in the region of the (spiritual) heart on the Supreme Reality which is inherent in all beings. In this way the field of external knowledge is reabsorbed into awareness of one's Self and the whole is finally absorbed into Shiva. As this realization destroys all dualism, Shivaism, we may say, ultimately ends in Advaita.

In the tantric discipline, meditation is practised so as to transform the worshipper, the object of worship, and the act of worship, into *Chit* or Pure Consciousness. The culmination, therefore, is the realization of the identity of the Self in man with the Self behind the universe.

It is not known whether or not there existed other religions at the time of the composition of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, but without doubt there were various sects. The *Gita* attempts to reconcile the differences between these religious ideas. No other book has treated this subject as deeply. It deals with three questions which are fundamental to everyone: Who am I? Where am I? What is the purpose of my life? Another important question discussed is: If there is a goal to attain, what path should I follow?

In recent times, Shri Ramakrishna has spoken of the need for everyone to have a religious path appropriate to his or her own



nature. This is the reason why we find so many different faiths. A person whose nature is predominantly devotional becomes attracted to the path of love and devotion; he or she would be unlikely to find Vivekananda's *Jnana Yoga* of interest. This book addresses itself to the Ultimate Reality and to man's real nature. The devotee, however, is content to pray and to meditate on his beloved Chosen Ideal.

Diversity of paths is an absolute necessity. In the *Gita*, as each path is treated as a Yoga, everybody reading it—and not only Hindus—can receive inspiration in the following of their own particular nature. In the sixth chapter called “The Yoga of Self-Mastery” or “The Yoga of Meditation”, the two titles seem to designate different paths; they are, however, inseparable. One cannot experience profound meditation without self-mastery. Patanjali, in his *Yoga Aphorisms*, often returns to the idea of self-mastery while speaking about meditation.

Everywhere we see today a great interest in the subject of meditation. When visitors come to the Centre here at Greta for the first time and I tell them that the community practises meditation together, this piece of information is always greeted with great happiness. The questions that follow are always about meditation. Why is this? It is because most people are instinctively aware that meditation is conducive to good health and the overcoming of bad habits; meditation also gives a stability to the mind that permits the attaining of a higher level of consciousness.

Everyone has his own goal and this accounts for the numerous schools of meditation we find everywhere. There is transcendental meditation, group meditation geared along modern lines, Zen meditation, Tibetan Buddhist meditation, Yoga meditation and so on. All these approaches are valuable for meditation itself and can produce varying results.

Neither are the techniques of meditation identical. This is a vast subject and it would not be possible for me to outline them all here. All that I will say is that meditation is a necessity. We must learn how to meditate and we should practice it as much



as we are able. The goal is attainable and even a little effort brings beneficial results. Those who have more leisure at their disposal can certainly attain an incomparably higher level of awareness—greater than they could imagine—than what they have been accustomed to. Everything that the different schools teach is useful, but only if we have a clear grasp of our present mental state. Not everyone, therefore, is capable of meditation.

In the ancient writings of India, such as the Upanishads and the Puranas, we constantly encounter the word *tapas*. Every Indian child is conversant with it. In the Upanishads it is stated that in order to know the Supreme Reality, Brahman, one must do *tapas*. Through *tapas* we discover what it is that we are searching for.

*Tapas* is characterized by the practice of austerity and intense concentration. This leads to a stable meditation posture in which the student shows no sign of movement and is absolutely unconscious of the outside world. He becomes absorbed in the thought that nothing exists outside of himself. In this state great heat is generated; such a student is insensitive to cold, he perspires even if it is freezing. All this, however, is an effect, it is not the longed-for goal. By *tapas* the practice of profound meditation is sustained and eventually the goal of an integrated personality is attained.

The search for an *eternal* Subject has interested man for centuries. All his different religious practices—meditation, prayer, worship—all are aids helping him to discover his "Self". Some readers may be surprised that I mix up the idea of meditation with religion. It is not too difficult a point to understand. Vedanta states everything in a form that allows us to see each religion, and every idea of each religion, in its correct place. Vedanta helps us to discriminate and make a positive distinction between the different religions; it also instructs us about the spiritual goal attained through meditation whereby we discover Universal Truth.

What is the reason for the wide diversity in the different



religions? All depends on the region in which the Prophet or Founder was born and the area in which he taught. If the same Master had lived in another region he would have said the same thing but in a form appropriate to that region. It is not through reason alone, however, that we are able to understand the harmony in the world's religions; this awareness comes through a superior knowledge which we term *prajna*.

In order to arrive at a better understanding of the term meditation, let us consider it as a complete technique for the mastery of the mind. In *hatha-yoga* we are led through various exercises to acquire, not only mastery of the body, but, incredible though it may sound, mastery of the brain. A master of *hatha-yoga* has control over all his organs—his lungs, digestive system, everything. They function or cease to function by his mere will. Mastery of the mind, however, is much more difficult to achieve: yet it is absolutely necessary if we are to know who we are. We must go beyond normal consciousness, beyond the mind that is always occupied with thoughts of the world.

A steady mind requires a firm posture, so, in order to achieve mind control we need to seat ourselves in a position which we are able to maintain for some time. To begin with this may present problems but, in time, the student will discover that when he or she is seated in a relaxed and comfortable position he will slowly attain to a different state of awareness. It must be obvious to you all, of course, that the postures adopted by yogis or the seated positions used by the Japanese and Chinese Buddhists are counsels of perfection. Over many centuries a firm position was developed by which the aspirant became completely immune from all that was going on around him.

At the time of meditation the attention may be fixed on any object—on the breathing, a point, the spiritual master, an image of God, or on an idea or quality such as friendliness, compassion, kindness, goodness, etc. All these are equally useful. Though the forms of concentration are many, we each have to adopt that form which is appropriate to our mental make-up. There is no single road, for each one of us has a



differing background, a different nature and temperament to work through. A teacher who has observed you closely over a period of time should be able to advise you on an ideal that suits your own nature. But, more than the teacher, you yourself must so choose. And you must also be devoted. *Dharana*, a word used by Patanjali, indicates a very strong attachment. *Dharana* should be so developed that even if, during your meditation, you feel it necessary to shift your position slightly, you will not be disturbed mentally; your mind should not register any change at all.

A story told within the Buddhist tradition illustrates the kind of mental firmness that is required. One day a monk was sitting in the town square completely absorbed in his meditation. He had gone beyond his body consciousness. (For ourselves the body is everything and we devote a good deal of our time ensuring that it is as healthy and as beautiful as is possible. But the monk in our story had reached a stage where he was no longer aware of it. Perhaps he had spent some years meditating on a skeleton. In some Buddhist monasteries this practice is undertaken so as to impress upon the mind of the novice the ephemeral nature of the body. But to return to our story.) As the monk was meditating a pretty young woman happened to pass in front of him. At that moment the monk happened to open his eyes. He saw nothing of the woman but her teeth. A little later her husband also passed by and asked if the monk could help him. He was searching for his wife. "No", replied the monk, "I have not seen a woman at all. I have only seen some bones pass by, a skeleton." The teeth that the monk saw immediately suggested to him a skeleton and he saw nothing but this.

The most popular kind of meditation in India seeks the aid of the special "forms" of God. In the life of Sir. Ramakrishna we recall the delightful episode of Gopala's Mother. A lady devotee worshipped the Child Krishna (Gopal) all her life; she saw the divine Child near her. He would come and play, climb on her shoulders and demand to be fed. Her *dharana*, we can say, was so well established that she saw only the Child and nothing else.



Those who meditate on Shiva see only Shiva; those who meditate on Jesus see only Jesus. As a result of intense concentration a spiritual awareness is attained which the mind never loses.

Now we take up a very important question. We may or may not accept it, but there is an element which the Hindus call *Chaitanya* or Pure-Consciousness. Consciousness is our real Self. Consciousness is always there. Only the body can disappear for a certain time, when its life-span is complete. The essential problem is: Who am I? If I don't know my own self, the other questions are irrelevant. I must define myself. The second chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* is devoted entirely to this subject. It teaches us that our real Self is an indestructible spirit, eternally alive. It is that which influences our entire existence. However, we don't see "it". We are not aware of "it". I am conscious of you, I am conscious of things; but I am not at all conscious of the Self. What comes between us and our real Consciousness? It is the *chitta*, the mind. Therefore, *dhyana*, profound meditation, must be practised with great intensity to remove the veil that separates us from our real nature. This is the purpose of all the different techniques.

This idea of a real Self, of a superior Self has been expressed for many centuries by numerous religions, by numerous prophets and saints. Therefore, the aim of meditation is to acquire knowledge of our real nature. It is the highest state of consciousness one can attain. Afterwards, there remains nought, for the so-called self has disappeared: it has left with the mind. The *chitta* is undisturbed. As long as our mind is active, as is its habit, it is constantly aware of images. When the film ends only the screen remains, completely blank, without images. We can become aware of this through the fact that our real Self is like light. We can use this light at all levels.

There is a good explanation of the practice of meditation and of what we can gain by it. It is said first of all that we all possess enormous energy and that we waste this energy uselessly.



## Meditation

Sometimes we admit this useless waste of energy. At other times, we don't admit it because we are in the grip of sensory impressions. The yogis often live alone, far from everything. They live absolutely isolated in mountain caves or in the forest in order to avoid waste of the energy they possess, both physical and mental.

Let us get back to the subject of posture. When the body is perfectly relaxed, in a position appropriate for meditation, then there is a minimum of expenditure of energy. If one has great mastery of oneself, of one's body, the energy will be gathered internally to a greater degree. This is the first part of the practice that helps us avoid the useless expenditure of energy. One may then ask: what can be done with this energy? You have a goal and, with all this gathered energy, you can go beyond the level of ordinary consciousness, which has been conditioned by all the ideas brought in by the various experiences of daily life. This is the goal of Yoga. In Patanjali's book three words occur: *dharana*, *dhyana* and *samadhi*.

*Dharana* is the concentration on an object and ideas, or on a point of the body such as the spot between the eyebrows, the centre of the chest, etc. The impressions received come solely from that concentration.

*Dhyana*, or meditation according to Yoga, is the state in which the mind is able to hold itself steady in an uninterrupted state.

*Samadhi* designates the state where the spirit is so completely absorbed in meditation that it has lost all consciousness of the external world and even of any inkling concerning the object of meditation. There are today fewer controversies than before surrounding the subject of *samadhi*; it has been finally understood that it is not a kind of self-hypnosis. Sri Ramana Maharshi, a great master of our age, has defined *samadhi* as *jagrata-shushupti*. *Jagrata* is the state of wakefulness and *shushupti* is profound sleep. *Samadhi* is both one and also the other! For us, they cannot exist at the same moment. We can say: when I am awake, I am quite awake; when I sleep I am quite asleep. How

can the two states be simultaneous? It is difficult to understand; however, it is so. Normally, with the constant awareness of "self", that cannot happen. The self intervenes as a great obstacle. The self can only operate at the level of ordinary consciousness. When the mind functions at that level, the self also functions in the same way. But in the state of deep sleep, the self does not function. At that moment I am not at all conscious of what is going on around me. *Turiya* is yet another state: the eyes are open; one sees, but the consciousness of "I" is so weak that it seems not to exist. When this last curtain has fallen, the "I" who was there as a personality with a particular character, with its own temperament, etc., disappears. Then the light shines forth in all its radiance. As Swami Vivekananda said: "When the spirit goes beyond the level of ordinary consciousness and that of the unconscious, this state is given the name of *samadhi* or superconsciousness."

You may ask again: what is the use of all that? But the yogi can say that, with the aid of his teacher, he has been able to master all of the energy he possesses in himself. He can thus control it at will in any direction.

Whatever road we may take, we can advance little by little by means of this control—this mastery of the mind. By practising meditation we find what we are looking for. We can go as far as we like, just as a traveller, climbing a mountain, when overwhelmed by the beauty of the landscape, decides to stop and let his companions continue without him. Meditation can lead to the Realization of the Supreme, but it can also aid in maintaining good health, in overcoming bad habits. By this technique, first of all one gets relaxation. Then comes concentration which controls the body completely. When the body is perfectly relaxed, all its obstacles can be overcome.

A few days ago, I read a book on illness and its treatment. The author wrote that illness could increase or decrease and even be cured according to the degree of attention we focus on it. If the attention is slight, nature begins to act inside to re-establish a balance that will help in the restoration of good



health. That is perhaps difficult to accept, but it has been tested by several people. The author confirms that you will aggravate your condition by thinking only of your illness. Forget the sickness in order to facilitate the cure. Sri Ramakrishna said: "O mind, be still; forget my body and its sickness." Instead of letting the mind dwell solely on the illness, one must direct the spirit in another direction. If you meditate each day, you will make progress each day. Often people say they are not making progress, that they don't feel any spiritual benefit. That may be so, but I do not believe that there has not been any progress at all if even a very little effort has been made.

Every effort leaves an impression: the mind, the power of thought, becomes controlled and that is what we are seeking in practising meditation. When you achieve great mastery of the mind you will be able to detach your power of thought from every part of your body. Swami Turiyananda (a direct disciple of Shri Ramakrishna), who was to be operated on, said: "Anaesthesia is not necessary, You can perform the surgery. It is enough for me to remove my mind from it." How could he have arrived at that state of indifference? First, by stopping the waste of energy—by controlling one's thoughts—and directing them to another level.

I want to add several other ideas without going deeper into the technique, for the subject is very vast. It will be dealt with later.

In different meditations, certain people concentrate greatly on breathing, finding that technique very useful. Thus, in Yoga, there is a practice devoted to the mastery of respiration, called *pranayama*. The Hindus consider the practice of *pranayama* absolutely necessary before meditation. *Pranayama* helps us to control the mind. It is an authentic technique, the same as the technique of concentration on images, or ideas, or on the Chosen Ideal.

Shri Ramakrishna would sometimes surprise people with the answers to very difficult questions. In his explanation he would



say: "My Divine Mother told me that." We are astonished to see how he found answers which normally we do not discover through reason. The only explanation that I can give is that he had reached a level of consciousness where each answer was available to him.

The ultimate goal of meditation is to reach pure Consciousness, the Light that casts no shadow. But before attaining that there are several different levels. Shri Ramakrishna explained that better than any other master. No one ever practised as he did such a variety of techniques and nobody had such a variety of experiences. Thus, arriving at the highest level, he experienced the Divine Mother. He always spoke of his Divine Mother as of a living being constantly close to him, helping him to resolve all problems. As a result, this same Ramakrishna became the Divine Mother. He became a disciple of Tota Puri, practising Vedantic discipline in which there is nothing but pure Consciousness. There, name and form are completely erased. In the state of *samadhi*, Shri Ramakrishna was awake; he was not asleep. He had seen That which is the aim and goal of all of the various techniques of meditation.

If you can achieve that state, you are truly the master. With the mind completely controlled, you discover many things much more clearly than before. Normal understanding is that of the world, of what we see. It is not the Reality, it is not the Truth. That which we take for truth is the product of our thoughts, a creation of the mind. With the changing of the mental, the world changes, everything changes; you then see the Truth behind everything. At that moment you can say that you have attained the supreme goal of your life. You understand who you are, you understand where you are. You are transformed.

Meditation, which is an activity of the mind, can therefore have a very great influence upon our lives. Everyone can derive benefit from it according to his or her way of meditating and in accordance with his or her Chosen Ideal. Through meditation



everyone can also acquire a more peaceful mind for living in society and have a wider grasp of problems and of how to solve them.

Let me say again that we should not waste the precious energy owing to which we live in this world. Let us economize as far as possible and let us practise intense concentration in order to master our power of thinking and to attain our true nature—pure Consciousness.

### Different Techniques

I have attempted to explain what meditation is and what we can gain by practising it to the best of our possibility. There are two types of people who practise meditation. Some ask purely for material benefits: better health, the elimination of certain faults, worldly success, etc. Others desire mainly to attain a high spiritual level. So, in different religions, it is practised in order to reach a higher state than that of ordinary life. This is often the search for God or of spiritual realization, *Nirvana*, as the Buddhists call it. Some meditate in order to acquire great mastery of body and of the mind in order to achieve better concentration, to accomplish in the best way possible all they wish to do in this world. Thus, the goal to be reached through meditation is not the same for everyone.

Preparation for meditation is very important, for one cannot meditate without first creating the right atmosphere. It encourages calming of the agitated mind, which is always occupied with sensory objects and various thoughts. As a help in that direction different exercises of *Hatha-Yoga* can be practised, followed by relaxation, control of breathing, allowing idle thoughts about food, work, rest, sleep, etc. to pass out of the mind.

Now we come to the techniques. Naturally they are quite varied. There are Hindu techniques, Buddhist techniques and those of other religions. There are those students who don't belong to any one particular religion or another. We should

choose the form of meditation which seems to agree with our own nature, our own feelings and the goal we wish to reach.

As I said before, this practice has great value. It can bring about the transformation of our nature, the transformation of our normal consciousness which is limited by "me" and "I". We can arrive at a very high level of consciousness. Therefore, if one has gained an awareness of God, a great change is produced by a spiritual experience. I will give three examples.

First, the example of the Buddha. Buddha did not search for God, but he wanted to know how it would be possible to conquer suffering caused by the miseries encountered in this world. He thought to achieve that without the help of God and he has shown us the way through his teaching.

Then Saint Francis of Assisi, who is venerated by millions of people. What did he possess? Nothing, only love so great that it went far beyond the love for all creatures. This is the stage of a profound transformation.

In more recent times, Hindu saints, or those from other countries and from different religions, have had very similar experiences. Thus, we are attracted by those who have given themselves completely to others, no matter what religion they practised. What impresses us in their behaviour is always a certain grandeur and a certain beauty.

Therefore, whether we follow a theistic or atheistic road, our way of meditation should contain a well-defined ideal. How can we achieve this? The body has very limited means, on the other hand the spirit is very powerful. Even if it is very difficult to control our thoughts, the mind can become an instrument for achieving a very elevated state, so much so that we can at last reach an unlimited level of consciousness, i.e. of Realization. The Vedas, which are among the oldest of Hindu scriptures, use the word *brahmavid* to designate one who is a knower of Brahman. This person becomes Brahman Himself—*Brahmavid Brahmanêva bhâvati*. It would seem that this is not possible. Brahman is infinite. He who knows Brahman must therefore become infinite, not physically of course. Physically he cannot



become infinite. But his spirit—normally conditioned by his body, his thoughts and his personality—surmounts all these limitations and reaches this Infinite. To reach Infinity is the goal.

There is also the third type, those who seek God, like Shri Ramakrishna who worshipped the Divine Mother, and the worshippers of Krishna or of Jesus or other spiritual personages. They use the spiritual ideal most appropriate to them, often in a concrete form. In these techniques one must guide one's mind along a path which is most suitable. To meditate fully on God is difficult, for God is infinite. The mind is not capable of concentrating on the infinite. It can only concentrate on a well-defined thing like a picture, an idea or a quality. Therefore, in all of the techniques of meditation, there is a practical ideal in one form or another. However, certain persons prefer not to use forms. They say they cannot concentrate on a form, they cannot imagine a form. I am always surprised to hear that, because for me, the use of a form seems entirely natural. To visualize a form is very easy and the imagination is very useful for this practice. In any case, you must choose yourself according to your preferences and your capacities. Some concentrate on sound. Sometimes it is that of a gong, a few notes on which they meditate. Friends have told me that music facilitates their meditation. Other artistic forms can also help to achieve concentration. In the Hindu religion there is *japa*, the repetition of a sacred name, of a prayer or of a *mantra*, often with the help of a rosary. In the Tibetan religion also, monks always carry a rosary, as do Moslems and Christians. The repetition of the sacred Name of the Lord is therefore recognized as a technique for spiritual concentration.

When you have decided to follow a particular path, you will set out on this road and you will not leave it. You will plunge yourself as deeply as possible into your meditation. The main question is: do you have a great yearning for a particular goal? If you cannot meditate in a suitable way in spite of the lessons you



have received and the instructions given by your teacher, your mind is to blame. Your mind can be your own enemy, when you have not chosen your ideal properly and are not terribly attracted to it. In this case, after a few moments the mind wanders.

The first condition for good meditation is first of all to know what interests you intensely. It is not necessary to choose a very high ideal on which to concentrate. You can even choose just any ordinary person. Thus Shri Ramakrishna tells the story as follows: There once lived in a small village a simple man, a peasant. He had a garden and animals among which there was a sheep. One day he heard a holy man speak on spirituality. He was attracted by that, but when he tried to meditate he could not do it. He returned to the holy man and told him he could not meditate. "What is preventing you?" asked the sadhu. "Oh. I have a sheep which I like very much and I am always thinking about it." The holy man said; "Good, concentrate on that sheep, the one you like so much. Even within a sheep is found the Light of God." It is not always easy to concentrate on God, but, by meditating even on an animal, an object of love, one can attain a very high level of consciousness.

Shri Ramakrishna advised people who were very attached to their children, their husband or wife to realize that, within these beloved beings, there is the presence of God. In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* it is said that it is not the physical person that is attractive, but that it is the Atman residing in that person that attracts you. It is He who gives all joys. The love for someone, the joy felt in that love, comes from the source which we call God.

So, if you cannot concentrate on some divinity, concentrate on what pleases you most, constantly reminding yourself that that represents for you the Supreme, manifested for you in this form. At that point, meditation becomes easier. Of course, the ideal would be to meditate on a being like Buddha, Jesus, Ramakrishna, your spiritual preceptor or another well-known



great saint, because several aspects in them always impress us greatly. Some attention directed towards these great beings frees us from many vain and fleeting thoughts. In the teachings of Swami Brahmananda, which we often read, there is mention of the Chosen Ideal, the *ishta*. The Sanskrit word *ishta* designates that which we love the most. Thinking about our Chosen Ideal will therefore always bring us joy. Concentration will then be easier and more profound.

I have spoken to you about form. Now I will talk about the *mantra*, or the name. Naturally, each *mantra* is connected with a great spiritual personality. We must have the firm conviction that the repetition of the *mantra* is the best way to reach our spiritual goal. Thus, there are the Hindu *mantras*, Buddhist *mantras*, Christian *mantras*. This use of repeating a *mantra* or invocation has perhaps disappeared in some religions but survives nevertheless in others. Meditation or *japa* is practised everywhere in India; all sects repeat *mantras*.

If we are attracted neither by form nor by sound, then what can we do? I will try and say something about universal meditation. This does not require that we adhere to any particular religious belief. It is merely a technique. However, it can also suit people who believe in God, or those who do *japa*, or who use forms.

You must have understood already that meditation is a state which can be reached by the practice of concentration. The concentration must be intense, so one-pointed that we get to the point of forgetting ourselves completely. It can be a one-track thought or a sublimation of love. When Jesus taught, he spoke in a simple way and everywhere Jesus is recognized as the Messenger of Love. The message of love is considered the supreme message. Jesus, therefore, advised us to concentrate on love. Love God with all your heart, mind and soul.

To meditate well, we must have great mastery of our mind. The control of breathing can help greatly to gain this. This is why Hindus, before doing *japa* first practice *pranayama*. This is a



very simple technique. Breathing is done very gently, very slowly. To begin with, you inhale for ten seconds and then exhale for ten seconds, blocking first one nostril then the other after each intake of air; after a while you will be able to do it for three or maybe four minutes. It is recommended that *pranayama* should be practised under the guidance of a teacher, otherwise it could be dangerous.

This is the first preparation for good meditation and it is also useful for that technique which I have called universal meditation. One has to control the respiration quite consciously. Your attention should be entirely fixed on your respiration. By doing this, you will think about nothing else.

The following exercise is a little more difficult. You must become the witness of your thoughts. At first, you will doubtless experience difficulty, but little by little you will be able to distance yourself from your thoughts; to remain indifferent, for example, to success or failure, to an agreeable or disagreeable word that has been spoken to you. Then you become the witness of your thoughts without any emotional reaction. You become aware that there is a separation between you and your thoughts. That is necessary.

Here is another point, perhaps the most important. Feel peace, tranquillity. It is necessary to meditate very deeply to feel internal peace. Then, no thought, no sensory experience, makes itself manifest any longer. One must dwell for some time on that ideal of peace, to have the feeling of being free, not to be attached any longer to any person or any idea. Thus a great internal change will take place. The Hindus do not always speak of God; they speak of the Supreme Reality, Brahman. The Ultimate Reality is the absolute *Sat-Chit-Ananda*, absolute Existence, absolute Knowledge, absolute Bliss.

In our real nature there exists nothing but bliss, infinite joy. Only we must become aware of it. What causes all evil is thought; though our real "Self" is not affected by it.

Another important point is surrendering ourselves completely to God, or, if you prefer, to the Absolute. By using



any method we choose we can go beyond our limited consciousness and reach a more elevated level where the consciousness of the "Self" merges with the universal "Self". This means transformation. At that moment there is only "we". In this expansion of consciousness, I am one with everyone, I am united with the Infinite. There is no longer any awareness of the body; this "I" is now the Universal "I".

Arriving at this point there is no more rebirth; there is no more death. Only the body must die. The Buddha said: "That which is created must decompose after a certain time." But my true Self, being a universal spirit, remains always and is united with everything on the highest level. *Aham Brahmasmi*—I am Brahman. The followers of Vedanta use that statement as a technique for meditation.

In spite of the different paths taken, even by using the methods of universal meditation, the same ideal always remains: mastery of the body, of thought and of feelings lead individual consciousness to a much greater awareness, namely that of unity with all that lives. By doing this, one is not trying to destroy the ego. Do not forget this important fact. It is necessary to expand our ego from its limited condition, determined by the body, mind and personality. This is the beauty we find in the great masters such as Jesus, Buddha or Saint Francis of Assisi. Painful experiences, suffering met in daily life, no longer count from then on for a being who has reached these high spiritual states, who has felt that unity, because his true Self is beyond that mundane state.

One can also make a habit of having good thoughts, in preparing for meditation. In these preparatory techniques there is a certain form of concentration, a constant effort to expand limited consciousness in order to lift it to a higher level.

Deep meditation leads to the transformation of ordinary consciousness, and, at the same time it brings us spiritual vision. Then we no longer see beings and things in the same way. That new vision of the whole world is the ideal. There must be that goal: to feel at one with everyone and everything.

In the centre at Gretz, we repeat, before each meal these words of the Holy Mother: "The world is not a stranger to you; the whole world and you yourself are one." That should become for each of us a reality and not a fleeting thought. We must feel it deeply. The Saints have shown us by the example of their lives that this is not a simple theory, but that it can be felt by all who try sincerely. With this new vision, our behaviour with others changes, the problems of daily life are resolved.

Om!  
Lead us from the unreal to the Real,  
From darkness to Light,  
From death to Immortality.  
Peace! Peace! Peace!



## Chapter Nine

# THE MECHANICS OF MEDITATION

*Swami Bhavyananda*

It is natural that people who have been earnestly practising meditation for a long time should want to assess their progress. When they look back, many feel that they may have covered a number of years, but not much distance towards the goal, and, of course, they are disappointed. They ask: "Why have I not made much progress? Have I been following the right path?" Being unable to analyse the situation objectively, some tend to abandon spiritual practices, saying "Meditation is not for me!"

This is not, by any means, an uncommon situation. And so the individual needs to ask himself the question, "Where have I gone wrong?" There are subtle ways in which things may go wrong in our preparations for spiritual life. Perhaps we are suffering from certain delusions, such as a feeling of "I am more spiritual than you are", or, possibly, some long-standing, ingrained habits or tendencies, which we thought we had conquered completely, are still present with us. Tendencies which are long sown are difficult to eradicate. They are like weeds: if the garden is not tended for a while, they grow; weeds need no attention!

But we should not feel despondent. We should take the matter calmly, reflect on it and try to eradicate whatever complacent attitudes we may have. Even spiritual practices may become a complacent routine. It is all too easy to think, "I have come some way and I am now well protected. I have entered the house of the great and can rest." Beware! This is the moment the devil has been waiting for. All those embedded tendencies are still there. One has to be aware of their existence and act carefully.

Once we realize the situation, we must be prepared to work to overcome the difficulties. For most of us, who might be considered mediocre aspirants, the impediments are not really very great; but for a great man the obstructions are much bigger. The temptation of Christ by the devil and the temptations that came to the Buddha were truly enormous. For us, such great temptations are not necessary—small ones are enough to put us off. But though the obstacles may not be great, it is essential for us to know them and to learn how to handle them.

One of the most effective ways of overcoming these problems is to surrender oneself to one's Chosen Ideal and to seek His help. Individuals engaged in spiritual practice are normally people with faith, and so holding on to God and relying upon Him is a great help. And once we have surrendered ourselves we should then continue with our spiritual practices and duties to the best of our ability. In short, we must keep to our routine—thinking of God, meditation and repetition of the Holy Name or *japa*. If we do this we can overcome all obstacles and find the required guidance within ourselves.

So if we have been following a spiritual path, let us be honest with ourselves and make a mental note of our weak points as well as our strong ones. Indeed it may be necessary to resist the temptation to note only our strong points and ignore the weak ones. The fact of the matter is that the weak ones are also there and a chain is as strong as its weakest link. So if we have any weak tendencies, we must be aware of them and take corrective measures. Many of us fail to recognize our weak points which act as impediments to our spiritual progress.

In the Indian tradition there are what we call the internal enemies. The main ones are desire, anger, greed, ego and jealousy. They are all within, not outside ourselves. We must also keep a watch on laziness, because it is all too easy to make excuses for ourselves! Then there is doubt: when it is difficult to achieve something, we are inclined to doubt the possibility of



achieving it. Sometimes we may also feel a lack of enthusiasm. Yet "enthusiasm is an extra right hand"; so when we cease to be enthusiastic, even the smallest jobs appear difficult. Clinging to sense enjoyments is also, in very subtle ways, an impediment. Many of us tend not to worry about these things and tell ourselves that most of them are "harmless" habits. However, too many so-called harmless habits combined together can result in a great deal of harm.

In the practice of meditation, *pranayama* is very important, for if we are unable to sit down, adopt a steady posture and regulate our breathing, we cannot expect to feel relaxed and this really does act as an obstruction. In many books *pranayama* is translated as breathing. This is not quite correct, for breathing is really only a sign that there is life in the body. It is more correct to say that *prana* is the life principle within us, and *pranayama* is the control of the vital forces of the body. When we are angry we find that our breathing is disturbed, because the life principle is agitated. On the other hand, when we are calm and peaceful our breathing is regular. It is therefore necessary to practise the control of breathing in a systematic way, so that the *prana*, the life principle within us, may become calm and relaxed. So we can see that a few breathing exercises will undoubtedly be of help in our meditation.

There are also other factors to be considered in the course of our normal daily life. For example, prejudice, intolerant or arrogant attitudes, and bad company may appear to be minor problems but, in fact, their roots go very deep indeed. The company of good people and the good qualities associated with them are great aids to spiritual life. Through association with them we develop a dispassion towards material existence and a more objective outlook. Also, when we are in good company, our thoughts are noble and wholesome, and they help to direct us along the right road. It is important to realize that when we find the right path we must do our utmost to follow it. For example, when we are driving a car, our progress depends upon following the road signs. So too in spiritual life we must seek the



company of good people who can act as signposts towards our ultimate destination.

Desire for name and fame is a very subtle temptation. For example, if we possess expert knowledge in a certain field, we tend to be egoistic and this inevitably expresses itself in our dealings with others. During a conversation it is all too easy to show off. But when others do not appreciate or praise our achievements, we feel offended, because our ego is hurt. That too is a danger to which we should be alert, and we should practise a little humility and learn to develop a loving expression in all our day-to-day contacts with others. This is a great help and will surely help us to build up our character.

So we see that our personality is formed by our thought patterns—they are the inner field of activity and the basis of our character building. "Sow a thought, reap an act; sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny." When things go wrong, we tend to say, "Oh, it is my fate!" But it is really the result of our habits. Habits, once set, are difficult to get rid of and so we must be careful to form good habits at an early stage. Ultimately, we are what we think.

It is also very useful in spiritual life to make a habit of reading a few pages from a good book every day. Reading a holy book really can become a spiritual activity, if we do it the right way. The question we must ask ourselves is: "Are we concentrating enough to absorb the message of the printed word?" If we are then it must change us in some way. But in order that this change may take place we must choose our reading matter with great care. We must select those books which inspire and help us in both character-formation and personal life. Every morning and evening we should make it a habit to read a few pages from such a book. It may be that at times we are not in the mood, but we should not allow this to break our routine; we must keep it up.

It is also useful to listen to devotional music. In India I was once the guest of a district administrator who lived in a large house in the hills. Early in the morning I used to hear



devotional music in all parts of the house. He told me that being a district administrator made it very difficult for him to think of God during the working day and that his spiritual teacher had advised him to begin the day with prayer. He had, accordingly, set up a relay system with loudspeakers in all the rooms and in this way he could hear God's Name.

We must approach all matters with an open mind so as to enable us to understand and appreciate the points of view of others. In this way we are open to good influences. If we know we have done wrong, we should accept it knowing the frailty of our human nature. We can learn from our mistakes and so avoid repeating them.

In the spiritual scheme of life there should be no place for controversy, for this tends to create discord. Argument can be of two kinds: one used with a view to clarification and understanding, and the other as an egoistical expression of opinion. The spiritual aspirant should not be involved in useless argumentation. We may be right, but if we then find it hard to convince someone else, what are we to do? The sensible thing to do is not to get oneself into an argument, for that constitutes a kind of inner disturbance. Discussion and questioning with a view to understanding is worthwhile, but simply trying to put across one's own ideas often causes only bad feeling.

Faith is an important ingredient in spiritual life. But faith is not acceptance without questioning. Indeed, we need to go through three stages: doubt, questioning and finding out and, finally, acceptance. For example, suppose we are told something and we are asked to accept it without question, regardless of whether we understand it or not. Our immediate reaction will be, "I have been told this but it does not make sense", and we will feel reluctant to accept it. However, if we search for the meaning, gain an understanding, and then accept it, that is faith, real faith. It is up to us to analyse and understand the teachings of the Scriptures and the words of the Guru and find the Truth in them. The strength of our faith will



depend upon our realization of the Truth contained in them, even if it be only intellectual understanding in the initial stages. Once we have achieved that, we experience a genuine stability and we cannot be disturbed. If someone else wants to oppose, argue or upset our intellectual understanding, it will not matter; if our faith is deep, we have no cause to worry and can simply reply, "I know that this is the Truth." We do not have to concern ourselves with unnecessary arguments, and that is why our faith, built on a firm foundation of questioning, is essential. It is also worth bearing in mind that enquiry does not mean impertinent questioning.

Shri Ramakrishna was once asked by Narendra—that questioning and searching young man—"If you really know the Truth, will you please prove it now." On another occasion, when Shri Ramakrishna told him of a vision he had had, Narendra challenged him; Shri Ramakrishna prayed to the Divine Mother, "Narendra says that I am a little mad; is this vision only my imagination?" The answer came to him, "No, do not worry." He returned to Narendra and said, "Mother has told me not to worry. I do not believe what you say." This is a typical example of the depth of his faith in the Reality of the Mother; for him, Her word was final. But it took time for Ramakrishna to become established in that Reality. Many of his visitors were highly intelligent people and they often used to say things that created doubt in his mind, but he came to realize that they lacked insight. He recognized that he had not had much formal education and did not have any bookish knowledge, but then his appeal to the Divine Mother was all he needed. It is simply not possible for anyone to shake that kind of faith and if we can bring something of that into our spiritual life, we will find that most of the obstructions disappear.

Another impediment is the acquisition of too much book knowledge. We gather information and acquire so much information about many things and this obscures our immediate needs. But it is only through real knowledge, not relative knowledge, that immortality is achieved. When



## *Meditation*

ignorance and partial knowledge are both transcended we reach the stage of ultimate Truth. If we do not attain that, the rest is of little value. In this so-called educated, enlightened society, people are busy collecting information which is extremely useful in their daily lives, but it is external. It is not enough to learn certain ideas from books and explain them to others; that may, of course, bring some satisfaction and pleasure but it does not bring depth. The ultimate understanding of Truth is more than that. The mere accumulation of information can become a burden. It is like an ass carrying a heavy load and feeling only the weight but not realizing the value. A great deal of our book knowledge can be a dead weight used only in unnecessary argumentation and that, as we have seen, can be a danger. Meditation and reflection carried out regularly in our daily life, meditating on God Who is the source of all knowledge, and the practice of spiritual disciplines, bring an insight far superior to any form of book knowledge.

Much of our day-to-day life is spent at our place of work, but even there we must seek to be aware of the spiritual purpose of life. We live in a world composed of different types of people and it is not unusual to have to face some very difficult situations. Spiritual practice comes to our aid on such occasions. As we noted earlier, we must begin the day with meditation and end with meditation; this gives us strength to deal with the problems of life in a wholesome way and also helps to remove any impediments.

Speech is one of the greatest blessings to man, but it has been said that often man speaks and then thinks. Therein lies the danger! How often, in Shakespeare's words, do we give tongue to those "unproportioned thoughts". Speech, a wonderful gift to God, should be used in a controlled way. It is better to be silent than to speak thoughtlessly; silence is indeed golden. In the world of expression, there can be so much of ego and self-assertion, which can lead to trouble. Therefore we have to



be careful of what we say; a deliberate and conscious effort must be made to cultivate good thoughts; this will eventually lead to right action and good character. Self-restraint and self-control must be practised at all times and in all places. We do not know when we may be overtaken by a storm. The *Gita* says that the senses carry away even the wise man; so how careful must the average man be! It takes a lot of effort to correct a wrong, it is better not to slip into wrong ways. We must constantly think wholesome thoughts; then there is no chance of unholy thoughts entering our minds.

For people of faith there is no place for worry. This is God's Own Creation; so if we are seeking the spiritual path and our faith is in God, worry and mistrust have no place. God is the source of our life. It is essential that our life—both internal and external—be pure. Otherwise, unwanted hidden tendencies may be re-awakened in us and they can cause mischief. Temptations must be resisted and self-control is necessary to resist them.

Some turn to spiritual life under difficult circumstances. For example, during the course of a happy and peaceful life one may encounter a deep disappointment and may try to escape—a kind of running away from life. If we turn to God in this way, without our heart being in it, we find that a sense of disappointment will continue to haunt us. We must come to the spiritual path with the desire to know the Truth and to know God.

In meditation, the Chosen Ideal, the Deity, or the aspect of Incarnation to which we are devoted, is extremely important. Once we have decided on our Chosen Ideal and we have been given a *mantra* or the Holy Name suited to our spiritual state, it is something sacred to us, to be kept to ourselves and not to be discussed. Whenever we are disturbed or upset, all we can do is to resort to prayer and to repeat the Holy Name, thereby reaching the depths of our inner life. Even if we do it imperfectly because of our distress, anger or dissatisfaction, at least we are able to obstruct and control the flow of the disturbance. So



when we are angry, it is useful to repeat God's Name; when we are pleased, we repeat God's Name. We thus bring the spiritual element into our daily life, and impure tendencies cease to dominate us.

Finally, we must be aware of the fact that by choosing to lead a spiritual life, we are swimming against the current. The whole world around us is flowing in one direction, and we have decided to go in another. But although we seek different values we may also find that if we relax just a little, we may find ourselves drifting back. So we must persist in our efforts; "eternal vigilance is the price of liberty", and any distraction may easily hamper our spiritual progress.

The obstacles facing each of us are very much our own and distinct; they vary from person to person. General principles can be given, but it is not possible to give ready-made prescriptions for dealing with these obstacles, for each of us requires, as it were, a particular remedy; as a medicine, each prescriptions for dealing with these obstacles, for each of us. Similarly, if we watch children playing, we may see a child accidentally fall down, get up again and after dusting himself, continue with the game as though nothing had happened; another child may fall down, but he does not get up and instead keeps on crying. That can also happen in spiritual life; we must be optimistic. If we set out to follow the spiritual path we must resolve to find the Truth. If we make a mistake, we simply correct it and continue along our chosen path.

If we retain this outlook things will gradually fall into their proper place. We know from our normal existence, which is also fraught with all kinds of impediments and difficulties, that if we know what we are seeking, we can learn how to overcome the problems.

In this way we can see how spiritual life can be an independent, optimistic, joyful venture and, in all aspects of life, be the main force which drives us on. We are in the midst of the world but, at the same time, we must endeavour to seek the real purpose of life.



## *Chapter Ten*

### OBSTACLES AND AIDS TO MEDITATION

*Swami Nityabodhananda*

Spiritual life is like travelling in a new country. The spiritual guide resembles someone who has already visited the country. His enthusiasm for it is contagious. While the scriptures give accounts of the inner country, they cannot transmit the same feeling as one who has been there. Moreover, the prerequisite for a spiritual life must be an interest, born of a real desire to know the truth. Without this, the continued efforts that the journey requires can never be sustained. This interest can be inspired by a spiritual man, whose life revolves around God and not the world. His function in our life is then gradually to shift the focus of our attention, and through his fervour we begin to see the world and our purpose here quite differently.

The scriptures do not address their teaching to people who have absolutely no concern or inclination for spiritual life. For, even given genuine interest, even with a guide, we cannot be sure of attaining the goal. At times we may be invaded by doubt, at others by physical illness. Or again, after having practised for some time, a kind of dryness may be experienced; many have the ability to begin, but far fewer have the steadfastness to continue. The yoga books, which envisage these human frailties and give precise instructions, list nine obstacles.



### **Physical illness**

This is the first obstacle. The books claim that the practice of yoga itself will keep the body healthy, but yoga practice cannot change a body completely. It can increase to a maximum the secretion of glands and other functions, but it cannot remedy some of the congenital or constitutional defects. The aspirant must take note of this fact and must not become depressed because he or she is not able to overcome the obstacle of congenital physical defect. What he will gain by constant practice will be the development of will-power. That is why we find many cases of spiritual people with gigantic wills, often encased in feeble bodies. They are not able to remedy their physical condition, but are able to build up will, character and personality.

### **Listlessness, idleness, languor**

The will of which we have spoken just now is important if we are to avoid three other possible obstacles, namely listlessness, idleness and languor. Listlessness appears when we lack enthusiasm and when the attention refuses to be concentrated. The only remedying factor in such a moment of indifference or inattentiveness is the will. By an act of will such as, "I can concentrate because I have done so before with success", we should put an end to that particular mood. When we are overwhelmed by the *tamas* element which makes us unwilling or unable to summon up a spiritual effort we can regain our drive by an effort of will.

To be unable to apply energy is idleness, and unwillingness is languor. We are unable to do something due to lack of energy. We are unwilling due to lack of initiative. Both can be rectified only by the will. If it is a real case of lack of energy, as in the case of total physical fatigue, nothing is to be attempted before taking a complete rest. In the case of imaginary fatigue, a change in the technique of meditation, or a change in the symbol of meditation is to be tried and this change is sure to awaken new interest.



### **Doubt, heedlessness**

It is not enough to have the will and energy to achieve concentration, one must also persevere with constancy unassailed by doubts. These are likely to appear in the form of, "Am I following the right path; will I attain realisation by the means I have adopted, etc.?" The only remedy for such doubts is the presence of the teacher, who is the embodiment of spiritual certitude; or of other co-pilgrims on the path, who can give us courage and faith drawn from their own experience. We are not speaking here of the metaphysical doubt which appears when two levels of consciousness intersect one another, the doubt which is the cousin of contradiction. But we are here referring to doubt which appears when the oil of faith does not sufficiently feed the flame of spiritual life. Closely allied to doubt is heedlessness. Here it is not lack of reflection, but want of vigilance in adopting the appropriate step for each stage. An opportunity may come to make progress with the help of someone superior to us, but we allow this opportunity to pass by unheeded.

### **Failure and inability to maintain the progress made**

Even with willingness and application, there are still some who cannot make regular progress. The *Yoga Sutras* explain that this failure is due to previous karma which manifests as congenital impediments or subconscious opposition. If previous *karmas* drag us back, the momentum of the practice must take us forward. As Meister Eckhart says: "If you have lost God, search for Him where you have lost Him." That is to say, we must refer our minds to a spiritual experience we had in the past and draw momentum from that. There is always a tendency to slide backwards and this is one of the dangers that beset the path. And again there is the danger of the aspirant becoming satisfied with the progress he has made. This satisfaction will also cause him to lose ground.



### **Worldliness or erroneous perception**

The fundamental obstacle to spiritual progress is our attachment to, or fondness for, the world of the senses. Desires continue in a subtle form because the roots of the desires have not been removed. Yoga does not always prescribe a direct attack on desires. It asks us to increase our interest in spiritual joys like meditation, so that the fondness for external pleasures will decrease by and by. Increased experience of spiritual happiness will also help us to escape from mental states in which worldly attachment is born. The last obstacles to spiritual life are psychic and magic powers which an aspirant may discover. The peace and calm of *samadhi* is not to be exchanged for psychic powers. Psychic powers do not bring about a complete change in the individual, whereas *samadhi* does. Often an aspirant having had an agreeable experience during meditation, which is clearly not *samadhi*, wants to have it again and yearns for it. Perhaps some may succeed in repeating it by imagining intensely the same experience, but even then it will not be quite the same experience as they had before. The first experience came unasked and spontaneously, whereas the second came because they sought it expressly. To insist on having an experience or to deliberately seek it is one of the great obstacles or temptations in spiritual practice.

Another great temptation or pitfall in spiritual life is to evaluate immediately one's own spiritual experience and to share it with others. The tendency to compare one's spiritual experience with that of others is one to which we all incline, due to our sense level of perception. I may say that I did not sleep as well as yesterday, or that the coffee in this restaurant is not as good as in another. But to permit such a comparison to be made on the spiritual plane is not only to break the continuity of spiritual experience which is an unconscious flow, but also to make way for personal pride, because the result of an immediate evaluation is a sense of acquisition, and acquisition inevitably leads to pride.



There is no so-called acquisition in spiritual life. We are only dropping the scales that have gathered around us and our vision. To be conscious of the dropping of the scales is to be conscious of the scales. So, the best attitude is the attitude of relaxation or total abandon, where we neither evaluate nor compare our experience, but simply live it. We do not even speak about it to others, because when we speak we lose the intensity of our experience. If and when we are on the heights of realization, then only are we allowed to share the joys of our spiritual experience with others.

### **Aids to meditation**

The most important aids to spiritual life are a sound mind in a healthy body, faith, and the company of the spiritual teacher. It may be asked: "Is spiritual life out of the question for those without good health?" Where there is a sound mind, the defects of the body can be overcome. It is traditional practice to keep close to the guru, at least for some time, until the disciple has formed his spiritual life; that is, until the disciple has learned the art of meditation and discrimination, until these arts have become automatic reflexes. Those who lack faith at the beginning of their spiritual life will absorb it through the presence of their teacher. For the teacher is a man of faith and his faith and certitude are infectious.

The goal of spiritual life is the awakening in us of Pure Consciousness untrammelled by any empirical conditions. It is the acquisition of knowledge of the noumenal Self. This knowledge is experienced directly. The knowledge of the Self which we acquire through *buddhi* or purified reason is only inferred knowledge, where we experience the "me" or the object-self and not the "I" or the subject-self.

The awakening of Pure Consciousness is not the product of empirical conditions. All the same, certain material physical conditions must be made favourable so that Consciousness can break forth. To give a simile, the lotus springs from the mud,



but the lotus is not the mud nor is it determined by the mud.

Meditation being the central fact and the mainstay of spiritual life, material conditions such as agreeable natural scenery are very much to be desired. A place exclusively for meditation should be chosen and we should return there every day. Neither too much light nor too much wind is good for meditation, nor too noisy an environment. The place chosen must be calm and peaceful, which will help to enhance the spiritual vibrations in us. Keep flowers near the spot where you meditate, flowers being the symbol of purity. Keep pictures of saints and sages near the place of meditation so that your thoughts may flow naturally towards remembrance of them.

Next, come the eight steps to meditation and complete absorption, which yoga calls independence or *kaivalya*. The technique of yoga is to cultivate and project opposite ideas or create opposite reflexes. Our minds are always invaded by thoughts of injury, deceit, unlawful gain, sex, greed, etc. We are not asked to chase after them or suppress them. We are asked to replace them by thoughts of non-injury, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence, and non-acceptance of gifts. Chasing and suppressing are negative efforts which use up a great deal of energy, whereas replacing them by positive virtues is a real achievement. The cultivation of the above five cardinal virtues constitutes the first step, namely *yama* or abstention. The second is *niyama*, which is the cultivation of contentment.

If we cannot acquire the above virtues, easier lessons are given, namely, cultivation of social virtues like feeling happiness at the welfare of others, pity for those in distress, etc. Yoga puts emphasis on these social virtues, among other things to impress on us that the yogin is not necessarily someone who lives in the forest or in solitude. He is in society and is one who has developed effective social attitudes.

Rejoicing at the happiness of others, feeling sympathy for those in distress, taking delight in the virtuous deeds of our fellow men and practising indifference towards wrong-doers or



the vicious—it is only in this way that we can get rid of jealousy of spiritual progress in others, free ourselves from righteous indignation, anger and hatred against wrong-doers and indifference towards the suffering and the poor.

The third is posture. The best posture for meditation is the one in which we can remain relaxed for a long time and in which the spinal cord, neck and head are held erect. It is in this position that our thoughts rise to higher levels.

The fourth is rhythmic breathing or *pranayama*. As there is a very intimate link between respiration and thought, we can calm our thoughts if we can make our breathing rhythmic. By increasing the intake of oxygen, rhythmic breathing has the power of cleansing the interior of our organism and also of awakening the lower centres of consciousness by bringing a certain agreeable warmth to them.

The fifth is recollection or gathering the mind, which is consciously or unconsciously dispersed about various objects and themes. This recollection can be compared to the process by which a fisherman who, having spread his net over a wide area, slowly draws it towards himself and brings it to a point where the object of his endeavour (the fish) is concentrated.

It is at this stage of recollection that the real spiritual part of the discipline begins. The tendency of the mind-net to be dispersed all round, is manifest in its fluctuations and in its attachment to innate predispositions. The inclination to predispositions or *vrittis* should be stopped; for even a good predisposition is unhelpful to concentration. Even a gold chain is after all a chain. The important thing is to arrive at the pure state of mind, where the mind is completely free from all *vrittis* caused by innate attitudes. How can one still the waves on the mind-lake? By creating one wave and pouring all the mind's energy into this chosen wave. This chosen wave is the divine symbol which we engender in meditation with the help of our creative imagination.

Every time a wave rises in our mind, we should immediately



merge that wave into that symbol, which is the symbol of divinity. Thus the outgoing energy of the mind gives life to this symbol. This singleness of intent is the sixth stage. By similarity of presentation and singleness of intent the mind-stuff is bound to one subject alone, which brings about a kind of auto-hypnotism without external suggestion. Here recollection deepens into fixed attention or *dharana*. The discipline of fixed attention, which is the supreme remedy for avoiding all distractions, can be fixed on a certain part of the body. Thus the mind can be fixed on the tip of the nose, on the heart centre, or in the centre of the forehead, or on the light within the head. The idea behind this discipline is to bring into the body the support of consciousness, which was hitherto seeking support outside.

The stage of fixed attention has great psychological content. A subject like art, music or painting is preferred so that the wandering vagaries of the mind will be arrested. All the *vruttis* of the artist's mind find fulfilment in the one main *vrutti*, art. Art becomes his habit, and the habit builds his character and personality. When we say that art as a habit becomes his character and personality, we mean that the ideal of art chosen by him illumines his consciousness and becomes the driving force of his life, his will, the master-feeling of his life.

The same transformation of the art-symbol into Consciousness and will is done by the spiritual aspirant when he transforms the chosen symbol for meditation into Consciousness. Suppose one has chosen Buddha as the symbol in meditation. Every time a thought arises in the mind during meditation one will imagine the Buddha's face on it or cover that thought with the mask of Buddha. Then slowly Buddha dissolves in Consciousness. There is no more Buddha. In other words, we can say that Buddha had become timeless.

When Buddha dissolves in Consciousness leaving only a spiritual certainty, then I have meditated well. Even the certainty that I have meditated well is absent at the moment of meditation and only arises afterwards with the aid of memory.



At the moment of deep meditation we arrive at contentless Consciousness, or seedless Consciousness, or mind without residue. There is only the subject, the pure "I" in that moment, the undivided and undifferentiated subject and therefore all thinking has stopped. Not only that, all self-reference vanishes. In meditation the one who meditates is not conscious of who it is that meditates. This losing of self-reference, which is comparable to the losing of self-reference in deep sleep, is the last stage in spiritual practice; it is known as *samadhi* or deep spiritual absorption.

In meditation our mind progressively loses its self-reference. The story of our mind in meditation is the story of the salt doll that wants to measure the ocean and never comes back to give a report. The experience we have in deep meditation is beyond words and thought. Shri Ramakrishna put the same idea in another way. He said that whenever he tried to speak of his experience during *samadhi*, the Divine Mother closed his mouth.

In all moments of subjectivity we have this losing of self-reference. In imagination, in deep artistic appreciation, we lose all idea of time and place and all that we can say about it is, that we forgot ourselves altogether. In other words, in those moments our attention increased without our knowledge, without our intentionally increasing it. Suppose I am in a mountain retreat, living in solitude with no distractions. There is an easy way of going down to a town, where there are people thronging, cafés, cinemas and other types of amusement. I enjoy going down to this town. The reason is that my attention, which was small in the hill retreat, steadily enlarges in the town, surrounded as I am by distractions which impinge on my attention in spite of myself. The unconscious enlargement of my attention gives me pleasure.

What happens in meditation—and that accounts for the spiritual pleasure of those who meditate well—is that the enlarged attention dwelling on the symbol unconsciously drifts into the Self. By concentrating on a symbol like Buddha my



attention is enlarged, apparently by conscious effort. The next stage is to absorb this attention in meditation. Without this absorption there is no real meditation. So long as we remain on the symbol-level our meditation has not started. It is only fixed attention.

We cannot consciously absorb the fixed attention. It is an unconscious process. All that we can do is to place the enlarged attention at the doors of the Self and wait with abandon and openness. All spiritual disciplines speak of a state of openness before realization. They are referring to the moment when the attention, enlarged by the symbol, spontaneously drifts into Consciousness. When it drifts into Consciousness, we lose all self-reference, but we feel joy. We taste the timeless in meditation.

Once we experience *samadhi* we are transformed and our way of life changes. Though we may continue to eat, drink and sleep and fulfil other physical functions we are no more in duality, no more subject to anger, jealousy, passion or lust. Our lives radiate with the one and only purpose of constant communion with the Divine and of sharing the joy of it with others around us.

Just as one who is deeply in love sees the beloved's face everywhere, so also the man of *samadhi* or the liberated man sees the face of God everywhere. In this unity of feeling there is no question of pain, misery, despondency or passion, for we see oneness everywhere. We expand into the world or the world condenses into our heart, thus enabling us to look upon the weal and woe of the world as our own and suffer for the world with the certainty of self-transcendence. But never is it at its zenith and intensity as when we live for others or suffer for others.

It is the *samadhi* of Buddha, Christ and Ramakrishna that infuses faith into us to embark on a spiritual life. Their lives whisper into our ears that we too have the possibility of approaching the grandeur of their experience. They inspire us to "imitate" them in our humble way. Their love and solicitude

for man's spiritual welfare affect us by their example and make us feel that the moments we live for others are the best in our lives. In other words, the best moments are those when we forget our petty egos and are liberated from them, their anxiety and possessiveness and, above all, the enfeebling thought that we are limited in our knowledge and comprehension.

The substance of spiritual life is the promise of liberation from the thralldom of the petty self, from the frustration of our limited knowledge and powers. Whether it is by disinterested work, Divine love, or knowledge, it amounts to the same thing: a channel is opened in us to the larger Self, which is at present eclipsed, to draw on the power and glory of the Divine, whose voice is scarcely heard, submerged beneath the customs and habits of an empirical life. It is this promise of the freedom of a greater kingdom that attracts us to spiritual life. So long as we are sustained by this hunger for spiritual freedom the errors we may make pale into insignificance. After all, what matters is our ideal and the prospect of living it; not the trials and errors we make in the process of finding it and bringing it to perfection.



## Chapter Eleven

# THE TRAINED MIND

*Swami Bhavyananda*

In dealing with the subject of equanimity of mind we discussed in detail the mind and its various faculties. We saw how the mind is the instrument of the soul in dealing with the body. Though the mind is only a subtle form of matter it can take us beyond matter in the sense that it can be an effective instrument to lead us to the highest spiritual realization.

The mind itself is a most complex instrument. At its ordinary level it is, of course, closely linked with the body, but at its higher reaches it has a much greater purpose to serve. Some would call that purpose *reason*. Reason is a wonderful faculty of the mind, no doubt, but it is a limited faculty, nevertheless. When reliable data are available from observable facts, the mind reasons, but in the absence of such data reason is not very effective. When we say we "understand" something, we mean only that we have understood by reason or inference the forces or laws working behind it. The truth itself, the why and wherefore which lie behind, are not known. For example, we understand the law of gravitation, but why gravitation exists we cannot grasp with the mind. There seems to be a higher wisdom within us—call it "wisdom" or "truth" if you wish to give it a name, which, when expressed through the mind is clothed in a different language. This higher level of the mind is to be reached by some means or other.

To understand the truth behind the mind we are required to develop "sharpness of mind". As the Upanishads put it, "It can be perceived by those whose intellect is sharp-pointed and subtle" (*Katha Up.* 1.3.12). The mind is like a musical instrument; it has to be tuned properly to produce music. If the



strings are too slack or too taut the best music cannot be produced. Thus an effort has to be made to tune the human system, both body and mind, so that it can manifest the truth, which is the aim of human life. Today we have trained the human mind and body to enjoy life and culture and civilization. The same mind can be trained to a higher plane to enjoy the delights of transcendental spiritual experience.

In spite of our not being fit instruments, we do sometimes get a flashing glimpse of that Reality. Quite often such an experience puzzles us. It may be that we are terrified to pursue it; Rabindranath Tagore says,

“Now and then I get a glimpse of You. Why not always?  
clouds rise in my heart and obstruct Your vision.”

It is like clouds covering the sun: we long for sight of the sun, but clouds and fog hide it from us. Suddenly the clouds part and we get a glimpse, which is perhaps quickly covered again. Sudden flashes of the Reality reach in, through our daily events, but the pressures of daily life, and of our mad pursuit of pleasure, are so strong in us that we forget and ignore these intimations. Daily trifles overwhelm us. That is why we must tune our mind properly and keep on cherishing more and more these glimpses from beyond, until they fuse at last into a strong irresistible current. This is how the training of the mind starts. Then only are we on the spiritual quest. None of these first attempts is lost; all such experiences are scrutinized by the higher mind and accepted. As we progress, the next higher step opens of itself. The spirit of seeking must grip the mind. Just as on a river, when we sail down to reach the high seas there is always a possibility of our drifting into canals and by-ways and missing the route, so various impediments endanger the aspirant. To stay in the main current he must cautiously pilot his craft.

As one progresses in mental discipline one experiences the glow of Truth, like a light in the distance, and following it he leaves behind the mind. That is, by analysing the mind man comes face to face with a Reality which is eternally pure and



perfect. This is possible. No more will the happiness and unhappiness of the world disturb him; even death cannot frighten him. This does not mean that it is an experience after death: it can happen here in this very world.

“If a man has known It here, then there is truth;  
if he has not known It here, there is the great  
destruction for him” (*Kena Up.* II.5).

If it is not an experience to be had while living, it is not really worth pursuing, whatever doctrines and priests may promise us. On the other hand, the result of this experience is a life full of peace, love, and compassion.

Those who have made some effort in handling the mind know how difficult it is to manipulate the mental energies of man. One is considered a good man if he practises a fraction of these disciplines. But if one wishes to rise higher in mental and moral life, a much greater measure of discipline has to be imposed on the mind, and at the highest stage even the mind must be left behind. So the Upanishads declare, “From that Reality speech and mind turn back without reaching.” For this we may give an analogy. When the astronauts who used the lunar module to reach the moon wanted to return, they left behind them some very costly equipment and even the module itself. What at one stage was equipment necessary for reaching the moon became an impediment for the completion of the return journey. So also our mind has to be left behind in the last stages of our spiritual journey, however ridiculous such an idea may appear to us now. Some would call it insane, and that is how it may look to a man who is just starting on the path. The people around Shri Ramakrishna called him insane, when he was passing through these spiritual adventures. In referring to this state of Shri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda tells us, “Blessed is the man on whom such madness comes. The whole universe is mad—some for wealth, some for pleasure, some for fame, some for a hundred other things. They are mad for gold, or for husband or for wife, . . . mad to be rich, mad for every foolish



thing except God. . . . Blessed is the man who is mad after God. Such men are very few."

Withdrawing the mind from the pleasures of the world is a must for the spiritual aspirant. He must turn the mind upon itself, to go deeper. This is what the *Katha Upanishad* tells us: "A certain wise one, desiring immortality, with senses turned back, perceived the Self within" (*Katha Up.* II.1.1.). Jesus, when he talks of the Kingdom of God, is at pains to point this out: "and when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the Kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, 'The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation; neither shall they say, Lo, here! or Lo, there! For behold, the Kingdom of God is within you'." We tend to think of withdrawal as a diminishing, or a losing of something, but that is not correct. When we close our senses and mind to the phenomenal world, we become aware of another state which is equally absorbing and gripping. As the *Gita* tells us, "That which is darkness for all beings, for the self-controlled is light; and where all beings are awake and enjoying, there the spiritual man sees only darkness." Our mind and senses, even with the help of the best instruments that science and technology can give us, reveal very little of Reality. It is common knowledge today that in spite of all the wonders men of science have unveiled, men have not yet understood even a drop of this ocean of existence. The humblest—who are also the greatest—men of science, confess this. We have reached one moon. There are many other planets in our solar system. And there are thought to be millions of such solar systems. This makes us humble, too, in the thought that relative knowledge seems to conceal even more than it reveals.

A seeker after Truth, having understood the limited sphere which our mind can reveal in the positive sciences, turns to the domain of the science of the inner world. To make one's mind a fit instrument to proceed in this realm, one has to free it from its constant habit of going out through the senses to the external world. Strange as it may seem, the latter are of no use in this new



field of research. By means of the strict disciplines which we discussed earlier (i.e. *shama* and *dama*, the retraining of mental tendencies and of outer organs respectively) one purifies the mind; concentration becomes easy for the pure mind; and purity is the result of mind's freedom from the slavery of the sense-organs. Such a pure mind alone is an effective instrument to the yogi. He is able to direct such a mind to the exploration of its own depths. "If the mind becomes purified, illumination is like a fruit on the palm of one's hand" (*Vivekachudamani*, 181).

The path is long and difficult, but the goal is most desirable. Every inch of progress proves how worthwhile is all this effort.

Man is frightened today of the forces he has released by his own efforts, and is afraid of the consequences of his own scientific inventions. He realizes that all these achievements can fall under the control of capricious minds; one such mind in a fit of madness could destroy all this glittering dream-world created by science and technology. It is the fear of powerful weapons of destruction that has kept the peace of the world very precariously balanced for some years now. Any moment man could practically annihilate human life on this earth.

What then is our hope? Here is the secret: we have to become aware of the role of the mind in all our activities, whether they be called spiritual or secular. To make life fruitful and worth living we must exercise great control over our mind. The fact is that the nature of Reality can be appreciated only in a pure mind. Keeping this in view, all sane persons should guide their minds in the right direction, pointing towards that Reality. It is not a purposeless effort; the purpose is to experience that Reality as one's very own.

Let us recall the phenomena of the behaviour of physical light. You are familiar with the fact that light has very little penetrating capacity. When by scientific technique the frequency is increased, the same light rays develop greater and greater penetrating capacity, like that of the X-rays. The same phenomenon can be seen in the mind also. The average untrained mind, being undisciplined and diffuse, is extremely

dull. It can perceive only the gross, superficial experiences; it cannot understand the depths of things, nor differentiate between appearance and reality. This is the nature of the common raw mind. Yet we know that the same mind can become sharp and deeply penetrating in its power. There have been such minds and they have made a systematic inquiry and investigation into the universe around us. Likewise in the internal world, mental discipline gives man the power to control the sensory and motor systems of his own body. The trained mind can also discipline reason, and even imagination. The success we have achieved in physical sciences is the result of training the mind in a certain direction. So all this is encompassed by our understanding.

What further training is the mind capable of? What do we expect of such training? Vedanta says, it can be made to come face to face with the noumenon behind the phenomenon, to know the Reality behind all appearance, to discover the One behind the changing many—and this is indeed the most fascinating and absorbing challenge of which the human mind is capable.



## *Chapter Twelve*

### MEDITATION IN MONISM

*Swami Ghanananda*

Every religion has four parts, namely, mythology and ritual, philosophy and higher spiritual disciplines. Of all forms of spiritual disciplines meditation is the highest. In it the approach to the divine goal is made directly by the soul of man, and he ultimately realizes the relationship between the soul and his Maker, and experiences God as the highest reality. The value of meditation, therefore, is higher than that of ritual as a form of practical spiritual discipline. In studying mythology and philosophy and doing spiritual disciplines like ritual, the thought of God is present in the mind of man. But in meditation this thought becomes deepest and most intense until at last it transcends itself when the highest Illumination is attained.

Many sincere and honest people believe that if they sit down to think of God they will be able to meditate and obtain the fruits of meditation. They think, therefore, that they only need sufficient time to do so. When they are young or in middle age they believe that a day will come after many years when they will be free from the turmoil of work and be able to devote some time every day to the thought of God; but such people generally find it extremely hard in spite of proper guidance and spiritual help. It goes to show that only when the mind has been trained in the earlier years of life and has kept up the habit through middle age, will it be able to meditate in the last years of life.

We know that all forms of training, whether physical, for the growth and development of the body, or mental, for the growth and development of the intellect, heart or will, are the outcome of a science. Thus there is the science of meditation, which began to be studied and formulated even from most ancient



times by the Indo-Aryans, and which reached the highest excellence unsurpassed among other peoples. Even in the days of the Brahmanas and Samhitas, which preceded the age of the Upanishads—those expressions of deepest meditateness and spiritual experience—the performer of ritual often passed into a state of communion with the Deity. In the Upanishadic period this became deeper and was specially cultivated by those who became the Seers of the Upanishads. The science, therefore, grew and flourished, and though it was in the hands of a few, it was kept alive. In the post-Vedic age we find its greatest teacher, Shri Krishna, teaching his disciple, Arjuna, the way of meditation; and in a subsequent period Kapila and Patanjali developed and expounded the psychological and psychic aspects of meditations. In the post-Buddhistic age Sankara, Ramanuja, Madhva and others expounded the science of meditation in their commentaries, each in his own way.

Whatever the path a man may find suitable for him to follow, whether it be the path of devotion or that of knowledge, or the path of right action or that of psychic control, meditation is the maturer form of all spiritual practices. A man may hear the teachings of the scriptures and philosophies: he tries to understand and reflect on the truths so taught. But when he practises, meditation forms an important part of his disciplines. Again, when a man does all work in a spirit of dedication his mind slowly but steadily becomes filled with the thought of God to whom he dedicates his work: his consciousness becomes so deeply coloured in the long run, that meditation becomes natural to him. This is true of devotional practices, and also of the psychic and psychological disciplines prescribed by Raja Yoga. Our endeavours to live the spiritual life from the day we began to have an inkling of its nature till the day of Enlightenment, form a series of concentric circles which contract more and more until the Reality called God, which is their centre, is reached.

In Vedanta, meditation is compared by the teacher



Ramanuja to the uninterrupted flow of oil from one vessel to another.

Vedanta is studied and practised in three aspects namely, monistic, qualified-monistic and dualistic. In monistic Vedanta the approach to meditation is similar to that in Samkhya except that in Samkhya they speak of a plurality of souls, whereas in monism the ultimate Reality is One. In Samkhya the practical procedure consists in eliminating *prakriti* and its modifications—the body, 'mind' and ego—and arriving at the spiritual consciousness called the Purusha; whereas in Vedanta it consists in denying the *absolute* existence of body, mind and ego, as well as the universe, which are only relatively real, and arriving at the One Absolute Reality called Brahman with which the Self of man, the essence of his being, is identical.

Monistic meditation is meditation on the Absolute. As the Absolute is beyond form and beyond attributes, this type of meditation is the most difficult of all. It is not thinking of mere formlessness such as 'vacant space', the blue sky or the shoreless ocean. This does not constitute meditation on the Absolute. It is only thinking of the 'material infinity' called *mahakasha* or the universal space. A higher and subtler form of infinity is the 'mental infinity' called *chittakasha* or the space of the mind from which infinite thought-forms arise, as in the dream state. But the true Absolute, the Infinite of monism, is the Spiritual Infinity or the Infinity of the Spirit, called *chidakasha*, the Void beyond all forms and attributes. This is the negation of everything conceivable or expressible and is described in the words, 'not this, nor that', of the Upanishads. This is inconceivably higher than the infinity of the universe and the infinity of the mind, for the universe and the mind are both limited, but the Infinity of the Spirit, the Atman or Brahman, is the true Infinity, the true Absolute of monism.

From the above it must be clear that monistic meditation is bound to prove difficult even in the case of those who have arrived at an intellectual conviction of the identity of the Atman or the Self in man with Brahman or the Oversoul.



Vedanta, therefore, prescribes four forms<sup>1</sup> of preliminary disciplines for monistic aspirants, without undergoing which monistic seekers cannot successfully attempt their meditation. The first and foremost of these is the constant discrimination between the Real and the unreal. Day and night the aspirant is to think of the enduring Real which abides and does not change, and which is, therefore, different from the passing real. He is to discriminate constantly between the Absolute Reality and the relative reality of the universe and its phenomena. Vedanta boldly asserts that not only is the universe with its myriad forms clothed in myriad hues ephemeral, but also the body of man and his mind including his ego. This teaching is based on the experience of the Seers.

Even this discrimination between the Real and the unreal is insufficient to help the seeker in his monistic meditation and help him realize the goal of monism. Man lives in this world, and therefore with a view to protecting his mind from obstacles to the practice of discrimination, three other forms of spiritual disciplines are also enjoined. One of these consists in the practice of the following six virtues:

(a) checking the mind from the pursuit of all objects except hearing the Upanishads and other teachings of Vedanta;

(b) checking the organs of action and knowledge from all objects except hearing the Upanishads and other teachings of Vedanta;

(c) keeping the organs so restrained from drifting along their old course to sense objects;

(d) remaining unruffled by pleasure and pain, profit and loss, prosperity and adversity, honour and dishonour, and other pairs of opposites;

(e) constantly concentrating the mind on hearing the Upanishads and other teachings of Vedanta, and practising such virtues as modesty, humility, devotion, purity and service to the guru;



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(f) faith in God; faith in the Upanishads and other teachings of Vedanta; faith in the guru; and faith in one's capacity to realize the Truth.

Practice of the above six virtues constitutes the second form of preliminary disciplines.

A third form consists in the relinquishment of the desire for the fruits of action in this world or in *svarga*, that supernatural world where souls enjoy subtle pleasures and happiness. The monist aims at knowledge, and cares for nothing but knowledge.

Fourthly and finally the seeker is exhorted to create in himself a divine discontent and a thirst for liberation from the thralldom of body, mind and ego, as well as from nescience, by attaining Illumination.

These disciplines prepare the mind for steadiness in daily meditation on the Atman, the Pure Consciousness in man, and on his identity with the Oversoul or Transcendental Consciousness.

In order to help its students in monistic meditation, Vedanta gives an unchallenged and unchallengeable definition of the Absolute Reality by declaring that It is That which remains unaffected throughout all time—past, present and future. This definition brings the conception of Reality right into the heart of man, as we shall see presently.

With a view to ascertaining the nature of Reality or what It is, the Seers of India first studied objective phenomena. They noted that objects changed with lapse of time. They were once in a subtle state and then their present condition, and from this they will again change into a subtle state. What is true of individual objects is also true of the universe as a whole. The universe also was once in a subtle state from which it evolved into its present condition, and it will again return to its subtle state in the future. Thus what we see is not a permanent reality. But we should remember that though it may change and change, it never ceases to exist; in other words the notion of existence can never be removed from our minds.



The ancient Seers further found that not only the objective universe but also the observer who saw it changed from time to time. His body and mind change with years. Nay, more, he is not the same during the 24 hours of the day and night. During day he is awake, but enters into quite a different state when he sleeps and begins to dream, and when he is in dreamless sleep he is in yet another state which is different from his waking and dream states. It must therefore be clear that not only do the objective phenomena of the universe change, but there is a change also in the subjective counterpart in man.

A study of matter in the objective universe eventually led to the growth and development of science. A study of phenomena as presented to the consciousness of man in the different states of waking, dream and sleep, as well as the study of these three states in relation to the Self of man, contributed to the growth and development of monistic religion and philosophy.

An investigation into the three states of consciousness known to man, viz., waking, dream and sleep, is one of the characteristic features of Vedanta. Vedanta claims that no study of man is complete unless a study of his personality in all three states is attempted. As a result of such study we find that in the waking state the universe appears as real, tangible, perceptible to the five senses. In the dream state the universe becomes thin and attenuated. And in sleep man does not see anything, does not know anything; the universe has entirely disappeared and he is not even aware that he is sleeping; but when he wakes in the morning, he remembers to have slept well or ill as the case may be. Now every act of remembrance is an act of re-cognition. This means that the cognition took place even in sleep without man's knowledge. Who could this cognizer be?

The Upanishads declare that the cognizer in sleep is Consciousness itself. It directly registers sleep without the help of mind and ego, for these do not function in sleep—it registers the fact of sleep just as at night the thermometer records the temperature and the barometer the atmospheric pressure, though we are fast asleep.



Consciousness is present in our waking and dream states, but it takes the help of the mind and the ego to perceive and know. Mind and ego are its adjuncts in the waking and dream states. In the waking state we are conscious of ourselves, our pleasures and pains, joys and sorrows. We are conscious of these in the dream state also, though the time, space and causation in the dream state are of a standard different from that of the waking state. When I am awake, my identity is felt as such and such. In dream I perceive many things which are not seen in the waking state, and the ego of waking has vanished and another ego has taken its place; yet I know that another person does not dream for me; it is I myself who dream and wake up again. In sleep nothing is perceived and there is neither the ego of dream nor that of waking; yet on waking we all feel and know intuitively the identity of our personality in waking, dream and sleep. Extending the study of consciousness to the period from our birth till old age, we shall find that it was we that were born, it is we that are now living and it is we that will grow old and die.

This notion of the identity and continuity of human personality can arise only when something exists as a background of the stages of life and states of consciousness. This is Pure Consciousness. It is behind the three states of waking, dream and dreamless sleep, or rather It has three modes of being, called waking, dream and dreamless sleep. It is also behind all the stages of life such as infancy, youth, middle age and old age. Nay, It has been existing eternally throughout our past lives and will exist throughout the future. It is the Atman or the Self, a fact underlying all that is given by experience. "The Pure Consciousness is that of which the personal consciousness, which is bound up with the activities of body and mind and with which alone man is normally acquainted, is a reflection in matter." Suppose somebody hits me, then I become conscious of pain. This is a state of personal consciousness and is a complex. From it, if I eliminate whatever is contributed by the body and the mind, what remains is the consciousness that accompanies all mental processes, which



was first differentiated by Plotinus among Western philosophers and called the accompaniment—*Parakolonthesis*—of the mental activities by the soul. This is the light of Consciousness which manifests in both the mental and physical worlds. "It is the power of pure intelligence which being unchangeable cannot become the seat of perception, for this latter belongs to the mind." Thus Pure Consciousness is separate from mental activity. *It is not a mere idea or abstraction but a Reality, indeed the greatest Reality that man can attain.*

This Pure Consciousness is called Purusha by the Samkhya Philosophy and Atman by Vedanta. But for It and Its illuminating power, the power to manifest mental and bodily functions, such functions would go on unconsciously and unknown. Unlike matter, It is immutable, beginningless and endless, a steady shadowless light that knows not any change. It is the immaterial part of man; It is his immortal soul, his deathless Self, the core of his being. Shankara says, "The Atman is *jna*, Eternal Consciousness, because It is uncreate. Eternal Consciousness is the nature of the Atman just as heat and light are of fire."<sup>1</sup> The moment a seeker will realize It, he will intuitively realize Its identity with the Oversoul, Brahman.

In all the three states of waking, dream and dreamless sleep the Atman is the witness. *But our goal is to be the Atman with nothing to witness*—the Atman as It is, shining in Its own glory undimmed by its adjuncts.

What has been given above is what one can learn by investigating the nature of the three states. The tearing off of the veil of *prakriti* with a view to realizing the Atman and Its identity with Brahman has to be attempted first by meditating on the Atman and then on Its identity with Brahman, until eventually this identity is realized. If this method is found difficult, one should begin by meditating on God with attributes, and if necessary, on God with form and attributes, and in due course follow the monistic method.

In monism we have a method of meditation which does not want us to accept any theological doctrine or dogma of any



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particular religion. Its philosophy and its approach are like the air and water, the gift of Mother Nature: they belong to everyone.

Monism accepts all paths and religions, yet rises above them all.

<sup>1</sup>Vide *Vedantasara* and similar texts.

<sup>2</sup>Commentary on the *Vedanta Sūtras*, II. iii. 18.

## *Chapter Thirteen*

### THE WAY OF MEDITATION

*Swami Pavitrananda*

There is a great deal of interest in meditation among a section of people in the West. It might be due to the fact that some of them do not find what they want in their orthodox way of religious life; they want something new, thinking that they will be able to quench their spiritual thirst. That is good. But when you take up a thing, or want to take up a thing, that does not belong to you, which belongs to a different culture, a different civilization with a different background, there is a little risk, and you may not be able to get the correct thing.

In the West, say in Christianity, in Judaism and in Islam also, more or less, people are accustomed to pray, not so much to meditate, though intrinsically both are the same. When you say, "Let us meditate," it is a little different from, "Let us pray." Prayer is easy from one standpoint: You pray for certain things; you pray for earthly goods; you pray for devotion. But when you say meditate, you come to a different thing altogether; it belongs to a different background.

What I want to caution is this: you must know what it is, really; you must not go into a sentimental ecstasy. "This is oriental philosophy. Let us meditate." You must know what meditation is, and you should not be blind to the good points in that. It is not your fault only; it is the fault of people in general.

In India these things happened at the beginning of the last century. People, when they got Western education, would think there was not much which Hinduism could offer them. They would model their religious life on the basis of Christianity, and they thought that would be a great saving factor in their life. At that time they had not the patience to think that it comes from a



separate civilization, nor to see what suits them more. Both attitudes are bad, and this is human weakness all over the world.

And so I want to emphasize that you should not go into a sentimental ecstasy. See things quietly; there are good elements, and there are evil elements in everything. Yes, it is good to meditate, but you must know what it is that you do. There are several books on meditation, and naturally people get ideas of meditation from those books, and then they write a book on meditation. They themselves have not meditated; they have not taken to the meditative life seriously. Naturally, there is a great risk, for they do not know what they are saying. In certain details they might be correct, but they do not give the vital points which are necessary. Very often, you cannot get these things from books.

Even in diplomacy you do not always get things solved by correspondence. It is necessary for people to come to Washington from France, from Indonesia, from Burma, and from India, to settle their problems by personal talks. You do not get things solved through correspondence.

In the same way, in the religious life which vitally concerns you, in delicate points of religious life and religious practices, you cannot get the real thing from books, especially when written by persons who do not know what they are doing. There is a great risk you will be disillusioned. You will not get anything or you will not be able to continue it, because it was a momentary impulse, a curiosity. You cannot build up your life simply on idle curiosity, just to experiment with something. So, from this standpoint, even, you cannot get help for your spiritual life, and it is a bit risky. I have seen many books on meditation written in English. I could not get anything out of them that was really helpful or that would be able to sustain people in their spiritual endeavour. It might be a little curiosity will be satisfied.

But now, what are the problems of meditation? The first thing is, what should be the object of meditation? Meditation on



what? And the second thing is whether you are interested in meditation. These two things are necessary. You cannot have concentration on any subject in which you are not interested. You cannot say that you will meditate on a particular object whether or not you have interest in that object. If you have no interest, you cannot meditate. That is an idle thing, and the attempt will be futile. It will be mental wrestling, which might also do you harm. You do not know what you are doing; you have no object of interest, but still you meditate for an hour or so. What are you doing? Playing with fire, I should say.

So two things are important. First, what should be the object of meditation, and second, whether you have been able to develop interest in meditation. How can you have interest? How do you get your object of meditation? It depends on one's temperament, on one's inclination, and that requires a long study. You cannot get it from books. Fortunately, there may be many objects of meditation.

In the standard book on Yoga by Patanjali, he writes very sensibly, and he gives many alternatives. Yes, he says, you can worship God through meditation. That is one process. But you have no idea about God, only some vague idea. You can pray, but you cannot meditate on a vague idea.

Patanjali is practical, and he says, "Yes, there are some sacred words, which are sound symbols of God. You can meditate on the symbols; you can repeat those words, and through repetition the idea of God will come in your mind. You can meditate on that idea." He gives some practical hints, some definite objects of meditation. People belonging to other religions can modify that direction. Yes, meditate on some religious idea, on some prayer formula. I find no reason why it will not be successful. It belongs to you; it belongs to your background. Meditate on the sound symbol of the ultimate reality.

If you cannot do that, if you have no interest even in that, that is all right. There are alternatives. The next thing you can do is meditate on a World Teacher such as Buddha or Christ. There



is then something concrete to meditate upon. Yes, meditate on Christ, meditate on Buddha, meditate on any other prophet or saint that appeals to you. What happens psychologically? When you meditate on Buddha, when you meditate on Christ, Christlike qualities will come to you. When you think day and night, when you become absorbed in the thought of Christ, in the thoughts of Buddha, naturally you partake of their qualities. Your inner life begins to change. Psychologically it is so significant, so true.

Someone will say, "Well Christ was born a human being; Buddha was born as a human being. Why should I put them on the pedestal of God?"

But it is more practical. It is enough if you think of Christ or Buddha; it is enough for you if you want to meditate. Psychologically it will be helpful. You will get something concrete; you will become like Christ or Buddha, and your spiritual life will begin to unfold. This is not something to read in a book; it is concrete; it gives you definite help.

If one cannot do that, it is still all right. There are other alternatives. It may be that sometime you had some spiritual experience, some spiritual idea in a dream that impressed you very much. That is closely related to you. You might say, "I have no faith in Christ; I have no interest in Buddha or any prophet who lived long, long ago." That is all right. But when you have experienced something in a dream which uplifted you, which gave you spiritual joy, that is closely related to you. Think on those ideas; make that the object of your meditation. There, also, you will get something concrete.

If you are not fortunate enough to have any such dream, all right, meditate on anything which you find uplifting, such as natural scenery. Sometimes, when you are face to face with a very beautiful natural scene you become quiet and you find something spiritually uplifting. Of course, it depends on temperament. All temperaments may not find that, but each temperament will find something which will uplift him or her.



Now, take advantage of that situation; meditate on those ideas. If you are in a vast field, if you are near an ocean, the ocean becomes a symbol of the Infinite. Think of that, not only while you are on the beach, but carry that thought home, carry that thought always. At the beach, where you are face to face with the ocean, think deeply of the vast expanse of water, and think so deeply that it makes an impression on you, so that you can carry that thought while you are away from the ocean. These can be made objects of meditation, and they are something concrete. Each of these objects will help you, or at least will give you some help for meditation.

These are the objects of meditation. But I say again that two things are necessary: You must know what is the object of your meditation according to your temperament, and you must have interest in meditation. Unless there is interest in meditation, nothing will help you. The first thing, I should say, is interest in spiritual life. Otherwise, you will do it for a while and give it up, you will say, "There is nothing in it. I did it for two or three long years; I did not get anything, and I can tell you from my own experience, there is nothing in it." You are not qualified to do that. You had no interest in spiritual life, and you could not get anything. It is natural that you will not get anything. But it is unnatural and irrational to say confidently that there is nothing in it.

What are the indications that you have spiritual interest? The indication is that your ethical standard of life is higher than that of ordinary people. Ordinary people are not interested in religion or spiritual things, but you have cultivated certain ethical virtues. These are the indications that you have spiritual interest. You naturally have love for truth, not that at exactly that time you have any definite religious idea; you might or you might not belong to any church. Even then, if you have love for truth, that indicates that there is a spiritual quality in you. Some people are born with spontaneous love for truthfulness, and they hate falsehood. It is said that simply by being truthful you can realize the highest Truth.



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You will have no ill feeling against anyone, you will have spontaneous love for one and all, not only the good, but also those persons who are hated as wicked. At least, you have a certain amount of sympathy for all. It is not that you have attained perfection in these things, but you feel the necessity of projecting good thoughts against evil thoughts, against evil conduct. You feel the necessity of it; you see the good points in it. So one must have love for one and all.

Yes, in the beginning, or even in different stages of spiritual growth, you will find there is resentment, such things come from within. But you will make an attempt to control that. When you have this attitude towards life, that indicates you have spiritual urge and you will have no worldly ambition.

It is good to do worldly duties; that is necessary, even for one's spiritual growth. Now that you have some spiritual interest, you cannot say, "This is nothing." That is not real religious spirit. You must do your duty perfectly well, with a religious devotion. You must do your worldly duties, but you must not have any worldly ambition. You see, it is so true. When you have worldly ambition, you cannot have ambition for spiritual growth. The two cannot be together. If you want spiritual growth, you must give your thoughts to that wholeheartedly. So, you are doing worldly duties just like an ordinary person who is grossly attached to worldly things. It might be that outwardly you are doing this thing with so much tenacity, steadfastness and perseverance; but you must not have worldly ambitions. Your treasure is somewhere else. That indicates that you have spiritual interest.

So, these things will indicate that you have interest in spiritual life and you should take to spiritual things in right earnestness; otherwise, you could do things in a dilettante fashion. You can naturally see there would be no result. There might be harm, even.

Now, what is meditation, as different from prayer? I say you pray for something, pray for health, pray for worldly things,



pray even for devotion, but meditation means you turn the searchlight of your mind on mind itself; you turn your thoughts inwards. In prayer you look to the sky, you look above, for God is on high. In meditation you shut your eyes and turn the searchlight of your mind within yourself. Real meditation means the mind does not wander; in real meditation thought becomes one-pointed. So it is necessary, as I said, that you must have an object of meditation. With the help of that, you make your mind one-pointed. And it is strange; if you can make your mind one-pointed on any object of meditation, you will experience spiritual truth, since the object of meditation is to make the mind one-pointed.

Swami Vivekananda said, and I was wondering how bold he was that he could experiment that way, he said in one of his talks, "At one period I began to meditate on a black point, not on an object, not on a deity, any God, not any religious idea. I began to meditate on a black point." Just imagine! He had power of mind; he could experiment, and it is good that he experimented that way, for he left his experience behind. What happened?

He said, "Afterwards, the mind became one-pointed, and I forgot that I was meditating on a black point. I felt as if I was in an ocean of thought. I forgot everything; I forgot the object of meditation, the black point, and I forgot myself. I felt as if I was in an ocean of thought, and I began to experience spiritual truths. That is the most important thing; I began to experience supersensuous spiritual truths."

This sentence is most important. What happened is this: As the mind began to become calm and tranquil, spiritual thoughts began to appear on the surface, even when he was meditating on a black point, when the mind became tranquil, or the mind began to be tranquil, he forgot even the dark point on which he was meditating, and he began to experience spiritual truths.



Yes, for ordinary people the object of meditation should be that on which one can easily fix one's mind for spiritual uplift. Naturally, we want the object of meditation to be a God or Goddess, a saint or a saintly person. So, in India, there are innumerable Gods and Goddesses on which one can meditate and the advantage is that there is scope for so much variation. Choose whatever you like, and meditate on that, on any God or Goddess you like. That was the psychology for meditation. With so many Gods or Goddesses, to give variety, to give a choice to all people. People get benefit out of that meditation; they feel exalted, spiritual exaltation.

You see, the real end was that by meditating, by making the mind one-pointed, it got spiritual truth. It is said by Patanjali, "If the mind can be stopped functioning," (That means if you can stop the mind from wandering, even for a short while) "You will get the highest spiritual experience." The mind is always wandering. If you can stop that wandering by any means, if you can make it one-pointed, even without saying a single prayer, even without spiritual interest, if you can do that you will get the highest spiritual experience. I say even without spiritual interest, but usually you will not be able to make the mind one-pointed that way; if you could, psychologically it is a fact, you will get the highest spiritual experience, because the mind has become one-pointed, has stopped functioning.

Don't be shocked or alarmed by the idea that the mind stops functioning. When our mind functions it is not in the right way. The mind is simply wandering. We are not the masters of our mind; rather, we are the slaves of our mind. When the mind stops functioning, that means you have become master of your mind, you can control the mind, you have held the reins and controlled the mind, and the mind becomes one-pointed. Once you can do that, the mind is perfectly under your control. That is real meditation. That is the purpose of meditation.

Now, what benefit do you derive from these things? How can we apply the hints that we have got here in our practical life?



How can we develop our spiritual life through meditation, knowing full well we are of earth and we are earthly? We have frailties; we have weaknesses; we have no control of our mind. But we should start even from there. The first thing, as I said, is that you must develop your spiritual interest. If you have not those virtues which I have enumerated, if you have even a particle of spiritual interest, of spiritual yearning, try to develop those virtues consciously and deliberately. When there comes a tendency that forgets the truth for a worldly benefit, just scare yourself. You might get worldly benefits, but to that extent you will be away from the spiritual path. Try at least to protest that it is not right. In that way, try to develop the ethical qualities. And when you have developed ethical qualities, it will be easier for you to develop spiritual interest, or spiritual interest will follow when you have developed ethical qualities.

In meditation, to come to the practical points, the first thing that is necessary is that you must be able to sit quietly for a sufficiently long time. You will have to wrestle with your wandering mind for a period before the mind becomes tired, before the mind becomes calm, and for that the most important thing is that you must be able to sit quietly for a long time. In our busy life of modern civilization, it has become so difficult to be quiet, even for a few minutes. We become restless. But cultivate that habit; deliberately cultivate the habit of sitting quietly and calmly.

Do not always use books. When we are quiet, at once we take some books, a newspaper or turn to the radio or television. But just try to be quiet without any help. When you see a beautiful scene, try to be quiet and see whether you can derive some spiritual inspiration from that scene. Sit quietly in a vast field; that is a place where you can meditate very easily, because the surroundings are so conducive to spiritual thoughts. One may try that way. Wherever you find an opportunity, when you are in an environment which is spiritually helpful, at least sit quietly for some time, just to see what you get from that environment. That will help you to sit quietly.



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Those who like may try to sit quietly for a while every day. That will be training. Otherwise, if you simply learn some postures, some *asanas* from a yogi, some form of physical exercise, it may or may not give you good health, but it will not help you in spiritual life. In spiritual life you sit quietly with some spiritual thought, or at least try to sit quietly, and in that posture try to develop some spiritual outlook, try to think some spiritual thoughts. That will be training. So the Patanjali Yogabook, a standard book on meditation, says that you must be able to sit in a steadfast posture for a sufficiently long time and then try regular meditation.

What is regular meditation? Try to fix your thought on a certain object of meditation, try to withdraw your thoughts from ordinary spheres of thought activity. Just try to correct your thoughts and direct them to a particular object of meditation. It will be difficult to correct your thoughts psychologically unless you have an object of meditation. It is not that people deliberately try to withdraw their thoughts from the world. They try to direct their thoughts to a certain object of meditation, and when that object of meditation interests them so it becomes easier. In that way you try and you try.

You will not succeed at the very start. For a long time you will have to struggle, but if you want spiritual progress you will be ready to give a price for it. You have to wait indefinitely also, but when you have spiritual interest, genuine and urgent, you do not mind if you have to wait. If you have to wait for a great treasure, it is worth waiting; it tests you, whether you have real interest. You cannot say, "I shall wait for two or three years; if I do not get any result I shall give it up." You have quite the liberty to give it up, but that is not the way to develop the life of meditation and to get spiritual progress.

This is a problem, an age-long problem. It was said in the *Gita* by Arjuna, a typical question which he asked Shri Krishna, as if on behalf of all of us, "You speak of meditation", he said to



Krishna, "but I find that it is as difficult to control the mind as it is to control the air, the wind that blows." It is a common problem with all.

But what was the direction Shri Krishna gave to Arjuna? There are only two ways. You need steadfast practice, persistent practice, and dispassion for things which are not spiritual. It is so true. Through practice you will develop the power of controlling the mind. Try also to have dispassion for things which are not spiritually helpful. These are the only ways. They are the hints. If you feel that you are in despair, if you feel that no result will come to you, if you feel that you are so unfortunate that you cannot progress, know that these are the ways.

It might be that if you are ready to wait the result will come earlier. If you become impatient in times of meditation, if instead of trying to concentrate your thoughts on the object of meditation, you concentrate on the idea, "That way I am not getting the result", if you do that, you concentrate on your feeling of impatience, and thereby you go farther and farther away from spiritual evolution. So the only way is to practice.

And what happens when the mind becomes fixed on a particular object of meditation? Yes, at first the mind becomes concentrated on that object of meditation, and you feel that all wandering thoughts have vanished; your thoughts have become one-pointed. But there also, you see, you feel the existence of two things: You are meditating, and there is the object of meditation. But that also should go, for the highest spiritual experience. And if you pursue the practice of meditation and concentration, there will come a time when you forget that you are meditating, you will forget there is an object of meditation; you have become one with Existence; your thoughts have penetrated into the deeper Existence behind the outer and apparent existence, behind every existence, behind even material things. There is an essence of existence behind everything.



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So Swami Vivekananda said, "If you can concentrate your mind on anything, you will enter into the essence of existence." When you meditate on the object of meditation, and your concentration becomes very, very deep, you become identified with the object of meditation, or you become one with the absolute Existence. That means the superconscious state, that means you get the highest spiritual experience. Meditation means the mind has melted away into the inner Self and you have realized that you are the inner Self. When you are the inner Self, you do not think, you do not meditate. God does not think like us; God is thought itself. He has not to take the help of the instrument of meditation, of thinking. He has become the thought itself. In the same way, when your meditation has been deep enough, you have entered into the essence of existence, you have become one with that existence, and that is Bliss, that is the highest spiritual experience.

That happens even with your meditation on God, or on some concrete reality. Let us see what happens when one meditates on Buddha. I take the example of Buddha, because Buddha's posture is always in meditation; Buddha is so much identified with meditation. What happens if one meditates on Buddha? First, as I said, the mind wanders, and then you will be full of thought of Buddha. Yes, at that time you will get great joy, because your mind has been divested of worldly thoughts; you are full of the idea of Buddha. Not the ideas which Buddha preached but the ideas of which Buddha was the embodiment. You become almost an embodiment of Buddha's ideas, and thereby you get joy and peace.

But that also is not the last point. You meditate and meditate, and afterwards you have forgotten yourself, you have forgotten that you are meditating on Buddha. You have reached the essence of Being, you have got Enlightenment, or you have become one with the Enlightenment. At that time you have solved the riddle of the Universe, as Buddha did, at a flash. You know what this Universe is, you know what life is, and you know



what death means. You get at a flash the solution of the mystery of existence, by being one with Existence. That is the way of meditation. That is the goal of meditation.

In prayer also you pass through these stages, though you start with the idea that you pray to God for something. But, as you develop the power of concentration, even in prayer you develop the power of concentration, you pass through these stages, and afterwards you become one with God. "I and my Father are one", as Christ said. These are the stages through which one passes, whatever the path one follows. So meditation is important.

In one of the Upanishads it is beautifully said, "If you sit silent and look at the Universe, you feel as if the Universe were meditating." If you sit quiet, even in a city like New York, if you sit quiet and see what people are doing, how fast they are going, you will feel that behind all this surface activity there is some meditative silence. The Universe is as if meditating. Look at the sky. The Upanishad says, "If you look at the sky, you feel as if the sky is meditating. Look at the waters, a vast expanse of water: you feel as if the ocean is meditating."

Look at the mountains, but don't rush in for a picnic. Just look at the mountain scenery. You feel there is a silence behind those mountains. In India, people go to the mountains for meditation, and they get inspirational help from the environment.

In the same way, behind the outer activities of man, there is something still, something calm and tranquil. And it is said that those who have developed their spiritual life, those who became spiritually great, became great because they meditated. Ordinary persons spend their time in gossiping, in fighting, in quarrelling, in finding fault with others. I am quoting the Upanishads itself, which puts it beautifully.

Those who meditate make their life great, spiritually great. The Upanishads say, "Therefore practise meditation." It is the



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last word. When the Upanishads conclude a passage, some beautiful passage, they say, "Therefore practise meditation." This is the last word.

Him from whom the whole Universe has come into being, to whom we owe the Existence of our body and mind, try to know Him and Him alone.

That is the way to bliss, that is the way to immortality.

Om. Peace; Peace; Peace be unto all!

## GUIDED MEDITATION

Compiled by Swami Ghanananda for use in leading group meditation.

We salute that true Divine Guru, the leader of our souls,  
Who is the embodiment of the Bliss of Brahman  
And the bestower of supreme happiness;  
Who is the Absolute, yet the personification of the highest  
knowledge;  
Who is beyond the pairs of opposites such as heat and cold,  
pleasure and pain, happiness and misery, life and death:  
Who is pure and untainted like the sky  
And has been indicated by such Vedic teachings as "That Thou  
Art";  
The One without a second, the eternal, the pure, the  
immovable;  
The witness of all modifications of our mind,  
Abiding ever beyond thoughts and attributes.

That alone do we remember; that alone do we worship;  
That alone which is the Witness of the universe, do we adore;  
In That alone do we take refuge, which is our sole support, the  
Self-existent Lord and the only seaworthy vessel which can  
take us safely across this sea of life to the haven of peace and  
bliss.  
O Lord, Thou art the embodiment of infinite energy; fill us with  
energy.  
Thou art the embodiment of infinite virility; endow us with  
virility.  
Thou art the embodiment of infinite strength; bestow on us  
strength.  
Thou art the embodiment of infinite power; grant us power.  
Thou art the embodiment of infinite courage; inspire us with  
courage.



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Thou art the embodiment of infinite fortitude; steel us with fortitude.

May our bodies become pure;  
May we be free from impurity and sin;  
May we realize ourselves as the Light Divine.  
May our minds become pure;  
May we be free from impurity and sin;  
May we realize ourselves as the Light Divine.  
May our souls become pure;  
May we be free from impurity and sin;  
May we realize ourselves as the Light Divine.

O Lord, lead us from the unreal to the Real;  
Lead us from darkness to Light;  
And lead us from death to Immortality.

May all be freed from dangers.  
May all realize what is good.  
May all be actuated by noble thoughts.  
May all rejoice everywhere.  
May all be happy.  
May all be free from disease.  
May all realize what is good.  
May none be subject to misery.

May the wicked become virtuous.  
May the virtuous attain tranquillity.  
May the tranquil be free from bonds.  
May the free make others free.

Om Peace, Peace, Peace.

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