

Simran: The Path of Awakening our True Self

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“The highest truth is that which we can only realize by plunging into it. And when our consciousness is fully merged in it, then we know that it is no mere acquisition, but that we are one with it”.

– Tagore

The Art of meditation is, no doubt, the kernel of religious evolution. Without the practice of concentration and meditation, no man can ever expect to reach the highest state of spiritual enlightenment. When we study the lives of the great Christian, Jew, Hindu, Buddhist, Mohammedan and Sikh mystics, we fully realize that they reached the highest spiritual consciousness through the power of concentration and meditation. Huxley, in his famous book “The Perennial Philosophy”, comments:

“The biographies of the Saints testify unequivocally to the fact that spiritual training leads to a transcendence of personality. In all circumstances and in relation to all creatures, so the Saint ‘loves his enemies’, or, if he is a Buddhist, does not even recognize the existence of enemies, but treats all sentient beings, sub-human as well as human, with the same compassion and disinterested good-will. Insofar as they are Saints, they are astonishingly alike. Their actions, are uniformly selfless and they are constantly recollected, so that at every moment they know who they are and what is their true relation to the universe and its spiritual ground.”

Pragmatic Value

Apart from the religious and cognitive attainments of man through the practice of concentration and meditation, the present author recognises its pragmatic value in the integration of the human mind and personality.

Meditation leads to the state of transcendence in which the person achieves a level of self-understanding and continuously realises the nature and quality of his relationship to the Ground of Being. This realisation leads to an acceptance and understanding of what is, and so psychological openness based on faith and love, rendering any psychological defences irrelevant.

In the cases of Saints such as Saint Teresa of Avila, Meister Eckhart, Baha U'llah, Lord Buddha, Guru Nanak and several scores of others, it seems evident that the experience of transcendence through meditation occurred with such frequency and intensity that it became a permanent element in their lives, colouring every thought and action.

“Meditation”, states the Bhagavad-Gita, “leads the individual into a state of enlightenment in Brahman... A man does not fall back from it into delusion.” A deluded mind becomes extremely disturbed and agitated by some of the secondary emotions such as, power orientation, hatred, and jealousy. One way of overcoming the disturbing conditions of the mind is to cultivate positive power of concentration and meditation.

Patanjali, a famous Indian philosopher outlines the following steps to reach the perfect state of meditation:

- a. Yama – mental control.
- b. Niyama – physical regulation and mental training.
- c. Asana – Posture.
- d. Pranayama – breathing exercises.
- e. Pratyhara – withdrawal of mind from sense objects.
- f. Dharana – concentration.
- g. Dhyana – Meditation.
- h. Samadhi – Super Consciousness.

Until it attains high states of consciousness, the mind functions almost entirely through nervous system. Through ethical observation, physical as well as inner cleansing, the individual can cultivate a kind of self-acceptance leading to contentment and other such qualities.

It is desirable that one tries to relax the body when one practices concentration. Physical relaxation is extremely helpful for mental repose, so it is advisable to sit in a relaxed position (*asana*) and let the whole neuro-muscular system loosen up.

Tension, anxiety

It has been experimentally shown that nervous tension and free floating anxiety can be removed or decreased by willfully relaxing the neuro-muscular system. In relaxation exercises, rhythmical breathing (*pranayama*) is also found to be efficacious.

After practicing relaxation for a few minutes, one should take a symbol or personal aspect of God on which to focus the mind. In the practice of concentration the entire mind can be made to converge on a symbol, a personal aspect of God, signifying the universal qualities of Divine Ground. For example, a devout Christian should take Jesus or the Madonna as his ideal and concentrate the mind on one or the other. With an Indian background one can take any of the Incarnations who are spiritually loved by the Indians.

In the beginning, one will observe that the mind will run away to previous thoughts and to objects of senses. It is observed that libidinal experiences and negative thoughts come to the surface of the mind usually at this time. One should not be discouraged and give up the practice of meditation when one finds that it is difficult to hold the mind on a spiritual symbol for more than a few seconds. Experience has proven that the mind becomes steady and peaceful within a short time.

By practicing meditation for some months one can gain power to hold continuously the thought of the particular aspect of Divine Ground (God-Consciousness).

When concentration is very deep and the mind does not waver but remains focused on the object of thought, that is meditation. It is a degree of the depth of concentration in which the mind flows continuously to an object as “oil poured from one vessel to another”.

In the vast majority of cases of divine relationship, people have to cultivate understanding of Divine Ground by remembering the incidents in the lives of divine personalities. Also, the repetition of the name of God develops a spiritual aspect of cognitive and affective relationship with the Divine Ground. Once it is established, the meditation becomes spontaneous and enjoyable.

When the whole mind is completely withdrawn from the objective world and is focussed on the object of realisation, when love reaches its culmination, and as such it makes the devotee the veritable embodiment of love, the individual transcends the limitation of personality and directly experiences the absolute in its integrated Unity. We say he has reached the state of super-consciousness (samadhi).

According to St. Teresa of Avila "The best sign that anyone has made progress is that she thinks herself the last of all and proves it by her behaviour, and that she arrives at the well-being of others in all she does. This is the truest test".

Serious matter

If that is so, the yogi through samadhi (super-conscious experiences) reaches the state of Universal Consciousness – a state in which the subjective and objective worlds are completely identical. The manifestations merge to form one absolute existence. Without differentiation of any kind – a merger with the Divine Ground.

These experiences not only change the intellectual side of knowledge of the reality behind the phenomenal world, but they also change the quality of the emotional life of the person.

In this tension-filled, power-oriented world, where relaxation is achieved by changing the blood chemistry through the use of various drugs, the techniques of relaxation, and meditation should be taken seriously by those who are concerned with bringing about positive orientation to human behaviour. If the restructuring of thought processes can produce a self-actualising individual, it must be tried, before other physio-chemical approaches or the so-called short-cuts are put into universal use.

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