



YOGA AND MEDITATION

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Man must touch the spiritual beauty at some point, for not by bread alone does man live. But he believes that this contact is painful and should be rendered as painless and as brief as possible. Meditation is in vogue. Actresses pose for five-minute meditations and speak of the enhancement of their "spiritual beauty".

There is a scramble for seats on the meditation bus, but the trip to the transcendent should not last longer than five minutes. The art of meditation has been pillled, and sugarcoated—meditation may even be induced by drugs. An LSD or Marijuana trip is supposed to give the sublime self-realisation of the Lord Buddha, while another avatar is considered a hippie.

Yet, if a journey to outer space demands rigorous discipline covering a period of years, it should be clear that a trip to the transcendent is not that easy. The demands of meditation properly performed are more exacting than the discipline needed by the cosmonaut.

A space trip can come a cropper due to a fault in a tiny wire and meditation can keep on hugging the things of earth, if the body is neglected.

For meditation must begin with the body, that vehicle of the Self which, if not controlled in its desires, prevents true meditation. The wisdom of the ancients knew this, but modern make-believe would ignore the body. Ignoring the body, springs from ignorance of the body and for that matter of the soul. For the body cannot be ignored, a mosquito, a stomach-ache, a running nose divert attention to themselves and the sublime is caught up in the ridiculous. A dull body begets a dull mind, a distracted body, a distraught mind.

It is easy to assert that one can meditate in the heart of Piccadilly but has one ever tried to still the Piccadilly of ones own body, nerves and emotions? The *Yoga Sūtras* of Patanjali, that classic of meditative wisdom, begin not with the esoteric but with the common-sensical.

'Choose a place', says Patanjali, (as also other ancient authorities) 'free of insects, noise and evil smells and spreading a rug, sit on it. The choice of time is also important, before sunrise or after sunset, for, at early dawn and late evening, the Spirit of God broods over the earth like a healing benediction. And for the practical-minded, there is less dust.'

Body posture is important. Meditation begins with the body and the awareness from within of every pore of the body in the various *āsanas* is itself meditation. It is like the turning on of millions of spiritual eyes.

The mind impregnates the body and yet remains an observer, the body becomes mind and yet remains supremely alert as body. And so mind and matter are fused in the dynamism of sheer energy, which is active without being spent, creative without bringing on exhaustion. The *āsanas* are not simply important because they strengthen the nerves, lungs and other parts of the body for their role in meditation but they are themselves vehicles of meditative action.

The classical meditative pose that we find depicted even in the ruins of Mohenjodaro, is the crossed-legged *Padmāsana* pose with the spine held straight and rigid. When the ancients

however counselled ; 'sit in any comfortable position with the spine straight', they certainly did not mean that slouching would do. For to sit in a loose collapsed sort of way induces sleep, and drowsiness is not to be mistaken for meditation.

Meditation does not make the mind dull, rather, in meditation, the mind is still but razor-sharp, silent but vibrant with energy. But this stage cannot be achieved without a stable sitting posture, where the spine ascends and the mind descends and dissolves in the consciousness of the heart, where the true Self reveals itself.

The whole body, far from being ignored, is taken up in this spiritual alertness, till the whole mind becomes pure flame. An alert, erect spine creates a spiritual intensity of concentration, that burns out distracting thoughts and brooding over past and future, and leaves one in the virginal, fresh present.

In *Dhyāna* or pure meditation, the eyes are shut, the head held erect and the gaze directed downward and backward as though the parallel gaze of the eyes is searching the infinity of darkness that lies beyond the back of the head for Him, Who is the True Light that enlightens every man. The facial skin is relaxed and descends. The brain is released from the senses as the eyes, ears, root of the tongue, *etc.*, become passive and consciousness passes from the active aggressive front part of the brain to the quiet, observing back of the brain. The hands are pressed together, palm against palm before the breast-bone. This classic pose of all prayer is not only symbolic but also practical. Symbolically the palms salute the Lord, who is within. The mind is drawn to surrender to the Holy One. This surrender by breaking the chain of distracting thoughts, increases the intensity of one's concentration. Practically speaking, the hands are locked together by the magnetism of the human body. The increase or decrease of the pressure on the palms is the sensitive gauge of one's alertness and one's freedom from distracting thoughts. The exact balance of the electric currents of the body can also be tested by the palms pressed against each other. If both palms press equally against each other, both mind and body are in balance and harmony. If one palm exerts more pressure than the other, that side of the body is more alert also. By increasing the pressure on the weaker palm a delicate adjustment should be made to bring the body-mind unit back to balance. For Yoga is nothing, if it is not perfect harmony.

It has been maintained that yogic meditation is without content, mere emptying of the mind. For those who have had the experience of its richness and satisfying fulness, such an assertion can only sound ridiculous. The intellect of the mind may cease its roving but the intellect of the heart goes out to the Lord. And it is the heart that matters. Is there really need of the petty content of our own thoughts, when the heart is drawn to the Infinite One, Who is always near and ever receding, immanent and transcendent at the same time ?

The yogic *prāṇāyāmic* or breathing techniques are meditative in their origin and in their effect. Consisting basically of breath inhalation, breath retention and breath exhalation, their rhythmic movements still the mind by withdrawing the senses and help one to uncover the depths of the Self. Unlike as in *Dhyāna*, the head is sunk on the chest with a firm chin-lock. Physically the chin-lock relieves the strain on the heart.

Mentally the chin-lock releases the breath from the egotistical domination of the brain and makes it more gentle and impersonal. The chin-lock takes one to the quiet centre of the heart, where the Lord resides. The hands either rest on the knees or control the breath with the fingers. But the other basic aspects of meditation such as the gaze of the eyes, the erect spine *etc.*, are maintained, the *prāṇāyāmic* techniques, like the *Āsanās* are vehicles of meditation and prayers. Breath inhalation or *pūraka* is acceptable of the Lord, breath retention or *kumbhak* (form a pot filled to the brim with water which is thereafter silent) is savouring of the Lord in the full deep stillness of the heart. Exhalation or *rechaka* is not simply exhalation but it is the emptying

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