

Meditation

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To realise God an aspirant must have patience, perseverance, purity of body and mind, intense desire or yearning, the aggregate of the six attributes, namely *shama* (tranquillity of mind), *dama* (restraint of the senses), *uparati* (giving up attachment to objects), *titiksha* (remaining unaffected amidst all kinds of afflictions), *shradha* (faith in the words of the spiritual teacher and the scriptures) and *samadhana* (concentration of mind on the Chosen Ideal, or God).

Do not tell anybody else, except the Guru, the realisations and the visions, or similar experiences, that spiritual practices may bring you. Always keep your spiritual treasure – your inmost thoughts - hidden within you. These are not for vulgar gaze. These are your sacred possessions to be shared only between you and the Lord in secret. Likewise, do not talk of your defects and blemishes to others. You lose thereby your selfrespect and the respect of others for you. They are for you to confess to the Lord. Pray to Him for strength to overcome them.

When you begin meditation, first sit steadily for a while and watch the mind; let it wander wherever it pleases. Think that you are the witness, the seer. Sit watching how the mind floats and sinks, runs and skips; keep thinking, "I am not the body, nor the senses, nor the mind; I am altogether separate from the mind. The mind, too, is material; it is only a finer form of matter. I am the *Atman* (Self), the master; the mind is my servant." Whenever any idle thought arises in the mind try at once to put it down forcibly.

Ordinarily one breathes through the left nostril at the time of rest, through the right at the time of work, and through both at the time of meditation. The state most favorable to meditation is when the body and mind have become calm and there is an even flow of breath through both nostrils. But do not pay too much attention to watching your breath, nor make this a guide by which to regulate your activities.

When the mind is absolutely calm, breathing becomes steady and *kumbhaka* (suspension of breath) follows. When breathing is steady, the mind becomes one-pointed. *Bhakti* (love of God) also brings about *kumbhaka* and breathing becomes steady. Even without practising *yoga*, *pranayama* (control of breath) is attained automatically if one remembers, and thinks of, the Lord and does *japa* (repetition of the matram) with a yearning heart. There is no other easy or convenient method to achieve onepointedness of mind except by *abhyasa*, or

¹ Swami Virajananda (1873-1951), a disciple of Sri Sarada Devi, was the 6th President of the Ramakrishna Order.

repeated and sustained efforts, and *vairagya*, or non-attachment to worldly objects.

Whatever be the time you devote to *japa* and meditation - even if it be only ten or fifteen minutes - do it with all your heart and soul. The Lord is the indweller, the inner guide. He sees your heart; His measure is not how long you meditate on Him nor how many times you do *japa*, but your inner longing.

Self-effort (*purushakara*) is necessary for spiritual attainment. Resolve firmly, "I will realise God through my own efforts by doing spiritual practices," and go on steadfastly practising *japa* and meditation, seated in proper posture, for at least two hours every morning and evening, for three or four years - and see if you succeed or not.

When by continued practice of *japa* and meditation the mind will have become calm and purified, then the mind itself will be your Guru or guide, and you will have proper understanding of everything, and find the solution of your spiritual doubts and questions within yourself. The mind will tell you what you should do, one thing after another, and how you should conduct yourself.

Japa, or mental repetition of the *mantra*, counting it on the fingers, using a rosary, or keeping the number of the repetitions - all these are only preliminary means to help withdraw the mind from other objects and fix it on the object of worship. Otherwise, you will not know when the mind may have run away in another direction; or you may even have dozed off. So, though these processes may appear to cause a little distraction at the outset, they will enable one to keep watch over the mind's vagaries and to detect them easily, and to draw the mind back and keep it on the object of meditation.

Never think yourself to be weak. Have firm faith in yourself. Think, "There is nothing that I cannot do; I can do everything if I want." Why should you acknowledge defeat to your mind? Know that if you can subdue it, the whole world will be under your feet. One who has no self-confidence does not have real faith in God. Swami Vivekananda has said that the real atheist is he who has no faith in himself. Nobody listens to the words of one who has no self-confidence; and God also does not listen to his prayers.

Asana is that posture in which one can sit for meditation steadily and with ease for a long time. But the spine has to be kept straight, and the chest, neck and head should be held erect, so that the entire weight of the upper part of the body may fall on the ribs and the chest may not sag. A stooping posture in any case is not healthy.

Japa, meditation, ritualistic worship, prayer, recollectedness, reading sacred books, association with holy men, godly conversation, retiring into solitude and thinking spiritual thoughts - whichever of these attracts you, according to mood and opportunity, and gives you joy, take advantage of that and do it. But meditation and *japa* are the main things. Never miss them for a single day however occupied you may be, or even

in times of sickness or infirmity, in misfortune or calamity. In such circumstances, if you cannot or do not find it convenient to carry on your practice in full measure, make salutation, and pray and do *japa* for at least ten or fifteen minutes.

The sensible man does not try to diagnose his own disease and prescribe medicine for himself by reading medical books. In case of disease, a doctor's advice should be sought. In the same way, if after reading many books and scriptures one proceeds to choose for himself a particular spiritual discipline his mind may become confused, and troubled by doubts and misgivings. Progress may be interrupted, and waste of effort and even harm may result. The reason is that the various scriptures contain divergent or even contradictory directions and methods for aspirants of different temperaments and capacities, and different stages of life. It is therefore dangerous in many cases to decide for yourself what is exactly suitable for you. The Guru alone can direct you to the right path. That is why spiritual knowledge has to be acquired direct from the Guru. Know that the initiation and instructions given by him are the only path for you to follow. If you do the spiritual practices as enjoined by him unswervingly and with full faith in them and in him, you are sure to achieve success in course of time. In any event, never give up these practices and take to other methods under anybody else's advice. If you jump from one thing to another, the only result will be that you will lose your way and drift about without gaining anything.

When God in His boundless mercy has, through the Guru, imparted the *Siddha-mantra* (mystic formula of the particular name of the Deity) which is the key to the portal of His sanctuary - know that He has given Himself away freely. But it is necessary for you to have that firm conviction. If you lose that invaluable jewel through carelessness and negligence, know that you are unfit for His grace. The right appreciation of this gift is the practice of the mantra and the instructions imparted by the Guru with your whole heart and soul until the Goal is reached. Only by so doing will you be able to repay a part of the debt to him. The more you realise that God is nearer and dearer to you than your near and dear ones, the more you will be the recipient of His grace. Through His grace you will be free and ever blissful even in this life.

Until love and devotion to God grow, one cannot be aware of the transitory and insubstantial nature of the world. The mind is but one; and it cannot be partitioned into compartments, one part given to God and other parts filled with desires for name, fame and sense objects. God cannot be realised unless the whole mind be given to Him. Unless one can do that, one has to be born again and again in the world and suffer endless misery.

In order to renounce the world, one need not take the holy orders or retire to the forest. Real renunciation is of the mind. If you give up the world mentally, it is the same whether you remain in the world or in the forest. If you run away to the forest, without completely renouncing from

your mind attachment for worldly objects, the world will follow you there also and trouble you just the same; there will be no escape from it.

If you have to be in the world at all, make God your world. Set up your home with Him. Whatever you do, see or hear, think that to be God. It is all play, a game with Him. Know life to be a game in which Mother herself is the Player and you are Her playmate. The world will be quite different when and if you know that Mother is playing with you. Then you will find that in this world there is neither happiness nor misery, good nor evil, attachment nor aversion, greed nor jealousy; consequently, all delusion, self-interest and conflict will vanish and no pairs of opposites can torment you there. All ideas of union or separation, of friend or foe, of high and low, of "I and mine" are non-existent in that play of yours with the Divine Mother. There is only inexhaustible bliss, boundless love, and infinite peace. If even a drop of that bliss be experienced the pleasures of worldly objects will seem contemptible. The possession of even an atom of that love will make the whole world dearer than one's dearest ones, and heavenly bliss will be felt through every pore of the body.

There is no fear in that play, no anxiety, no bondage, no weariness; it is always an ever-new play. And what infinite modes of play does the Mother know! Endless are the forms and ways in which She plays! One loses oneself in the very thought of it and is merged therein. In that moment of transcendental ecstasy the play ceases; for who will play then, and with whom? That beatific experience, that state of blissful union, is beyond the reach of speech and mind! He alone knows who knows! Great fun! Oh, the great fun!

If God comes and says: "What do you want? Do you want me, or do you want to live a happy life full of name, fame, health and wealth for a hundred years with wife, children and grandchildren?"

You will find that, except perhaps for one in ten million, all will eagerly pray for the latter.

To realise God one must devote oneself to the task heart and soul, a hundred per cent. Not even less by a millionth part of one per cent, or the minutest fraction thereof, will do. What almost all of us seek is to realise Him easily without much toil and trouble, and without sacrificing anything. We want to compromise between God and the world. We think that if the Guru out of his infinite mercy can get Him for us, and give us salvation, nothing could be better than that. Alas, how can this be? "The Lord must have His entire due, settled and squared to the last farthing."

He who really wants Him finds Him; he who does not, is made to dance to the tune of the five devils, becomes the sport of the five elements which comprise the material of the body and the universe: earth, water, heat, air and space. He is at the mercy of evil influences of all kinds.