

Meditation – General Introduction

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Meditation is one of the spiritual disciplines which occupies an important position in most of the spiritual traditions. Therefore, a proper understanding of its role is necessary for every spiritual seeker. Now-a-days, Meditation is recommended for physical and mental health, personality development and better performance also. Hence, a clear understanding of meditation is useful for all, whether one seeks spiritual enlightenment or not.

The Upanisads (Vedanta) point out that Self-Knowledge is the only means of liberation¹ and that Self-enquiry guided by the Vedantic teachings is the only means of Self-Knowledge. So, Self-enquiry occupies primary position for a spiritual seeker.

Meditation is prescribed neither for Self-knowledge nor for liberation. It is meant for preparing the mind to receive and assimilate the vedantic teachings. Accordingly, Meditation can be broadly classified into two types, viz.,

- ◆ **Preparatory Meditation**, which is to be practised before one exposes oneself to vedantic teaching and
- ◆ **Assimilatory Meditation** which is to be practised after one exposes oneself to systematic vedantic teaching consistently for a length of time.

One has to develop different mental faculties to receive the Self-knowledge. Accordingly, Preparatory meditation can be subdivided into four types. This is based on the faculty to be developed.

Preparatory Meditations

(1) Relaxation Meditation

In this, you learn to relax at all levels. – In any posture: consciously relax every part

¹ Inner freedom – i.e. freedom from slavery to objects, external and internal.

of the body from head to toe. When the body is totally relaxed, you feel bodiless. Then, observe the breathing. This will help in making the breathing-process smooth and even. Next, relax the mind. The following methods can be used to relax the mind:

- ◆ Imagine you are seated in a natural setup like beach, garden, mountain, riverbank or Ashram.
- ◆ Consciously unload all your mental burden at the feet of the Lord (in the form of your favorite deity (Ista-devata).
- ◆ Repeat to yourself: "I am confident of facing any situation in life, now that the Lord is there to share my burden. I have no worries now. I am relaxed." Use any key word like "Shantih" to invoke and enjoy the relaxation, ignoring all other thoughts.

(2) Concentration Meditation

While the previous meditation is for simple, deep relaxation, this meditation is to develop the faculty of focussing.

The following methods can be used to develop this faculty:

- ◆ Perform a Puja to the Lord mentally. It can be a simple one offering a few flowers or an elaborate one involving ritualistic steps. Alternatively, you can visualise a Puja done by another person in a temple, Ashram etc.
- ◆ Mentally chant the prayers you know in any language. Be conscious of your chanting.
- ◆ Mentally repeat any one name of the Lord or the words "Om Santih". Be conscious of every letter.

(3) Expansion Meditation

All the time, being obsessed with personal or family life, one develops a narrow, frog-in-the-well mind. To break this, one has to meditate on the totality which expands the mind and makes the individual and family problems insignificant. Try the following:

- ◆ Mentally see the sky, stars, moon, earth, oceans, mountains, etc.
- ◆ Appreciate the cosmic processes of sunrise, sunset, planetary movements, flow of rivers, flight of birds, etc.
- ◆ In short, tune yourself to the natural rhythm, the cosmic orchestra. Learn to enjoy the cosmic dance of the cosmic Lord.

(4) Value Meditation

This meditation is very important. This will help in internalising the values. This will bring about a transform in transactional life.

- ◆ Take up any value like confidence, patience, compassion, etc. Mentally see how important they are for a life of peace and progress. Bring to your mind any person who enjoys that particular value and appreciate him/her.
- ◆ Take the opposite trait like diffidence, irritation, rudeness, etc. Mentally see how they spoil the peace of yourself and others around.
- ◆ Look at yourself as one endowed with a particular value.

The above four types of meditation can be practised by anyone. One need not be a seeker of spiritual enlightenment for practising these. These meditations will bring about a deep transformation in one's personality which will give inner peace. Peace does not depend on what one has but on what one is.

(5) Assimilatory (Vedantic) Meditation

The seeker of spiritual enlightenment should not stop with the practise of the above mentioned meditations. Self-enquiry with the help of a Guru and the scriptures is a must. Consistent and systematic study of scriptures for a length of time under the guidance of a traditional master will lead to Self-discovery. To assimilate and own up this wisdom, one has to practise Vedantic meditation as follows:

- ◆ Mentally dwell on the Truth of yourself as revealed by the scriptural teachings.
- ◆ Mentally dwell on the Truth of the Lord as revealed in the scriptures.
- ◆ Mentally dwell upon the nature of the world to which your own body and mind belong.

Obstacles and Remedies

(1) Sleep

This is the most common obstacle. One need not feel guilty about it. The solution to this will vary from individual to individual. Some general methods can be tried by all:

- ◆ Meditate after a bath or at least after washing the hands, feet and face with cold water.
- ◆ Meditate when the stomach is neither too full nor too empty.
- ◆ Choose any part of the day when you are alert.
- ◆ Give a strong autosuggestion, "I will be alert".
- ◆ Don't meditate after tiring activity.
- ◆ Don't meditate when there is a backlog of sleep.
- ◆ Have short sessions of 15 to 20 minutes only initially.

(2) Distraction

This is the second common obstacle. One need not feel guilty about it. The following methods can be adopted to avoid this.

- ◆ Learn more and more and more about meditation and its value. Mind enjoys doing what it values.
- ◆ Reduce your likes and dislikes which are the root cause of disturbance and distractions.
- ◆ Give up all anxieties by taking Lord as your partner in life.
- ◆ Give a strong autosuggestion, "I-have an appointment with myself. Let me die to all my wordly roles".

(3) Dullness

Sometimes the mind becomes dull. It is neither asleep nor restless. If this happens, nothing can be done. One has to hope and wait for clearance. However, one can try to avoid this situation by the following methods:

- ◆ Don't have suppressed feelings (which will create a loaded unconscious). Share your feelings with someone.
- ◆ Write your feelings (and tear-up the paper if you don't want to keep it).
- ◆ Express your feelings openly to the Lord, your Ista devata.

(4) Tasting the Tranquility

The withdrawal and quietitude in meditation creates a sense of well-being. Many mistake this temporary experience of well-being as spiritual fulfillment and tend to enjoy it more and more. This is the subtlest form of obstacles. This can be solved only by applying Vedantic discrimination properly.

Conclusion

Everyone can practise the first four forms of meditation. It will be very useful whatever be one's field of activity. If one is a spiritual seeker, they become all the more important. One does not require any special initiation to practise these four forms of meditation.

Om Tat Sat



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