

SOME INTERESTING ASPECTS OF MEDITATION

By I. K Taimni

The word "meditation" stands for a large variety of mental exercises adopted by people who have a spiritual ideal of one kind or another in their lives and want to realize this ideal, at least to some extent. As the mental activity and discipline involved in meditation is of very wide scope, it is not easy to deal here with the subject systematically and comprehensively. Those who read this article are expected to be familiar with the general aspects of meditation. We shall therefore confine ourselves to the discussion of a few interesting aspects of meditation, which are not generally understood, but are of vital interest to those who are serious about the problems of the inner life and do not want to go through their meditation as a mere routine.

It is also not easy to define the purpose of meditation as this depends upon the mental background, temperament, and spiritual evolution of the individual. But it may be indicated, in most general terms, by saying that this purpose is to bring the lower personality in conscious touch with the Higher Self, thus making it increasingly aware of its divine origin, destiny, and nature. All those people who meditate regularly as part of a systematic spiritual discipline must believe that behind the physical world is hidden a real spiritual world of unimaginable splendor, and that it is possible for a human being to come into contact with this inner world in an increasing measure by means of meditation. Otherwise, there would be no point in engaging in this kind of mental activity.

The world of Reality is hidden within the mind of every human being and can be known more and more fully by penetrating progressively into deeper levels of the mind. This is why it is necessary in every true spiritual discipline not only to deal with the mind in various ways but also to go into its deeper levels through meditation.

Ordinary knowledge can be acquired through mental activity which is confined to what may be called the surface of things, to the observation of physical phenomena, the collection of sensory data and, working upon this data, through the mental processes of comparison, reasoning, etc. But knowledge concerning the invisible subtler worlds of a mental nature hidden within the physical world cannot be acquired in this manner. It is necessary to go into the deeper levels of mind and consciousness by means of well-defined techniques, which are part of yogic discipline.

The difference between these two kinds of mental activity can be understood by comparison with the technique of swimming. An individual who has learned to swim on the surface of water can explore everything that is present on the surface. But many worlds of infinite variety lie hidden beneath the surface of the ocean at various depths and in various localities. He can come in contact with these worlds and investigate them only when he learns to dive, to go beneath the surface into the deeper levels of the water. The process of diving is somewhat different from that of ordinary swimming on the surface and involves problems and techniques of a different kind. The difference between ordinary mental activity and meditation is of a similar nature.

Ordinary thinking—even when it is deep and purposeful—involves only movements of the mind on the surface. In rigorous reasoning, which represents perhaps the highest and most difficult form of this kind of mental activity, the mind moves in a disciplined manner; but still the movement is superficial, if we may say so. It is not movement of increasing depth of the mind. The mind may be engaged in prolonged and concentrated mental activity, but as long as it moves in this manner it can deal with and know only what is related to our external life. All achievements in the realm of the mind, even those of a remarkable nature, are possible through this kind of mental activity. But the subtler and more real worlds hidden within the deeper levels of the mind cannot be explored and known in this manner. This requires a different kind of mental activity, which may be referred to as movement of mind in depth. In this kind of mental activity, the mind also moves but the individual tries at the same time to penetrate progressively into its deeper levels. What movement of the mind in depth means will be fully understood upon studying the *Yoga-Sutras*.

The above idea may provide a clue to the secret of successful meditation and shows us why (in the case of most people) meditation is not able to achieve its real aim, namely, progressive contact with the deeper levels of the mind owing to increasing penetrating power of perception. The movement of mind in depth, which is necessary for successful meditation, requires not only a somewhat different kind of movement but also more effort.

Most of us who have learned to use our mind efficiently don't realize that the exercise of the mind in a particular kind of activity becomes almost effortless after a time; in fact, we cannot be really efficient until it becomes effortless. The experienced speaker can go on speaking fluently once he has mastered the technique of choosing and arranging his ideas, while standing and expressing them without a break. The ideas, whether trivial or profound, are already there in the mind of the speaker, perhaps expressed hundreds of times before; it is only a question of picking and

choosing among them and then expressing them continuously. The experienced columnist takes up the pen and reels off pages after pages of commentary almost effortlessly. He has only to choose ideas from the flood of printed matter, which is coming out of the press, and express them in a striking manner. Once the technique of marshalling ideas and expressing them effectively has been mastered, the rest is easy.

This, it will be seen, is not unlike learning to swim. Once a person has acquired the simple knack of keeping afloat on the water, swimming becomes merely a matter of physical stamina and certain movements of the body. No particular effort, in the real sense, is then needed for continuing to swim.

Most of our mental activities are of this nature. Our mind moves in accustomed grooves or is exercised almost effortlessly in doing things the technique of which has been mastered to an adequate degree. It has not to be kept concentrated or pushing in one direction by an effort of the will or by the overpowering attraction of an object to be accomplished or known. It is therefore not used for sustained mental effort guided by a definite objective and motivated by a continuous pressure of will or attraction—exactly what is needed for successful meditation.

So, merely sitting down in a certain posture and making the mind bring up a connected series of ideas on a chosen subject is not real meditation, though this is all that most people do. It may be seen that this kind of mental exercise is really like writing an essay without pen and paper or giving a lecture without speaking. Neither can the common practice of allowing the mind to move in accustomed and well-worn grooves created by repetition of religious texts, be considered as meditation in the true sense, though this is what most religious people do when they “meditate” during their daily religious observance. We tend to cast every kind of necessary activity into a routine so that the mind has not to make much effort and has not to make a choice between alternative courses of action or ideas. This also accounts for the great popularity of rituals in carrying out our religious duties. The idea is to have at least the form of religious life, if not its substance. But anyone can see that stagnation is inevitable under these conditions. There is perhaps no greater obstacle on the path of spiritual unfoldment than the false sense of achievement and security engendered by the habit of routine.

Why is it not possible to produce the required mental state when we sit down to meditate? Mainly because our interest in things on which we want to meditate is not adequately intense and deep. We may imagine that we want to find the reality that we believe is hidden within the deeper layers of our mind and consciousness. But this is only a vague thought motivated by an equally vague wish. There is no clearly defined and dynamic purpose, no intensity of desire in the background of our mind

to solve the problems of our inner life and unravel the mysteries of our existence. To have a qualitative idea of this particular kind of mental state we have to recall the tremendous intensity of purpose and concentration that characterized the mind of a scientist such as Edison when he was working on a scientific invention. His mind was so deeply absorbed in the pursuit of his aim that he forgot even to eat and sleep. That is the kind of mental state which is needed for real meditation; when it is present, results appear quickly as pointed out in the *Yoga-Sutras*. (I-21)

This condition is not present because we have not fulfilled certain basic conditions for treading the path of spiritual unfoldment through meditation. We are not really aware of the tremendous illusions and limitations under which we are living our present life; therefore there is no real urge to get out of this condition. The attractions of things down here are too powerful and provide a constant irresistible force for distracting the mind. The mind has not been trained properly to accomplish worthwhile tasks, which we have set before ourselves. The ideal does not attract us with sufficient force. In short, we don't possess the essential qualifications.

It is to provide the right conditions for the successful practice of meditation that all true systems of spiritual culture insist on preliminary training of the mind and character. In the well-known *Sadhana-Chatushthaya*, the fourfold system of Self-culture, it is necessary first to acquire the four basic qualifications for treading the Path. These are called in Sanskrit *Viveka*, *Vairagya*, *Shattsampatti*, and *Mumukshatva*. It is only at a fairly advanced stage of progress that the practice of intensive meditation is taken up to open up the channels between the lower and the higher and establish the center of consciousness on the spiritual planes of manifestation.

In treading the path of Raja Yoga outlined in the *Yoga-Sutras*, the aspirant has first to practice *Bahiranga* or External Yoga to prepare himself for the practice of meditation with its three stages of *Dharana*, *Dhyana*, and *Samadhi*. He is not expected to begin even the practice of *Dharana* until he has mastered the fourth technique of *Pranayama*, as is clear from Sutra II-53.

In every system of Yoga the candidate is expected to possess the basic qualifications for practicing Yoga, even when this is not specifically mentioned. If he does not possess them in an adequate degree he is first made to go through rigorous training for this purpose. It is only in pseudo systems of Yoga that so-called *Gurus* take on pupils and initiate them into the mysteries of "transcendental meditation" or *Samadhi* without even enquiring whether they possess the necessary qualifications or capacity for this purpose. To do so would seriously affect their clientele.

Those of us who cannot meditate successfully should do a little heart-searching and self-introspection. It will be possible then to see for ourselves that the fundamental cause of this failure is probably lack of serious purpose and earnestness.

We start the practice of meditation before we really want those things which are the object of meditation. This is like putting the cart before the horse. We must have real problems before we proceed to solve those problems. The object of meditation is to solve the problems of the inner life by penetrating into the deeper layers of mind and consciousness, where alone the solution of these problems can be found. If these problems do not exist for us, there is no use in sitting down to meditate day after day to solve these problems. Meditation is not an end in itself. It is merely a means to an end.

I am reminded in this connection of the mentality of many students who come to the universities for research. They want to do research, but if you ask them what problems they want to solve, they have no answer. You have to give them a problem to work on. In academic life it is possible to want to do research first and seek for a problem afterwards, because the object of such students is not really research, but training for research, which will enable them to undertake real research afterwards. But for an aspirant, who has to penetrate into the unknown realms of the mind by his own efforts, this is obviously impossible. In his case there will be no incentive and therefore no urge for the mind to leave the realm of the known and go within itself to discover what lies hidden within the deeper layers of consciousness.

It is only when the problems are real, the result of our own deep thought and experience—not problems which we have created artificially or adopted from others—that the intuitive faculty begins to function in meditation and spiritual knowledge, which throws light on these problems, begins to well up naturally from within.

We should not forget that in using the mind in real meditation we are trying to deal with the realities of life, and there should be present not only real problems but a real urge to solve those problems. Intuition can function only in this kind of mental atmosphere of realism. If sincerity and earnestness are not present in an adequate degree, the very basic requirements for gaining intuitive knowledge from within are absent and meditation is bound to be barren and frustrating.

When the problems of the inner life become real for us they not only permeate our whole life but their solution becomes a matter of urgency. Even when the lower mind is engaged in external activities, the higher mind is in the background constantly brooding over these problems and seeking their solution. This constant brooding over a problem is called *Bhavana* in Sanskrit and is a necessary part of real meditation, which brings the intuitive faculty into play. The effect of this constant brooding is further enhanced by *Japa*, in which the potency present in “sound” is utilized to reinforce the effect of thought. In the light of what has been said above,

the student will be able to understand the significance of aphorism I-28 in the *Yoga-Sutras*.

It is necessary to note carefully that all knowledge concerning the spiritual realities of life is gained not through the intellectual faculty of reason but through the little known and much suspected spiritual faculty of intuition. True intuition is not a mysterious but unreliable capacity for guessing truth, as is generally supposed by people with an essentially materialistic outlook. It is the faculty of direct perception or awareness of truth, which results when the consciousness of the seeker somehow becomes attuned to the Divine Consciousness. In this Consciousness all realities of existence are present externally in their true form. In the exercise of ordinary intuition during the early stages, the consciousness of the seeker leaps, as it were, over the barriers of the intellect and can know any reality at least partially by direct perception. In *Samadhi* the same result is brought about in a controlled and scientific manner, and the perception is therefore full and free from defects. The very nature of all spiritual facts of existence is such that they cannot be known by any other method. Those who seek for the ultimate secrets of the universe through telescopes and the ultimate secrets of human life through microscopes can, by the very nature of things, never succeed.

As intuition is the faculty of direct perception without the help of intermediate instruments, it is free from the inevitable distorting influence and error introduced by the vehicles of consciousness. All the imperfection which may be present in its exercise is due to the defective medium of the mind through which it is exercised and the knowledge is interpreted. If this is pure and harmonized, its lack of development does not matter, except when the results of this perception have to be interpreted and formulated in terms of the intellect for communication to others. Many saints who were highly developed spiritually were illiterate. The lack of a trained intellect prevented them from interpreting and conveying satisfactorily the truths of the inner life to others, but it did not affect their perception of these truths.

The effectiveness of the intuitive faculty depends upon its penetrating power. The more penetrating its perception, called *Viveka-khyati* in the *Yoga-Sutras*, the deeper the realities which it can perceive and the more comprehensive its vision. The acme of its penetrating power is reached when it can penetrate through all the complexities and bewildering variety of manifested existence and *perceive* them as derived from and existing in the One Reality. The unfoldment of intuition is thus not a question of putting together or building up something but that of sharpening the power of perception, so that it can cut through the jungle of illusions and obstructions which obscure our spiritual vision. That is why purification,

renunciation, and harmonization play a more important part in treading the path of Holiness than acquisition of knowledge.

Since intuition plays such an important part in meditation, it will be worthwhile dwelling for a while on the manner in which intuitive knowledge appears in consciousness during the early stages. Direct perception of the realities of spiritual life in the fullest sense takes place only in *Samadhi*, but the aspirant need not wait for that advanced stage of yogic training in order to gain some qualitative experience of intuitive knowledge. It is possible to have definite experiences of this kind of knowledge, provided the conditions for the functioning of the intuitive faculty are at least present to some extent. In fact, it is not only possible but necessary to have this kind of experience, because it shows us that the channel between our spiritual and intellectual natures has begun to open up and the real purpose of meditation is being fulfilled at least partially.

There is something extraordinarily heartening in having even occasional experiences of this nature, because they assure us that there is an inexhaustible source of spiritual knowledge within us and it is possible for us to draw upon that source by progressive attunement to it. We, of course, believe in all this as a theoretical possibility, but it is quite a different thing to realize that our belief has a basis in fact and that it is possible to put it to practical use. With this definite assurance we turn increasingly inward for everything we need for our spiritual progress, and thus is laid the foundation of the true occult life—centered in our Divinity.

To understand how the intuitive faculty functions in the earlier stages of spiritual progress, it is necessary to have some idea of the difference between spiritual knowledge as it exists on the planes of Spirit and as it appears on the planes of the lower mind. On the higher planes it is unencumbered by the lower mind and exists in its *Svarupa* or true form. On the lower planes it is clothed in the lower mind and can exist only in its *Rupa*, or in the form of concepts and ideas. Therefore, when spiritual knowledge descends into the realm of the lower mind it must assume a concept or set of ideas as a body, just as the Atma or the Spirit must take up a body when it has to function on the physical plane. Under these conditions the true spiritual knowledge serves as a soul of the intellectual concept present in the lower mind. But there is a tremendous difference between such a concept ensouled and irradiated by spiritual knowledge and a concept formed by the mind as a result of mere intellectual study and devoid of any spiritual insight. The former is living, dynamic, and of great significance to the aspirant. The latter is a mere collection of ideas, divorced from life and incapable of providing any inspiration or satisfaction to the individual.

The above considerations provide an explanation of the manner in which knowledge of a spiritual nature generally wells up from within as a result of the functioning of the intuitive faculty. It seems to come from nowhere, without any warning, and in its first impact on the mind, appears to be a mere void without form or substance. But very quickly it seems to crystallize into a pattern consisting of ideas, which give it a mental form and serve to embody its significance.

In this manner of its expression through the lower mind, one is reminded of a rocket in fireworks, which shoots up into the sky as if from nowhere and then bursts into a shower of colored sparks shining beautifully against the dark background. At one moment it is a mere streak of light in the sky, heralding an exquisite display of light and color, and at another it has transformed itself into a display of scintillating stars in the sky, revealing the splendor which was hidden within its bosom.

It is characteristic of intuitive knowledge which appears in this manner that it should be caught in a mental receptacle immediately, the moment it makes its first impact on the mind. All that is necessary for this is to direct the mind to it with full attention. It then records and gives shape to itself naturally, rapidly, and effortlessly. This effortless and lucid expression reveals its intuitive origin and is a part of its inherent nature. But the expression needs an alert and receptive mind, which is ready and competent to give it a suitable shape and keep itself out of the picture for the time being. The poet must convert it immediately into a beautiful song, the musician into a symphony, the mathematician into a theorem, the philosopher into a concept, the artist into a concrete form. Any delay or lack of attention means almost certainly that the heavenly visitor will turn back and depart and, perhaps, make his visits less frequently.

The mode of influx hinted at above is only one of the ways in which intuitive knowledge may appear within the mind of the aspirant. The ways of the Spirit are mysterious and unpredictable and don't always conform to a set pattern, nor are all such communications associated with the same degree of intensity or enlightenment. But every time knowledge descends from those high realms, the hallmark of the Spirit is there and the recipient can always recognize it. There can be no confusion or bewilderment when the Spirit communicates, but only enlightenment, though of different degrees depending upon the capacity of the receiver.

Knowledge that appears in this manner should not be confused with experiences of a psychic nature, which take the form of visions and sounds of various kinds and have their origin in the psychic nature of man. Though generally spectacular, these lack the reliability and certainty associated with all manifestations of the Spirit. The fact that they frequently result in excitement and vainglorious ideas about one's spiritual progress is enough to show their lower origin. All expressions of the Spirit

are associated with an indescribable imperturbability and impersonality and though there is an influx of peace and power there is no excitement of any kind.

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