

Swami Yatiswarananda

ESSENTIALS OF MEDITATIVE LIFE

MEDITATION & SPIRITUAL LIFE

Chapter 18

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“This book, a compilation of class-talks given by Swami Yatiswarananda to groups of earnest spiritual aspirants in Europe, the USA and India is a practical manual of spiritual life, with special emphasis on meditation. Though designed for the use of religious people in general, it is specially intended for those who sincerely practise prayer, Japa [repetition of holy name] and meditation and are eager to attain some spiritual fulfillment. The true seeker of Truth will find in it simple but valuable guidance regarding preliminary preparations, different techniques of meditation, various obstacles that are to be overcome, the nature of genuine spiritual experiences, and other important details of meditative life which can otherwise be gained only through intimate contact with an illumined Guru.”

(From the inside flap of the cover)

The book was compiled and edited by
Swami Bhajanananda

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Prayers & Meditations

(M&SPL pp.370–372)

Given below are some prayers and meditations which Swami Yatiswarananda used to recite in the beginning of his classes and lectures.

***yaṁ brahmanā varuṇendrarudramarutaḥ stuvanti
divyaistavairavedaiḥ sāṅgapadakranopanīṣadairgāyanti
yaṁ sāmāgāḥ .***

***dhyānāvasthita-tadgatena manasa paśyanti yaṁ yogino
yasyāntam na viduḥ surāsuragaṇā devāya tasmai namaḥ ..***

(Bhāgavata XII.13.1)

***om̐ nārāyaṇaḥ param̐ brahma tattvaṁ nārāyaṇaḥ paraḥ .
nārāyaṇaḥ paro jyotirātmā nārāyaṇaḥ paraḥ ..***

***yacca kiñcitjagatyasmin dṛśyate śrūyate.apī va .
antarbahiśca tat sarvaṁ vyāpya nārāyaṇaḥ sthitaḥ ..***

(Tattiriyaranyaka XII.4-5)

***om̐ pūrṇam-adaḥ pūrṇam-idaṁ pūrṇāt pūrṇam-udacyate .
pūrṇasya pūrṇam-ādaya pūrṇam-evāvaśiṣyate ..
om̐ śāntiḥ . śāntiḥ . śāntiḥ ..***

Let us offer our salutations to the all-pervading, all-blissful divine Spirit who dwells in the hearts of us all. He is the Lord of the past, present and future. By realizing Him, one goes beyond fear and attains to peace. He is the supreme Principle of existence, the supreme Reality, the supreme Light and the supreme Self. Out of Him, the all-pervading, all-blissful divine Spirit, we all have come into being, in Him we live, to Him we return. OM Shantih, Shantih, Shantih.

- Let us for a few moments sit quiet, relaxing our body and mind.
- Let us offer our salutations to the Supreme, all-pervading Spirit. May He guide our understanding.
- Let us offer our salutations also to all the great teachers and saints of the world; teachers and saints whose teachings we all have inherited. May they inspire us with love for the Truth.
- The supreme Spirit is the Source of all purity. Let us breathe in

vibrations of purity; let them destroy all our impurities; let us breathe out vibrations of purity. Let us breathe in vibrations of strength, let them destroy all our weaknesses; let us breathe out vibrations of strength. Let us breathe in vibrations of peace, let the vibrations destroy all our restlessness; let us breathe out vibrations of Peace. Let us send forth currents of Purity, Strength and Peace to all our fellow-beings—to the east, to the west, to the north, to the south. Let us be at peace with ourselves, at peace with the whole world.

- Let us now take up the position of the Witness or the Spectator and draw our mind from all distractions, from sounds and other troubles. Let us detach ourselves also from all the thoughts, pictures and feelings that rise within. Let us be wide awake.
- Our body is the divine temple. Let us focus our consciousness in the sanctuary of our heart and there feel that our soul is like a little sphere of light and this little sphere of light is part of the infinite Spirit shining everywhere. The infinite Being is immanent in the sun, moon, stars and planets. The infinite Spirit shines in all beings. The Spirit is immanent in our eyes, ears, in all our senses. The divine Spirit shines in our mind. It shines in our heart. Let us all feel the contact.
- The monist meditates on the Supreme Spirit as Sat-Cit-Ananda—Infinite Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. The devotee worships the same Being in various aspects as God the Father, God the Mother, God the Friend, God the Beloved. The infinite Spirit manifests Itself as the great gods and goddesses. He again comes down on earth, as it were, in the form of the divine Incarnation for blessing mankind.
- We may select any theme we please, for our meditation, but as we meditate, let us all feel that both the worshipper and the Worshipped are drowned in the one Sat-Cit-Ananda — Infinite Existence-Consciousness-Bliss.
- It is really the one infinite Being that manifests Itself in one aspect as the devotee, in the other aspect as the Deity. Let us feel the divine contact in our heart of hearts, and may the divine Presence soothe our nerves, calm our minds, quiet our hearts. May the divine Spirit guide our understanding and enlighten our consciousness.

- Let us for a few moments meditate on the all-pervading, all-blissful Spirit in any aspect we please, in any way we please. But let us by all means feel the divine contact.

.....
[All meditate]

Post-meditation chant

***Saha nāvavatu saha nau bhunaktu saha vīryam
 karavāvahai tejasvi nāvadhītamastu mā vidviṣāvahai
 OM śāntiḥ, śāntiḥ, śāntiḥ***

(Taittiriopanishad)

*May the all-pervading, all-blissful Divine Spirit, the Soul of
 our souls. protect us all.*

May He guide us all, may He nourish us all.

*May the teachings we learn become forceful and fruitful
 through His grace.*

May Peace and Harmony dwell amongst us all.

OM Shantih, Shantih, Shantihi.

[Discourse]

Post-discourse chants

**tvameva mātā ca pitā tvameva
tvameva bandhuśca sakhā tvameva .**

**tvameva vidyā draviṇaṁ tvameva
tvameva sarvaṁ mama devadeva ..**

(Prapanna Gita 28)

**asato mā sadgamaya .
tamaso mā jyotirgamaya .
mṛtyorma.amṛtam gamaya ..**

(Bṛhadaranyaka Up.)

**ajāta ityevaṁ kaścidbhīruḥ prapadyate .
rudra yat te dakṣiṇaṁ mukhaṁ tena mām pāhi nityam ..**

(Svetasvatara Up. 4.21)

O Lord, Thou art the All-Pervading, Divine Spirit, the goal of all spiritual paths. — Thou art our Mother. Thou art our Father. Thou art our Friend. Thou art our Companion. Thou art our knowledge. Thou art our wealth. Thou art our all-in-all.

*From the unreal lead us to the Real.
From darkness, lead us to Light.
From death, lead us to Immortality.*

Reach us through and through our soul and evermore bless us all with Thy inspiring presence.

*May we find Thee in the heart of our hearts.
May we find Thee in all our fellow-beings.
May we love Thee and serve Thee in all.*

*May the world be peaceful.
May all be free from danger.
May all realize what is good.
May all be actuated by noble thoughts.
May all be happy everywhere.
Om, Shantih, Shantih, Shantih.*



For more prayers, see Swami Yatiswarananda, *Universal Prayers* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1974)



Swami Yatiswarananda (1889–1966), a senior monk and former Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Order and Mission, was a well-known spiritual figure in the Neo-Vedanta movement. Besides seven years of pioneering work in spreading Vedanta in Europe and ten years of teaching Vedanta in the U.S.A., he served in succession as the President of Sri Ramakrishna Ashramas in Bombay, Madras and Bangalore. Known in his premonastic life as Suresh Chandra Bhattacharya, the Swami was an initiated disciple of Swami Brahmananda (the great direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna), and was widely respected for his high spiritual attainments, Yogic insight and mature wisdom. He advocated and lived a well-harmonized spiritual life with meditation as the keynote, and love and service as the main melody. He was a source of inspiration not only to his monastic and lay disciples, but also to a large number of other people in India and abroad to whom he endeared himself by his selfless love and gracious manners.

(From back cover of *Meditation & Spiritual Life*)

Essentials of Meditative Life

(M&SPL CHAPTER 18)

The Path before us

First of all, it is essential on our part to hold before us the spiritual ideal clearly. According to the ancient school of thought known as the Sankhya, there are only two types of entities — the Purusha or the soul which is of the nature of pure consciousness, and the Prakriti or Nature. Vedanta calls the soul of man, the Atman and says that all souls are parts of an infinite, all-pervading supreme Spirit called Paramatman or Brahman. Hence Self-realization in Vedanta means God-realization. Those of us who believe in the existence of the Atman or the soul and the Paramatman, the Soul of our souls, aspire to have our union with Him, within us and in all beings. Realization of the all-pervading Divine is the goal of our spiritual life.

When as students, we approached the great disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, they placed before us the ideal of Self-realization. But by Self-realization they did not mean anything exclusive. They told us clearly that the more you approach your higher Self, the more you experience the supreme Spirit and the more you feel He is manifest in all. And then what follows is, you feel like serving the Lord in all. But, before that, we must try to follow the spiritual path through prayer and worship, get some clear conception of one's own soul and the nature of the Deity who dwells in everyone.

Now, since this is the ideal, the question arises: What path should we follow? And here too they placed before us the twofold ideal of salvation and service. Work and worship should go hand in hand. Work is to be performed in the spirit of serving the Lord who dwells in all beings. We perform activities of various kinds, but we do not know how to do it, how to perform our duties, how to engage ourselves in various activities for our spiritual benefit. Work has to be done at first in a spirit of duty. Duty must be performed under all circumstances and then, as we advance, we feel we have to offer all the fruits of our work to the supreme Spirit who is the presiding deity of all forms of activities. Then there comes a time when we ask; why should we work? The answer too then wells up within us: for pleasing the Lord. And there may yet come a time when we feel the divine presence permeating and interpenetrating us. Then we just become channels

for the flow of divine power—the divine power that works for the good of mankind.

Be spiritually hungry

Just as work is to be done in the proper spirit, so also worship is to be performed in the right manner. All of us have to perform work of some kind or other. Work is compulsory, but the trouble is, worship is optional! Most of us do not feel inclined to do any worship, or Japa [repetition of holy name] or meditation, and that is the pity of it. If we are hungry spiritually, we would like to take spiritual food. We feed our bodies; we should feed the body with good healthy food. We feed our minds through our studies — the ideas should be good. Similarly we should feed the soul. How to do it? Through the practice of worship, Japa, meditation.

There is a parable of Sri Ramakrishna: A child was going to bed and said, 'Mummy, if I feel hungry, please wake me up,' and the mother said, 'I need not do that. Your hunger itself will wake you up.'¹ There comes a time in the course of the evolution of the soul when we become spiritually hungry and wake up from our age-long slumber. But then, mere waking up is not enough.

We must be up and doing. I am reminded of a remarkable saying of the Holy Mother. She said, 'The room may contain different kinds of food-stuff, but one must cook them. He who cooks earlier gets his meals earlier too.'² Many of us are lazy, we do not want to cook at the proper time; may be, we want to cook but late in the evening; and some are so lazy that they would rather starve than cook their food! Naturally, they cannot get much out of spiritual life and they feel miserable.

What Brahmananda taught

When we try to sit quietly and do some form of mental worship, some form of Japa or meditation, at first we come across many obstacles. This is only natural, as Swami Brahmananda used to tell us. Here let me do a little reading from the *Eternal Companion*, the book which contains the spiritual teachings of the Swami. He says:

1. The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1974), pp 93, 424.

2. Sri Sarada Devi the Holy Mother (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1958) P. 520.

Practise Japa and meditation regularly. Do not miss even one day. The mind is like a spoiled child — always restless. Try repeatedly to steady it, by fixing it on the Chosen Ideal, and at last you will become absorbed in Him. If you continue your practice for two or three years, you will begin to feel an unspeakable joy and the mind will become steady. In the beginning the practice of Japa and meditation seems dry. It is like taking bitter medicine. You must forcibly pour the thought of God into your mind, then as you persist, you will be flooded with joy. What a terrible ordeal the student undergoes to pass his examination. To realize God is a far easier task! Call on Him sincerely with a tranquil heart.³

The disciple to whom he was speaking said, 'At times I feel that with all my struggle I am making no progress. It all seems unreal. Despair takes hold of me.'

The Swami gave him hope:

No, no. There is no cause for despair. The effect of meditation is inevitable. You are bound to get results if you practise Japa with devotion, or even without it, for devotion will follow. Continue your practice regularly for a little longer. You will find peace. One's health also is improved if one meditates.

Meditation in the primary stage is like waging a war with the mind. With effort the restless mind has to be brought under control and placed at the feet of the Lord. But in the beginning, take care that you do not overtax your brain. Go slowly, then gradually intensify your effort. Through regular practice, the mind will become steady and meditation will be easier. You will no longer feel any strain even while sitting for long hours in contemplation.

Just as after a deep sleep a man feels refreshed in body and mind, so will you feel refreshed after meditation and there will follow an intense experience of happiness.

The body and mind are closely related. When the body is disturbed, the mind also becomes disturbed. Therefore particular care must be given to the diet in order to keep the body healthy

Meditation is not such an easy matter. When you have eaten too much, the mind becomes restless. Also unless you keep

3. Swami Prabhavananda, *The Eternal Companion* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1971) pp. 335-6.

lust, anger, greed and such other passions under control, the mind will remain unsteady. How can you meditate with an unsteady mind? Unless you meditate, you cannot control the mind and unless the mind is controlled, you cannot meditate. But if you think, 'First let me control the mind and then I shall meditate,' you will never succeed. You must steady your mind and meditate at the same time.

As you sit down to meditate, think of the cravings of the mind as mere dreams. See them as unreal. They can never attach themselves to the mind. Feel that you are pure. In this way purity will gradually fill your mind....

If you wish to realize God, practise the spiritual disciplines with patience and perseverance. In due course you will be enlightened.⁴

When the supreme Being is realized, the illumined soul attains peace and blessedness and shares this peace and blessedness with his fellow-beings. That is the ideal the Swami held before us, and he placed before us also the practice which we should follow with a view to realizing the ideal.

Early stages

As I said, when you wish to sit quietly, many types of disturbances arise in the mind. Sometimes, when you are not sitting for meditation, you may feel an amount of calmness; but the moment you sit for meditation, your mind becomes turbulent. Not only that. The body may start aching, our senses again may start running riot, and no end of wild thoughts start rising in the mind. And Japa and meditation become a great struggle, but this struggle has to be gone through.

The mystics of all religions place before us the ideal of attaining a basic minimum of purity, first of all —purity of the body, purity of the senses, purity of the mind, and also purity of the ego. The body may be suffering from some disease and so the different organs of the body may not coordinate or function properly. Our senses are all outgoing, eager to come in touch with sense objects. Our mind is swayed by past impressions. And then again, there is another type of conflict in our mind: our thinking goes one way, feeling goes another way, will goes a third way, and besides that, our ego is perverse. The ego is like a bubble but the little bubble thinks of itself too

4. .See M&SPL pp. 336-339.

much. It forgets the other bubbles, it forgets even the ocean, and wants to grow. What happens? The bubble bursts. And this actually happens with many human beings.

Now, let us not be terrified by all these troubles that appear before us. In the *Bhagavad-Gita*, we find Arjuna complaining to the Lord: 'You speak of mental control, you speak of self-realization. But I find my mind is most turbulent: I cannot control it.' The master recognised the difficulty of the student, and with great sympathy and love said: 'Yes, what you say is right, but by following the proper means, through the practice of detachment and constant meditation, this turbulent mind — which appears to be uncontrollable — can be controlled.'⁵ Eventually one comes into touch with the supreme Spirit, the Soul of our souls, the Soul of the universe.

Don't complain about environment

Let us first of all note that we often complain too much about our environment. We really do not want to do anything except always complain about the environment. Suppose we change the environment— well, the same complaint will be there. We do not find anywhere an ideal environment: such a thing does not exist. You make this plea: 'Environment is not favourable, how can I practise meditation?' Well, right here you have to practise meditation. Do you not try to sleep in the midst of the most troublesome environment? Similarly you have to try to practise meditation whatever be the nature of the environment. How? By withdrawing yourself from all outside disturbances, just as you do before you sleep. This can be done by practice. Then again, we have our physical troubles. May be the body is having some trouble. Many a time we hear complaints like: 'Ah, Swamiji, when I sit for meditation I get a headache.' Well, for some people meditation itself is a headache! Anyway, try to be healthy. That is why Bhagavan Sri Krishna says in the chapter on the Yoga of Meditation in the *Gita*: '*Yoga is easy and destroys sorrow for a man who is regulated and moderate in his food, recreation, work, sleep and wakefulness.*'⁶ One should follow the middle path avoiding the extremes. This gives the spiritual seeker strength and vigour to follow the spiritual path.

5. The Bhagavad-Gita, VI, 33-36.

6. The Bhagavad-Gita VI.17.

Train the body first

Some form of discipline is to be practised so that our body may be trained to some extent. Then the senses are to be trained and also the mind. Not only that, the ego should also be trained.

How do you train the body? Take care of your food: avoid overeating and select the food that agrees with you and conduces to the harmony of the body. Many people think eating food is the greatest exercise for the stomach! This is not enough. Apart from eating healthy food, you must also have some exercise of all the limbs, specially some exercise of the stomach, so that your digestion, assimilation, and evacuation can be as good as possible. These are the rules, primary rules, that are to be followed. Our ancient teachers said: 'The first duty is to take care of the body which is the means for the pursuit of spiritual life.' I see sometimes weaklings come and say 'I want to forget my body.' What bodies have they got? A mass of flesh and bones! Develop the body properly. You can never forget the body if it is not in a healthy condition.

Moral discipline

The teacher of Yoga, Patañjali, is unwilling to give any instruction on asana or posture unless and until the spiritual seeker is to some extent established in what he calls *Yama* and *Niyama*. The spiritual seeker should practise non-violence, should tell the truth, should not be greedy, should practise continence as much as possible, and should not depend on others helplessly. This is what he calls *Yama*.⁷ And even that is not enough. He says that one should practise an amount of purity, external and internal. One should try to be contented, adjusted to one's own environment as much as possible. One should practise the three-fold discipline — of the body, of speech, and of the mind. Further, one should study the scriptures and assimilate the ideas. Even that is not enough; egocentric activity is no good. One must try to surrender oneself completely to the supreme Spirit, who, as the devotee later on discovers, is the Soul of his soul. All these come under *Niyama*.⁸

Swami Brahmananda used to tell us, "I will conquer lust, I will conquer anger and greed", if that is your approach, you can never

7. Patañjali, Yoga Sutra II.30.

8. *ibid*, II.32.

conquer them; but if you can fix your mind on God, the passions will leave you of themselves,' 'You can never be fully established in morality unless you believe in God.'⁹ By God he did not mean any extra-cosmic Being. In the beginning we may think of God as a Being or Power who has brought this world into being, who sustains it, and who takes it back. As we progress, we find that the Power which we thought was outside is not only a Power, but also a Presence within, and advancing further the spiritual seeker sees, feels, the presence of the Divine in all.

Cultivate mental harmony

Sometimes people come and say, 'Swami, I want to forget everything including my mind.' What sort of mind have they got? Swami Vivekananda used to have a pun on the word 'mind'. In Bengali, we call it 'mon'. Now, 'mon' also means 'a maund' i.e., 80 lbs. And so, the great Swami used to ask the youngsters who went to him: "Has your mind got the weight of 80 pounds or only a 'chatak' (two ounces)? What sort of mind have you?" The mind is to be developed. Will is to be developed. Thoughts and feelings are to be developed. Then only the question of transcending the mind comes. It is a difficult task but if there is spiritual aspiration, all this becomes easy. Where there is a will, there is a way.

When you want to pass an examination (especially in India where every young man, instead of struggling for knowledge, is over-anxious to get some appointment to maintain himself and his family), what an amount of trouble you take! That is because you have an ideal to strive for. In spiritual life also if we keep the spiritual ideal living and bright before us, everything becomes easy. All the trouble that we take would be worth taking.

Let us remind ourselves of the wonderful analogy we have in the *Katha Upanishad*. The Upanishad says that the body is like a chariot, senses are like horses, the mind is like the rein, intellect is like the charioteer, and the Atman is the master of the chariot.¹⁰ As the chariot moves, if some of the wheels come off and roll away, can it proceed? Horses have become restive, turbulent. In order to control the horses you have to hold your reins tight. And the master of the chariot must ask the charioteer to be wide awake. But what usually hap-

9. The Eternal Companion, Op. cit., p. 245.

10. Katha Upanisad 1.3.3.

pens is: the master goes to sleep, the charioteer becomes drunk, the reins become slack, and then the horses start running wild; fortunately there is no great disaster. So, before any disaster comes, let us be wide awake: let the master of the chariot be wide awake. Let him ask the charioteer to be alert and, with the help of the mind, control the senses, direct the senses along the right path. Then the chariot will move properly.

But let us remember, none of us can suddenly attain perfection in spiritual disciplines. A certain minimum progress is necessary so that our body, mind and the senses are in a harmonious state. And the ego, the perverse ego, should be in a mood to come into touch with the cosmic will that lies behind our little will. When to some extent we have become established —remember, to some extent—in bringing about harmony first in the body, then in the mind and the senses, and when we have succeeded in awakening the spiritual aspiration — when we have done all this to some extent, then we may start with *asana* (posture) which is the actual first step in the path of meditation.

Posture (Asana)

Remember, it is only after the practice of Yama and Niyama to some extent that Patañjali, the teacher of Yoga, asks us to sit in a certain posture. What is the posture that we should choose? The definition is: '*Posture is that which is firm and pleasant.*'¹¹ Select that posture in which you can sit steadily and in which you feel at ease. Some one may ask: 'May I lie down?' Well, you may lie down, and practise it as an Asana, but you take an amount of risk: that posture is usually associated with sleep. By lying down and trying to practise meditation, you may not progress at all. You may have a little good nap and that may refresh you but will make you spiritually dull. 'Worship is possible in a sitting posture'¹² — that is what Vyasa says. Sitting posture is better, but take care that it is a relaxed posture in which you feel relaxed in body and also in mind. If you wish to practise Yogasanas as an exercise, you may do that some other time. But when you sit for meditation you should sit firm but relaxed in body and mind.

11. Patañjali, Yoga Sutra, II.46.

12. Badarayana, Brahma Sutra 4.1.7.

Pray for all

After sitting, remember the Lord. He is our Ideal, He is the indwelling Spirit. He is inside and outside. You may chant a prayer. Be a little musical. Let your mind, your senses and the body vibrate with a little spiritual vibration. Then salute the supreme Being. One great danger in spiritual life, when we follow a particular path, is that we are likely to be very fanatical. So it is very good to salute not only the supreme Spirit, but also the great Teachers and saints of your country and of all countries of the world. What happens then? The mind becomes broad.

Another danger in spiritual life is to be extremely selfish. Many a time, I have found that at least in the beginning of spiritual life, spiritual seekers think too much of themselves. They forget the others. So it is good to pray not only for one's own welfare but also for the welfare of all. Just as you aspire after peace, you want to attain purity, you want to attain illumination, so also pray for peace, purity and enlightenment for everybody. 'Let all people move towards the supreme Being. Let all people become pure. Let all people become illumined.' This kind of prayer has a broadening effect on our mind.

You will be astonished to see how quickly this kind of prayer soothes your nerves and calms your mind. Besides expanding our consciousness to some extent, this kind of prayer and salutation greatly helps us in the practice of meditation.

Significance of breathing

At this stage a little practice of rhythmic breathing is very helpful. Take a deep breath, and slowly breathe out. You need not hold the breath or close the nostrils. Just breathe in and breathe out in a steady, regulated way through both the nostrils. But give suggestions to the mind: 'I am breathing in purity, strength and peace.' The infinite Being is the source of all peace. As a matter of fact, in spiritual life, we cannot have enough of purity, enough of strength and peace; the more we get, the better. Fill yourselves with the divine purity, divine strength and divine peace. Breathe out purity. Send forth currents of purity to everybody. Have sympathy for all; be friendly towards all. You will be surprised to find how easy it will be for you to rise to higher planes of consciousness if you have succeeded in cultivating this mood because when we are in this mood, it is easy to detach our senses from their objects.

Spiritualize desires

The senses want to come into touch with the outer world. Control the senses; give the senses an inward turn as the Upanisadic seers did. Spiritualize the activities of the senses. As the Vedic prayer goes: 'O Gods, may we hear with our ears what is auspicious. O Ye adorable ones, may we see with our eyes what is auspicious.' Hear what is good; speak what is good; see what is good. Give a good direction to the senses. Let them be spiritualized.

Next comes the mind which is always trying to run riot. How to calm the mind? All kinds of desires and passions create troubles to the mind. Cultivate the spiritual mood, a little of the mood of expanded consciousness. Think that these distractions are illusory and dreamlike. Tell yourself: 'Don't be afraid of lust, anger, greed, infatuation, pride and malice. Don't be afraid at all.' Spiritualize them. Yearn to have the divine communion. Get angry with your anger, get angry with all that stands in your way — not with people. Covet the supreme Being who is the greatest wealth. If you want to feel proud, feel proud thinking you are a child of God, and so on. Then what happens? All our desires are given a spiritual turn. They no longer trouble us; they may even be of help to us in spiritual life.

There is a wrong conception prevailing among a section of people. Some shallow psychologists say to spiritual aspirants: 'You are all suppressing or repressing your emotions.' We do not do anything of that kind. We want to store up the energy of our senses and the mind. We want to direct this energy along the spiritual path. We want to sing the glory of the Lord. We want to visualize the form of the supreme Being. We want to direct our senses inwardly so that there comes a time in the life of the spiritual seeker when he comes to develop new eyes for seeing the Invisible, new ears for hearing the divine Voice, or 'the music of the spheres' and enjoy the fun of all that is going on eternally. One is able to play with the divine Being; but all this is only on the way. We have to go further.

The temple of the Divine

In the well-known *Katha Upanisad* analogy already referred to, the body is likened to a chariot. Another analogy is that the body is a temple of which the region of the heart is the sanctum sanctorum. This is a grand conception. In this temple, you find there is the devotee and also there is the Deity. You must be able to bring about the

union of the two. But this temple is a very peculiar temple. Our little physical body is permeated and interpenetrated by our mental body or the subtle body. The subtle body again is interpenetrated and permeated by the *Jivatman* [individual soul], and the Jivatman is part of the *Paramatman* [supreme Soul]. And as we succeed in making the body, subtle body, the senses, and the mind harmonious, we become more and more conscious of the divine light that shines within. So, we enter the sanctuary of the 'heart', find that the 'heart' is filled with the light of the Atman and this light is a part of the Paramatman.

How to meditate

If you want to follow the formless meditation, merge your body, mind, the whole world and everything into God. Think: 'I am a little sphere of light, and the supreme Being is the infinite sphere of light, shining everywhere.' But so long as we have body-consciousness and too much of the sense of personality, we cannot practise this type of meditation. So, now think that your soul is putting on a pure subtle body (i.e. mental body), and a pure physical body, and the Infinite Spirit takes the form of the *Ishta Devata*, the divine Ideal we worship.

Now visualize: In the infinite divine Light which is also infinite Love and infinite Bliss, we have the devotee and we have the Deity who is the embodiment of infinite Light, infinite Love and Bliss. Repeat some appropriate divine Name (Mantra) and meditate on Him.

First of all, meditate on the blissful luminous divine form of the *Ishta Devata*. Then meditate on His infinite purity, His infinite love, His infinite compassion. Finally, meditate on His infinite consciousness in which He is, as it were, drowned.

What happens? As one goes on repeating the divine Name and meditating on the divine Being, moving from one aspect to another, a remarkable change takes place. Through moral practice we succeed, as I said, in establishing an amount of harmony; but the harmony that is established by meditating on the Lord, is of a superior kind. When real harmony is established in our mind, in our soul, in a spontaneous way, we feel we are in touch with the cosmic harmony. Even our body is a part of the cosmic body—, *Virat-Purusha*. Our mind is part of the cosmic Mind — the *Hiranyagarbha*. Our soul is part of the cosmic Spirit— the *Ishvara*. Many who practise spiritual discipline and meditation attain to this state of consciousness. If

we follow the way of Japa and meditation correctly, we are sure to be blessed with some form of divine vision, some form of divine experience. That increases our faith and makes our mind steady in the path of meditation.

Our mind wants to run away from the object of meditation. But through the practice of moral culture, we should succeed in minimizing these disturbances of the mind. And further, as we do our Japa and meditation we are giving the mind a certain theme. that is, the divine Name we repeat and the divine Form we visualize. All these serve to focus the mind and hold our attention within. We must think of Him with a little love in our heart. When there is some love and devotion in our heart for the Chosen Ideal, it becomes easy for us to follow the path of Japa and meditation.

And what Japa and meditation do is this: they keep the mind engaged. They hold it within. The Name, the divine Form, and the idea, along with love for God keep the mind concentrated within. When our interest in the object of meditation becomes greater than our interest in outside things, the object of meditation becomes a reality more and more. The mind at least for a little while dwells on the supreme Spirit, dwells on the divine blissful Form, dwells on the noble attributes. Then comes the time when one feels the divine Presence. In the lives of spiritual seekers we find that at this stage many are blessed with the spiritual vision of the divine Form. The divine Being manifests Himself in some aspect or other; then He becomes the Guru.

The Guru is within

Our teachers tell us that the Guru is within. We may take the help of an outside teacher at the beginning of our spiritual life, but as we advance, we find the real Guru is inside and we must place ourselves at the feet of the divine Guru within. He takes the disciple step by step from lower rungs of spiritual experience to higher and higher rungs. That is what happened to the saints, the saints we have met. If we know how to tune our minds properly we can 'hear' the experiences of saints, their songs, the outpouring of their hearts, the expression of their spiritual realizations, their instructions. These experiences actually take place. If we sincerely follow this spiritual path, after having fulfilled some of the conditions, we are sure to get some spiritual results.

Self-surrender to the Lord

The results of meditation are sure to follow, but as we go on with our Japa and meditation, let us not look for the results too much. Results will come by themselves. By being over-anxious about the results, we will be forgetting to do our spiritual practice properly, and here comes the most important question of self-surrender. Patañjali, the Yoga-teacher, says, '*By sacrificing all to Ishvara comes Samadhi*'.¹³ Surrender yourself completely, offer all the fruits of your labour, of your spiritual practice, to the supreme Being. Learn to connect your little 'will' to the 'divine will', and then a miracle takes place. That Truth, that Reality which shines within, which also shines outside in all beings, reveals Itself in all Its glory, and then there comes the communion between the soul and the Oversoul. Swami Vivekananda has given us a definition of religion; it is '*the eternal relation between the eternal soul and the eternal God*'.¹⁴ But in order to realize this, we have to practise various disciplines with single-minded devotion.

Cultivate a definite attitude

Here comes a very important question of finding out where you stand. Find out with what attitude you have to approach the supreme Being. Very few of us are competent to approach the supreme Being as the Soul of our souls. We are like children. We want to depend on the divine Being, just as a child depends on the father or the mother. We need a friend, we need a life's companion, we need one who would love us, whom we can make the centre of our love, the centre of our emotion. Now the Lord is there, He is manifest in these countless divine Forms and relations. Take up anyone of them. In our study of the various sects of Hinduism we find that the devotee begins spiritual life with the worship of God as the Master, as the Father, as the Mother or even as the divine Child. There are devotees who would like to love the Lord as Child-Krishna, or Child-Rama. Other devotees would like to worship the Mother of the Universe, in Her different aspects as Durga, Kali, Uma, or Kumari. Through all these forms of worship or meditation the mind and heart become pure. As has already been said, the purity that we attain through the

13. Patañjali, Yoga Sutra, II.45.

14. The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Advaita Ashrama, 1964) Vol. 111, p. 4 (Calcutta).

practice of morals is not enough. We want a higher type of purity, the purity that enables the soul to detach itself not only from the body, the senses, and the mind, but also from the little ego — the last bondage that the soul has to overcome—and this is possible only in the higher type of worship or meditation we have described above.

One Self in all

The union between the Atman and the Paramatman is to be brought about. And as the supreme Being, the supreme Teacher, reveals His glory, the devotee realizes that the God he has been worshipping is not only inside but is also manifest in all. And then begins a new life, a fuller life. As Bhagavan Sri Krishna says in the *Gita*: *'With the heart concentrated by Yoga with the eye of evenness for all things, he beholds the Self in all beings and all beings in the Self.'*¹⁵ Now the devotee realizes that the Atman that is inside is also outside, and seeing the Lord manifest in all, he worships Him in everyone.

For one's salvation and world's welfare

Now, here is a point to understand. Even long before we attain this higher spiritual experience, even when we are worshipping only the personal aspect of God, something of this higher universal attitude must be cultivated. If I approach God, looking upon Him as the Master, and myself as the servant, let me not at the same time, forget my fellow-beings. We are all servants of the supreme Spirit. If we look upon God as our Father or Mother, then let us look upon our fellow-beings as children of the same God. If we are bold enough to think of God as the Soul of our souls, then let us remember, we are all fellow-souls eternally connected with the supreme Spirit and, through our connection with the supreme Spirit, connected with one another. Then our life takes a new turn. The great ones who told us, 'Work and worship should go hand in hand,' told us also, 'Hold this ideal before you: *"For one's own salvation and for the good of the world"*.' You have to strive for your own spiritual illumination or spiritual freedom. At the same time, strive to promote the welfare of all. The illumined soul alone can see God in everyone and his service is spontaneous. But those of us who are still in ignorance must strongly imagine that we are all connected with one another through the di-

15. The Bhagavad Gita, VI.29.

vine Spirit and, as we try to promote our own welfare, let us also try to promote the welfare of all.

Here, the instruction we received, 'Work and worship should go hand in hand', comes to have a new meaning. As we progress in meditation, as we try to grow inwardly, we should work not only for the members of our family but also for the welfare of others. What a beautiful order would have been in the world if this were practised! If each of us thought of others as he would think of himself, we would surely get much more. Ordinarily in a selfish mood, we think, 'Well, I am interested only in myself.' But when the outlook broadens, we feel we are all parts of a greater Whole, and then we feel great kinship and nearness with everybody. And when everybody tries to apply the ideal of 'work and worship' in actual life with this outlook, our lives will become sweeter and fruitful, and spiritual awareness will be an accomplished fact.

And as we do our spiritual practice and service let us not be ego-centric. Let us offer all the fruits of our labour to the supreme Spirit. Sri Ramakrishna has said, 'If we move towards God one step, He comes towards us ten steps.' It is a fact to be realized in the world of Spirit. So proceed. May the supreme Spirit ever protect and guide you, and fill your heart with His divine Presence, Purity, Love and Bliss!

END OF
Essentials of Meditative Life
by
Swami Yatiswarananda

