

## **Meditate to Elevate**

### **(Part One of a Series on Meditation)**

Recently, I completed a Teacher Training for Meditation and it's been an angel with wings to help me understand an otherwise complex subject, my monkey mind. It gave me a reason why to slow down and use the dusty meditation cushion in my living room. I'm going to share some of the meditation nuggets that I have learned with you, because quite frankly, we humans, have loads more intelligence and resources to inner intelligence and healing than is being utilized, and it comes in the form of consciousness. The way to access our higher states of consciousness and intelligence is to take the journey inward, to 'know thyself'-to meditate.

What is meditation? Meditation is a method to assist an individual in observing and evolving the mind's layers: Consciousness-the state of wakefulness; Subconscious's, the state of intellectualization; and Super consciousness, the state where inspiration, creation, intuition, bliss and transcendental experiences occur. As we move into Super consciousness, one can cultivate the ground to access Universal Intelligence, which is by no means, a small feat.

At first, when you start to look inward, and see the mind, it is as the sky, but hardly ever clear, without a cloud, drop of rain or thunderous lightning. Under these conditions, one may not be able to see the Sun, but that doesn't mean it does not exist. It is merely 'not seen' under these conditions. It is the same with the Self and higher intelligence, it always exists; it is just that most of us have not experienced or 'seen' the inner Self, because of the darkness or clouds we cast over the Self with our mind-states and conditionings.

During meditation, different parts of our mind can become illuminated and brought to consciousness, the state of wakefulness, which is critical today, because most individuals are not awake to the internal processes and deep seated emotions that lie within. Why? Because the lower mind, the mind of ego, greed, power and fear distracts us from looking inward. As a simple example, many people overeat and disregard the fact that their belly is full because they 'love the taste' of the food, or they fear not having enough or are trying to fill an inner void. One's stomach is the size of one's closed fist so it's not hard to intellectualize portion-sizes, but many still ignore that knowledge. Instead, if we were more mindful of what we chose to eat, when and how much, we could start to see the cycles or conditionings that are programmed into our mental systems. With that insight, we could make different choices about our diets. In turn, our culture could start to significantly reduce diseases/conditions related to diet, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, stroke, peripheral artery disease, obesity, attention-deficit disorders or other disease states. Entire segments of our lives could improve if we just paid more attention, concentrated attention to the mental processes of what's going on under the surface.

People often shy away from meditation because it's not easy! A beginner's mind identifies with fear, ego and the senses, which pulls one into the same habits, patterns and mind-states, but eventually with practice, one will see the forces continually distracting us from going deeper within. Meditation helps us to observe the 'weather' of our minds at each moment, and with enough willpower and practice, we can change the weather, at will.

So how does one go about meditating? The first step is a burning desire to change the habits and conditionings which have set the neural pathways in your brain. After that, there are several more relevant steps to take, concentration and withdrawal of the senses, which will be discussed in the next part of this series. Then, I will offer up some simple exercises that you can do anywhere, at any time, which are forms of meditation, all directed at understanding one's internal mental processes and interpretations. We practice dental hygiene and personal hygiene, but hardly ever mental hygiene. Perhaps, it's time to take a look?

Namaste.

### **Meditate to Elevate- Part 2 of Series: Dharana-Concentration**

Concentration, *dharana*, is an important aspect of meditation as one-pointed focus increases our mental power. In order to be able to concentrate, *pratyahara*, a withdrawal of the senses or sensory stimulation must first be achieved so that the mind becomes immune to the distraction of our senses and sense objects. Once the senses are withdrawn, a foundation is prepared to sit and begin concentration techniques.

So how does this relate to meditation? Well, in order to attain any state of meditation, one has to get the wired often-robotic monkey mind to cooperate and be still-not sleep, but to just be still. It may come as no surprise to you that the mind loves to take control and direct our thoughts, and thereafter, our decisions and behaviors. In fact, 95% of our thoughts are *unconscious* or *subconscious*. Of the 5% conscious thoughts we produce, nearly 70% of those are either negative or repetitive. How so? If a negative behavior or belief is reinforced enough, especially during developmental years, the brain creates a neural pathway for that negative thought which will outweigh its opposing belief or behavior. What wires together fires together? What doesn't fire, doesn't wire. Also, as we age, the mind become more dissipated as the tension and stress of our lives increases, which reinforces even further a poor quality of mind.

The power of concentration, which helps to still the mind, is not a practice we were trained with as we developed, and so it is often challenging for a majority of the population. The mind has great potential power but rarely used because the numerous thoughts that run across the film of our mind dissipate its power distract our attention, and yes, our mental power. As our attention dissipates, humans experience a loss of mental activity, wrong decisions, ineffective communication, poor memory and senility.

However, with an alert but inactive mind, one can observe one's inner state of being, the thoughts that continue to arise, and the energy in the body from moment to moment. With an alert but inactive mind, one is not polarized by the senses, the external world or thoughts, which is always a temporary state of being! In other words, you can begin to 'see' clearly the internal chaos you have created for

yourself based upon this reality and how to release it. When the mind is concentrated, it becomes relaxed. When the mind is relaxed, the brain becomes more relaxed and thereby, open to receiving and creating new ideas and concepts which increases the dimensions and depth of consciousness.

With an alert but inactive mind, one can also feel what frequency one's energy is vibrating at. Many of us live vibrating at lower levels, driven by fear, ego, greed, anger and jealousy, for example, rather than from the heart or from the wisdom of their experiences. As one move away from survival and base-level instincts, our energy will vibrate at higher frequencies, and our actions will be more regularly infused with love, compassion and creative genius.

Sitting and concentrating also helps one to become more aware of the extreme or negative emotions triggered by thoughts and beliefs. Armed with this awareness, one can begin to tailor their mental hygiene practice accordingly, to harmonize the nervous system as well as both hemispheres of the brain. The Tantras provide many fabulous concentration methods for accomplishing this.

Almost any object, mantra or image can be used as the basis for concentration. Generally speaking, any object that comes to one's mind spontaneously is usually the most effective. Once you have selected the object of concentration, it should be used daily, and there should be a regularity of practice. Once the mind becomes more concentrated through a regular committed practice infused with faith, our awareness increases, and the meditative experience becomes more accessible.

Stay tuned for the Part 3 of the "Meditate to Elevate" Series which discusses pranayama-breath-energy techniques, often utilized to prepare the mind and body to concentrate and reach states of meditation.

### **Prana and Pranayama: Part 3 in Series on Meditation**

What is Prana, Pranayama and why is it relevant to meditation?

Prana is an energetic force that exists within all beings and things. "Yama" means no restrain and "Ayama" means to extend, lengthen; thus 'Pranayama' practices works with extension and restraining of one's energetic force. Some might say that breath is prana, but that is not quite accurate. 'Prana' denotes constancy, a force in constant motion, energy that drives action. The kind of energy that burst forth to manifest the Universe and human beings. Science might describe 'prana' as multidimensional energy: a combination of electrical, magnetic, electromagnetic, photonic, ocular, thermal and mental energies.

Prana travels along energy meridians in the body. It is said that there are 72,000 nadis, energy pathways, in the body. The main energy channels, or "Nadis", are the Ida (lunar) channel, the Pingala (solar)

channel and the Sushumna Nadi, the main energy meridian that travels from the base of the spine up and out through the crown of the head. The Ida and Pingala criss-cross along the Sushumna Nadi, at seven different points, denoting a convergence, resulting in a chakra, or energy wheel. One can remove blockages associated with each chakra with the help of pranayama practice.

Breath techniques can help to increase or 'restrain' the quanta of prana. It also aids in channeling and directing that energy in our bodies using inhalation, exhalation and retention. In order to help a practitioner withdraw from one's senses (pratyahara) and concentrate (dharana), pranayama techniques are vital to one's progress in attaining inward meditative states.

Pranayama practices have been known for over 4000 years, but detailed practices primarily appear in writing the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, Gheranda Samhita and Hatharatnavali, between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Centuries. There are many practices identified which could easily overwhelm and confuse.

A good starting point in working with breath techniques is to build a foundation utilizing first, an attention to breath. We take approximately 21, 600 breaths per day, or 900 per hour, although many of us are not even aware of this involuntary process.

A simple, and sometimes not-so-simple, technique might be to become aware of the breath at the nostril tips, ribs, or belly during inhalation and exhalation, with pointed concentration of nothing but breath awareness for 5-10 minutes. Unconscious breathing is controlled by medulla oblongata and conscious breathing is controlled by more evolved areas of the brain, at the cerebral cortex. To bring awareness to this process, transforms the involuntary to voluntary as well as from static to evolutionary. This transformation alone generally has an effect of calming one's nervous system, reacting on the sympathetic nervous system.

Short, shallow or sharp breathing indicates an active, anxious or depressed mind, whereas long, deep breaths indicate a calm mind and attitude. During these receptive, relaxed states of being, without thought, is when the magic begins to happen.

Along with breath techniques, many yogis also practice with engaging bandhas (energetic locks), working with the koshas (energy sheaths) and/or chakras (energy vortices).

Yogis believe that the brain and its corresponding nervous system is controlled by the chakras and the nadis. If there is a blockage, then mental and physical stability decreases, and meditation is blocked as well.

And once you begin to understand that you can control your own beliefs and reactions, by reconditioning your mind, you will see how you are able to thereby, control your reality. Consciousness inward translates into consciousness outward. Moreover, stillness inward, in deep meditative states, connects you to the Divine, and with it a divine sense of ease and fulfillment and connectedness, of Whole. With control of prana, comes control of the monkey mind, and increased physical and mental health, concentration, harmony, relaxation and ease in your life.

Life is a meditative path. Yogis have some 'far-out' ways (as my teacher would say) to help you along, and pranayama is one of them.

Namaste that!

