

Discourses/Articles

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MEDITATION, THE FOOD OF THE SOUL

A daily session of meditation may be regarded as the food that is needed by the soul of man. Even as the body is hungry, the soul has its own hunger. The body struggles to maintain itself by acquisition of the requisite food. So is the soul seeking that particular type of food which can maintain its existence. The soul is wiped out of its existence, as it were, when its true nature is neglected by the preponderance of the clamours of the senses in the body. A complete neglect, in conscience, of the presence of the essential character of the Self, the Soul, is a veritable acquiescence in the destruction of the Self. Most of us may be said to be dead souls with the self destroyed and the smoke of its cremation rising up in the form of this body and physical satisfactions. But the soul is really not dead. The eternity of its being is a standing refutation of any kind of feeling that it can be destroyed or annihilated by any amount of material forces. But, for all practical purposes, the existence of the Self or the Soul, when it is not an object of one's direct awareness, is something like the wealth of an individual of which he is not aware. The large properties that one owns may be said to be almost nothing if the awareness of the presence of this property is not there in the possessor thereof. The property is not destroyed. It is still there. But the presence of that wealth is practically of no utility in one's existence or daily life, because the awareness of the presence of the property is not there. Similar may be said to be the predicament of the Atman, or the Self, or the Soul. It is there, no doubt; but for all meaningful purposes, it is not there, because we are not aware of its presence. What we are aware of is a body which is a quaint distortion of its affirmations, but which the body is affirmed and all its associations are also affirmed. What we call spiritual meditation is an effective remedy that is employed for the rejuvenation of the awareness of the Self by a gradual indrawn attitude of our consciousness which is to be carried on throughout one's life.

The practice of meditation is to be regarded, as least by honest spiritual seekers, as a whole-souled occupation. It is not to be regarded as one among many other items of daily activity. It is the principal work or function for which one is here, almost, and all our other functions are contributory to the effectiveness of the principal function which is the meditation of our self on the Selfhood of things. The body, with its affirmations, creates a repellent atmosphere around itself. Thus there is conflict, not only psychologically, but even socially. All conflicts are repulsions of forces engendered by the affirmations of the body and its associations so that the healing forces of Nature are cut off and there is a vacillating, dilapidated, worn-out individuality of ours which sinks down, every day, deeper and deeper into the mire of confusion. The daily duty of meditation is to be one's dearest possession in life. It should be an overwhelming eagerness on the part of every spiritual seeker, or *sadhaka*, to find enough time for meditation to counteract these repulsive energies that are emanating from the body, contrary to the requirements of nature and opposed to the law of the universe. The meditative practice is a double process of guarding oneself from the influx of repellent

forces which insist on the presence of objects of the senses in space and in time, and on the other hand it is a positive affirmation of the characteristics of the Atman or the Self. There is a necessity, therefore, for an inward, cultural, positive process as well as what you may call a negative guarding oneself from the entry of adverse forces. The body and the senses urge us forward in the direction of things, insisting on the presence of objects outside us. The vehemence of the senses consists in the affirmation of the externality in objects, and nothing can be worse for us because the world is not outside us.

The world is one complete whole of which we are parts in such a manner that we cannot separate ourselves in any way whatsoever from the atmosphere of the world. It is a large constitution of an integrated, organic completeness. Hence every individual, every person, every thing, living or non-living, is inseparably related vitally to the structure of the core of the universe. This being the fact it is surprising that we should be complacent of and satisfied with a life that is totally opposed to the inner demands of this law of the cosmos. The eagerness to be seated in meditation should be obvious on the very face of it in the light of this little analysis that we are in a position to make. A good psychologist or a psychoanalyst is a seeker, a student of one's own mind who knows the strengths of his own mind and also its weakness. Both are important things. Your weaknesses are as important as your strengths, because they are two aspects of the same mind. The incapacities of the mind and the unintelligent parts of the mind are its weaknesses, and the clarity that is present in the mind is its strength. So an assessment of the psychological capacity of each person is also to be conducted, every day, as accountants draw balance sheets and strike assets and liabilities, etc. It should be our duty every day, at least when we go to bed in the evening, to be a little bit wakeful about the activities that we are carrying on throughout the day and the output of our labour during that particular day. There is an asset and there is also a liability. We have done something which is worthwhile and we have also done something which is of no sense. Both these may be calculated inwardly and we may know ourselves to some extent when we retire at the close of the day. Let every day pass with a little bit of satisfaction that something has been done in the direction of the positivity of our life, in the direction of a rising up from the malaise of this abyss in which we are sunk unwittingly by the powers of our own senses.

The senses have ceased to be merely our instruments of activity. They are our masters, as it were. We are puppets pulled by the strings of these senses, and the power, the velocity and the tempestuous impetuosity of the senses is such that we do not seem to be anywhere there. We are just dragged as if by a powerful vehicle which is moving with force and in which we are seated. The time when the instruments of the senses were under our control has gone and the masters have become the servants. This is, again a caution that has to be instilled into our minds. Meditation is not an easy practice. It is not merely seatedness of the body; it is not a breathing exercise merely. It is not even a study of books and a little bit of musing over the contents of a text. It is, rather, a conscientious feeling within one's own self of one's being in the presence of the light of the goal which one is pursuing, or which one is, at least, expected to pursue. The difficulty in meditation arises on account of the powers that are contrarily emanating in our own bodies, in our minds. We have been born into a circumstance, socially and personally, which is not conducive to a positivity of attitude. We have to decondition our brains and our feelings to a large extent in order that we may be placed in a conducive spiritual atmosphere. There is no such thing as a spiritual atmosphere outside in the

world, because the world has been what it was centuries back and nothing has happened to it, and nothing may really happen. An atmosphere of spirituality has to be created within us by an adjustment of ourselves to the existing order of things. This is a very difficult thing to understand and a more difficult thing to practise. The world is not going to change merely because we give an order to the world that it may transform itself to our requirements. It is not the way, perhaps; the other way round is the truth. As a great passage in the Isavasya Upanishad tells us, “*Yathatathyatorthan vyadadhacchasvatibhyah samabhyah*”—there seems to be a great wisdom in the way in which God has created the world. We should not be under the impression that we are here to improve upon the creation of God. Nothing of the kind is necessary. That would be to cry a discomfiture of the wisdom of God Himself, to imagine that we are here to improve upon His creation. No improvement is necessary, and it is not possible. Because, as this passage says, God’s constitution or the ordinance from the very beginning of creation was so perfectly arranged that for eternity it need not be amended and it does not require any kind of change. From the beginning of creation to the end of the universe it is a perfection. This is a great dictum we read in this little passage from the Upanishad. The idea behind it is that perfection is not to be created by us. In fact what is perfect cannot be created, and a created thing is always imperfect. So perfection is something which is already there and our achievement or attainment of perfection is not a production of a perfection that is not already there, but an adjustment of ourselves or attunement of ourselves to the perfection that is already there. We do not create sunlight. We behold it by opening our eyes.

Thus, a kind of en rapport situation is introduced into our own feelings or understandings and volitions when we sit for meditation. A very important factor that we have to remember here is that it is not a work that we are performing as a labour under a master or an employer. A guru is compelling me to meditate or an ashram is forcing me to be in the order of its atmosphere of which meditation is a part. Nothing of the sort is the truth of meditation. It is a need that we feel within our own selves. Hunger is not something injected into you by orders issued by masters from outside. You feel a need, and it is the inward urge of yours. The soul affirms itself in meditation, even as the body affirms itself in hunger and thirst, and so on, in other ways. The affirmation of the Atman or the Soul, or Consciousness, whatever you would like to call it, is the actual practice of meditation. The affirmation of the Soul is, therefore, the assertion of its characters. The Soul is nothing but the qualities of which it is constituted. The property and the substance cannot be separated here. The property of the Supreme Being is the same as the existence of the Supreme Being; it is not like the objects that we see here in which the quality differs from the substance. The characteristics of the Self are the existence of the Self, and vice versa. Thus, an affirmation is induced to the mood of the mind in meditation.

What are the characteristics of the Self? A pervasiveness of Substance. This is very important to remember, again. The Substance is pervading all things, not merely as an airy ethereal quality imagined in the mind. It is a substantiality, and a hard substantiality which is nothing but the substantiality beyond the apparent substantiality of things, the truth that is behind the appearance of objects, and pervasive in the sense that it is undividedly present in all things. It is Akhanda-Akarasa-Satchidananda-Svarupa, as great masters have not been tired of telling us. Akhanda-Ekarasa is the truth or the character of the Self—undivided in the sense that it cannot be partitioned even by a conceptual spatiality. We cannot even imagine spatiality as a distinction in the

structure of the Self. Thus is its undividedness. It is homogeneous in its basic character—Ekarasa. It is Pure Existence, which means to say that all the existences of things in the world are nothing but the appearances of this basic Existence. We generally imagine that existence is an attribute, a character of objects. When we say, “a chair exists” or “a table exists”, or “some person exists”, we are unwittingly under the impression that existence is a quality of that object that exists. When we say, “a tree exists”, we think that the tree is the substance and “exists” is the predicate of the sentence. The subject is always regarded as superior to the predicate. In the sentence, “a tree exists”, “a chair exists”, “a table exists”, we imagine that the existence is a predicate of the subject which is the tree, the chair or the table. Nothing of the kind is the essentiality of things. The existence of God, or the existence of the Self, or the Ultimate Existence, is not a character of a thing that is the subject. It is not a predicate in a sentence. It is rather prior to the very thing itself. The tree is not the subject. It is the predicate rather, and the existence of the tree is the subject. This point has been elucidated in a very beautiful manner in some passages of the Panchadasi of Sage Vidyaranya. Existence is prior to the formation and the nomenclature of things. Name and form come afterwards; existence is the first principle. But we see, usually, name and form first and existence afterwards. This is a complete reversal in the process of our perception of things.

In the meditation on the Self we are to feel that the existence of this truth in us is prior to the name and the form which are superimposed on us and make us appear to be masters and mistresses, men, women and children, this or that. These are not our forms, nor our names. Neither are we men, nor are we women. Neither are we even human beings. Individuals we are not. We are not name, not form, but a substance which is the permeating element behind all names and forms. And it is a Sat (existence) that is aware that it exists. It is not a stony existence which is unconscious. We are intelligent. When I say, “I am”, I imply that I am conscious that I am. I am seated here and I am speaking to you. My statement that I am sitting here implies that I am conscious that I am sitting here. So is existence inseparable from the consciousness of existence. I am, means that I am conscious that I am, and so on. There is an association inseparably between Pure Being and the consciousness of that Being. Inasmuch as it is unfettered existence, free from the intermixture of names and forms and the relativities of space and time, it is unending ecstasy of joy, Ananda—Bliss. So it is Akhanda, Ekarasa, Satchidananda (Undivided Essence of Existence-Consciousness-Bliss). Such would be some of the ideas that we would do well to introduce into our minds in the practice of our meditations. Every day this practice has to continue, just as we do not miss a breakfast, a lunch or a supper. Whatever be the hectic activity in which we are involved, essentials are never to be forgotten. What could be more essential than this need of the soul which is the very vitality and the meaning behind our formative existence in the body and in society? And a little bit of scratching of the mind in the name of meditation may not be adequate. We cannot move a hill with a pinhead or a penknife. It requires a huge bulldozer to break it. Thus, a great effort is to be put forth in order to break through the shackles of spatio-temporal involvements and this unfortunate vehemence of our senses which insist that we are bodies and social elements only. Hard is the job. Difficult is the method and many are the obstacles, as everyone knows.

A protected time, a reasonably lengthy period of effort is to be allotted for this meditation. At least two sittings, in the morning and in the evening, would be necessary.

It does not mean that the moment you wake up you should run to have a cup of tea. That is not the point. When you wake up, a few minutes of meditation would be your duty because, at that particular hour, when you are just awake, you are most suited in the mood of your mind for an indrawn attitude. The vehement externality of perception has not started and the inertia or the lethargic mood of sleep has gone. Tamas has gone, Rajas has not started. So you are in a convenient hour, as a little flash of Sattva is latently there. Therefore, we have been told again and again that these particular few minutes would be one of the best moments for contemplating in this manner, and also the time when you go to bed. The last thought should be the best of thoughts. We should not carry with us worries, anxieties and tomorrow's problems when we go to bed. Who knows that tomorrow morning we would really wake up? Why should we worry and go to bed? The last thought is supposed to be the determining power of our future existence. Saints have told us in their messages that when we go to bed we may reasonably think it is the last day of our life. If we get up in the morning, it is a blessing from God, a Grace that He has extended to us. We may then be happy that a new lease has been given to us by the mercy of the Supreme Being. You know human history—what happened to people. Today something is, tomorrow it is not. Everything moves; nothing is. There is a transitoriness even in the most substantial of things, and even the most powerful men vanished like mist before the sun. When the early morning dawns, the person we know is nowhere in the world. So, strike your balance sheet with an asset every evening when you go to bed. And, I think, one of the latest men who was fond of thinking along these lines was Thomas Kempes who wrote the famous book called "The Imitation of Christ". And many other saints, like Tukaram, have been hammering on this point in their songs. Go to bed with the thought of your great goal, the great Master, the Creator, Paramatman. Even if this is to be the last day, it does not matter. You offer a last prayer to that Mighty Being and quit this air for a new and fresh one which is better. But let us not be under the impression that everything is in our hands. The destiny of the universe is in the hands of a power which has moulded destinies of all things in a manner transcendent to the conceptions of individuals. A practical note has to be stuck in our daily life, practical in the sense of a reality in our lives and not merely an imaginary, body-body attitude. One has to be very careful. We do not see even one inch ahead of us. Everything is dark, hazy and misty. Oftentimes it appears that one foot ahead is seen, and often even one foot ahead is not seen. Even the present is not clear; the past is dead. So there is a great chaos, a confusion in our minds.

With the kind blessings of the sages, who are compassionate enough to extend their grace to us, may we successfully endeavour on this difficult path of the spirit. We do not know which great masters are seated here even in this very hall, apart from the people who are visible to our naked eyes. There may be invisible presences here. We have the blessings of everyone, everywhere, if we could only learn the art of belonging to everyone, and to all things.