

Concentration and Meditation

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THIRD EDITION
REVISED AND ENLARGED

PUBLISHED BY
THE VEDANTA CENTRE
BOSTON . MASS . U . S . A

Reprinted from the Vedanta Monthly

"THE MESSAGE OF THE EAST"

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PRINTED IN U. S. A.

CONTENTS

	<i>Page No.</i>
I. CONCENTRATION	7
II. MEDITATION	19
III. AIDS TO MEDITATION	33
IV. SUPERCONSCIOUS VISION	49
V. PRACTICAL HINTS	64
a. Fixity of Purpose	64
b. Practice of Concentration	66
c. Methods of Meditation	72

I.

CONCENTRATION

WE all possess the faculty of concentration, but with the majority it is instinctive and automatic, not conscious. Even among the animals we see how a lion or tiger will gather his strength by a moment of absolute stillness before he springs upon his prey; that automatic, instinctive power of concentration is embedded in every living creature. But until we can gain conscious command over our mental and spiritual forces, we can never have complete concentration. When the scattered mind is gathered together it is like a bright searchlight, and by it man is able to investigate the latent powers which he possesses but of which he is not now wholly aware. As he grows more conscious of these hidden forces and learns to use them, he becomes more and more proficient.

We never wish to be defeated and yet how often our strength of mind or our physical capacities prove inadequate. It is because we have not the full and conscious possession of our whole being. Man cannot achieve much unless he has free use of his hands and feet, free use of his eyes and ears, free use of his muscles and above all free use of his mind and intelligence. But how many of us have the free use of all these? When we would make use of them we find them hopelessly scattered and rebellious to our will. The cause of this does not lie in any inherent lack of power, but in our inability to co-ordinate, and in our lack of definite one-pointed purpose. We miss the mark because we do not set our aim properly.

Once in ancient India there was a tournament held to test marksmanship in archery. A wooden fish was set up on a high pole and the eye of the fish was the target. One by one many valiant princes

came and tried their skill but in vain. Before each one shot his arrow the teacher asked him what he saw and invariably all replied that they saw a fish on a pole at a great height, with head, eyes, etc.; but Arjuna as he took his aim said: "I see the eye of the fish," and he was the only one who succeeded in hitting the mark.

A similar incident is given by the Chinese sage, Chuang-Tzu: "The man who forged swords for the Minister of War was eighty years of age. Yet he never made the slightest slip in his work. The Minister of War said to him: 'Is it your skill, sir, or have you any method?' 'It is concentration,' replied the man. 'When twenty years old, I took to forging swords. I cared for nothing else. If a thing was not a sword, I did not notice it. I availed myself of whatever energy I did not use in other directions in order to secure greater efficiency in the direction required.' "

Concentration means wholeness, unity, equilibrium. The hands, feet, mind, all our members and faculties must be unified. They must all work in harmony, in tranquillity and balance. Balance is needed everywhere in life. A man may be over-active or he may be idle; both indicate absence of self-adjustment. Sri Krishna declares in the Gita: "O Arjuna, the practice of Yoga is not for him who eats too much or who does not eat at all, nor for him who sleeps too much or who keeps awake in excess. He who is moderate in eating and recreation, moderate in his efforts in work, moderate in sleep and wakefulness, his practice of Yoga destroys all misery." What does this signify? That he who goes to extremes is a slave of impulse, he is not the master. He lacks balance and lack of balance means lack of strength and without strength no great work can be accomplished. If on the contrary we practise

moderation or equilibrium even in our most ordinary daily tasks, we shall see how steady will be our gain in concentration.

The practice of moderation necessitates a certain amount of self-discipline. The Hindus call this *Tapas*, which literally means "fire" or "heat," and they believe that unless this fire of self-discipline is lighted in order to burn to ashes all the impurities and limitations of our system, spiritual illumination will be impossible. But here too extremes must be avoided. Often people through misunderstanding or over-enthusiasm torture and strain themselves in the hope of advancing more rapidly, but they defeat their own end. Excessive penance or mortification is as harmful as self-indulgence. The purpose of all discipline is to make our constitution more enduring, more adaptable and more responsive. Body and mind must be made wholly obedient to the will and independent of external circumstances.

The person who is a slave to physical comforts should gradually eliminate all that is superfluous and train himself to be content with the bare necessities. Any one who finds it difficult to overcome physical lethargy and rise early in the morning should drag himself out of bed by sheer force of will. One who is inclined to over-eating should by degrees reduce the quantity of his food. A person who has the habit of talking unnecessarily should practise stillness by persistent control of all useless motions. Such practices not only increase our power of concentration and meditation, but do much to improve our bodily health and make us happier in every way.

The mind falls naturally into three general states:—the dull state; the over-active or scattered state; and the calm, centred state. These correspond to the three *Gunas* or qualities of matter, called in Sanskrit *Tamas*, *Rajas* and *Sattwa*.

They are innate in every living being and manifest in the human mind as the subconscious, the conscious and the super-conscious. The first quality is that of darkness, inertia, heaviness, the brute state. When the mind is overcome by this quality, it lacks in power to differentiate between right and wrong and is easily carried away by lower animal passions.

The second quality is that of excessive ambition, egotism, arrogance and discontent. When this quality is in ascendancy, a man is consumed by feverish unrest and an irresistible desire to multiply possessions and to entangle himself more and more in external undertakings. His energies are scattered and often wasted. No matter how much he achieves, he is never satisfied; for the flame of his desire mounts with each new gratification as a fire fed by fresh fuel. With the quality of *Sattwa* the mind grows collected, serene and illumined. This is the fitting state

for spiritual attainment. In order to reach it the condition of dullness or inertia must be conquered by stimulating all the physical and mental activities. Then these activities must be regulated and directed until they are focused. The sub-conscious must be brought into complete subjection to the conscious and the conscious must be expanded into the superconscious. This is the natural process in acquiring the power of concentration and meditation.

Meditation is inseparable from concentration. When the mind has gained its full strength through singleness, it naturally becomes meditative. Often the mind is compared to a lake. If the surface is absolutely smooth—not a ripple—then we can see clearly what lies beneath. Similarly when this mind becomes calm, when the wind of uncontrolled desire does not constantly create ripples over the surface of it, then the image of our true nature is

not broken and we obtain a perfect reflection of what we are in reality and what our relation is with the Supreme Intelligence. As long as the mind is agitated, so long our vision can never be unerring. We are constantly hoping that some one else may give us knowledge and happiness, but that is not possible. These can only come from within.

What we need is to be active spiritually. As we go on living our outer life, we must devote some time each day to making our mind introspective, that we may develop our subtler powers of perception. In all investigations certain instruments are necessary, as we see scientists inventing finer and finer instruments for their researches. Also for spiritual observation we need a form of mind which can discern the subtler things imperceptible to our ordinary sense faculties. The concentrated mind is such an instrument and the only one fitted for higher research. It is

like a focused light. We know that when light is dissipated we cannot see well, but when the scattered rays are brought together by the help of a shade or reflector, then everything grows distinct. So will the hidden powers of the universe be revealed to us when through determined and steadfast practice we gather up the present forces of our mind, which is now weak only because it is disorganized and divided.

We must not remain content, however, with the lower forms of concentration. These may bring us physical health, prosperity or success, because concentration always gives power; but even though we acquire more wealth, greater honor or increased bodily strength, we shall find that one part of our being still remains unsatisfied in spite of all our worldly acquisitions. Never will it be content until we awaken and begin to work for our higher development. Nor should such work be

regarded as selfish, because all human beings are bound together and as we unfold our own spiritual nature we cannot fail to benefit others. The same life runs through and through everywhere; and only he who can seize hold of that subtle spiritual being hidden in every heart, will know how to solve the riddle of this human existence for himself and be able to render lasting help to his fellow-men. That one alone lives happily and fearlessly. Now we are fearful because so many things are hidden from us: we fear the future because we do not know what the future may bring; we fear death because we are not sure what may come after. For this reason we must learn to focus the mind and turn it within, then by its brilliant light we shall understand all things and attain the vision of Truth.

The purpose of meditation is to gain that vision. Nor must we stop until we have seen by direct perception our true

Self and our relation with the Supreme. That must be the purpose of all our spiritual practice. When the mind becomes fixed on the Supreme Being, when through meditation we are united with that Power, then we have fullness of vision. This is called the superconscious state or *Samadhi*. As we concentrate on That which is All-Light, the darkness of mind and body will vanish; for what we constantly think upon, that we become. There is only one Power, one Intelligence, one Mind, which is God, and our mind is nothing but a reflex of that Universal Mind. As it works separate from that Mind, it remains unintelligent, ignorant, powerless; but when it becomes united with It, it attains a state of complete illumination: "After having attained which no other gain seems greater; being established wherein man is not overwhelmed even by great sorrow."

II.

MEDITATION

WHEN the mind is poised and well concentrated, the Supreme Self of man becomes visible. At other times we do not see the real man and the apparent man thinks himself all in all. The Seer or higher Self is there, but we are not conscious of it. When, however, the mind becomes poised, the Self appears in its true state and we do not have to make any effort to perceive it. In the Mundaka-Upanishad these two selves of man are compared to two birds on a tree. One sits aloft, calm, serene, immersed in its own glory; the other jumps from limb to limb, eating the sweet and bitter fruits of the tree. Each time it tastes a bitter fruit, it looks towards the other bird and beholding it calm, contented, shining, its grief passes away.

So long as there is any disturbance in our mind, we cannot get the vision of our true Self. All these waves—in the form of selfishness, ambition, desires—must subside. The mind must be made one-pointed. When a man attains this, he sees the Self. At other times he identifies himself with some passing adjunct of mind like anger or jealousy or fear. If we analyze, we shall see that when any one speaks harshly to us, the word is first outside us, then it enters into us and we grow angry. At first anger and we are separate; then we become one, we identify ourselves with it and we suffer. The wise man, however, does not identify himself with these states or modifications of mind and body. He does everything like other people, — eats, sleeps, works — but his actions differ from others because he knows the distinction between the true Self and the ego. He realizes that all these outer things only exist because the

Self is behind them and he is only conscious of That, so he goes through the various experiences of life without being affected by them.

As long as we identify ourselves with conditions, we suffer; but when we cease to identify ourselves with these passing conditions, we never really suffer. At present our mind is going in many directions. We must turn it and direct it towards a fixed goal. We must train it to differentiate itself from its modifications. Now, if something agreeable happens, we feel pleasure; if something disagreeable comes, we feel pain. But this pleasure and pain are only momentary; and when in both we can keep our mind steady, we gain lasting concentration.

The mind manifests in various states. The first is the scattered state (*Vikshipta*). In this state the thought moves hither and thither without any sense of responsibility. We may be sitting here, but our mind may

be travelling hundreds of miles away. So long as it is thus wandering and scattered, the Yogis say, we can never accomplish anything; nor can we hope to find peace. Yet it is only a state. The mind is not that, it merely lacks the power to separate itself from the conditions which have covered it. In opposition to this is the state of dullness or slothfulness, in which the mind does not wish to exert itself in any direction. Not that there is no desire. It is full of desires, but it is overpowered by a heaviness which keeps it from making the necessary effort to satisfy them.

Then there is the concentrated state (*Ekagra*), which is the final aim of Yoga. This is the state of union, for the power of concentration leads to union or communion with God. It makes us one with the object of worship. The first practice in acquiring this concentrated state is to hold the mind to one point, the object of

our search. No modification must be allowed in it. When we have accomplished this, if we can then hold our thought absolutely steady for twelve seconds, this will constitute a *Dhyana* or meditation; and twelve of these will give *Samadhi*. That is, twelve such meditations will bring superconscious vision. So long as there is a sense of division in the mind and we are struggling to concentrate, there cannot be meditation; for meditation means a state of collectiveness or unity of thought. At present our mind is in constant struggle. It will not obey; but we must make it obey. We have indulged it all our life from our childhood; now when we try to make it obey it rebels. Therefore our practice must be carried on with firmness and perseverance. When the mind finds that we will not obey it, then it will obey us. The same is true of the body, for that which makes both body and mind act is Spirit.

Yoga means uniting ourselves with the object of our search. It also means disuniting the mind from disturbing influences. Like a driver who restrains his horses and makes them go as he wills, since otherwise they will run away with him, so we must control our senses; for the senses are like horses, the mind is like the reins, and only by holding firmly to it can we keep control over these horses of our senses. If we do not, they will drag us away. We must begin by fixing our mind on our Ideal. At first we may have to practise fixing it on some picture or outer object. But this external concentration is a very low form. It is better to have some inner Ideal. If we can hold the thought of purity or of some pure being in our mind, while that is there, there will be no room for impurity; and if we continue this practice, little by little the mind will become pure. By thus holding the thought on purity, if only for three or four minutes,

we shall be like different beings; we shall be so filled with peace, power and light.

In order to do this, however, we must bring our mind into perfect harmony with our Ideal. If we begin to think of purity and then unkind thoughts against someone rise, we cannot hold the thought of purity. We may have the most beautiful flowers, we may have incense, we may have holy pictures; but until our mind is pure, that is, until it is one-pointed and fixed on the Ideal, we shall never know holiness. When our mind rests firmly in love, holiness and purity, nothing can overwhelm us. Any outside condition can be overcome through the power of concentration, because the mind, when focused, becomes strong and is able to shut out whatever disturbs it. The scattered mind is like a single thread, it can be broken easily; but the concentrated mind is like many pieces of thread twisted together and difficult to break. Therefore

we must govern all our thoughts and hold our mind steadily on the object of our concentration. When we can make our mind absolutely harmonious with our Ideal, then alone we are peaceful; for all unhappiness comes from friction or duality.

If the mind is concentrated, we do not hear sounds, we do not see anything; all our senses are in abeyance. External sounds, external vision, all external sense perceptions, therefore, can be overcome by concentration; and intensity of concentration leads to meditation. Meditation, however, is not an easy thing. It means feeling the presence of God within. The highest form of meditation is not thinking of any external object. This means fixing the mind on the Real, the Unchangeable. An artist's mind is fixed on some object in nature and he succeeds in painting a beautiful picture. But this is changeable. If, however, he carries his thought on to the idea of beauty beyond

the object, then he may attain meditation. At first we may have to picture some object in our mind, but if we go on to the reality behind it, our mind becomes one-pointed and we perceive the Truth.

Ordinarily we can only see a person who is near; we cannot see one who is far. Meditation is the power which enables us to see and draw near to a person thousands of miles away. Sometimes this meditation comes in sleep. Again we may have a pure vision and by meditating on that we may acquire wisdom. Wisdom means steadiness, balance. When the mind is balanced, then we have clear vision. So we must make our minds steady. When a man gains a steady mind, he can penetrate any veil, external or internal, as light penetrates darkness. Lack of concentration creates a veil and our vision is clouded; but the moment we concentrate our mind, we pierce through the veil and at once see clearly. Through

concentration we develop extraordinary sense perceptions. We sense things which other people cannot. If some one holds unkind thoughts, we perceive it; and if any one holds a loving thought, we feel that at once also. But this does not mean that we suffer more. We dwell closer to God and can feel more keenly what others feel; also we can sympathize better. Only that one really suffers who lives in ignorance and selfishness. .

Another way of reaching the superconscious state is by meditating on the heart of one who is holy and pure—an effulgent being. This may be inside or outside. We see this in the case of St. Francis of Assisi, who as the result of his constant meditation on Christ is said to have received the marks of the stigmata. In India there are hundreds of such examples where the disciple, by meditating on the Master who has become one with God, also becomes one with God. From this

has come the idea of being freed from all sins and sorrows by holding the thought on a Saviour or a holy character; because, Patanjali says in his Yoga teaching, whatever our mind dwells upon, we become joined to that. Our thought forms a point of connection between us and the object thought of. Hence as our mind dwells on holy things, we become holy. So strong is this power of thought to change the character that Sri Krishna declares in the Bhagavad-Gita: "Even if the most wicked worshippeth Me with undivided devotion, he should be regarded as good, for he is rightly resolved. Very soon doth he become a righteous soul and attaineth to eternal peace."

As with good, so with evil. If evil enters our mind, it is because we have attracted it by our thought. Whenever we think of evil, we unite ourselves with it. So we must be careful what we fix our thought upon. The mind is always

concentrated on something. It is constantly active and so is the body. If, therefore, we wish to take care for our welfare, we must observe on what our mind dwells. The saint is always watchful. He does not let his mind run away. He never lets go of it or allows it to be disturbed by any condition of life. As a loving wife keeps her thought fixed on her absent husband and thus unites herself with him; so if we keep our thought fixed on the Lord, we shall become united with Him.

We must, however, have sincerity of purpose. We must not merely seek a comfortable road to Truth. We must strive to cultivate staunchness of feeling and an ardent devoted spirit. Devotion gives us steadfastness in resolution. If we are interested in one thing to-day, another to-morrow, we shall never attain concentration. We shall only fritter away our energies. First we must take an

Ideal. Then we must think of it, become absorbed in it, lose ourselves in it. There must be nothing in our mind except our Ideal. When we have pure devotion for the one Ideal, that is concentration. When the mind through such devotion is properly collected, its power becomes tremendous and it carries us quickly to the realization of Truth.

Real faith and devotion to our Ideal will come when we have attained a certain amount of perception. To gain it we must first pay attention to external observances and practices; next we must make the mind introspective; then concentration and meditation will follow. In *Samadhi*, the state of perfect peace and bliss, the body is controlled by the mind and the mind is controlled by the Self. This consciousness of ours is only a reflex of the universal consciousness and as we learn more and more to make ourselves open to its light we gain greater and

greater illumination. This is a privilege which belongs to all. But we can hasten it by responding to the call of the Spirit and obtain it very much sooner. This inherent light of the Spirit may at times seem dim and indistinct. Sometimes our mind with its cloud of worry and anxieties may hide its brightness, but in spite of all adverse vicissitudes this divine, unfailing spark in us ever comes to our rescue for it is self-existent and self-effulgent. The Soul is omnipotent. It may remain under a cloud for a time, but in the end it is bound to reach the highest state of spiritual effulgence.

III.

AIDS TO MEDITATION

BEFORE we can take up any spiritual practice the mind must become well established in the fundamental ethical principles, such as non-injuring, non-stealing, truthfulness, continence, external and internal purity, contentment, control of the senses, study of the Scriptures and self-surrender. This means that we must not give way to jealousy, anger, hatred or unkindness by thought, word or action; we must not covet or envy; we must speak the truth fearlessly; we must observe chastity, inner and outer cleanliness and self-restraint; and we must be faithful in our higher study and in devotion to our Ideal. Until these are firmly fixed in the heart, no amount of outer practice can help us; for the foundation must be right before we can

construct a solid building, and the building of our character or spiritual structure can never be solid unless we are well grounded in these moral qualities. They are also essential to tranquillity of mind, for unless we can look within and find ourselves above reproach, we can never enjoy peace or serenity. Christ said "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." If we have anything in our life that is not in accordance with our spiritual principles, no amount of sitting still and trying to meditate will bring us the blessing of contemplation.

The next step is the practice of posture; that is, one must learn to sit properly. You may ask: "What can that have to do with our spiritual progress?" We imagine that we can sit in any way we

wish, but that is not true. Unless the mind is balanced, we cannot sit still even for a few seconds; also if our body is not in a good condition, the mind cannot help thinking of it and it is difficult for it to gain absolute tranquillity. The idea of posture, therefore, is to acquire firmness of both mind and body. We learn to sit in a manner in which we are as little conscious as possible of our physical existence; thus our mind is not dragged down by the weight of the body and it more easily grows calm. One who has not proper control over his body cannot make proper use of his mind, he can never concentrate—much less can he meditate. A man who lacks mastery over the physical organism cannot possibly gain spiritual consciousness; hence the need to practise posture.

In the beginning we may have to force the body to be still. We do this by making up our mind that for a stated time we

shall hold our body in a certain position with balance and stability. By doing this from day to day we overcome physical restlessness as well as physical lethargy. How often we feel overpowered by our bodily conditions, the body does not want to do a thing and at once we yield. Perhaps it does not feel well and so we sacrifice our spiritual study. This means that the body is proving its supremacy over the mind, which should never be. The practice of posture will help us to gain control of the body, so that it will not interfere with our mind and we can become less conscious of our physical and more conscious of our spiritual nature. The chief suggestion with regard to posture is to hold the spinal column in an easy, erect position, for we find that most of the conditions of ill-health arise from disorders in the spinal column. The position of the spine has much to do with the breath and with the flow of life-force. Unless it is properly

held, neither the breathing nor the circulation of the nerve currents can be normal.

There are people who are not used to sitting straight and at first it will be very difficult for them; but after a little effort it will become easy and natural and then the mind will have greater freedom to think. When we have learned to hold ourselves in an erect, easy, natural way, the mind will be able to go upward. As long as the body keeps moving we cannot focus and elevate our thought. We know that a telescope needs to be steady before we can focus the lens and observe the stars or planets; similarly these instruments of body and mind must be steady before we can have clear inner vision. *Asana* or posture means a steadfast feeling. We feel no wavering anywhere, our body is well established, our mind is well established, neither disturbs our balance and thus we acquire a state of perfect equilibrium.

Breath is the next thing to be considered. "What can breath have to do with our spiritual development?" you may ask again. Breath is life. It is the medium through which the life current flows into us, permeating our whole being and sustaining us. We know that a person has ceased to live, that the life current is no longer working in him when he has lost the power to breathe, and we say that "he has breathed his last." Now we breathe automatically, involuntarily, unconsciously; we must learn to breathe consciously, properly and rhythmically. Through breath alone we can create such a rhythm within the body that it will restore health. *Pranayama* means controlling the life-force by controlling the breath. When we understand how to do this, we can fill ourselves with *Prana* or life-force and eliminate all impurities.

We all breathe, but we do not derive the proper benefit from our breathing. This

is because we do not consciously regulate our breath. Breath is controlled by thought. If we observe, we shall see that whenever our mind is very restless, our breathing becomes irregular. Also when the body is ill, the breath becomes disordered. It is because we have lost the rhythm, everything is thrown out of balance and the result is a disturbance in both our physical and mental health. To avoid this, the Yogis tell us to cultivate the habit of rhythmic breathing and this will enable us to store up the vital energy we have within us. When our inhaling and exhaling become even, it affects us just like a musical rhythm, creating harmony throughout our system.

After these preparatory steps, the next is to make the mind introspective. It is all very well to have some one tell us to look within, that only there shall we realize the Truth; but how to go within? We cannot do it suddenly, because of the

hold the body has over us. Our mind also is divided and claimed by many things. To detach ourselves from our bodily conditions and make our mind one-pointed requires steady effort. Sometimes we grow discouraged and want to give up; but those are the moments when we must hold firmly and not let our spirit be depressed or allow ourselves to fall back. Arjuna says to Sri Krishna in the Bhagavad-Gita: Do not be depressed; even this mind which seems so unyielding and difficult to subdue, will become your obedient servant through constant practice of dispassion and discrimination.

Intensity of purpose is what brings concentration. When we really feel devoted to an Ideal, then nothing can hold us back; we shall surmount every difficulty. At first we may have to make a great effort, but if we really yearn for spiritual things, our mind will naturally become single. Singleness is what we want. The

ideal of Yoga and of all philosophy and religion is to make the mind single, the heart single, the purpose single; for all sages and seers recognize that in this singleness lies the whole secret of realization. Christ says that the eye and heart must be single before we can see God or Truth.

Holding the mind to one point means controlling all the waves or modifications which rise on its surface. You know that in order to put a thread through the eye of a needle, you have to twist the thread to a point; if you do not, it is a difficult task to put it through. Similarly the mind, which has become divided through its varied interests, must be made single before it can penetrate into the depths of our being. This does not necessarily mean that we cannot take interest in other things, that we must give up everything; singleness means that we are able to put our whole force into whatever we under-

take, and through this concentrated energy we see more clearly and accomplish things more quickly. Concentrating our mind on ordinary external objects, however, gives us only limited results; but when we can direct our thought on inner spiritual objects:—on infinite strength, infinite wisdom, infinite love or purity; on the effulgent flame of life seated in the heart; on anything through which the current of divine life is running; we find that our mind becomes quickened and all its latent qualities are awakened. The mind takes the color of whatever it dwells upon, and by bringing it in contact with spiritual things it becomes purified and strengthened.

We must not think that the aim of these spiritual practices is to gain a little bit of physical health or a little bit of mental power; their main object is to free the soul. Freedom means completeness, no lack anywhere—no lack of knowledge, no

lack of power, no lack of anything. Before we can realize this and release the soul from bondage, we must go through certain practices in order to form fixed spiritual habits and entirely wipe out past impressions. We have to choose the Ideal upon which to concentrate according to our own individual need or inclination. One cannot go contrary to one's natural spiritual instinct. Whether we recognize it or not, we have within ourselves a spiritual instinct just as we have a physical instinct, and this spiritual instinct must be our guide in choosing our Ideal. Having chosen, we must follow this Ideal in spite of failures, in spite of obstructions in the way; day by day we must hold it before us; and if we forget it, we must bring our mind back to it. In this way the mind grows unwavering and one-pointed, we can easily follow a thought without interruption and meditation becomes possible.

No one else can give us an adequate idea of what meditation is, of the value or the ecstasy of it; we can never know until we ourselves taste it. Then only does the soul become wakeful, become itself, enter into its own element. Why is it we suffer? Because we come in contact with so many things that are not in harmony with our real nature. Meditation eliminates all such foreign elements from our thoughts. But this practice of exclusion is not to make us more narrow and bound, it is to help us collect our forces. Wherever we have an unusual task we always try to store up our energies and have a reserve to call upon. So before we undertake the practice of meditation, we must have so collected and stored our forces that we shall not be wanting in strength, either physically or mentally.

Often people fail to realize a desired end because of the lack of collectedness in body and mind. So Patanjali, the great

teacher of Yoga, tells us that we must protect ourselves from the very outset. If we neglect to make the foundation strong, the superstructure cannot be satisfactory. Many people do not gain spiritual vision because they have not paid proper attention to the preliminary stages. When we are well established in our first practices, then the other things will come naturally. The higher study not only deals with the spiritual nature, it also deals with our human nature. We must discipline and gain mastery over the whole of our being. But we must do everything gradually. This is one of the great things we must bear in mind. We must not be impatient and overdo. What we need in all practice is moderation; then we shall go steadily forward, doing each day a little more according to our capacity. We must not put too much pressure either on our body or our mind; but if we are patient and persevering, soon we shall find

that things which seemed impossible to conquer have been conquered.

This life is not a matter of a few seconds. It did not spring from just this little beginning; it has had a past and it will have a future, so there is no need for undue hurry. If we have imperfections, we can overcome them; and whatever virtues we possess, we did something to earn them and we can earn more. Understanding this, we should strive to take up these practices and carry them on with perseverance and an undepressed heart; then we shall gradually overcome all obstacles.

One little glimpse of higher things, one little proof will strengthen our faith on our journey. First we hear about a thing; then we reflect; and after thinking and reasoning, a flash of light comes and proves to us that what we heard is true. Just one little flash is enough to give us confidence to go on; then comes another

and then another, until at last the whole Truth shines. At first it comes only once in a while. One day perhaps we feel great serenity, a great sense of illumination, then it disappears. Again we persevere and again it comes and remains a little longer. So we go on until some day it comes and stays with us. But this is only possible through constant meditation. To make it a permanent factor in our life we must practise steadily.

We cannot gain any vital end without supreme effort. This supreme effort we must make within ourselves, and we must persevere until the meditative life has become perfectly natural to us. This means creating a new habit. We have formed certain physical habits and it is not difficult for us to follow these; but we have not formed a habit of meditation; therefore it seems unnatural and difficult and we often grow discouraged. Let us form the habit of faithful practice. In-

stead of dwelling on petty things and devoting our energy to small personal aims, we must hold our mind on larger ends. As we release it from the bondage of selfish concerns and fix it on noble worshipful thoughts, we shall find that it will become more and more independent and free. At first it may not feel at home in the spiritual realm; but very soon it will begin to feel at home there; then no matter how it may be engaged, always like the needle of a compass it will keep itself pointed towards the Ideal.

Only in the Infinite, the Unchanging, do we find a firm basis for our meditation. But to enter into relationship with That we must consecrate ourselves. We must have firmness of determination. We must seek and pray and yearn for it. We must not stop until our mind gains direct contact with the all-effulgent Spirit. It is in this spiritual union that the soul attains its highest illumination.

IV.

SUPERCONSCIOUS VISION

SEEING supernaturally is one of the great dreams of all mystics, devotees and seekers. What does it mean to see supernaturally? Does our normal vision become abnormal? Some people imagine that this is the case. The idea of meditation and of superconscious vision to an average person seems very indefinite, abstract and wholly alien to practical everyday life. But there can be nothing of greater practical value to a man than this deeper sight. What is the basis of life? Can one succeed by clinging to the point of view of mere physical existence? Those who are absorbed in the material believe that the habit of meditation decreases ambition and energy. It is one of the accusations made against those who take up the contemplative life that they lack ambition.

But what is ambition? Is it enough to be ambitious to acquire wealth, to accumulate possessions, to gain worldly name and power; or should we have another kind of ambition? Is it wrong to be ambitious spiritually? One who is ambitious for spiritual attainment is willing to make any sacrifice to gain it. The man who has not this point of view, may laugh at the one who thus sacrifices his material advantage. But the question is, which is the more lasting and which sheds the greater amount of light on our path and on that of our fellow-beings? This should be the basis of comparison. Whether we want to walk in the darkness alone or whether we want to offer up all our aspirations, our faculties, our will and mind to God and walk in His light; whether we want to follow the impulses of our body or to gather up our forces and let the higher principle within govern us; these are questions very close to every

human heart and the answers to them come only from within through meditation.

Meditation is not a visionary abstraction. It does not mean that we sit in a corner and become selfish or morbid and indifferent to everything else in life. On the contrary, all our sympathies are quickened, our perceptions grow keener, our feelings deepen and we perform our duties with greater efficiency. We do not lose our present consciousness, but it becomes enlarged. We do not lose any feeling of sympathy or love, we have a more abundant supply. It is not death to the mortal side of man when he attains a higher state of consciousness. It does not mean the extinction of his present self, but the quickening of a larger Self. The lesser light is swallowed up in a bigger light. The lesser light still exists, but it is merged in the greater glory of the larger light.

As long as we are guided by self-will and swept by the ordinary impulses of life, we never find happiness or rest. It is the contemplative man who is full of joy and peace. He is not carried away by his lower impulses. He exercises perfect control over all his faculties and powers, and he gains this control through meditation. Meditation means the unbroken flow of the thought towards some object. There are people who meditate on material things and there are others who just as naturally hold their mind fixed on the spiritual. According to where we place our thought do we gain the result. Whatever a man thinks, that he becomes. This is the law. What a man's mind dwells upon, according to that his life and character are moulded, also his destiny.

We have free will to direct our mind either in one way or another. Constantly we are moulding our life by the thoughts we are thinking. We can avoid all evil

and unclean, detrimental thoughts if we wish; but more often we do not wish nor do we exert ourselves. Some one provokes or injures us and that person will rise in our mind more often than the one who has given us spiritual inspiration. The mind can become in this way very treacherous. Yet it is not the fault of the mind. It is the fault of the training we give to it. The mind has the power of retention; and when we train it to retain only that which is helpful to us and to discard that which is harmful, we advance quickly. If we begin to hold certain thoughts, we see the effect immediately; also whatever we allow our mind to associate with, we absorb the quality of that. If we come in contact with a person who is dull, heavy, ignorant, lethargic, very soon we also begin to feel heavy and dull. In the same way when we come in contact with one who is inspiring, radiant and spiritual, those same qualities rise up in us.

Either consciously or unconsciously we have formed our present habits of mind, and to build a new set of habits means tremendous zeal and steadfast effort. By intelligent reasoning and discrimination every one can know the right path to follow. There is a right instinct in us all which tells us what to do and what to avoid; but very few of us have the strength, stability, and determination to keep that right path constantly before the mind and follow it. Why is this? Because we have so many wrong impressions in the mind. We have to create a new set of impressions and there is nothing which can help us do this so quickly as the practice of concentration and meditation. In the Vedanta teaching there is no need whatsoever for any one to be despondent, believing that it is too late for him to begin or that he is unfitted for spiritual striving. It matters not how unfitted we may appear to be, we can always over-

come. The key is in our own hand. We do not need a different kind of mind to follow the path of meditation and attain higher consciousness. It is the same mind which creates bondage for us and which liberates us. It is the same mind which makes us happy or miserable. The difference lies wholly in the training it has received.

We all have moments of exaltation and inspiration. The question is how to follow them up. No surer means can be found than the practice of meditation. There are no set rules for meditation, as there are no set rules for spiritual evolution in any form. Various suggestions are offered us by the great philosophies and religions of the world and we must absorb them according to our capacity. From beginning to end the path of meditation teaches us that it is not the letter which saves us; it is from the Spirit within that we receive the revelation and it

comes to us when we reach the superconscious state. As we practise meditation, gradually our consciousness extends. Instead of centering it in our little being and relating ourselves through it to one little environment or group, we begin to feel the pulse of the universe. The heart of the universe takes possession of our heart and the great cosmic life begins to surge through our life.

In India they say that there are three different states of consciousness—waking, dreaming and sound sleep. In the first, although a man may appear to be awake and may seem to know and feel and do, yet he is not free from error. In the dream state between sleep and waking he is still not free from error. In sound sleep his active consciousness is dormant. But there is a fourth state, where a man does not make any mistakes, where he feels and knows unerringly, because he has come so close to the heart of the Infinite

that he has no self-will left to hinder him. When our individual consciousness thus becomes merged in the universal consciousness, we do not lose our identity. Buddha did not lose anything when he attained Nirvana. He dropped the limiting, finite self and he became the Awakened One. This awaking of the higher consciousness comes to us when we drop the bondage of our lower nature; but we have to strive for it, and we can accomplish it only through persistent effort.

Meditation means forming the habit of unbroken thought. Whatever we think with singleness of heart becomes meditation. The power to meditate is a wonderful gift, but it cannot come suddenly. If we have not formed the habit of excluding all non-essential thoughts and distractions from our mind, it will not come to us; it cannot. Therefore we must begin to train the mind. This path is not for the

careless person. It is for those who live every moment with thoughtfulness and with vigilance. We can all acquire this gift. Without it life is very empty. Accumulating material possessions does not fortify our happiness; it is the finding of the inward light. No priest or minister, no gospel or form of religion, can open the door for us to that unbounded source of spiritual blessing. We ourselves must open it, through yearning and well-directed effort.

The spiritual goal cannot be attained through material means. We need the hand of God to lead us. Our steps are faltering without His guidance, our will is frail, our mind is full of error; but if we turn our thought unfailingly towards the Divine, our nature gradually becomes transformed. But how may we meditate on God, you may ask. If God is our Father and Mother, if He is the one from Whom we have descended, certainly there

cannot be any closer bond than that which exists between God and ourselves. Why then should there be any reluctance or any hesitancy on our part to go directly to Him and ask Him how we shall meditate, in what way we shall call upon Him? The great Saviours and saints tell us that we must be born again as little children, if we would enter the kingdom of God. As the little child goes to its mother, in the same way we must be willing to go to the great Divine Mother as little children and lay all our troubles at Her feet. It is the self-conscious person who has endless troubles and distractions and miseries. The selfless person has always a sense of serenity. He can meditate.

We may not have the same power in the beginning, but we all possess it intrinsically. There is not one who is not equipped with all the finest possibilities; but no one else can bring them out for us.

No one can drink for us and quench our thirst; no one can eat for us and nourish our body. We have to do it for ourselves and meditation will help. The contemplative life does not mean that we go apart and lose all practical usefulness, or that we cease to contribute our share towards the good of humanity. On the contrary we pray and meditate in order that we may have greater power, greater ability, greater clearness of vision. Then whatever we contribute will be the gift of God. That is what the superconscious man does. He does nothing with self-conscious feeling. He does not even write a sentence thinking that he is doing it. We say "Thy will be done"; but when it comes to actual practice, we use our own will. There is no contradiction in the life of the superconscious man.

We make the best use of our human life by putting the Divine into it. The human life by itself can easily become barren

and burdensome. If we feel that our life is full of darkness and despondency, it is because we have not given access to the Divine. We have not brought in the divine light and this is the reason why it remains in darkness. Why not bring in that light? Why not open that gate of our heart? Why close it to that one thing which can revive us? God has not created man with two hearts. He has not given him a divided mind. It is we who divide ourselves through our complex desires and ambitions and our self-will. So long as we are weak, our understanding will be clouded and incorrect; but when all our forces are gathered up in a one-pointed, aspiring, contemplative life, we shall begin to see clearly. Through the practice of meditation we cannot in any way lose our efficiency. People who have developed the power of meditation are always the most efficient. Whatever they do is invariably well done.

We must not imagine that our spiritual life and our life in the world cannot blend in harmony. If they do not, there is something wrong in us. It means that our inner and our outer life are not coinciding, that we are hypocrites. We think one thing and do another. When the inner and the outer blend, when our thoughts and our acts are the reproduction of one and the same ideal, then we may know that we are living in accord with the Highest. And meditation is the chief means in accomplishing this. It helps us to direct our action. Before we do anything if we fortify ourselves by the light of meditation, we are not apt to make mistakes and we do not have to waste any time undoing what we have done. When we are inspired and fortified by contact with the inner Source of strength and wisdom, we cannot go very far wrong. When we have made God the foundation of our

life, then whatever we construct on that foundation will be enduring and will bring lasting happiness.

Superconsciousness is clarified vision. All that we see in that state is free from error. Also it is inclusive. Our sight grows more comprehensive. That is why those who have this wider vision become more tolerant, more loving, and more enduring. A person with small vision sees only from one angle and easily grows irritable and angry; but when the heart has become a part of the universal heart, it is never impatient or unloving. Peace and happiness come through understanding and understanding comes through the light of meditation.

V.
PRACTICAL HINTS

(a)

FIXITY OF PURPOSE

HE whose joy is within, whose relaxation is within, and whose light is within, that Yogi, being well-established in Brahman (the Supreme), attains to absolute freedom.—*Bhagavad-Gita*.

As the champion warrior relies for victory upon his armor's strength, so right thought is like a strong cuirass able to withstand the six sense-robbers.

If a man's faith is unsteady, if he does not know the true law, if his peace of mind is troubled, his knowledge will never be perfect. If a man's thoughts are not dissipated, if his mind is not perplexed, if he has ceased to think of good or evil, then there is no fear for him while he is watchful. Knowing that this body is fragile

like a jar, and making his thought firm like a fortress, one should attack Mara, the tempter, with the weapon of knowledge, one should watch him when conquered, and should never rest.

Whatever a hater may do to a hater, or an enemy to an enemy, a wrongly-directed mind will do him greater mischief. Not a mother, not a father, will do so much, nor any other relatives; a well-directed mind will do us greater service.—*Buddha*.

In studying the wisdom of the sages it is imperative to have one definite aim—that of becoming a true man. The Ancients said that he who could will, could always accomplish, and that determination was half the battle. Once we have a definite aim, we become as bowmen with arrows trained on the target, or as travellers already moving towards their destination. In formulating our aims, let us be courageous rather than timid, and seek the truth even as the hungry man

seeks food, the thirsty water, allowing nothing to hinder us as we press on towards the goal. Chu said: "Unless the aim be single, it cannot succeed." Then let him who ventures in the quest for true wisdom be single-minded, with the concentration of a setting hen or of a cat watching her prey.—*Kaibara Ekken*.

(b)

PRACTICE OF CONCENTRATION

Concentration is the source of strength in politics, in war, in trade, in short in all the management of human affairs.

—*Emerson*.

As a fletcher makes straight his arrow, a wise man makes straight his trembling and unsteady thought, which is difficult to guard, difficult to hold back. It is good to tame the mind, which is difficult to hold in and flighty, rushing wherever it listeth; a tamed mind brings happiness. Let the

wise man guard his thoughts, for they are difficult to perceive, very artful, and they rush wherever they list: thoughts well guarded bring happiness. Those who bridle their mind which travels far, moves about alone, is without a body, and hides in the chamber of the heart, will be free from the bonds of Mara, the tempter.

—*Buddha.*

This is the rule for achieving concentration: restraint of the breath, restraint of the senses, meditation, fixed attention, investigation, absorption, these are called the sixfold Yoga. When beholding by this Yoga, he beholds the gold-coloured maker, the lord, the person, Brahman, the cause, then the sage, leaving behind good and evil, makes everything (breath, organs of sense, body, &c.) to be one in the Highest Indestructible.

—*Maitrayana-Brahmana-Upanishad.*

As a lamp placed in a windless spot does not flicker, the same simile is used to define a Yogi of subdued mind, practising union with the Self. In that state, when the mind is completely subdued by the practice of Yoga and has attained serenity, in that state, seeing Self by the self, he is satisfied in the Self alone. In that state, transcending the senses, he (the Yogi) feels that infinite bliss which is perceived by the purified understanding; knowing that and being established therein, he never falls back from his real state (of Self-knowledge); after having attained which, no other gain seems greater; being established wherein, he is not overwhelmed even by great sorrow. Know that (state) of separation from the contact with pain as Yoga. This Yoga should be practised with perseverance and undepressed heart.

Abandoning without reserve all the desires born of mental fancies, and restraining completely by the mind the entire

group of the senses from all directions, with understanding held by firmness, and mind established in the Self, let him (thus) by degrees attain tranquillity; let him not think of anything else. Wheresoever the restless and unsteady mind may wander away, let him withdraw it from there and bring it under the control of the Self alone.

A Yogi should constantly practise concentration of the heart, remaining in seclusion alone, subduing his body and mind and being free from longing and possession (sense of ownership). In a cleanly spot having established his seat firmly, neither too high nor too low, with a cloth, skin and Kusha grass, placed one on the other; being seated there, making the mind one-pointed and subduing the activities of mind and senses, let him practise Yoga for self-purification. Let him hold his body, head and neck erect and motionless, fixing the gaze on the tip of his

nose, not looking around. Being serene-hearted and fearless, ever steadfast in the vow of *Brahmacharya* (continence) and controlling the mind, let him sit steadfastly absorbed in thoughts of Me, regarding Me as his supreme goal. Thus ever keeping himself steadfast, the Yogi of subdued mind attains eternal peace and freedom, which abide in Me.

But, O Arjuna, (the practice of) Yoga is not for him who eats too much or who does not eat at all, nor for him who sleeps too much or keeps awake (in excess). He who is moderate in eating and recreation, moderate in his efforts in work, moderate in sleep and wakefulness, (his practice of) Yoga becomes the destroyer of all misery. When the mind, completely subdued, rests in Self alone, free from longing for all objects of desire, then he is said to be a *Yukta* (steadfast in Self-knowledge).

—*Bhagavad-Gita.*

At that time (the time of concentration) the seer (the *Purusha*) rests in his own (unmodified) state.

At other times (other than that of concentration) the seer is identified with the modifications (of his mind).

The concentration called right knowledge is that which is followed by reasoning, discrimination, bliss, unqualified ego.

There is another concentration which is attained by the constant practice of cessation of all mental activity, in which the mind retains only the unmanifested impressions.

For the extremely energetic, concentration is near.

Disease, mental laziness, doubt, cessation, false perception, non-attaining concentration, and falling away from the state when obtained, are the obstructing distractions.

Grief, mental distress, tremor of the body, irregular breathing, accompany non-retention of concentration.

To remedy this the practice of one subject should be made.

—*Patanjali Yoga Aphorisms.*

(c)

METHODS OF MEDITATION

Meditation is directed to the highest Being (Brahman) within.

As a fire without fuel dies down on the hearth, thus do the thoughts, when all activity ceases, become quiet in their place.

For thoughts alone cause the round of births; let a man strive to purify his thoughts. What a man thinks, that he is: this is the old secret.

By the serenity of his thoughts a man blots out all actions, whether good or bad. Dwelling within his Self with serene thoughts, he obtains imperishable happiness.

If the thoughts of a man were so fixed on Brahman as they are on the things of this world, who would not then be freed from bondage?

The mind, it is said, is of two kinds, pure or impure; impure from the contact with lust, pure when free from lust.

When a man, having freed his mind from sloth, distraction, and vacillation, becomes as it were delivered from his mind, that is the highest point.

The mind must be restrained in the heart till it comes to an end;—that is knowledge, that is liberty; all the rest are extensions of the ties (which bind us to this life).

That happiness which belongs to a mind which by deep meditation has been washed clean from all impurity and has entered within the Self, cannot be described here by words; it can be felt by the inward power only.

Mind alone is the cause of bondage and liberty for men; if attached to the world, it becomes bound; if free from the world, that is liberty.

—*Maitrayana-Brahmana-Upanishad.*

God is seen when the mind is tranquil. When the mental sea is agitated by the wind of desires, it cannot reflect God and then God-vision is impossible.

—*Sri Ramakrishna.*

Nowhere either with more quiet or more freedom from trouble does a man retire than into his own soul, particularly when he has within him such thoughts that by looking into them he is immediately in perfect tranquillity; and I affirm that tranquillity is nothing else than the good ordering of the mind Remember to retire into this little territory of thy own and above all do not distract or restrain thyself, but be free Things do not touch the soul, for they are external and

remain immovable, but our perturbations come only from the opinion which is within.—*Marcus Aurelius*.

Friendship, mercy, gladness, indifference, being thought of in regard to subjects, happy, unhappy, good and evil respectively, pacify the mind.

By throwing out and restraining the breath.

Those forms of concentration that bring extraordinary sense perceptions cause perseverance of the mind.

Or (by the meditation on) the Effulgent One which is beyond all sorrow.

Or (by meditation on) the heart that has given up all attachment to sense objects.

Or by meditating on the knowledge that comes in sleep.

Or by the meditation on anything that appeals to one as good.

The Yogi's mind thus meditating, becomes unobstructed from the atomic to the Infinite.

The Yogi whose *Vrittis* (modifications) have thus become powerless (controlled) obtains in the receiver, receiving and received (the self, the mind and external objects), concentratedness and sameness, like the crystal (before different coloured objects).

Dharana (concentration) is holding the mind on to some particular object.

An unbroken flow of knowledge in that object is *Dhyana* (meditation).

When that, giving up all forms, reflects only the meaning, it is *Samadhi*.

By the suppression of the disturbed modifications of the mind, and by the rise of modifications of control, the mind is said to attain the controlling modifications—following the controlling powers of the mind.

Its flow becomes steady by habit.

Taking in all sorts of objects, and concentrating upon one object, these two powers being destroyed and manifested

respectively, the mind gets the modification called *Samadhi* (illumination).

—*Patanjali Yoga Aphorisms*.

Now what most contributes to the growth of these wings (of the soul) is meditation, by which we learn little by little to wean our affections from earthly things, and to get a habit of contemplating the things that are immaterial and intelligible, and to shake off the pollutions it has contracted by its union with the terrestrial and mortal body. And, indeed, by these advantages it revives in some manner, it rouses up itself, it is filled with divine vigor and reunites itself to the Intelligent Perfection within.—*Hierocles*.

And there is, further, the most Divine Knowledge of Almighty God, which is known, through not knowing (agnosia) during the union above mind; when the mind, having stood apart from all existing things, then having dismissed also it-

self, has been made one with the super-luminous rays, thence and there being illuminated by the unsearchable depth of wisdom.—*Dionysius the Areopagite*.

The spirit which is truly sanctified attains to so lofty a degree that all which it sees is real, all which it desires is granted, and in all which it commands, it is obeyed.—*Avicenna*.

Do not you perceive that when you have let your mind loose, it is no longer in your power to call it back, either to propriety or modesty or moderation? . . . For this reason philosophers advise us not to be contented with mere learning; but to add meditation likewise, and then practice . . . Be desirous to converse in purity with your own pure mind and with God.

—*Epictetus*.

Fixing the mind on the lotus of the heart, or on the centre of the head, is what

is called *Dharana* (concentration). When remaining in one place, making one place as the base, when the waves of the mind rise up, without being touched by other waves—when all other waves have stopped—and one wave only rises in the mind, that is called *Dhyana* (meditation). When no basis is necessary, when the whole of the mind has become one wave, “one-formedness,” it is called *Samadhi* (superconsciousness).

Imagine a lotus upon the top of the head, several inches up, and virtue as its centre, the stalk as knowledge. The eight petals of the lotus are the eight powers of the Yogi. Inside, the stamens and pistils are renunciation. If the Yogi refuses the external powers he will come to salvation. So the eight petals of the lotus are the eight powers, but the internal stamens and pistils are the extreme renunciation, the renunciation of all these. Inside of that lotus think of the Golden

One, the Almighty, the Intangible, He whose name is *Om*, the Inexpressible, surrounded with effulgent light. Meditate on that.

Think of a space in your heart, and in the midst of that space think that a flame is burning. Think of that flame as your own soul, and inside that flame is another space, effulgent, and that is the Soul of your soul, God. Meditate upon that in the heart.

Chastity, non-injuring, pardoning every one, are all different *Vrittis* (qualities of mind). Be not afraid if you are not perfect in all of these; work, and the others will come. He who has given up all attachment, all fear and all anger, he whose whole soul has gone unto the Lord, he who has taken refuge in the Lord, whose heart has become purified, with whatsoever desire he comes to the Lord He will grant that to him.

—*Swami Vivekananda.*