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*The Meaning and Method of*  
***Meditation***

**SWAMI KRISHNANANDA**



# THE MEANING AND METHOD OF MEDITATION

SWAMI KRISHNANANDA



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## **PUBLISHERS' NOTE**

The 25th of April 2022 marks the auspicious occasion of the Birth Centenary of Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj. To commemorate this sacred occasion, the Headquarters Ashram has decided to bring out booklets comprising the illuminating discourses of Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj for free distribution.

Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj arrived at the holy abode of Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj in 1944, and remained here until his Mahasamadhi in November 2001. Swamiji Maharaj was a master of practically every system of Indian thought and Western philosophy. "Many Sankaras are rolled into one Krishnananda," said Sri Gurudev.

Over the years, Swami Maharaj gave many profound and insightful discourses during Sunday night Satsanga, and on holy occasions such as Sri Gurudev's birthday, Sri Krishna Janmasthanami, Mahasivaratri, etc., and also during Sadhana Week and Yoga Vedanta Courses conducted by the Yoga

Vedanta Forest Academy of the Ashram. Sri Swami Maharaj always spoke extempore, spontaneously, without any preparation, and every discourse was fresh, unique, and divinely inspired. The audience was bathed in that stupendous unfathomable energy that radiated from Swamiji Maharaj during these discourses.

We are immensely happy to bring out some of Sri Swamiji Maharaj's discourses in booklet form as our worshipful offering at his holy feet on the blessed occasion of his Birth Centenary.

The present booklet, '**The Meaning and Method of Meditation**', consists of an enlightening exposition by Sri Swamiji Krishnanandaji Maharaj on the art of true meditation.

May the abundant blessings of the Almighty Lord, Sadgurudev Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj and Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj be upon all.

—The Divine Life Society

## THE MEANING AND METHOD OF MEDITATION

The art of meditation is not a job to be performed as one does the duties of one's profession in life, for all activities of life are in the form of a function of one's individuality or personality which is to a large extent extraneous to one's nature, due to which there is a fatigue after work and there are times when one gets fed up with work, altogether. But meditation is not such a function and it differs from activities with which man is usually familiar. If sometimes one is tired of meditation, we have only to conclude one has only engaged oneself in another kind of activity, calling it meditation, while really it was not so.

We have to make a careful distinction between one's *being* and the *action* that proceeds from one's being. What sometimes fatigues the person is the latter and not the former. We may be tired of work, but we cannot be tired of our own selves. So it naturally follows that whenever we are tired of a work or a function, it is not part of our nature but extraneous to it. If meditation is also to become a

work or a function of our being, it too would fall outside our nature. And one day we shall not only be tired of it but also be sick of it, since it would impose itself as a foreign element upon our being or nature, and it is the character of essential being to cast out every foreign body by various methods.

Aspirants on the spiritual path are generally conversant with the fact that meditation is the pinnacle of Yoga and the consummation of spiritual endeavour. But it is only a very few that really gain access into the centrality of its meaning and mostly its essentiality is missed in a confusion that is usually made by equating it with a kind of work or activity of the mind, which is precisely the reason why most people find it difficult to sit long in meditation and are overcome either by sleep or a general weariness of the psycho-physical system. It is curious that what one is aiming at as the goal of one's life should become the cause of fatigue, frustration and even disgust on occasions. People seek to know the secrets of meditation on account of dissatisfaction with the normal activities of life and detecting a lacuna in the value of earthly existence. And if even this remedy that is sought to fill this gap in life is to create a sense of another lacuna, shortcoming or dissatisfaction and if there should be factors

which can press one into a sense of 'enough' even with meditation and make one turn to some other occupation as a diversion away from it, it has to be concluded that there is a serious defect in one's concept of meditation itself.

When we carefully and sympathetically investigate into meditation as a spiritual exercise, we come face to face with certain tremendous truths about Nature and life as a whole. Before engaging oneself in any task, a clear idea of it is necessary, lest one should make a mess of what one is supposed to do. The question that is fundamental is: 'How does one know that meditation is the remedy for the short-comings of life'?

An answer to this question would necessitate a knowledge of what it is that one really lacks in life, due to which one turns to meditation for help. Broadly speaking, one's dissatisfaction is caused by a general feeling which comes upon one, after having lived through life for a sufficient number of years, that the desires of man seem to have no end; that the more are his possessions, the more also are his ambitions and cravings; that those who appear to be friends seem also to be capable of deserting one in crucial hours of life; that sense-objects entangle one in mechanical complexities rather than give relief



from tension, anxiety and want; that one's longing for happiness exceeds all finitudes of concept and can never be made good by anything that the world contains, on account of the limitation brought about by one thing excluding another and the capacity of one thing to include another in its structure; that the so-called pleasures of life appear to be a mere itching of nerves and a submission to involuntary urges and a slavery to instincts rather than the achievement of real freedom which is the one thing that man finally aspires for.

If these and such other things are the defects of life, how does one seek to rectify it by meditation? The defects seem to be really horrifying, more than what ordinary human mind can compass and contain. But nevertheless, there rises a hope that meditation can set right these shortcomings and, if this hope has any significance or reality, the gamut of meditation should naturally extend beyond all limitations of human life. Truly, meditation should then be a universal work of the mind and not a simple private thinking in the closet of one's room or house. This aspect of the nature of meditation is outside the scope of the notion of it which many spiritual aspirants may be entertaining in their minds. An analysis of the nature of meditation

opens up a deeper reality than is comprised in the usual psychological processes of the mind, such as thinking, feeling and understanding, and it really turns out to be a rousing of the *soul* of man instead of a mere functioning of the mind.

The soul does not rise into activity under normal conditions. Man is mostly, throughout his life, confined only to certain aspects of its manifestations when he thinks, understands, feels, wills, remembers, and so on. All this, no doubt, is partial expression of the human individuality, but it is not in any way near to the upsurge of the soul. The difference between normal human functions and soul's activity is that in the former case, when one function is being performed the others are set aside, ignored or suppressed, so that men cannot do all things at the same time; but in the latter, the whole of man in his essentiality rises to the occasion and nothing of him is excluded in this activity. Rarely does the soul act in human life, but when it does act even in a mild form or even in a distorted way, one forgets the whole world including the consciousness of one's own personality and enjoys a happiness which always remains incomparable. The mild manifestations of the soul through the channels of the human personality are seen in the

ecstatic enthusiasms of art, particularly the fine arts, such as elevating music and the satisfaction derived through the appreciation of high genius in literature. In such appreciations one forgets oneself and becomes one with the object of appreciation. This is why art is capable of drawing the attention of man so powerfully and making him forget everything else for the time being. But in the daily life of an individual there are at least three occasions when the soul manifests itself externally and drowns one in incomparable joy; these are the satisfactions of (1) intense hunger, (2) sexual appetite and (3) sleep. In all these three instances, especially when the urges are very uncompromising, the totality of the being of a person acts, and here the logic of the intellect and the etiquettes of the world will be of no avail. The reason is simple: when the soul acts, even through the senses, mind and body, which are its distorted expressions, its pressure is irresistible, for the soul is the essence of the entire being and not merely of certain functional faculties of a person. While the joys of the manifestations of the partial aspects of the personality can be ignored or sacrificed for the sake of other insistent demands, there can be no such compromise when the soul presses itself forward into action.

The outcome of the above investigation is that when the soul normally acts, there is no consciousness of externality, not even of one's own personality, and hence the joy experienced then is transporting and enrapturing. And we have observed that meditation is the soul rising into action, not merely a function of the mind. This will explain also that meditation is a joy and cannot be a source of fatigue, tiresomeness, etc., when rightly practised. But meditation wholly differs from those channelised spatio-temporal manifestations of the soul, itemised in the above paragraphs. In meditation the soul's manifestation is not through the senses, mind and body, though its impact may be felt through any of these vestures before it fully reveals itself in the process called meditation.

The Sadhaka attempts to manifest the soul gradually in the meditational technique. The senses are bad media for the soul's manifestation, because the sensory activity is never a whole, one sense functioning differently from the other and being exclusive of the other, while the soul is inclusive of everything. Hence, when there is a sensory pressure from the soul it becomes a binding passion, almost a kind of madness, as it does not take into consideration the other aspects of life. The body, too,

is not the proper medium for the soul's expression, for it is inert and is almost lifeless but for the vital energy or the Prana pervading through it. The only other medium through which the soul can reveal itself is the mind which, though it operates in terms of the information supplied by the senses, has also the capacity to organise and synthesise sensory knowledge into a sort of wholeness, and, hence, is in a position to reflect the soul whose essential character is wholeness of being. Thus, the process of meditation has always to be through the mind though its intention is to transcend the mind. The mental activities, being midway between the operation of the senses and the soul's existence, partake of a double character, viz., attraction from objects outside and the longing for perfection from within. The more does the mind succeed in abstracting itself from sensory information in terms of objects, the more also is the success in meditation. For this purpose Sadhakas develop a series of techniques to draw the mind away from the objects of sense and direct it slowly to the wholeness of the soul. The main forms of this method, to put them serially, in an ascending order, would be (1) concentration on an external point, symbol, image or picture; (2) concentration on an internal point,

symbol, image or picture; (3) concentration on universal existence.

An external point, symbol, image or picture is chosen for the purpose of concentration, so that the mind may not suddenly feel itself bereaved from sense-objects and yet be tied down to a single sense-object. Some seekers concentrate their minds on a point or a dot on a wall, a candle-flame, a flower, a picture of any endearing object or a concrete image of one's chosen deity of worship. All these have ultimately the same effect on the mind and help to collect the mental rays from the diversified objects into a single forceful ray focussed upon a given object. The intention of such concentration is to disentangle the mind from its involvement in the network of objects. Every thought is a symptom of such an involvement since the thought is of an object and every object is related to every other object by similarity, comparison or contrast. Apart from this logical network of thought, a physical object is subtly related to other physical objects by means of invisible vibrations and hence the thought of an object is at the same time a stimulation of such vibrations which are in the end inseparable from the physical forms of the objects. Concentration on a given form breaks the thread of such relatedness

to external things and the objective of such concentration is finally the separation of thought from the sense of externality, which is the essence of existence of an object. When thought is freed from the bondage of externality, it is at once freed also from the quality of Rajas or the force which presses it towards the object, as well as Tamas which is a negative reaction of Rajasic activity. By this means concentration leads to freedom from Rajas and Tamas, which is simultaneous with the rise of Sattva or transparency of consciousness as reflected through the mind. It is in the state of Sattva that the true being of All things, called the Atman, reveals itself as comprehending all existence, and as incomparable brilliance and joy.

Concentration on internal centres is also practised by Sadhakas according to their special predilections of temperament. The process of psychological freedom achieved is similar to the one in concentration on external points or forms, the only difference being that in internal concentration the objects are only forms of thought instead of physical locations or things. The idea of the 'external' and 'internal' is really with reference to one's own physical body, so that it is more a procedure adopted for convenience rather than a system which has

any ultimate objective significance. Whatever is concentrated upon externally may be regarded as a psychological image in internal concentration. One special feature which is discoverable only in internal concentration is that in this method one can conceive any form of reality to one's own liking, which may not have anything corresponding in the physical world, such as the ideas of all-comprehensives, togetherness, unity, harmony, supreme abundance and even such ideas as of Infinity, Eternity and Immortality. But the last mentioned three ideas actually transcend the idea of internality and open up the concept of the universal.

The idea of universality overcomes the barriers of externality and internality created by the mind with reference to the body and the personality and visualises all things, including one's own individuality, as organically related to one another in a wider completeness to which there are no such things as subject and object, or the seer and seen, which are the outcome of self-reference by each particular individual in contrast to other individuals and things. The universal is incapable of even imagination since thought is always subjective and externalises the object. Thus the concept of the universal should be regarded as almost an impossibility. But, for



purpose of meditation, a conceptual universal may be presented before the mind through the mutual transference of meaning between the subject and object, which would result in three alternatives: (1) Every subject is also an object to others, (2) every object is a subject to its own self, and (3) there is neither a subject nor object where there is mutual determination among parts of a whole. Every unit of existence may be conceived as a whole in itself, i.e., an organism, self-determined in every way. There can be many such organisms, smaller and bigger in a series and the universe is the largest organism. To conceive it as it would conceive itself is to be able to think the universal. In meditation this technique would involve a little effort of thought and of the will to maintain awareness of a transcendence of the subject-object relation, in any of the ways suggested above. Since the bodily individuality as a psychophysical organism is maintained mostly by the tension obtaining between itself and others which it regards as objects, any procedure which will overcome or release this tension would be a welcome method of contemplating the universal. The seekers who belong to this last category should indeed be very rare and few in number, for this super-normal thinking is not given to everyone because

of the habit of the mind to pin faith in sense-objects by isolating them from its own location. The Upanishads and the Bhagavadgita are replete with descriptions of this state of consciousness, wherein the multiformed universal is contemplated. Special mention may be made of the 3rd and the 4th chapters of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, the 5th and 7th chapters of the Chhandogya Upanishad, the 11th chapter of the Bhagavadgita as also the description of the Absolute in its 13th chapter. This is the way of Jnana, pure knowledge or impersonal meditation.

The methods of meditation in Bhakti or love and devotion emphasise the personal form of God more than the impersonal and instead of the fixing of consciousness in its role as pure awareness, as in the path of knowledge, direct emotion as love to the form in which God manifests himself before the contemplative mind. The Vaishnava theology conceives God in a fivefold series of manifestations known as Para or the Supreme, Vyuha or the group, Vibhava or the incarnation, Archa or the symbol of worship and the Antaryamin or the indwelling. The Para is God conceived as the transcendent creator, whose nature is awe-inspiring, and his uplifted presence carries with it a feeling of

inaccessibility and a grand remoteness from the dust of the earth. Vyuha is God conceived as a group of manifestations, known in Vaishnava scriptures as Vasudeva, Sankarshana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha, corresponding almost to the mutual relationship of Brahman, Ishvara, Hiranyagarbha and Virat in the terminology of the Vedanta. Vibhava is God in an incarnation manifest in the planes of creation for redressing the sorrows of the denizens of the planes. Archa is the image or symbol used in external or internal worship, a limited form meant to help concentration of mind on God through a finite focus which gradually enlarges upon wider realities, stage by stage. Antaryamin is the counterpart of Para, God as the indwelling presence, not far removed from creation as the creator thereof, difficult to approach, but the very soul of creation, living within it and capable of vital contact in any speck of space or atom of creation.

The path of Bhakti also conceives methods of concentration of mind by Sravana or the hearing the glories of God, Kirtana or singing his names, Smarana or remembrance of him, through Japa, etc., Padasevana or adoration of his feet in his manifestations or in his essential being, Archana or formal worship by ritualistic methods, Vandana

or prayer offered to God, Dasya or the attitude of being a servant of God, Sakhya or the attitude of friendship towards God and, finally, Atma-Nivedana or self-surrender to God. These are various means of reaching the consummation of divine love by which the mind is fastened upon God's existence and all his associated attributes as omniscience, omnipotence, compassion, and the like.

The technique of concentration of mind in the Yoga system of Patanjali is concerned more with the volition aspect of the psychological organ than the understanding and feeling, as in Jnana and Bhakti. The will plays here the prominent role and concentration is the effort of the mind to fix its attention on the different degrees of reality, viz., (1) the physical universe of five elements in terms of the space-time relation and the relation of idea, name and form; (2) the five elements in themselves independent of these relations; (3) the inner formative principles of the five elements in terms of the space-time relation and the relation of idea, name and form; (4) the formative principles of the five elements independent of the relations; (5) the joy which follows from this concentration on transparent being; (6) pure Self-awareness that ensues thereby; (7) retention of the memory of

the extermination of all mental forms in the finest essence of Self-awareness and, lastly, (8) realisation of Pure Being as the Absolute.

A system of spiritual living known as Karma-Yoga rarely gets associated with meditation. But Karma-Yoga is really meditation in action and it is a Yoga by itself. It is, however, difficult for beginners in spiritual life to imagine how an action can also be a meditation, for action is usually associated with movement, physical or psychological, while meditation is regarded as attention in which all movement is checked. The action, which Karma Yoga is, differs from this usual definition of action as distinguished from concentration or attention of mind. An exposition of this method is mainly found in the Bhagavadgita where expertness in action is identified with balance in the attitude of consciousness. Yoga is not only supreme ability in the execution of perfected action but is at the same time stability of consciousness or equanimity of mind. The two aspects of this particular technique cannot be reconciled as long as action is limited to the personal activities proceeding from desire. Karma-Yoga is desireless action, which alone can be consistent with spiritual consciousness. The Self which is pure balance of existence is co-extensive

with cosmic reality and can therefore be reconcilable with action when it is transformed into an impersonal process of spiritual being instead of a personal activity of individual desire. This concept of spiritualised action is an advanced step in Yoga and cannot be prescribed to novices who cannot imagine anything beyond their bodily personality. But once the spirit is grasped, a seeker moves unscathed in life, unaffected by likes and dislikes and contemplates divinity in all actions which he identifies with the processes of the universe. In lesser concepts of Karma-Yoga, it is defined as one's attitude to all activity as a form of the movement of the properties of the external Nature, of which one remains an unconcerned witness. It is also regarded as action performed in the spirit of service of God or even service of humanity and all living beings, the fruits of which the performer does not long for but offers up entirely to God.

In internal forms of meditation a special feature is a system known as Kundalini-Yoga. Here, the human system in its subtle make-up within is regarded as a microcosmic specimen of the universe and attempt is made to manipulate the powers of Nature by the regulation of forces within one's own individuality. The realms of the cosmos correspond

to the centres in the individual, which are accepted to be seven in number. Concentration on these centres in the microcosm stimulates the forces lodged in the centres which bear an intimate relation to the relative centres in the macrocosm. Thus, meditation on these centres is tantamount to meditation on the reality of the cosmos. Enormous details on such meditations are laid down in a group of texts called Tantras, which enunciate methods of a gradual overstepping of the grosser forms of Nature through ritual, worship, recitation of formulae, regulation of breath and concentration of mind. Since some of the ways prescribed in the Tantras seem to take the seeker along the roads of sense-objects and the material Nature, though with a view to transcending them in spiritual experience, the danger of a set-back or fall for the inexperienced and the unwary is more in this path than in the other methods of Yoga. The technique is very scientific but not entirely free from the fears of temptation and retrogression when attempted by unpurified minds.

All the procedures of meditation are, in the end, ways of awakening the Soul-consciousness which, in its depth, is, at once, God-consciousness. What is apparently extraneous and outside one's body gets vitally woven up into the fabric of one's being in

rightly practised meditation. In brief, meditation is the art of uniting with Reality.



The art of meditation is not a job to be performed as one does the duties of one's profession in life, for all activities of life are in the form of a function of one's individuality or personality which is to a large extent extraneous to one's nature, due to which there is a fatigue after work and there are times when one gets fed up with work, altogether. But meditation is not such a function and it differs from activities with which man is usually familiar. If sometimes one is tired of meditation, we have only to conclude one has only engaged oneself in another kind of activity, calling it meditation, while really it was not so.

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