

## **Meditation as a way of life**

The aim of Meditation is to become your own master and not be a slave to situations in life. On a daily basis we find that situations around us are pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. We are pleased with the pleasant ones and want them to last; with the unpleasant ones, we are unhappy or angry and the neutral ones we don't even notice! The real truth is that pleasant, unpleasant and neutral events are purely personal. For example the presence of a dog can be very pleasant to me, very unpleasant to somebody else or a frightening experience to yet somebody else or just a neutral event to others. So, we have through life built up our own private psychological worlds in terms of which we live and from which we move and interact with the world outside us. So every single individual in the world lives in his own private world and mechanically and habitually interacts with the rest of society from his own point of view. He is a victim of his own world. He is living in a dream world. Is it possible to wake up from this dream and see the world as it really is? If we can do it we actually can see the truth! And that is truth!

Our private world is mostly made up of our childhood experiences, our religious upbringing; values inculcated in us by our elders and also our survival instincts. We try to control and manipulate circumstances and events around us and what we can't control and manipulate we try to cope with them. Thus our ordinary lives go on. Is it possible to live skillfully? This is the challenge! We will see that we are the cause of our own sorrow and are able to change it.

Is it possible to get out of our private worlds? Is it possible to remove the colored glasses, we are wearing to look at the world and see the world as it really is? Is it possible to remove the scales from our eyes and really see Reality?

Meditation claims to do this. So how do we set about this task? What is required is an investigative mind - a "let's" see. attitude. The searchlight is focused on ourselves. We study our own minds with clinical detachment or scientific objectivity. We have to be ruthlessly honest when we look at our own private world within which we are comfortably settled! Just seeing is enough - there is no need to struggle to change anything. Just seeing is a process of removing the scales from our eyes, so that we can see things as they really are like scientists working on data. The data we work on is the data of our own minds. This is the data that keeps us within its grip. Once we see the data the grip is released and we are free! True freedom comes when we see ourselves as we are - the "good" and the "bad" in us in all its nakedness and we have mastery over ourselves.

Now we will examine some areas we can work on to achieve this freedom.

1. Self understanding - to do this what one can do is to have a book and note down what situations in life or events etc. cause one to get angry, depressed, agitated, anxious, fearful, happy, relaxed etc. This has to be jotted down immediately as soon as the feeling occurs - otherwise it is missed. These feelings can occur at the place of work or while traveling in a bus or through a memory. When one is relaxed one can study these situations from all angles. why did I feel that way? As an experiment one can even try to artificially, bring out the memory of that, situation and the thoughts surrounding it and see if the emotion comes up again. Just play with it!

when one knows and understands this is happening, one will gradually gain mastery of the situation. One becomes more efficient and thinks more clearly. At least when a similar situation is going to arise in the future one is forewarned and the emotion may not come up at all! All this is because one has taken time to look at it. The important thing to remember is, one does not have to do anything about it. There is no effort or need to change for the better. Unless of course one feels the need for the change - then do it gently and mindfully. Be friendly to yourself. If one says "I have this bad quality and I must change this" a conflict situation arises. There is resistance. This only ends up giving strength to the bad quality, which one wants to give up! One has to understand oneself by just seeing who one is and that is all. This sounds simple and easy. But it is hard work! Results will show up little by little. At least one can play this like a game.

2. One can even bring up strong emotional situations and events from the past and study them objectively. Where have I gone wrong? Or have others been unfair to me. It is possible that others have hurt me. If so am I able to forgive them in my heart? They are acting from their own private worlds. (What we usually do is to justify ourselves and condemn the others). If I find that I have been wrong and acted irresponsibly can I forgive myself and get on with my life? It is not necessary to run around asking forgiveness. Just seeing it is enough!

3. As a game one can study the good points of the people one dislikes. Surely they must have some good points! I can't be always right and the person I dislike be always wrong. What do I dislike in him/her? That will be an interesting exercise.

4. Sometimes feelings are vague, without shape or form and sometimes contradictory feelings come up. lumped together - like hate and sympathy. Work on them, separate them, and study them. Sometimes there is a mild feeling of depression passing over. Catch it, bring it into focus and try to see why it happened. What is the cause? It will be an enlightening experience!

5. Look at the mind. What kind of machine is it? It is churning out thoughts, all the time. It can't be without thoughts! Can one stop thoughts? See if you can. Thoughts are like films, which we construct from past experiences and future plans. We think in circles. Watch the nature of thought. See how they rise and cease; see how a trend of thought stops mid stream and goes on into an entirely new trend. What triggered the new trend? As an experiment take the last thought and trace it back along the trend and see how it moved. See how emotions affect the thought flow. Are thoughts causing emotions or emotions causing the thought? Anger related to someone brings up thoughts that feed that anger and more anger is built up - a vicious circle! This exercise should help us to familiarize ourselves with our own minds. If we don't like anything we see there just say OK to it. There is no need to take it out on ourselves. See how our prejudices cause thoughts to move logically but in a crooked way. Can we be unbiased and logical?

6. You can sit down in a quiet place for about half an hour with eyes closed. Focus your attention on breathing in and breathing out - the in-breath and the out-breath. See how the mind jumps away from the breath to thoughts. it does not matter. Come back to the breath. If the mind keeps flitting around don't be angry with yourself. If you can't keep your own mind in control how can you expect to control every thing else in life to your satisfaction! In meditation there is no interference with what is happening, no controlling, no conforming to a model, "Just be" 'Summa eru.' Be open to what is happening. See what is happening, be aware; be mindful be awake. The Will is at bay - it is not controlling, checking or making choices. You are watching. That is all.

Watch the rising and passing away of thoughts and sensations both positive and negative. Don't get involved with them -just watch them. Don't push away the negative ones and promote the positive ones. Don't do anything – just see. You are a witness, if problems from the past keep coming up - say it is Ok! If you resist, the very resistance makes them stronger. Resistance gives energy to what you are resisting! Not to do anything, actually needs a lot of effort and alertness, It is like a hen sitting on eggs! She is. doing nothing yet she is doing something very important and productive. She. is sitting doing nothing; we are watching doing nothing! If When you are sitting in one position with eyes closed and watching, see what happens when you hear a sound or get a smell or a small pain or an ache or an insect bite. What do you do to overcome the ache or the pain? Just see it! Do you shift position, rub the area, associate the smell with its source, identify the sound or do you start a new line of thoughts? In normal life we miss out all the richness of these details, of daily living because we act so automatically and habitually. We live in a dream world having lost our touch with life! So sitting down helps to be in touch with what is. As an experiment one can hold on to the ache or pain or irritation for a little while. We see how in life we mechanically and mindlessly avoid unpleasant situations. Why not face them in our little laboratory and see what happens.

7. We get into moods sometimes. Why do these moods happen? Study them. What was the trigger? What are the thoughts accompanying the mood. Does the mood feed the thoughts or do thoughts feed the mood? Familiarize yourself with them. We indulge in our moods and thereby lose the opportunity of subjecting them to scrutiny. Some moods we want to cling to, like anger and hurt and thoughts go spinning around feeding the mood. Understand yourself, know yourself accept yourself, and love yourself. As an experiment when you are not in a mood try to induce that mood and see if you can bring it back. Or when you are in a bad mood write down all your thoughts and feelings. Later, maybe days later, when you are in a good mood or even in a neutral state read what you have written. What do you see? Does your writing seem absurd? or does it trigger another mood or is it neutral?

8. Boredom - Why and when does one get bored? Do you need stimulation all the time to keep you happy - music, TV or even problems to think about or people to talk to? Is it possible for you to be comfortable with yourself all alone? It is possible to be alone without being lonely? Loneliness and boredom are uncomfortable feelings therefore in normal life we keep escaping from them and don't even know it!. As an experiment why not stay in the uncomfortable feeling and see what you are trying to do to escape it. It does not matter if you really find it intolerable and you want to escape. Just knowing it is enough. Knowledge is power. One does not have to be angry with oneself. It is said that one does not have to go into extremes in an uncomfortable situation. The middle path is enough. Not too much comfort (by escaping) or too much discomfort. Whatever one does in the end is alright but see it.

9. Fear - Why do we have fear? Fear has always to do with loss. We fear to get hurt, to lose our lives, lose reputation, lose money or our position in society. Indecision is also caused by fear - fear to make the wrong decision. We cling to the familiar (our private world) because we feel safe in it. We don't want insecurity. Study fear. See how thoughts rise up to feed fear. The thoughts are all from our own private world! Why not venture out and take the risk. Make a decision right or wrong! You accept what comes and you take full responsibility. Others need not be blamed if your decision turns out to be wrong. Don't even blame the stars or fate or whatever. The responsibility is ours and it is alright.

10. Some of us have severe psychological wounds inflicted on us when we were children. Severe emotional traumas that have affected us for life. They are part of our private world now. We have put up psychological defenses to protect ourselves from the world and we don't even know them because they have become part of us! We cling to our hurts and fears and defenses as a survival tool. Is it possible to see these wounds and their effects on us? Is it possible to be open and to learn? Is it possible to let go of these and learn to be vulnerable and sensitive? Is it possible to forgive those who caused these wounds for they too may be acting out their defense mechanisms!

11. Anger - Why do we get angry? Is it because we expect others to do what we want? I have a model about myself and I expect others to comply with that model. If they don't I am angry. Living in society we have learnt to deny and suppress anger and don't even know that it is there! Suppressed anger can lead to depression, stress, anxiety, fear and guilt. Learn to face anger when it comes up. Learn about it. We can transform anger into something wholesome like understanding. What happens when others are angry with us? They too are like us - they too have models about themselves. Accept, their humanness and forgive them. When an anger situation arises the skillful thing to do is neither suppress it, nor express it but see it. Take wise action in such a situation. May be avoid that person till the anger subsides.

12. Another area we can work on is pain. A headache, toothache, arthritis etc. This body is subject to pain. There are 2 components to pain.

- a. The real physical pain.
- b. The psychological component to it like self-pity, complaining and fear.

Psychological pain can be called "suffering". This pain which is the mental component need not be there at all though the physical pain is a fact. There can be pain without suffering. We complicate and make worse our pain with suffering, without the mental part, pain is manageable. My pain becomes the pain. If you resist and detest the pain you give energy to it. Allow it to be there, make space for it, accommodate it, and Study it. Say ok to it.

13. Our memories too have 2 components.

- a. Real memories - events as they really happened.
- b. Psychological memories - like psychological wounds are hurtful.

Unwholesome memories, e.g. of parents who pressurized us and had great expectations of us which were uncomfortable to us. We have to work on our psychological memories and the emotions involved in them if they trouble us now.

14. Another area of study can be to see our motives. What are the motives for our actions? A study of this will show who we really are, When I do something do I do it because I want people to think highly of me, or because I have to compensate for some guilt feeling? Or is it to avoid blame? or is it to return a favor? Or is it as an investment for the future - like getting help in return? Or to get even for a favor done to me in the past so that I am not under obligation? Or is it out of pure love? Do I visit someone because I am bored at home or because I care about that person? This is an interesting area. The wholesome thing is to know your motive however unwholesome it is!

15 In doing our ordinary daily chores slowing down and seeing what we are doing

and how we are doing it helps us to see the mechanical ways we have adopted. It shows us our habit patterns. Do we enjoy doing certain things and are we averse to other things?

16. We live in society and interact with people, it is interesting to study our reactions (our feelings) to what people say and do. Is there contempt, joy, admiration, feelings of inferiority, need to boss, etc.?

17. Let us study our speech. We talk unnecessarily meaningless, useless talk most of time. Gossip has within it malice carrying tales, and spreading rumors. Speech is a reflection of how our minds work jumping from topic to topic. Why should we be embarrassed when there is silence in a group? See your need to dominate conversation or the need to veer the conversation to an area that interests you. When someone talks of something you are not interested in, see what happens to you. What do you do? The wholesome thing would be to be a good listener. Talk slowly and deliberately. Speak only when speech is necessary. Avoid useless chatter. Watch your tone of voice – is it different to different people - subordinates and superiors? Some have a compulsive desire to talk. It shows they have a great need to assert themselves. They feel threatened if they are left alone. Watch how a conversation is interrupted and how the trend changes. See all these and what you are doing about them. It is a game!

18. Let us look at our bodies. Do I like it or do I dislike it? What is my attitude towards my body? It does not matter what you feel - just see it. Then you will learn to accept your body as it is. It is ageing, it is ill, it has blemishes –see it. What are my feelings about it? We try to possess, our bodies and we either like or dislike what we see. The wholesome attitude is to treat the body like a vessel, or a coat - to be kept clean and looked after. It is not my vessel, my coat or my body. It is the vessel the coat, the body. If it gets lost or damaged it does not matter. Do I fear to lose it? See it. It does not matter what you see.

19. We create boundaries round ourselves by creating ideas of me and the other. I have an identity - like race, class, caste, religion, sex, country. I belong to these. They are a part of my private world. What is not 'me' is the 'other'. It can create suspicions and fear of the other and I can't face criticism, of what is "mine". We create these enclosures round ourselves when in reality the human race is without boundaries. See this - how you defend and fight for your identity!

20. The Ego- I have an image about myself. I am important to me. I have to be respected. What is me and mine are important. My Family, my friends, my ideas, my opinions; my prejudices are important. This is why I get hurt when what is mine is criticized and am pleased when I am Praised. I take a stand and this is my yardstick to judge others, In reality there is no need to be judgmental, there is no need to have expectations, of others and become disappointed when expectations are not met. As humans we are all the same; Bigger the ego bigger the hurt. When one has a poor self-image - a poor idea of himself, one is sad, feels inferior and indulges in self-pity. That too is Ego! The converse side! When there is no ego one is a nobody - there is lightness and joy and there is no suffering. Examine what kind of image you have of yourself and also our feelings when you interact with people.

**Conclusion** - All these years we have possessed our feelings, our emotions, our thoughts and our identities. Let us take a deep look at these. An experimental approach is needed (not a belief system). We have to have the objectivity and impartiality of a scientist to do this. We must learn about ourselves without overlooking what we don't like in us

or emphasizing what we like in us. Both the so-called 'good' and the 'bad' data should be looked at impartially. We must distance ourselves from the data and see. Then we can learn about ourselves and become our own masters. This is because we become detached from what we have been attached to all our lives! To get detachment one has to understand attachment!

### **Addenda**

It is theoretically possible to surmise what a person who has really detached himself from his private world, and thereby become master of himself behaves like. What qualities can he be expected to have? As he is egoless he is humble and yet dignified. He is child like. Has no inhibitions. He does not take himself seriously. He is at home anywhere. Is not judgmental Does not take offense. Is not hurt. He is easy to please and satisfied with little. He takes life as it comes he does not plan for future security or dwell in the past. He does not seek security. He is able to live in insecurity - without any anxiety. He is always happy lighthearted and of a loving disposition. He is gentle in speech and clear in his thinking. He is full of compassion because he is able to accept the humanness of other beings. He responds when a situation warrants it - he does not react (The difference in the meanings of response and reaction - can be illustrated with an example, if you hear a tap leaking in the middle of the night and it disturbs you, you toss about in bed irritated by this noise. This is reaction. To get up and close the tap is to respond). It means, to take appropriate action.

Such a person does not make value judgments, like - "this is good and this is bad" His attitude towards the beautiful and the ugly is the same. He has equanimity. Victory and failure, joy and sorrow are the same. He is happy when others are happy. (A normal worldling is unhappy or jealous when others are happy). He does not care about what others think of him. He is open, accepting, caring sensitive and accommodating. He takes full responsibility for his actions. He has accepted the world as it is, but has changed himself and is able to live happily in it !

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