

Lesson 12

MEDITATION

Vicente Hao Chin, Jr.
from *The Process of Self-Transformation*

Meditation is the time-tested means toward inward exploration of our consciousness. It helps us discover the subtle prison walls of our mind that prevent us from seeing reality as it is. It is the gateway to the discovery of the true self.

The term *meditation* is used for a wide range of practices. We must be able to distinguish spiritual meditation — or classical meditation — from the rest.

For example, the Silva Method of José Silva is called meditation, but it's different from spiritual meditation. The Silva Method involves the reconditioning of the lower triangle. It enables a person to become relaxed easily or to attain the alpha state of brain activity.

Spiritual meditation, however, is concerned with the fuller realization of the higher triangle. To do this, the meditator tries to make the lower triangle become serene.

This observation can also be made of Transcendental Meditation and Relaxation Response as they're popularly practiced. These methods have proven their usefulness and effectiveness in bringing about changes in the personality. They can be used in conjunction with spiritual meditation, but they are different from spiritual meditation.

SPIRITUAL MEDITATION

Spiritual meditation assumes a background philosophy or outlook that questions the assumptions of life as lived by the average person.

It sees the mundane world as but an outer layer of a much vaster reality. This mundane world is often characterized by conflicts that lead to sorrow and pain. Spiritual meditation doesn't seek to escape from such a world but rather to transcend it.

What follows is a description of the practice of spiritual meditation.

Meditation seeks the awakening of the transcendent consciousness, preceded by a series of preparations that make it possible for us to go beyond the personality, that is, the physical, emotional and mental levels of our consciousness. Such a meditation is not primarily involved with images or visions or voices. Where there are images or shapes or recognizable objects or colors, then it is still in the realm of concrete thoughts. Meditation seeks to transcend these.

The object of preparation is to allow the lower triangle, or personality triangle, to be serene. After preliminary preparations are done (body, emotions, sensory perceptions, etc., discussed below), the higher steps toward inner tranquility involve the following:

Concentration. This stage systematically disciplines the mind by reconditioning its habits. The use of a mantra is one of the ways to discipline the mind. A chosen mantra or word is used as an anchor. By mentally repeating it over and over again, usually following the rhythm of the inhalation and the exhalation of

the breath, the mind is disciplined to ignore things other than the mantra, thus gradually developing an attitude of disinterest in extraneous things not chosen by the meditator.

Concentration is a necessary step in Raja Yoga as described in the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali. The counting of breath in Zen is another example of this disciplinary stage.

Meditation involves an unenforced awareness of the contents of our consciousness. In concentration, there is a struggle between the intention of the meditator and the conditioned habits of the mind. In meditation, this struggle ceases, and the consciousness uninterruptedly maintains an awareness of whatever is in the mind.

Awareness. This stage involves watching the movements of the mind, including feelings, reactions and ideas as well as the origin of these movements. Such awareness brings about a calmness of the personality triangle, thus freeing the consciousness to be aware of subtler realms. Examples of this approach would be the “choiceless awareness” of Krishnamurti, mindfulness in Buddhist meditation and *vichara* or the self-inquiry meditation of Sri Ramana Maharshi.

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The meditation process then enters into the realms of *samadhi* when the center of conscious-

ness, the observer, loses its separateness from the object of its attention. The wall that divides itself from the object melts away.

Both these approaches are used by meditators. Eventually, however, all meditation leads to the awareness stage. Concentration or other modes of disciplining the mind are but preparations for awareness meditation.

PREPARATIONS FOR MEDITATION

A classic approach to meditation is outlined in the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali, written about 2,500 years ago. Despite the terseness of its aphorisms, it contains perhaps the most comprehensive map of the transcendent consciousness. It remains the outstanding text to this day on the subject.

A valuable part of the *Yoga Sutras* pertains to the preparations needed for the attainment of *samadhi*. Patanjali outlines the seven stages of preparation, which culminate in the eighth, *samadhi*, characterized by the *cessation of the modifications of the mind-stuff*. Each of the seven stages is concerned with specific aspects of our nature that prevent us from attaining *samadhi* and awakening *prajñā*, or intuitive consciousness. An overview of these preparations is helpful here.

1. Restraints (*yama*). These are five behaviors that eventually contribute to integration and the absence of internal psychological conflicts: *nonlying, nonviolence, nonstealing, nonsensuality and nonacquisitiveness*. Their opposites are behaviors that are rooted in psychological needs and desires that automatically disturb our mind.

2. Observances (*niyama*). These are five attitudes or qualities of mind that eventually lead to self-transcendence: *purity, contentment, simplicity, self-study and self-surrender*.

3. Proper posture (*asanas*). In entering into the meditative silence, our body must be steady and comfortable so that it doesn't become a source of disturbance. The best posture for meditation is probably the full lotus posi-

tion. Other alternative postures are the half-lotus posture, sitting posture and the kneeling posture.

4. Control of vital energy (*pranayama*). This vital energy, called *prana* or *ch'i*, circulates to all parts of the body throughout the day. When unregulated, it can be a source of disturbance in the mind. The control of the energy is done through regulating our breathing. We'll notice that inhalation and exhalation have an effect on thoughts. Hence, the eventual diminution of the breathing activity during meditation results in minimal stimulation of thoughts from pranic activity.

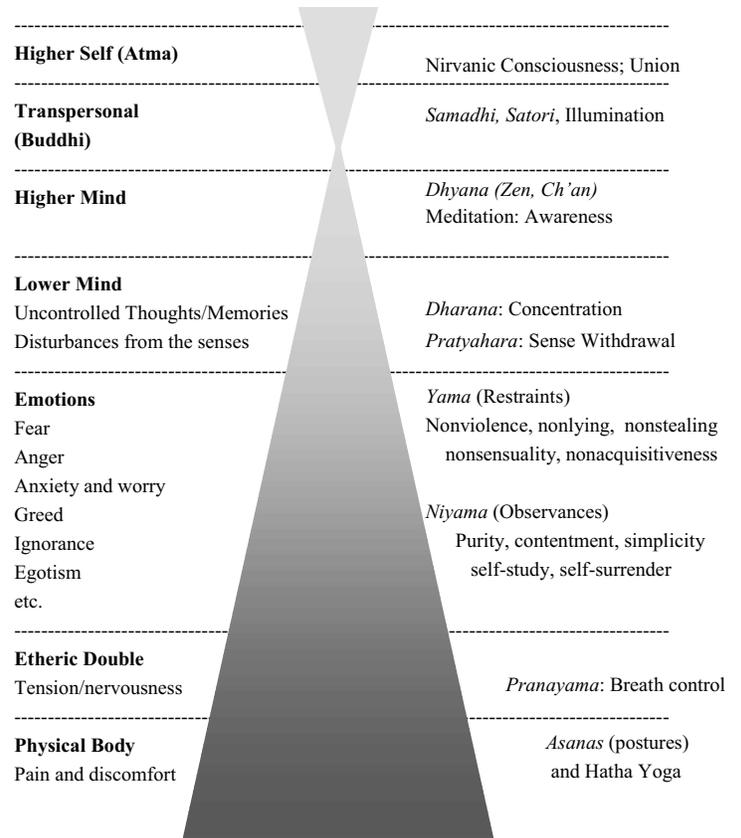
5. Sense withdrawal (*pratyahara*). The mind is then withdrawn from the reports of the senses. The reception of light, sounds and other sensory stimuli by our senses can't be avoided. It's automatic. But the perception of these sensory reports can be withdrawn by the mind. Thus, when we read an absorbing novel, we may not notice that a door just banged or that cars passed by. The ears continue to receive sensations, but the mind has not entertained them, that is, the mind was withdrawn from these sensations. Sense withdrawal refers to the act of the consciousness to withdraw from all sensory reports.

6. Concentration (*dharana*). This means focusing the mind on a chosen object. It trains the mind to be under the direction of the will of the meditator. The mind of the average person is a slave to external stimuli and psychological conditionings. It thinks according to these circumstances. Concentration is a practice that regulates this undisciplined tendency.

7. Meditation (*dhyana*). The uninterrupted dwelling of the consciousness on its object is meditation. Although concentration involves enforced discipline, meditation naturally dwells on the object without being distracted or disturbed.

8. *Samadhi*. This occurs when the distinction between the object and the meditator has ceased. Only the object now remains.

The above is but an outline of the eight stages. I recommend that you look into a deeper under-



Stages in Meditation

standing of the process by studying the *Yoga Sutras* themselves with the help of commentaries, such as those of Dr. I.K. Taimni in his book *The Science of Yoga*.¹

DEALING WITH THOUGHTS IN MEDITATION

Meditation seeks to attain a state of awareness that is not absorbed in thought processes. It's a state of being, rather than thinking, in which the malleable mental stuff (*citta*) ceases its almost endless modifications until even the ego center is dissolved. Yoga calls this state *samadhi*.

On the road to such a state, we encounter various mental conditions that effectively become obstacles to the cessation of *citta*. We need to be aware of these intermediate states and learn how to deal with them.

In the sections below, keep in mind that the end state that we seek is pure awareness with-

out content — pure subjectivity that is nondirected and effortless.

Initial Approaches. Each time we enter into meditation, it's essential that we take note of the state of our mind. Is it filled with the noise of the

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day? Is it peaceful? Is it stressed? The meditational approach that will be helpful sometimes depends on these initial states.

For example, when the mind and body are tense and are still reeling from the problems of the day, a Mantra Yoga approach may be helpful just to calm the mind. This makes use of words or focus points that allow the mind to dwell on one thing rather than be carried away by jumpy thoughts. The word or words constitute the auditory focus, and the visual focus can be any spatial point or activity.

I recommend that you begin your meditation with the repetition of a two-syllable word such as *Soham* ("That am I"), *Hamsa* ("I am That") or their English equivalents. You can also say "One-two." Let it follow the pattern of your inbreath and outbreath. The first syllable is mentally uttered when you breath in, and the second syllable is uttered when you breath out. Breathing is normal. At the same time, focus your mind on a point somewhere in your head, such as the area between your eyebrows. Do this mechanically until your thoughts move away from events and concerns. An alternative spatial focus point is your inbreath and outbreath.

The repetition of a one-word syllable such as "Om" can also be used. Mentally recite the word during exhalation. Be aware of the thoughts in between the recitation of the word. Alternate words can be "*Mu*" (meaning "nothing") or "One."

Thoughts. In dealing with thoughts, it's helpful to recognize the various levels of thinking, which are

- Images and sounds
- Abstract thoughts
- Intentions

Images and sounds. The first group consists of gross thoughts. Observe them until they calm down naturally. Mental chatter belongs to this class.

Abstract thoughts. When the train of images and the chatter of the mind cease, then you need to be aware of formless thoughts. These are the abstract thoughts that are subtle but imperceptibly swift in their movements. Recognition of things or objects or concepts is a movement on this level. That is, the moment we recognize anything, such as a chair, even if we don't call it a chair or identify it verbally, there is already a subtle movement in the mind. Be aware that the process of naming, recognizing and subtle judging is going on all the time. Awareness tends to slow down this automatic activity. We become aware of the space in between these thoughts.

Intentions. A special kind of abstract thought is intention. Intentions seem to emanate from nowhere — just popping out into the field of consciousness. We think that we voluntarily choose these intentions, until we discover that they just appear without our willing them. We note in fact that the belief that intentions are voluntary is illusory.

Behind all these is the energy that pervades consciousness — or perhaps *constitutes* consciousness. The energy is not distinguishable from the consciousness. When the energy disappears, consciousness also dims and disap-

pears. We become asleep or unconscious.

When this energy remains, there is awareness. The object of meditation is to maintain this awareness without being identified with any of its contents — thoughts, motives, perceptions, etc.

The Self. Finally, the consciousness may enter into a state of bare subjectivity, of bare awareness devoid of intentions, recognition, preferences and naming.

This state can easily be lost by the slightest perceptions from our senses or the slightest wisps of our memories. Gradually, through practice, the length of time this state can be sustained increases.

This state is like rich soil, where germination or gestation occurs under the ground unseen. A contemplative process goes on imperceptibly, leading to the emergence of a subtle substratum of consciousness that remains even during nonmeditative periods. It's the "presence" that mystics speak of, the emergence of *prajñā*, or of the *buddhic* consciousness.

This substratum of consciousness is a significant development in the practice, because it's the link between the transpersonal and the personal in our daily life. In fact, it's the emergence of the transpersonal in daily life.

Whatever is happening — while we're working, thinking, reading, feeling, reacting — this substratum is a nonparticipating, but influencing, witness. It influences because, by its very presence, it prevents certain unwholesome things from happening, such as tension, suppressed emotions and automatic reactions.

Barrenness. There will be times when apparently nothing is happening during meditation. We must not assume that nothing is *really* happening. Meditation, as mentioned above, is like planting a seed under the ground. We water it every day, and yet nothing seems to be happening on the surface. However, underneath the ground, unseen, the seed is germinating and sprouting. One day, a bud comes forth, silently, slowly, im-

perceptibly, that eventually grows into the luxuriance of the plant.

SELF-TRANSFORMATIVE EFFECTS OF MEDITATION

The regular practice of meditation has a cumulative effect on our consciousness, character and personality.

Meditation, as mentioned above, is like planting a seed under the ground. We water it every day, and yet nothing seems to be happening on the surface. However, underneath the ground, unseen, the seed is germinating and sprouting.

First, it helps expand our field of peripheral awareness, those contents and perceptions of the field of present consciousness that are outside our field of attention and awareness. This peripheral awareness begins to become part of our awareness. The effect is integrative, that is, the contents and perceptions of the peripheral awareness don't remain as independent elements of the consciousness that might eventually result in psychological conflicts and distress. If we become aware of subtle discomforts, we stay with the experience of discomfort until it's resolved, either through processing or reasoning, but not through repression.

As the field of peripheral awareness expands to subtler levels, we become aware not only of feelings or discomfort but even thoughts, motives, attitudes, prejudices or preferences that react automatically to perceptions or stimuli. This is good. They are part of the conditionings we carry within ourselves. This expansion of our awareness accelerates the dissolution of the push buttons in our subconscious. It is thus a working partner of

The Diagram of Meditation

By Helena P. Blavatsky

First conceive of UNITY by Expansion in space and infinite in Time. (Either with or without self-identification).

Then meditate logically and consistently on this in reference to states of consciousness.

Then the normal state of our consciousness must be moulded by:-

Acquisitions

1. The Perception in all embodied beings of Limitation only.
 - o Criticism without praise or blame
2. Continued attempt at attitude of mind to all existing things, which is neither love, hate nor indifference
 - o Different in external activity to each, because in each the capacity alters. Mentally the same to all.
 - o Equilibrium and constant calm. Greater ease in practicing the “virtues”, which are really the outcome of wisdom, for benevolence, sympathy, justice, etc., arise from the intuitive identification of the individual with others, although unknown to the personality.
3. Perpetual Presence in imagination in all Space and Time.
 - o From this originates a substratum of memory which does not cease in dreaming or waking. Its manifestation is courage.
 - o With memory of universality all dread vanishes during the dangers and trials of life.

Note: Acquisition is completed with the conception “I am all Space and Time.”

Beyond that . . . (it cannot be said).

Deprivations

Constant refusal to think of the reality of:

1. Sensation: Gluttony, Lust, etc.
2. Possessions and Personality: Vanity, Remorse, Greed, Selfishness, Ambition
3. The Distinction Friend and Foe: Resulting in absence of anger and bias (Replaced by Judgement)
4. Separations and Meetings Associations with Places, Times and Forms: Futile longings, Expectations, Sad memories, Broken-heartedness.

Note: These deprivations are produced by the perpetual imagination — without self-delusion* — of “I am without”; the recognition of their being the source of bondage, ignorance and strife. “Deprivation” is completed by the meditation: “I am without attributes”.

(*) There is no risk of self-delusion if the personality is deliberately forgotten.

General Note: All the passions and virtues interblend with each other. Therefore the diagram gives only general hints.

self-awareness processing in dealing with the fragmentation of the lower self.

Perceptions, recognitions or stimuli can be likened to a ping-pong ball that enters the field of consciousness. When the field of peripheral awareness is narrow, the ball immediately hits walls of the subconscious, with all its push buttons, bouncing off immediately, that is, eliciting immediate and automatic reaction. This bouncing is unpremeditated, unprocessed and not the result of mature reflection.

When, however, the field of peripheral awareness grows deeper, a different sequence of events happens. The ping-pong ball travels farther before hitting any wall, and thus slows down. If it hits anything at all, the bouncing will be less forceful. If it doesn't hit any wall, then it just slows down to a stop, and floats there until it dissipates. When the peripheral awareness is deep enough, then the coming of the ping-pong ball is noticed by a deeper layer of our consciousness — the illumined mind (*manasa-taijasi*) or the *buddhi* itself. The perception by the illumined mind or the *buddhi* results in an understanding that leads to a subtle response that is now translated by the personality into action (which assumes that the higher and lower triangles are now seamlessly integrated).

Second, the practice of meditation opens the channel between the brain consciousness and the transpersonal consciousness. In the average person, this channel is occupied by the ego or the personal self, with all its connections with the subconscious. Not much from the subtler levels can pass down to the grosser levels. The ego, with all its insecurities, wants to take charge.

In creating a larger peripheral awareness, meditation expands this channel or bridge and, at the same time, deflates the ego. This enables the light of the higher consciousness to filter down into our ordinary waking mind. As we process the concerns of the ego more and more, it becomes thinner and more transparent, becoming less of an obstruction to the descending light from the higher realms. In Yoga, this is described

as the state of *samapatti*, when the self is like a transparent jewel, no longer distorting the surrounding realities. Patanjali says that with this, there is the dawning of the spiritual light into our consciousness.

SAMADHI AND ENLIGHTENMENT

A special aspect of meditation, *samadhi*, needs to be touched upon in view of the vagueness that usually clouds an appreciation of it.

*The practice of meditation
opens the channel between the
brain consciousness and the
transpersonal consciousness.*

Samadhi is often equated with enlightenment in many writings. To the best of my understanding, this is not accurate. Enlightenment is a form of *samadhi*, but not all *samadhis* are the equivalent of enlightenment. In the same manner, *samadhi* and satori in Zen are not synonymous.

Samadhi, as a term used by Patanjali in his *Yoga Sutras*, is characterized by the *absence of the observer* in relation to an object of attention. Out of this state, *prajñā* or intuitive knowledge may emerge. What is normally understood as enlightenment is the presence of *samadhi* plus *prajñā*. *Prajñā* is the insight or knowledge from the *buddhic* or spiritual consciousness.

Samadhi involves a discipline, but enlightenment involves *samadhi* plus a freedom and an awakening: freedom from the conditioned view of life and the cosmos, and an awakening of a transcendent faculty of perception that enables us to see things in their *is-ness*.

It's not necessary for *samadhi* to occur before the light of *prajñā* or intuitive knowledge filters into our ordinary mind. When the insights of this higher faculty, or *buddhi*, filter into the

abstract mind, then the mind itself can be said to be illumined — the *manas-tajasi*, or “radiant mind.”²

INTUITION

It’s unfortunate that the word *intuition* has become confused with hunches and with extrasensory perception. True intuition is none of these, although in its manifestation it may make use of these other faculties of the psyche. Intuiting is transcendent seeing. It’s hard to explain and define to those who think mainly in terms of utility, pragmatism, worldly effectiveness and similar viewpoints. It’s like the travelers who have been walking and walking toward a mountain peak, only to realize that even if they’re not yet at the summit, they have already “arrived.” In fact, they have never been away from the goal. In fact, there was never any goal. This analogy is likely to be misunderstood by the mind. And it can’t be helped, because the mind works the way it does — thinking in terms of linear goals, purposes, objects and three-dimensional things. The analogy illustrates that intuition has got nothing to do with telepathy or clairvoyance or pragmatic hunches such as feeling that it might rain so we

grab an umbrella on our way out even though the sun is shining brightly.

Intuition is “reverse” seeing. It’s the mind somersaulting, such that while we’re back in the same position, we’re not in the same position. It’s turning our shirt inside out.

These are hopeless verbal efforts. But it may give the taste and allow the reader to explore it non-linearly. This is the meaning of *prajñā* or *bodhi* in Buddhism Christianity doesn’t have special equivalent terms to *prajñā* and *bodhi*; *intuition* and *spiritual* come close. The word *contemplation* has been employed for this purpose, but it tends to drag the meaning further away, due to the word’s association with thinking and deliberation. The word *faith* has similarly been used for this, but the word is so heavily laden with other connotations that again it covers more than it unveils.

Notes:

1. Taimni, I.K., *The Science of Yoga* (Chennai: Theosophical Publishing House, 1961).
2. Blavatsky, H.P., *The Key to Theosophy*, “Glossary.”

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Questions for Review:

1. What is the difference between spiritual meditation and other forms of meditation?
2. Why should concentration be practiced as a preparatory stage?
3. Why is awareness of fundamental importance to true meditation?
4. What are the eight stages of Raja Yoga practice?
5. How do we deal with noise of our thoughts in meditation?
6. What is samadhi and enlightenment?
7. What is intuition?