All About Meditation
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EDUCATIONAL INSIGHT

All About Meditation

Mystical Guidelines to the Fine Art of Exploring the Wonderful Within of Yourself

From the Teachings of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, Founder of Hinduism Today

The growth of the lotus flower is perhaps the best metaphor for the soul as it unfolds in consciousness. It begins in the mud, like a soul caught up in the instinctive nature; then it emerges into the water as a stem, like the soul immersed in the intellect and emotions; and ultimately it appears above the water as a bud, just as the soul awakens to its spiritual nature. For the soul, this stage of the bud beginning to open as a beautiful flower marks the onset of inner striving, seeking to know oneself and fathom the mysteries of life through the introspective process of meditation. Meditation is an art, a definite art, and well worth working for to become accomplished. It is not easy, and yet it is not difficult. It only takes persistence, working day after day to learn to control and train the outer as well as the subtle, inner forces.

Meditation is a long journey, a pilgrimage into the mind itself. Generally we become aware that there is such a thing as medi tation after the material world has lost its attraction to us and previous desires no longer bind us to patterns of fear, greed, attachment and ramification. We then seek through philosophy and religion to answer the questions, "Who am I? Where did I come from? Where am I going?" We ask others. We read books. We ponder and wonder. We pray. We even doubt for a while that there is a Truth to be realized, or that we, with all our seeming imperfection, can realize it if it does exist. Oddly enough, this is the beginning of the meditator's journey on the path, for we must empty ourselves fully before the pure,

superconscious energies can flow freely through us. Once this state of emptiness and genuine searching is reached, we soon recognize the futile attempt to find Truth on the outside. We vividly begin to know, from the depth of ourselves, a knowing we could not explain or justify. We simply know that Reality, or the Self God, resides within, and we must go within ourselves to realize it. Of itself, that knowing is not enough. Even great efforts to meditate and vast storehouses of spiritual knowledge are not enough. Many have tried to find the Truth this way. The Truth is deeper and is discovered by the resolute devotee who dedicates his life to the search; who lives a balanced life according to the yamas and niyamas, the Vedic spiritual laws; who willingly undergoes change; who finds and obeys a spiritual teacher, or satguru; and who learns precisely the disciplined art of meditation. This, then, outlines the destination of the meditator's journey and his means of travel.

One of the first steps is to convince the subconscious mind that meditation is good for us. We may want to meditate consciously, yet maintain fears or doubts about meditation. Somewhere along the way, a long series of events occurred and, upon reaction to them, awareness became externalized. We became geared to the materialistic concepts of the external world. As we begin to feel that urgency to get back within, the old patterns of thought and emotion, cause and effect, naturally repeat themselves. For a while, the contents of the subconscious may conflict with our concepts of what it is like to fully live spiritually. Our habits will be undisciplined, our willpower ineffective. Quite often the subconscious seems almost like another person, because it is always doing something unanticipated.

In these early stages, we must mold the areas that are different into a new lifestyle so that there will be nothing in the subconscious that opposes what is in the conscious or superconscious mind. Only when all three of these areas of consciousness act in harmony can meditation be truly attained and sustained. For us to be afraid of the subconscious is unwise, for it then holds a dominant position in our life. The subconscious is nothing more than the accumulation of vibratory rates of experience encountered by awareness when it was externalized, a storehouse containing the past.

Remold the Subconscious Mind

The solution to subconscious confusion is to set a goal for ourselves in the external world and to have a positive plan incorporating meditation daily as a lifestyle within

that goal. Through this positive initiative and daily effort in meditation, awareness is centered within. We learn how to disentangle and unexternalize awareness.

As soon as strong initiative is taken to change our nature toward refinement, a new inner process begins to take place. The forces of positive accomplishment from each of our past lives begin to manifest in this one. The high points of a past life, when something great has happened, become strung together. These merits or good deeds are vibrations in the ether substance of our memory patterns, because each one of us, right now, is a sum total of all previous experience. All of the distractions of the external area of the mind begin to fade, and positive meditation becomes easily attainable. It is not difficult to move our individual awareness quickly within when distractions occur.

Set Goals & New Patterns

This new pattern of setting goals and meeting them strengthens the will. One such goal is to perform sadhana every day without fail during a morning vigil period of worship, japa, scriptural study and meditation. Daily meditation has to become part of our lifestyle, not just a new something we do or study about. It must become a definite part of us. We have to live to meditate. This is the only way to reach the eventual goal on the path--the realization of the all-pervasive Sivam. Deep meditation takes the power of our spiritual will, which is cultivated through doing everything we do to perfection, through meeting the challenges of our goals, and through its constant expression as we seek to do more than we think we can each day. So, set your spiritual goals according to where you are on the path. Set goals for deeper, more superconscious meditation, for a change of your personality or outer nature, for better service to your fellow man, and for a totally religious lifestyle.

Goals are generally not used in spiritual life, because the inner mechanism of goal setting is not clearly understood. Dynamic, successful people who go into business for themselves have to have a positive, aggressive plan and keep their lives in a good routine to achieve success. The most prominent among them begin and end each day at a certain time in order to sustain the pressure of the business world. We can and should approach the practice of meditation in a similar way. Like the businessman, we want to succeed in our quest, the only difference being the choice of an inner goal as opposed to the choice of an outer goal, the fulfillment of which entangles us and further externalizes awareness.

In the early stages of meditation, it's very difficult to sit without moving, because that has not been part of our lifestyle. The subconscious mind has never been programmed to contentedly sit quietly. We didn't see our families doing that. Perhaps we haven't seen anybody doing that. No example has been set. Therefore, we have to be patient with ourselves and not sit for too long in the beginning. Start by sitting for ten minutes without moving. In a few weeks, extend it to twenty minutes, then a half hour. Thus we avoid being fanatical and allow the subconscious to make its necessary adjustments.

These adjustments are physical as well as emotional and intellectual. The nerve currents rearrange themselves so that prolonged stillness and absence of external activity is comfortable. Similarly, the philosophy of the path of enlightenment fully penetrates every layer of the subconscious, adjusting previous erroneous concepts of ourselves and enabling us to consciously intuit various philosophical areas and know them to be right and true from our personal experience of superconsciousness. This, then, may take a few years.

If we plant a tree, we have to wait for it to grow and mature before we enjoy its shade. So it is in meditation. We make our plans for beginning the practices of meditation, then give ourselves enough time, several years, to fully adjust and remold the subconscious mind. Living as we do in the externalized culture of the West, we are conditioned to be in a hurry to get everything. When we try to internalize awareness too quickly through various intense and sometimes fanatical ways, we reap the reaction. Meditation goes fine for a brief span, but then externalizes again according to the programming of our family and culture.

To permanently alter these patterns, we have to work gently to develop a new lifestyle for the totality of our being--physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually. This we do a little at a time. Wisdom tells us that it cannot be done all at once. We have to be patient with ourselves. If we are impatient on the path, failure is in view. We are going to fail, because instant spiritual unfoldment is a fairy-tale concept. It is far better that we recognize that there will be difficult challenges as the subconscious looms up, with all of its conflicts and confusions, heavy and strong. When it does, we must face them calmly, through spiritual journaling, vasana daha tantra. If our eventual goal is clearly in mind and we have a positive step-by-step plan on how to reach that goal, then we won't get excited when something goes wrong, because we view our mental and emotional storms in their proper and temporary perspective.

Face the Barriers

Not only does the subconscious create barriers in our own minds, it also draws to us the doubts and worries of other people for us to face and resolve. There is such a vast warehouse of negative conditioning against meditation that it is almost useless to begin if we believe any of it at all. We have all heard a few of the fears: "Something terrible must have happened to you as a child if you want to go into that." "You don't love me anymore. That's why you meditate--you're withdrawing." "You're just afraid of society and responsibility. It's an escape from the real world that you can't cope with." "You're going to be poor if you meditate. Everyone who meditates is broke, you know." And so it goes, on and on.

We do have to answer these objections for the subconscious and thus settle all doubts within ourselves. Of course, the results of meditation will themselves convince the subconscious of the benefit of inner sadhana as we bring forth perceptive insights, renewed energy, a happy and balanced life and spiritual attainment. Negative conditioning breaks down as we prove to ourselves according to our own experience that it was wrong. Such conditioning is inhibiting to some and has to be corrected. To counteract it, we can ask ourselves, "Why? What is it all about? How did I attract these problems? Do I still have such doubts in my subconscious, consciously unknown?" We can further ask, "Who has done the conditioning? What was their life like? Were they happy people?" Finally, from our own positive efforts to cognize, we actually remold the subconscious, erase false concepts and become free.

The mind in its apparently endless confusion and desires leads us by novelty from one thing to the next. The reaction to this causes the miseries of the world, and the miseries of the world happen inside of people. But occasionally we have to call a halt to the whole thing and get into ourselves. That's the process of meditation. It's an art. It's a faculty we have within ourselves which, when developed, gives a balance and a sense to life. And everyone, whether they know it or not, is searching, trying to find out what life is all about.

So many people tell me, "Oh, I would like to study yoga, but I just don't have the time," "I can't get quiet enough," or "The kids make too much noise," or some excuse like that. They don't realize that you don't become quiet automatically. Becoming quiet is a systematic process. You become quiet systematically. It might take you two weeks of practice before you can sit down and feel that you've made

any progress at all, or even feel like sitting down and trying to become quiet. But it's one of those things you eventually have to do. You get up and cook breakfast because you have to eat. You are hungry. And when you become hungry enough to get quiet within yourself, you will do so automatically. You will want to. And then what happens? You will sit down, and your mind will race. Say, "Mind, stop!" and see how fast you can make your mind stop and become quiet. Say, "Emotions, you are mind-controlled," and see how quiet you become.

Establish the Right Conditions

We now come to the practical aspects of meditation. In the beginning, it is best to find a suitable room that is dedicated solely to meditation. If you were a carpenter, you would get a shop for that purpose. You have a room for eating, a room for sleeping. Now you need a separate room just for the purpose of meditation. When you find it, wash the walls and ceiling, wash the windows. Prepare a small altar if you like, bringing together the elements of earth, air, fire and water. Establish a time for your meditations and meet those times strictly. There will be days when you just don't feel like meditating. Good. Those are often the best days, the times when we make strong inner strides. The finest times to meditate are six in the morning, twelve noon, six in the evening, and twelve midnight. All four of these times could be used, or just choose one. The period of meditation should be from ten minutes to one-half hour to begin with.

By sitting up straight, with the spine erect, we transmute the energies of the physical body. Posture is important, especially as meditation deepens and lengthens. With the spine erect and the head balanced at the top of the spine, the life force is quickened and intensified as energies flood freely through the nerve system. In a position such as this, we cannot become worried, fretful, depressed or sleepy during our meditation. But if we slump the shoulders forward, we short-circuit the life energies. In a position such as this, it is easy to become depressed, to have mental arguments with oneself or another, or to experience unhappiness. So, learn to sit dynamically, relaxed and yet poised. The full-lotus position, with the right foot resting on the left thigh and the left foot above, resting on the right thigh, is the most stable posture to assume, hands resting in the lap, right hand on top, with the thumbs touching.

Control Thinking with Your Breathing

The first observation you may have when thus seated for meditation is that thoughts are racing through the mind substance. You may become aware of many, many thoughts. Also the breath may be irregular. Therefore, the next step is to transmute the energies from the intellectual area of the mind through proper breathing, in just the same way that proper attitude, preparation and posture transmuted the physical-instinctive energies. Through regulation of the breath, thoughts are stilled and awareness moves into an area of the mind which does not think, but conceives and intuits.

There are vast and powerful systems of breathing that can stimulate the mind, sometimes to excess. Deep meditation requires only that the breath be systematically slowed or lengthened. This happens naturally as we go within, but can be encouraged by a method of breathing called kalibasa in Shum, my language of meditation. During kalibasa, the breath is counted, nine counts as we inhale, hold one count, nine counts as we exhale, hold one count. The length of the beats, or the rhythm of the breath, will slow as the meditation is sustained, until we are counting to the beat of the heart, hridaya spanda pranayama. This exercise allows awareness to flow into an area of the mind that is intensely alive, peaceful, blissful and conceives the totality of a concept rather than thinking out the various parts.

Control of the breath, to be learned properly, might take months or even years. That's all right. If you were learning to play a musical instrument, it would take months or even years to perfect the basic principles of making chords and putting chords together into a melody. There is no hurry. Hurry is the age we want to bypass when we meditate. The control of the breath is exactly the same as the control of awareness, so it is good to be patient in the early stages and perfect each element of practice.

During medi tation, the breath, the heartbeat, metabolism--it all slows down, just like in sleep. You know, deep meditation and deep sleep are extremely similar. Therefore, the practice of pranayama--regulation of the breath and the pranas, the currents of the body, should really be mastered first. In the very same way, the dancer doesn't just start out dancing. He starts out exer cis ing first. He may exercise strenuously for a year before he begins to really dance. The pianist doesn't sit down at the piano and start with a concert. He starts with the scales and with the chords. He starts by limbering his fingers, by perfecting his rhythm and posture. Meditation has to be taught like one of the fine arts. It's only the finely refined person who can really learn to meditate. Not everyone who wants to meditate can learn to meditate. Not everyone who wants to learn to dance or to play the piano can learn how to really, really do it. We need this preparation of the physical body

so that the physical and emotional bodies behave themselves while you are in a deep state of meditation.

Your breath will slow down un til you almost seem to stop breathing. Sometimes you do, and you're breathing with an inner breath. You have to educate yourself to that so it doesn't make you fearful and bring you out of meditation with a jerk and a gasp, which can then inhibit you. You can get fearful in meditation. So, good basics must be learned for one to become a deep meditator. You can spend hours or years working with the breath. Find a good teacher first, one who keeps it simple and gentle. You don't need to strain. Start simply by slowing the breath down. Breathe by moving the diaphragm in stead of the chest. This is how children breathe, you know. So, be a child. If you learn to control the breath, you can be master of your awareness.

As we learn to breathe rhythmically and from the diaphragm, we also release tensions in the solar plexus. We learn to be spontaneous and free on the inside, and life force runs through us in an uninhibited way. We achieve and learn to maintain contentment, santosha. All of these things come through the simple techniques we practice while in meditation. But the practice of meditation is not the end. It is the total being of man that is the end to be sought for--the well-rounded, content, spontaneous being that is totally free.

Going Within, Four Easy Steps

After you have quieted the body, and the breath is flowing regularly, close your eyes. Close your ears and shut off the external sense perceptions. As long as you are aware of sights and sounds on the outside, you are not concentrated. It is a fallacy to think you have to find a totally silent place before you can go within. When your senses are stilled, you don't hear any sounds. You're in a state of silence. You don't hear a car that passes, you don't hear a bird that sings, because your awareness has shifted to different perceptions. It helps, but it's not necessary, to have a totally silent place. This is not always possible, so it is best not to depend on outer silence. We must discover silence within ourselves. When you are reading a book that is extremely interesting, you are not hearing noises around you. You should be at least that interested in your meditations.

Having thus quieted the outer forces, we are prepared to meditate. Just sitting is not enough. To meditate for even ten or fifteen minutes takes as much energy as one would use in running around a city block three times. A powerful meditation fills and thrills us with an abundance of energy to be used creatively in the external world during the activities of daily life. Great effort is required to make inner strides. We must strive very, very hard and meet each inner challenge.

When we go into meditation, what do we meditate upon? What do we think about during meditation? Usually the sincere devotee will have a guru, or spiritual guide, and follow his instructions. He may have a mantra, or mystic sound, which he concentrates upon, or a particular technique or attitude he is perfecting. If you have no guru or specific instructions, then here is a raja yoga exercise that can enhance inner life, making it tangibly real and opening inner doors of the mind. Use it to begin each meditation for the rest of your life.

1. Feel the Body's Warmth: Simply sit, quiet the mind, and feel the warmth of the body. Feel the natural warmth in the feet, in the legs, in the head, in the neck, in the hands and face. Simply sit and be aware of that warmth. Feel the glow of the body. This is very easy, because the physical body is what many of us are most aware of. Take five, ten or fifteen minutes to do this. There is no hurry. Once you can feel this warmth that is created by the life force as it flows in and through the body's cells, once you can feel this all over the body at the same time, go within to the next step.

2. Become Aware of the Nerve Currents: The second step is to feel the nerve currents of the body. There are thousands of miles of nerve currents in each of us. Don't try to feel them all at once. Start with the little ones, with the feeling of the hands, thumbs touching, resting on your lap. Now feel the life force going through these nerves, energizing the body. Try to sense the even more subtle nerves that extend out and around the body about three or four feet. This may take a long time. When you have lo cated some of these nerves, feel the energy within them. Tune into the currents of life force as they flow through these nerves. This is a subtle feeling, and most likely awareness will wander into some other area of the mind. When this happens, gently bring it back to your point of concentration, to feeling the nerves within the body and the energy within the nerves.

3. Feel the Power Within the Spine: The third step takes us deeper inside, as we become dynamically aware in the spine. Feel the power within the spine, the

powerhouse of energy that feeds out to the external nerves and muscles. Visualize the spine in your mind's eye. See it as a hollow tube or channel through which life energies flow. Feel it with your inner feelings. It's there, subtle and silent, yet totally intense. It is a simple feeling. We can all feel it easily. As you feel this hollow spine filled with energy, realize that you are more that energy than you are the physical body through which it flows, more that pure energy than the emotions, than the thought force. Identify yourself with this energy and begin to live your true spiritual heritage on this Earth. As you dive deeper into that energy, you will find that this great power, your sense of awareness and your willpower are all one and the same thing.

4. Become Aware of Awareness: The fourth step comes as we plunge awareness into the essence, the center of this energy in the head and spine. This requires great discipline and exacting control to bring awareness to the point of being aware of itself. This state of being totally aware that we are aware is called kaif. It is pure awareness, not aware of any object, feeling or thought. Go into the physical forces that flood, day and night, through the spine and body. Then go into the energy of that, deeper into the vast inner space of that, into the essence of that, into the that of that, and into the that of that. As you sit in this state, new energies will flood the body, flowing out through the nerve system, out into the exterior world. The nature becomes very refined in meditating in this way. Once you are thus centered within yourself, you are ready to pursue a meditation, a mantra or a deep philosophical question.

Tame Distraction

Throughout your inner investigations in meditation, cling to the philosophical principle that the mind doesn't move. Thoughts are stationary within the mind, and only awareness moves. It flows from one thought to another, as the free citizen of the world travels through each country, each city, not attaching himself anywhere. When you are able, through practice, to sit for twenty minutes without moving even one finger, your superconscious mind can begin to express itself. It can even reprogram your subconscious and change past patterns of existence. That is one of the wonderful things about inner life. That's why it's inner life--it happens from the inside.

If you just sit and breathe, the inner nerve system of the body of your psyche, your soul, begins to work on the subconscious, to mold it like clay. Awareness is loosened

from limited concepts and made free to move vibrantly and buoyantly into the inner depths where peace and bliss remain undisturbed for centuries. However, if you move even a finger, you externalize the entire nervous system. Like shifting gears from high to low, you change the intensity of awareness, and the outer nerve system then is active. Superconscious programming ceases, awareness returns to the body and the senses, and the external mind takes over. By sitting still again at this point, it is just a matter of a few minutes for the forces to quiet and awareness to soar in and in once again. Sitting quietly in this state, you will feel when the superconscious nerve system begins to work in the physical body. You may feel an entirely different flow through your muscles, your bones and your cells. Let it happen.

As you sit to meditate, awareness may wander into past memories or future happenings. It may be distracted by the senses, by a sound or by a feeling of discomfort in the body. This is natural in the early stages. Gently bring awareness back to your point of concentration. Don't criticize awareness for wandering, for that is yet another distraction. Distractions will disappear if you become intensely interested and involved in your meditation. In such a state you won't even feel the physical body. You have gone to a movie, read a book or sat working on a project on your computer that was so engrossing you only later discovered your foot had fallen asleep for a half hour because it was in an awkward position. Similarly, once we are totally conscious on the inside, we will never be distracted by the physical body or the outside.

If distractions keep coming up in meditation over a long period of time, then perhaps you are not ready to meditate. There has to be a point where distractions stop. Until then you are hooked very strongly into the instinctive or intellectual area of the mind, and the whole idea of meditation won't inspire you very much. Therefore, you need something to spur you on inwardly. In Hinduism when this occurs, the grace of the satguru is sought. By going to your guru openly, you receive darshana, a little extra power that moves awareness permanently out of the areas of distraction. You are then able to sit in inner areas for long periods of time. Distractions become fewer and fewer, for he has wrenched you out of the instinctive and intellectual areas and changed the energy flow within your body. Learn from Your Sleep

Get into the habit of meditating before sleep each night. If you catch yourself dropping off to sleep while sitting for meditation, know that your meditation is over. The best thing to do is to deliberately go to sleep, because the spiritual power is gone and has to be invoked or opened up again. After getting ready for bed, sit in

the lotus position and have a dynamic meditation for as long as you can. When you feel drowsy, you may deliberately put your body to sleep in this way. Mentally say to yourself, "Prana in the left leg, flow, go to sleep. Prana in the right leg, flow, go to sleep. Prana in the left arm, flow, go to sleep. Prana in the right arm, flow, go to sleep. Torso prana, flow, go to sleep. Head filled with inner light, go to sleep." The first thing you know, it's morning.

The whole dream and sleep world is very interesting. Often we go into inner planes of consciousness at night. How do you know if you have been in meditation all through the night, studying at the inner-plane school in higher states of mind? You will wake up all of a sudden with no interim period of sleepiness. You wake up invigorated. There you are, as if you came out of nowhere back into external consciousness. Otherwise, you wake up through the subconscious dream world. You feel a little off-key, and you know that you have been in the dream or astral world or the realms of intellectual aggressiveness much of the night. Striving yoga students do go into inner-plane meditation schools for short periods of time during their sleeping hours. This occurs when the mind is a well-trained mind, a keen mind, a crystal-clear mind.

Perhaps by this time you have seen the clear white light, or less intense inner light, and you have seen how crystal clear and sharp it is. Each thought, each feeling, each action has to be crystal clear and sharp to maintain and bring through a balance of your consciousness to the external world. When this happens, you have control over these states of consciousness, so much so that you are your own catalyst, and you can slide into higher states and out to external states of consciousness without being disturbed by one or the other.

When we act and react in daily affairs, we dream at night. We are living in the external or the aggressive magnetic force, called pingala. Thus, we dream in pictures. Should a yogi live in the passive force, the magnetic indrawn force, called ida, he feels and emotes on the astral plane. He would have a fretful, eventful night, an emotional night. He would not dream in pictures as much as he would in feeling. When one is living in the pure spiritual force, sushumna, the primary life force, he flows from sleep into meditation. The meditator should strive to put his body to sleep consciously and deliberately, after balancing the external and internal magnetic forces. So, whether he is lying down in his body or sitting in the lotus posture, he is in deep meditation, going to schools of learning and schools of spiritual unfoldment within his own mind. In the morning, many of my students remember inner-plane class activities which occurred during the night, not as a dream but as their own experience. So, you can meditate while you sleep, but don't

sleep while you are meditating!

Clear the Subconscious

After you have practiced meditation for some time, your inner vision will become keen and clear. For a while there may be the feeling of arrival, that you have at last conquered life's cycles, that you are pure now and free at last. But soon, layer by layer, your past will begin to unfold itself to you as your subconscious mind shows you in vivid, pictorial form all the vibratory rates you have put into it in this life. Like a tape recorder, it begins to play back the patterns and vibrations of previous cause and effect.

Since some of these memories and actions may not have been complimentary, you may try to avoid looking at them. The more you avoid facing them, the more apparent they will become. You might think that everyone is seeing them, but they are not. This natural phase of spiritual unfoldment can be a pitfall, for these associations and attachments of the past seem temporarily attractive as they pass before the mind's eye. Old desires, old friends, old and comfortable habits you thought were gone now come up to tempt awareness, to pull it back into a seemingly desirable past. This event should not be taken too seriously. It is natural and necessary, but you must avoid a fear of the process, which, in order to stop the unpleasant feedback, often brings people to stop their efforts at meditation. This is not the time to stop meditating. Nor is it the time to avoid the past. It is the time to fully review each year of your life that led you to where you are now.

As you remain inwardly poised, watching the images of life but remaining detached, they gradually fade away, leaving awareness free to dive ever deeper into superconscious realms. This sometimes intense experience brings you into renewed desire to live the kind of life that does not produce distorted images. You become religious and consciously shape up your lifestyle according to the yamas and niyamas, so that the reverberation of each action is positive in the subconscious. You have seen the uncom pli mentary results of living according to the moods and emotions of the instinctive mind and the senses, and that experience has taught a great lesson. In reviewing life according to this new guideline, you may change your profession, your address, your diet and values. You will undoubtedly find new friends, for it is essential to associate with people that are of good character. Choose your friends carefully, but don't get too closely attached. People clinging to people is one of the biggest deterrents to the life of meditation.

Generally as soon as someone gets on the path and starts meditating, he wants to tell everyone else how to do it even before he has learned himself. This socializing never produces inner results. Keep your meditation abilities and activities to yourself. Don't talk about inner things with anyone but your guru. When it comes others' time to turn within, they will do so naturally, just as you did. That is the law.

Live a Harmonious Life

Good interpersonal relationships help the meditator a great deal, and meditation helps keep those relations harmonious. When we get along nicely with others, meditation becomes easy. If we have problems with other people, if we argue or disagree mentally and verbally, we must work exceedingly diligently in order to regain the subtlety of meditation. Poor interpersonal relationships are one of the biggest barriers, for they antagonize awareness, causing it to flow through the instinctive and intellectual forces. This puts stress and strain on the nerve system and closes inner doors to superconsciousness.

If we cannot get along with our fellow man, whom we watch closely, observing the expressions on his face and the inflections of his voice, how will we ever get along with the forces of the subconscious, which we cannot see, or the refined superconscious areas of the inner mind, when we face them in meditation? Obviously, we must conquer and harmonize all our relationships--not by working to change the other person, but by working with that other person within ourself, for we are only seeing in him what is in us. He becomes a mirror. We cannot allow the unraveling of the relationship by attempted outer manipulation, discussion or analysis to become a barrier to deeper meditation. Instead, we must internalize everything that needs change, work within ourselves and leave other people out of it. This helps to smooth interpersonal relationships; and as these relationships improve, so does our ability to meditate.

Our nerve system is just like a harp. It can be played by other people. They can cause many tones to be heard in our nerve system. All styles of music can be played on a harp, but no matter what kind of music is played, the harp remains the same. People can do all sorts of things to our nervous system, and make patterns of tone and color appear. This does not hurt the nervous system. It, like the harp, remains the same. The same nervous system can be played by our superconscious or by our passions. We can experience beautiful knowledge from within, which is the outgrowth of good meditation abilities, or experience a mental argument with

another person. All tones are played at different times through the same nervous system. We want our nervous system to be played from the inside out through the beautiful rhythm of superconsciousness. This is bliss. We do not want to allow other people to affect our nerve system in a negative way, only in a positive way. That is why it is imperative for those on the path to be in good company.

Realize that You Are Wonderful

Now we are in a new age. Everything is changing. Everything is different. We must believe that we can change by using our powers of meditation, for we are here, on the surface of this Earth, to value and fulfill our existence. Value yourself and your fellow man. Say to yourself again and again, "I am the most wonderful person in the whole world!" Then ask yourself, "Why? Because of my unruly subconscious? Not necessarily. Because of what I know intellectually? Not so. I am the most wonderful person in the world because of the great spiritual force that flows through my spine, head and body, and the energy within that, and the That within that."

Know full well that you can realize the very essence of this energy in this life. Feel the spine and the power within it that gives independence, enthusiasm and control. Then say to yourself, over and over, "I am a wonderful person," until you can fully and unreservedly believe it. Lean on your own spine. Depending on the greatness within is the keynote of this new age. Get your willpower going. If you find an unruly part of your nature, reprogram it, little by little, using the yamas and niyamas as your guideline. Live a dynamic, God-like life every day. Dance with Siva, live with Siva and merge with Siva. Get into this area of the mind called meditation. Make it a fundamental part of your life, and all forms of creativity, success and greatness will find expression in your life. Everyone is on this planet for one purpose. That purpose will be known to you through your powers of meditation, through seeing and then finally realizing your Self at the very core of the universe itself.

Enjoy Unbridled Inspiration

Concentration has to be practiced and perfected before meditation can begin. If you find that you are sitting and trying not to fall asleep for a half hour, you have only accomplished sitting and trying not to go to sleep for half an hour--and perhaps refraining from scratching your nose when it begins to itch. But that cannot be

called meditation. Meditation is a transforming state of mind, really. A person once said to me, "Well, I concentrate my mind by reading a book, and when I'm reading, I don't hear a thing." This is not concentration, but attention, the first step to concentration. Concentration is thinking about one definite thing for a given length of time until you begin to understand what you are thinking about. What should we concentrate upon? Start with any solid object. Take your watch, for instance. Think about your watch. Think about the crystal. Think about the hands. Let your mind direct itself toward the mechanism of your watch, and then observe how your mind, after a few moments, begins to wander and play tricks on you. You may start thinking about alarm clocks or a noise in the street.

Each time your concentration period is broken by a distraction, you must start all over again. Breathe deeply and coordinate all the energies of your body so that you are not distracted by an itch or a noise. Direct your awareness once again to your watch. Before you know it, you will be thinking about a movie you saw four weeks ago and living through all the fantasies of it again without realizing that ten minutes of your time has gone by. Be careful and gentle with your awareness, however. Bring it back to the object of your concentration in a firm, relaxed manner and say to yourself, "I am the master of my thought." Eventually, your awareness will begin to do just what you want it to.

Once you are able to direct your awareness, without wavering, upon one object, you will begin to understand what you are concentrating upon, and you will find that this state of understanding is the beginning of your meditation. You are more alive in this state than you were in the noisy condition of your mind before you began to concentrate, and you come forth from your meditation a little wiser than you were before you went in.

The next state of consciousness, which is attained when meditation has been perfected, is contemplation. In the contemplative state of awareness you will feel the essence of all life pouring and radiating through your body and through the object you have been meditating upon. When contemplation is sustained, the final step is samadhi, and that is finding or becoming your true Self, which is beyond all conditions of your mind, all phases of consciousness. Only after you have attained samadhi can you answer the question "Who am I?" from your own experience. Only then will you know that you are all-pervasive, and finally, in the deepest samadhi, that you are causeless, timeless, spaceless and that you have been able to realize this through a balance of your awakened inner and outer consciousness, a bringing together of the forces of your mind in yoga, or union.

Fourteen Secrets for Serious Meditators

1 Create your sacred space. Keep it clean and uplifting.

2 The only bad meditation is the one you skip. Use the power of habit. A strong meditation habit will carry you forward with less effort.

3 Decide on your meditation subject or goal and stick to it.

4 Meditation is hard work. The more effort you give to it, the more results you get back from it. Meditate when it's not easy. That is when the most progress takes place.

5 Learn to work past the obstacles of distraction.

6 Nurture curiosity; make your innersearch engaging.

7 Perfect your technique, but work equally hard to nurture the right spirit. It's the spirit/ will that matters most.

8 Move from each meditation to a positive external activity, and from a positive project into meditation. Let the external energies impel your seeking, and let your inner discoveries inform your outer life.

9 Meditate in the morning before you read your e-mail, open the newspaper or turn on the TV.

10 Become what you seek to experience. The quality of your meditations is a reflection of the state of your nerve system and the purity of your karmas.

11 Keep working on yourself between meditations.

12 Progress is cyclical, like a spiral. There are ups and downs, but the trajectory overall is always up. Enjoy the days when the wind is in your sails, and work on the other days extra hard.

13 Keep expectations realistic and achievable.

14 Write down your insights when they come, bringing them into words to impress the subconscious.

"Who Am I?" A Strategy for Self-Realization

"I am not the physical body, nor am I the five organs of sense-perception; I am not the five organs of external activity, nor am I the five vital forces, nor am I even the thinking mind." Ramana Maharishi

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"A conscious bliss ensues when one abides as the Self, by inquiring 'What is the true import of I?' This bliss is spontaneous, indestructible and limitless." These are the words of Ramana Maharishi (1879-1950), the renowned sage of Arunachala, South India, whose widely popular approach to meditation is called Atma-vichara, or Self inquiry. It epitomizes the path of discovery propounded in the Advaita Vedanta teachings of the Smarta Sampradaya.

Ramana spoke little and defied all efforts to have his teachings distilled into a set of instructions for meditation, but much can be learned from the gems of wisdom that he did confer regarding the path of Self knowing. In the English translation of Upadesa Manjari (A Bouquet of Spiritual Instruction), published in 1939, the sage is asked: "What is the correct method of practice for the disciple to adopt and follow?" The answer: "In the first instance, it should be recognized that the Atman, or the Self, is not something existing separate and distinct from the seeker, which he has yet to obtain, as it were, from without. Considering further that there is nothing loftier or more sublime than the object of his quest, which is identical with himself, he that would earnestly try to attain Liberation should initially proceed to discriminate between what is permanent and abiding and what is not. By this discriminative insight, he should know beyond doubt and free from misconception what he really is, i.e., in what his real Being consists. Realizing thus his true and natural state, he should remain changeless, firmly established therein. This is the correct method of practice, or sadhana, and is called the Vichara Marga, which is pre-eminently instrumental in gaining direct and immediate knowledge of the Self.

"Jnana is the utter annihilation of the mind by making it realize its absolute identity with the Atman, or the Self, by incessant practice of dhyana (meditation) or vichara (inquiry in quest of the Self). Utter annihilation of the mind is synonymous with that state of pure Being in which all effort (either to control or to direct it, which is necessary only if the mind is wayward or in any way subject to the influence of mundane existence) has finally ceased. Those who have attained that state never swerve from it. What is called Mauna, or Quiescence, is verily that state of pure Being.

"In sadhana, one should pay particular attention to the following points:

(a) "If the aspirant would only devote every minute spent in vain thinking about objects, which constitute the not-Self, in earnest inquiry in quest of the Self, he would, in a very short time, attain Self-Realization.

(b) "Until the mind obtains a firm and steady hold on the state of pure Being, practice of profound meditation tinged with religious emotion (bhavana) is essential, for, otherwise, the mind becomes an easy prey to wayward thoughts or is overcome by sleep.

(c) "The aspirant must not waste his time in an endless and vain repetition of such scriptural dicta as 'Sivoham' (the Supreme Lord am I) or 'Aham Bra hma smi' (I am Bra hman), which is considered characteristic of nir gun opa sana. Instead, the aspirant should, with the strength of mind he gains by such devout repetition, or upasana, practice At ma vi chara, or investigation in quest of the Self even as he is, without the superimposition of such ideas as 'I am Brahman,' etc.

(d) "The excellence of the sadhana, or the method of practice, adopted consists essentially in not yielding, by every possible means, any scope for obsessing thoughts of any kind to enter into the mind."

In his book Who Am I?, ca 1922, Siva pra kasam Pillai captured the famous discourse by that name which he heard Sri Ramana give twenty years earlier. Here are brief excerpts:

"Who am I? I am not the physical body, nor am I the five organs of sense-perception; I am not the five organs of external activity, nor am I the five vital forces, nor am I even the thinking mind. Neither am I that unconscious state of nescience that retains merely the subtle vasanas (latencies of the mind), being then free from the functional activity of the sense organs and of the mind, and being unaware of the existence of the objects of sense-perception.

"Therefore, summarily rejecting all the above mentioned physical adjuncts and their functions, saying, 'I am not this; no, nor am I this, not this,' that which then remains separate and alone by itself, that pure Awareness, verily am I. This Awareness is by its very nature Sat-Chit-Ananda (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss).

"By a steady and continuous investigation into the nature of the mind, the mind is transformed into That to which the 'I' refers, and that is verily the Self.

"Even when extraneous thoughts sprout up during such inquiry, do not seek to complete the rising thought, but, instead, deeply inquire within, 'To whom has this thought occurred?' No matter how many thoughts thus occur to you, if you would, with acute vigilance, inquire immediately, as and when each individual thought

arises, as to whom it has occurred, you would find it is to 'me.' If, then, you inquire, 'Who am I?' the mind gets introverted, and the rising thought also subsides. In this manner, as you persevere more and more in the practice of Self-inquiry, the mind acquires increasing strength and power to abide in its Source."

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Aspiring on the Spiritual Path Excerpts from the Writings of Sri Chinmoy

"Do you need happiness? Then do just three things: meditate regularly, smile soulfully and love untiringly." Sri Chinmoy

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No matter which path you follow for meditation, the first and foremost task is to try to make the mind calm and quiet. If the mind is constantly roaming, if it is all the time a victim of merciless thoughts, then you will make no progress whatsoever. The mind has to be made calm and quiet so that when the light descends from above, you can be fully conscious of it. In your conscious observation and conscious acceptance of light, you will enter into a profound meditation and see the purification, transformation and illumination of your life.

How will you make the mind calm and quiet? The mind has its own power, and right now this power is stronger than your present eagerness and determination to meditate. But if you can get help from your heart, then gradually you will be able to control your mind. The heart, in turn, gets constant assistance from the soul, which is all light and power. If you can keep your mind calm and quiet for ten or fifteen minutes, a new world will dawn within you.

On the problem of falling asleep in meditation. When you meditate you have to be absolutely dynamic. Do not allow sleepiness to enter into you. When you sit down to meditate, feel that you are entering into the battlefield where you have to fight against ignorance, imperfection and death.

The best thing is to breathe in deeply a few times before you meditate and make your whole body energetic. This dynamic energy will help you enter into meditation. If possible, take a small quantity of hot juice or hot milk before you begin your meditation also.

With each breath, try to feel that a stream of energy is entering into you. Then try to feel that you are breathing in through different parts of your body: your eyes, your ears, your forehead, your shoulders, the crown of your head and so on. Feel that each of these places is a door, and when you breathe in feel that you are opening this door. At that time, energy enters into you from the Universal Consciousness. Then try to invoke the power aspect of the Supreme. Do not invoke peace or light; only try to bring forward divine power from within or bring it down from above.

Lethargy and sleep come during meditation because sincere interest is lacking. If sincere interest is there, there will be no tendency to sleep. When a student wants to be first in school, when he has a real, sincere interest, then he studies without being forced by his parents. You should always try to be eager and enthusiastic about meditation. If you feel that you cannot meditate for half an hour, then plan to meditate for ten minutes. Then you will feel, "Oh, only ten minutes. Easily I can do that." If your goal is very near, then you will give it all your energy.

On the necessity of meditating every day. If you are serious about your spiritual life, then you have to meditate at least once a day. If you are very enthusiastic, you can meditate three times a day--early in the morning, at noon or during your lunch hour, and in the evening. Your morning and evening meditations can be for a longer time, for fifteen minutes or half an hour, whereas your noon meditation can be as short as five or ten minutes. If it is not possible to feed your soul three times a day, then please feed it at least once. Feel that the soul is a little divine child. If you don't feed the divine child within you, it will not be able to grow and manifest your inner divine qualities and your soul's possibilities.

It is better to meditate well just once a day in the morning than to sit five or six times a day with your eyes closed and just have pleasant thoughts drifting through your head. Before the sun rises, the earth-consciousness is not yet agitated. The world has not yet entered into its daily turmoil. Nature is calm and quiet and will help you meditate. Whether you meditate in the morning or the evening, it is of paramount importance to have a fixed time for your meditation.

On the benefits of group meditation. When you meditate with others, you can be of real help to them, and they can be of real help to you. Nobody meditates well every day. Let us say that today you are in a very high state of consciousness, while the person who is sitting beside you is not in his highest consciousness. If both of you are meditating together, your aspiration and even your very presence will inspire and lift up that person. Then, tomorrow it may happen that you are not inspired to go high, whereas the other person is in a high consciousness. At that time he will be able to lift you up. So, collective meditation is meant for mutual help.

During collective meditation try to feel that others are not separate entities. Feel that you are the only person meditating, and that you are entirely responsible for the meditation. It is always advisable that the disciples of one spiritual master meditate only with those on their own path or with those who have not yet chosen a path.

Is Vegetarianism Vital To Success in Meditation? Sri Chinmoy's Response

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Purity is of paramount importance for an aspirant. This purity we must establish in the body, in the vital and in the mind. When we eat meat, the aggressive animal consciousness enters into us. Our nerves become agitated and restless, and this can interfere with our meditation. If a seeker does not stop eating meat, generally he does not get subtle experiences or subtle visions.

The mild qualities of fruits and vegetables help us to establish in our inner life, as well as in our outer life, the qualities of sweetness, softness, simplicity and purity. If we are vegetarians, this helps our inner being to strengthen its own existence. Inwardly, we are praying and meditating; outwardly, the food we are taking from Mother Earth is helping us, too, giving us not only energy but also inspiration.

Many spiritual seekers have come to the conclusion that a vegetarian is in a position to make quicker progress in the spiritual life. But along with a vegetarian diet, one must pray and meditate. If one has aspiration, the vegetarian diet will help considerably; the body's purity wil help one's inner aspiration to become more intense and more soulful.

These passages are drawn from Sri Chinmoy's Meditation, Man-Perfection in God-Satisfaction, with permission from the publisher, Aum Publications, Jamaica, New York.