

No Perfect Way to Meditate

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Marc: Hi, Sundari.

I have two very practical questions, but first of all I'd like to let you know that since a day or ten I quit my Facebook account – completely. Over and done.

The reason why I am letting you know is the following: in the last weeks before quitting Facebook, I made some comments about the smear campaign with regard to James, both on the people interested in the *advaita* teachings of James Swartz' Facebook group (or something like that, I've already forgotten the right name) on the "Guruphiliac" Facebook group and probably also on James' own Facebook page (I don't remember). These comments were in favor of James; I don't believe one word of this slander. But some days after having closed my Facebook account (very abruptly), I realized that this implies that all my comments also will have disappeared. For some people, this may look like I suddenly changed my mind. But that's not the case, that's all I want to say. So closing my Facebook account has nothing to do with this case, but it has everything to do with James. ☺

Sundari: Thank you, Marc, we appreciate your support in this farcical attempt to slander James. This, I said to another supporter, about sums it up:

The unintended consequences for this low-life are that he/she has only served to increase James' fame and support! Interesting times, the price of fame. As a supporter wisely said:

"A scenario often seen in the competitive material world is that when a person scales heights of popularity and wisdom, there are always some decelerating forces that try to pull down the growth. The fact to be understood here is that if a person is being targeted continuously, that means the person holds a significant value. There is a famous colloquial idiom in this regard that says: 'People throw stones only on a mango tree which is full of mangoes and not to one which is empty.' Hence you may understand that you are a very significant person in your chosen field of deliverance and your scope and visibility is on the rise. You can read the history of great persons... they all had at some points journeys on thorny paths, right from Jesus to Gandhi. If the world needs your attention and contribution, then one has to move forward aiming at the rose by negotiating the thorns."

Marc: More exactly, with his recommendation to simplify life as much as possible I had developed a Facebook *vasana*, almost an addiction to it. Leaving Facebook is a good first step towards a simpler life in my case. Already it has brought more rest and peace in daily life. I think this recommendation is very important, but – and this is my first question – do you have any other practical tips to simplify life? Maybe from your own life or that of other people interested in Vedanta?

Sundari: We give practical advice on lifestyle issues in our *guna* books, soon to be released.

Basically though, wherever you have agitation (excess *rajas*) and dullness (excess *tamas*) manifesting in your life, be it in your diet, exercise or lack of it, money, sex, entertainment, home, relationships, etc. you must take stock of why and adjust for peace of mind. Nobody can advise you on personal issues, because everyone's *dharma* and *karma* is unique – but use common sense and apply *karma yoga* to all thoughts, words and actions.

Marc: My second question is about meditation. I'm a member of a Zen group, since many years. I'm not a Buddhist – I feel much more inclined towards the *advaita* teachings – but in this group this is no problem. So I just do the *zazen* (meditation according to the Zen method) because it brings a more *sattvic* mind. But – and this is my second question – do you (or James or other people) think that other types of meditation yield better results? (I've practiced the method of James, which he describes in one of his books, a few times, but not enough to know whether it suits me better). How about other techniques or how about forgetting about meditation altogether and just practice simple relaxation techniques? Maybe they have the same results with regard to creating more *sattva*? "Meditation" has a more lofty, "spiritual" connotation, but maybe mere relaxation works just as well?

Sundari: I have covered this topic extensively in *satsangs*, and so has James. You can read up on it in his books too. There is no ideal meditation, just what works to calm the mind for you. Many inquirers feel superior if "their" meditation results in supposedly higher states of mind – but that is just ego. The self is beyond all states and ever-present regardless of the state of mind you are in. You could meditate peeling carrots, driving your car, walking or working. It is just the ability to turn the mind inwards towards the self. While it is admirable and even recommended to meditate formally, it is not a prerequisite for self-inquiry or *moksa*. As the self, meditation is an object known to you, as is the meditator.

Meditation is not a valid means of knowledge; it is a tool to aid self-inquiry, but it does not equal self-inquiry. Unless one has realised that one is not the meditator but the one who knows the meditator, meditation can keep one stuck for years trying to have an experience of the self, which many meditators do have, but the problem is the identification with the experiencer/meditator is still there. Unless the knowledge that meditation is designed to impart is fully assimilated – i.e. "I am whole and complete, non-dual awareness" and not the meditator – the experience ends because it was just that, an experience. All experiences happen in time and so they are subject to change and will end. Only self-knowledge will permanently set one free of the meditator/experiencer because you – awareness/consciousness – are already free.

In this way the experience of self-realization does not necessarily lead to freedom, *moksa*. Therefore there are many frustrated meditators around, trying to get the experience back. Even if they succeed, they will most likely "lose" the self-realisation once again because the knowledge that they are that which makes all experience possible, i.e. awareness, escapes them. Meditation is no different from any other activity done to achieve a specific result – unless it is practiced with *karma yoga*.

The knowledge that the meditation points to is that you are the knower of the one who meditates, the one who thinks it is the doer/meditator. Meditation is just another object appearing in you, allowing the reflection of the self to appear in a still mind. However, since no experience can take place without you, awareness, and because as awareness you are actionless, no special

experience is required to experience the self. You are always experiencing the self, whether you are meditating or not. You just don't know this. And no action the doer takes can produce self-knowledge. This is because as the doer you are limited and no action taken by a limited being can produce a limitless result, i.e. freedom/*moksa*.

The self, awareness – YOU – are not an object of perception and cannot be known by the mind, because the mind is too gross and the self too subtle. The object or the effect cannot know the subject, the cause. The self is “beyond” the mind and the only means of knowledge for the *jiva* to know anything are perception and inference, which are suitable for knowing objects but not suitable means of knowledge to know awareness. Only Vedanta offers a complete and valid means of knowledge for awareness.

Although we can have an experience of the reflection of the self in a pure, *sattvic* mind in meditation, this is not enough to set us free of the doer. For this we need to expose the mind to self-inquiry and allow self-knowledge to remove our ignorance (*avidya*). Although self-inquiry is also an action, the result of self-inquiry is self-knowledge, which can produce a limitless result, meaning freedom from identification with the doer, or person.

Self-inquiry is just the application of knowledge. Self-inquiry states that awareness is our true nature and both knowledge and ignorance are objects appearing in you, awareness. Keeping this knowledge in mind and continually contemplating on it is self-inquiry. Self-inquiry is different from meditation because the knowledge is maintained by an act of will, whereas in meditation the knowledge appears during a particular experience.

Self-inquiry is superior to meditation because the doer does not need to maintain a particular state and wait for the knowledge. He or she has the knowledge already and applies it continually. Meditators do not know the value of knowledge, whereas inquirers do. That is why the meditators are meditating. Knowledge may arise in meditation or it may not. If it does, we say meditation is a “leading error.” But even if meditation does lead to knowledge of the “unbroken I thought” (*akandakara vritti*), the knowledge does not always stick, as I point out above.

There is a lot to be said for living a *dharmic* life and to practise *yoga* as a way of purifying the mind. But unless the conditioning that conditions the mind is understood, the *vasanas* are still binding and as soon as the peace wears off, which it will sooner or later because it is based on experience and not knowledge – the person/meditator, the doer, or the mind – is back, the *vasanas* are still there, and therefore the problems are still there. So one has to go back to meditation or *yoga* or whatever one does to try to get rid of the mind. It never works, not for long, no matter how much one tries to contort the mind into conformity. As stated, this is because it is not the mind that is the problem, and even if it was, it is not in control of the results of its actions. *Karma yoga* is what is needed.

Karma yoga is an attitude one takes towards actions and their results. It is an attitude of loving consecration of one's actions based on the understanding that life is a great gift that requires reciprocation and that the results of any action are not up to you, they are up to the Field of Existence, or *Isvara*. *Karma Yoga* means responding appropriately to what life asks of you on a moment-to-moment basis, consecrating every thought, word and deed before you think, speak or act to *Isvara*, the Field of Existence, which is to say to yourself, whether or not you see that both the person and the Field of Existence share a common identity as consciousness.

Contemplation is not something you do. It is the nature of *sattva*, which is the nature of the mind

when it is not conditioned by *rajas* and *tamas*. When the mind is *sattvic*, you automatically think dispassionately about things. *Karma yoga* produces a *sattvic* mind. A person who has been on the spiritual path for a long time but whose mind is still *rajasic* does not understand the value of *karma yoga*. As Krishna says, "A little *karma yoga* removes a lot of agitation."

~ Much love, Sundari