

A Problem with Yoga

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Mike: Hi, Jim. There are a couple of things I want to question in the general discussion of *manolaya* (cessation of thinking) and *manonasa* (destruction of mind). In *manolaya*, it is said that when the thoughts are arrested the mind becomes blissful and one's concentration stabilizes on the quiet mind for a very long time. I believe this is not the self, but is a temporary but enlightened-looking state. So how does one move into a more mature state leading to *manonasa*?

Jim: Believe it or not, through boredom brought on by understanding. Bliss only has meaning when it is associated with not-bliss, meaning pain or suffering. After you've experienced bliss for however long, the ego becomes uninterested and seeks for something better/more/different. Most people never get there, because their blisses are short-lived, fleeting *samadhis* that just whet the appetite for the incredible, fantastic, unbelievable infinite Bliss that they imagine is coming when they just learn how to permanently stop their noisy little minds. But when you've been blissful long enough, bliss stops being a big deal and you naturally start to ask what's next.

This doctrine of arresting the thought for the purpose of getting bliss is called Yoga. And while there is truth in it, it generally doesn't lead to enlightenment, because the emphasis is on experience, not on understanding. And it should be noted that infinite bliss is not enlightenment even though the self is infinite bliss. Bliss is a condition that happens when the mind is either arrested for a while or when the mind is very *sattvic*, subtle, a condition that you find quite often among people who are engaged in some sort of spiritual practice. Bliss is not conscious. It feels good to the mind/ego, but it can't communicate with you. It can't remove your ignorance of the fact that you are bliss and therefore need not seek it, which is what I'm calling understanding, or knowledge.

Saying that the self is infinite bliss simply means that it is a partless whole. The mind is finite, broken up into infinite segments of thought and no-thought. The bliss of the self is not a feel-good bliss, like the mind's. Mind-bliss feels good because it is broken up by periods of non-bliss. But in the self there is no non-bliss, so the idea of bliss loses its meaning. Enlightened people can walk away from a high state of mind without thinking twice, whereas worldly people take the high states as some sort of fantastic achievement and continually crave them.

Understandably, thought-stopping is an appealing idea to people who are suffering, even though it is impossible to achieve in reality. The belief is "I stop my mind (or it stops on its own, as it is wont to do from time to time) and presto chango, out comes infinite bliss." The problem with this approach is that it doesn't address the question of to whom the bliss occurs. For a person seeking happiness bliss is the object of their desire because it seems to be the solution to the problem of suffering. But bliss as an object is transitory, like every object.

For the self, the mind's bliss is an object too, but it is not an object of desire. Why? Because the self is whole and complete, lacking nothing. It feels good always, so it is not interested in temporary blisses. It looks down on the mind and sees how the mind perversely blocks the bliss with its incessant thought life (which is created by

its fears and desires) and then tries to remove the thoughts to get at the bliss. I explain the mechanism of bliss and the mind in the first chapter of my book on about the fourth or fifth page.

The very words *manolaya* and *manonasa* indicate the problem. *Mano* means “mind.” In *manolaya* the mind is suspended or temporarily removed, meaning thought is arrested. Deep sleep is *manolaya* and the bliss you have after an orgasm is *manolaya*. It happens because the desire that was obstructing the bliss of the self is temporarily removed and bliss floods into the mind. In *manonasa* the mind is eliminated, presumably once and for all.

Yoga is a problem because all one’s attention is on the mind. It assumes that one’s state of mind is the whole problem, so it doesn’t take into account the self, which is beyond the mind. Another problem with the Yoga approach is that it assumes that someone can learn some sort of technique for stopping the mind and that this stopping is enlightenment. If someone stops the mind, who did the stopping? And if that person is a problem, which he or she will be, then who is going to stop that person? Because with or without a mind I’m still me. Your mind stops for several hours out of every twenty-four when you enter deep sleep, but does that help? I’m still the same jerk when I wake up.

There is no reason for the self to stop the mind, because it is what it is whether or not the mind is stopped. Assuming that John is enlightened, do you see him without a mind? Not at all. His mind/ego is quite active. So when “you” stop the mind you end up with another problem. You now have to deal with yourself, the one who stopped it. This accounts for the fact that so many *yogis* have huge egos. According to Vedanta, the ego is the root-thought in the mind, so once the ego has eliminated all the subsidiary thoughts, the mind still has a huge, troublesome thought – me, the ego. So who is going to eliminate the ego?

The ego is going to eliminate the ego? Not on your life. The only thing that eliminates ego is the knowledge that the I is whole and complete. As long as you are thinking that there is something missing and trying to find that missing thing either in the outside world or by eliminating the supposed cause, the mind, you are going to have a mind. The mind is just *vasanas* outpicturing. And the *vasanas* stem from the mistaken belief that one is incomplete and inadequate. If you are really going to practice *yoga* then you have to live a *yogic* way of life, not the ersatz *yoga* lifestyle that has evolved in the West, but a true *yogic* life. This way of life is very simple and austere, and basically involves killing your desire for every worldly thing, rooting out the *vasanas*. In the West *yogis* think they can carry on their regular life, have their love affairs, etc. and practice *yoga*. But *yoga* by definition is not a regular lifestyle.

In Vedanta the emphasis is on the self. We are looking to understand the nature of the self, to see that it is always with us as us and that nothing need be done to get it or any enlightened state. A person is not ready for Vedanta until he or she has come to the conclusion that there is nothing left to get experience-wise, that the only thing to get is understanding. True, understanding is not that easy to come by either, but if you are always focused on what you are experiencing, trying to make it perfect (or are not experiencing), you will only come to the conclusion that something you don’t understand is bothering you when you try everything you can think of and realize that at the end of the day you’re still the you you’re trying to get rid of. If a *yogi* gets enlightened, like Rami (she first started practicing it at age sixteen) it is because they realize the limits of the mind-centered approach, stop chasing bliss and start to ask questions. The question she asked that led to her

enlightenment was this: “No matter where I go (inwardly) there is always something watching. What is that?” And I said, “The self.” And then she started seeking the self.

There is another *yoga*, what I call the *yoga* of mind-transcendence. In this *yoga* you use the mind to go beyond the mind so you can see from the self. In this *yoga*, of which the meditation technique I give in Chapter I of my book is an example, the mind is arrested for perhaps a few seconds or minutes, or it is quietened down enough for the Silence to become noticeable, and then the Silence is used as a gateway to the self. This technique is the quick way to *manonasa*, eradication of the mind, because it “puts you in the self.” The self is *manonasa* by nature, i.e. free of thought, so you get the benefits of thoughtlessness by default and need not work your butt off for years trying to exhaust all the *vasanas* that are creating the mind.

Mike: The terminology of description regarding *manonasa* appears to me as harsh, and as such is fodder for more resistance than usual. Are we speaking of the total destruction of thought as the precursor to salvation and the liberation from birth and death?

Jim: It is harsh because it’s stupid. I’m not saying this because I’m a Vedantin. I started out as a *yogi* and tried to stop my mind. I worked very hard at it and was fortunately led to the ideas that let me see the inherent contradiction in the Yoga philosophy.

Mike: I would appreciate a rundown of riff, if you please. I’m hearing from John (jeez, how he hates to be quoted in consideration of possible gross misinterpretation... so who’s to blame?) that heart when “opened” nurtures mind consequent to whole expression. Is this whole expression not considered thought?

Jim: Yes, absolutely. What I think he means is that when you become open-hearted or open-minded, free of the frozen concepts that constrict you, you start to express yourself. But this is obvious.

On the other hand, “opening” the heart is not something that you do. These *gurus* say “open your heart,” but it is useless talk. If one knew how to do it, one wouldn’t be asking a *guru* about it. It is something that happens as you mature, usually as a result of the understanding that you aren’t in charge of life. When you see that it isn’t up to you, you can become very open, soft and yielding.

Mike: Are we speaking in terms of *manonasa*, merely of the gross thought/ego pattern that is “destroyed,” gone, integrated, sublimated, transcended, eaten, whatever or of some as yet unnamed whole enchalada?

Jim: No. Vedanta is not against Yoga. The ideas of Yoga and Vedanta both come from the *Vedas*. In fact Vedanta recommends Yoga as a means of purifying the mind, not as a means of liberation. It says that you need only remove enough *rajas* (frantic activity) and *tamas* (numbing dullness) from the mind so you can think clearly and are emotionally peaceful. If you destroy the whole enchilada you won’t remove the ignorance that is causing the mind in the first place. So you will just be a very happy, stupid person if you go that route.

Which is to say you won't be that happy, because your stupidity will cause you to make choices that conflict with your experience of happiness.

When you can think clearly, you can understand the scripture and the words of the teacher. The self is not something you gain. You have it already. It is unappreciated, because of all the stupid ideas you have in your mind. So Vedanta sets out to destroy the foolish ideas you have. There are many forms of thought that don't give us any problem, that are not in conflict with happiness and need not be destroyed. But there are certain ideas that cause us to look for happiness where there isn't any and which define happiness in an unrealistic way. So those need to be examined and discarded. One of those ideas is the idea you are questioning, that the mind needs to be destroyed for enlightenment.

The problem with most people seeking enlightenment is that they are not ready for enlightenment. They are usually needy, lonely, unhappy, disaffected persons. And they have heard that the way out of their suffering is enlightenment, even though they have no idea what it actually is. And oddly, they also tend to be quite gullible, so they are easily confused by people who have had or claim to have had some sort of enlightenment "experience." Or by scripture - which can be equally confusing. And what needs to happen for these people is that they need to find out who they are in a relative sense before they try to unravel the mystery of their transcendental identity. I saw a poster for a *guru* in the seventies in San Francisco that had it right. He said, "Come to me when you are already happy."

Because actually, enlightenment is beyond happiness or blissful states of mind. It is the direct realization that "I am the light of the world," that "I am limitless awareness," that "I have no name or form," that "I live without breathing," that "nothing here in this ever-changing part of myself called the world has a hold on me."

Mike: I remember jousting with a friend not long ago. He insisted that the ego must be completely and utterly destroyed for man to have any hope of "healing." My equally certain tack was the argument that ego-thought is never destroyed, but that it is regulated to a subservient position via a focus upon non-ego thought.

Jim: Your idea is in harmony with Vedanta's. The ego is only a problem if you make it a problem. If you like your ego and treat it well, why destroy it? I wouldn't say "focus on non-ego thought" was the correct way to see it, because non-ego thought is not very attractive and the mind will become bored unless it can find something to focus on that is continually uplifting. I'd say to focus on the self instead, except that you can't really do that, because it is much subtler than the mind of the one who would be focusing. So again, we come back to the fundamental issue in this spiritual world - who? Who is focusing on what? Who am I?

Mike: Just what that might be is as yet and perhaps forever non-articulatable, but the basis for my position was/is that nothing dies, for nothing is born, and thought although mechanistically said to be destroyed is not destroyed as much as no longer commander-in-chief.

Jim: Yes. Thought, mind, ego, etc., these are ever-changing phenomena and

therefore unreal. How can you destroy what is unreal? And the real is something that never changes, so it can't be destroyed either. The idea that "you" have to destroy anything except ignorance is silly. Ignorance is in a category of its own. It is neither real nor unreal, so it can be destroyed? If I don't know where the supermarket is I can ask someone and the answer can destroy my ignorance.

It's like this with the *guru* too. He or she can give you the answer that can destroy your ignorance of the self. So the issue should be on "who am I?," not on the mind. The mind is not the self, so why should I bother with it? True, I need to do enough work on it to get it to a clear, humble position, but then I need to train it to inquire into the self, not set out to destroy itself. The mind is a very useful tool here in this world. Show me someone without a mind in the waking state and I'll show you a vegetable.

~ Jim