

Process of Meditation

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Meditation is the final gateway which leads to the discovery of the supreme Self within. Before the Self, the core of the human personality, could be reached, one's attention must first be withdrawn from the world of sensual activities and then from the five layers of matter enveloping it. The mind of man attracted by the sense organs constantly dwells in the sense objects around him. His attention being extrovert, the world of beings and things creates desires and agitations in his bosom thereby rendering him unfit for any concentrated activity. To subdue these activities the first step in the process of meditation would necessarily be to disengage his attention from the world. This is achieved, as seen earlier, by practicing selfless service, by cultivating devotion for the Lord or by studying and reflecting upon the scriptural truths.

Having thus achieved a certain amount of withdrawal from the world, the meditator chooses a quiet place for his meditation so as to be physically away from the disturbances of the external world. It has been the common experience of seekers particularly in larger cities not to be able to procure a quiet place for the purpose amidst the noises both outside and inside the house. Whenever such a situation arises the solution would be to choose a quiet time, say, an early hour of the morning when everything is silent and One should bear in mind that an absolute quietude is not found even in the serene atmosphere of the Himalayas, and what we are seeking for is a relatively peaceful place. In fact, real tranquility is found within one's self and not in the environment.

In the place chosen for meditation, the idol worshiped by the seeker is fixed in front of his meditation seat with the feet of the Lord in level with the vision of his eyes. In case where no particular idol is worshipped and the meditator wishes to have one, an Om sign may be prepared and placed likewise. Flowers, incense sticks and other decoration help to suggest to the sense organs that the mind has withdrawn from the world and is seeking the Truth.

After having thus detached from the gross external world the next step in the process of meditation is to withdraw one's attention from the physical body. The mind which has been pulled back from the world may still think of the body and continue to dissipate itself. To avoid this, the *sadhaka* is advised to maintain proper health and take precautions to ensure that the body does not cause any disturbance during the practice of meditation. Again, at the seat of meditation the strain in the limbs or the tension in the muscles may disturb one's concentration. To get over these disturbances the meditator is asked to sit in the correct posture using a thin flat cushion (not too soft—a bed sheet folded twice may serve the purpose). The correct posture for meditation is to sit with legs folded, having a maximum base, vertebral column erect (slightly bending forward in the pelvic region) with the left hand placed on the left thigh and the right hand with the *mala* on the right calf muscle. The eyes are kept gently closed and looking nowhere in particular as in sleep. With posture thus fixed, the mind is made to tap slowly the various muscles of the body starting from the neck and descending to the toes with a view to inspect and release their stiffness and tension, if any. This process is called 'Thought-Massage'. With the completion of the Thought-Massage, the withdrawal of one's attention from the disturbances of the physical body is complete.

The next source of disturbance is the mind where the predominant thoughts and desires of the day rise and cause agitations. Such of them which arise spontaneously are allowed to come up and exhaust themselves. The meditator is however cautioned not to initiate any fresh thoughts and thus create further agitations instead of quietening those that are already in his mind. All the while, the intellect stands firm and detachedly observes the thoughts coming up and passing away just as a military officer taking the salute watches a march past without identifying with anyone of the soldiers marching before him. By this practice all the agitations in

the mind settle down, at least temporarily, and the mind is available for the chant. The process is known as `Thought-Parade`.

After the Thought-Parade is over the individual is fully prepared and he starts his *japa* or chanting. As long as the chanting continues, the mind and intellect exist, since the mind is thought-flow and the intellect, the discriminating faculty which distinguishes one thought from another. In a concentrated spell of chanting, the meditator stops the chanting suddenly and in the silence, created by the absence of thoughts, there is neither the mind nor the intellect. That moment of dynamic silence is the state of God-Realization when the meditator, the meditated and the meditation merge into one eternal blissful Experience.