

Selected excerpts from Questions & Answers in Volume 1

Meditation on Truth, the Self, Atman, is the “granny,” or home base, in this game of cosmic play....(Lesson 25, p. 319)

QUESTION: “My question is: How does one increase the ability to separate from matter and maintain one-pointed consciousness? I know that meditation is essential, but even while meditating it is so difficult. I think in the verses to come Swamiji talks about using the breath, and other means of destroying obstacles to concentration. But what are your recommendations?”

ANSWER: Unfortunately, and from the standpoint of pure, original Mind, the separation of Spirit from Matter is a move that never should have to happen. That is, since soul and nature are eternally interconnected, yet each has its own place, an illumined mind would naturally assume this truth and get on with the play called life in full cognizance of its supreme nonmaterial status. But ignorance and delusion have crept in, obscuring the greater picture, decentralizing the mind, and causing the unreal to seem real. There are several factors at work in this darksome process. The gunas of prakriti are always spinning out their combinations of sloth, restlessness, and temporary balance interminably; karmas from past and present existences are fructifying, having their effect, working themselves out or compounding accordingly, as the case may be; samskaras are either forming, congealing further, or breaking apart, thus exerting their own influence on the matter; and the mind’s questionable penchant for pleasure, power, domination, even to suffer, is always working into this scheme. And add to this all those elements of the dual mind such as the six passions, the eight fetters, the nine vikshepas, the five kleshas, etc., which are all playing parts in the mind’s ability or inability to live in a harmonious fashion, free of accumulated karma leading to undesirable rebirths. As Holy Mother has said, “O, it is all so inscrutable!”

I hardly need to read the riot act on all of these factors, as those of you who have lived long enough to see the nature of name and form in time and space are or should be well-aware of the vicissitudes of Maya. Or maybe that is fast becoming a part of the problem, that so many lives lived in ignorance has convinced beings that they are actually products of matter instead of pure Soul-force. This is called forgetfulness (avidya) with regards to the mind, and false identification (dehadhyasahamkara) with regards to the body — superimposing the body over the soul as the reality. Whatever the case, the unique turn of mind that espied the problem of false superimposition due to the subtle presence of Maya moves to reverse this onerous process and dictates that aspiring souls wanting free of suffering and delusion, or simply longing for Truth again, divide the sentient Self from insentient matter and be free again. The end is simple, but according to the amount of obscuring layers placed over the mind’s awareness, the process can be difficult. All that we have learned from Kapila’s Sankhya (the division of Purusha and the 24 Cosmic Principles), and now, Patanjali’s Yoga (meditating on the alambanas, etc.), and in our root tradition (Vedanta’s recognition of the mind’s false superimposition over Brahman), points us in the right direction.

But this direction for most, as I started off saying, lies not through an easy awakening at this point, but through a morass of karmas needing neutralization and a host of false conceptions requiring clarification. Yoga is a vehicle that is well suited, initially designed, for

evening the playing field — the field here really being the mind-field. For, when the chitta (thought-force) is controlled/restrained (“yogah chitta-vritti-nirodha”) and utilized properly, and since everything in phenomenal existence comes forth out of thought-force, then when the mind is purified (well-informed) the body, being an object or result of thought-force, also gets informed as to its place in the scheme of things. End of problem.

Pertaining to your direct question, and after this substantial preamble, the role of meditation in all this is crucial and indispensable. It is just that real and authentic meditation cannot take place, as many are finding out, without several important factors being in place, or taking place. In general we can cite the first two limbs of Yoga primarily. When they are mastered then the following six, called Sadanga Yoga, or Six-limbed Yoga can be successfully undertaken. That is to say that when the ten yamas/niyamas settle naturally into life and mind, asana (single posture), pranayama (breath control), pratyahara (detachment from objects/thought forms), dharana (one-pointed concentration), dhyana (meditation), and samadhi (direct spiritual experience) will follow in due time, as a matter of course, if practice is maintained.

Knowing all of this is “half the battle,” as they say. That is why my teachings over the years of SRV’s existence, and the way of Vedanta and Eastern Philosophy in general, is to inform the mind first before it starts out upon its merry, or not so merry way, as the case may be. The case of a novice building his first house comes to mind. He begins with hardly a plan, even a schematic, and runs into problem after problem as he sallies forth — most of them unsolvable due to the misinformed steps he took earlier in the process. We do not want backtracking in order to accommodate, sometimes haphazardly and ineffectively, all manner of initial error. Thus, know the philosophy! Then, armed to the teeth with every cogent spiritual solution known to and given by the seers of the path, progress — slow, moderate, or swift — will be assured, and the goal, inevitable.

Now, as to how to meditate, and the difficulty of meditation practice, as Swamiji says, and I paraphrase: “The soldier never complains, even when he is sent into the front lines of the battle. His lot is only to follow orders willingly.” Meditation is not to be considered hard or easy; one is just to “do it” daily. The least amount of expectation, for any outcome, that comes, the better. For, when trying to realize that which is one’s very nature, and which stands right before and in front of you, a very slow pace is necessary. A man emerges from the shower and cannot find his towel. He searches everywhere in haste for it, but finally gives up. Then, sitting there quietly, in silent consternation, he espies it in the mirror’s reflection, draped around his own shoulders. It was there all the while. Does this story not sound like the act of meditating, the meditator, and final meditation itself?

My point is: slowing down to a stop. If the mind races, if it has gotten the habit of racing due to its dalliance with and mixing with nature, matter, objects, fancies, desires, pleasures, etc., how can it meditate? It is none of those things, nor their enjoyment, nor their suffering, nor their memory. In Sankhya, there are what is called the Six Proofs of Purusha, the Indwelling Soul. One of them states (the one that Patanjali contributed) that “Universal motion can only be detected by that which is eternally stationary.” It is to say that all this changing phenomena really points to a stationary Self, Purusha, for otherwise it could not be observed — for “Who is the Observer?” It is fun to turn this around as well, asserting that only from a position of eternal stability (Nitya-avasthana) can all that is in motion (Maya/Name and Form) be known for

what it is — constantly changing. One (prakriti) proves the other (Purusha), and that One uncovers the other. Both chase the other out of hiding. Quite a game of hide and seek, yes?

So meditation on Truth, the Self, Atman, is the “granny,” or home base, in this game of cosmic play. What to do if there is no home base? The kids must have a safe place to rest. Thus, think of meditation as the consummate resting place, and where Maya cannot intrude. Go there willingly, desiring both refection and refuge. Two of the teachings that we are to consider in our tradition are utsaha and upekshanam — enthusiasm and indifference. Can you mate these two? If you can, you have effected a “Durgulean” feat. Mother Durga unifies pairs of opposites that are otherwise impossible to join. We are to do the same with this high limb of Dhyana, difficult to reach and perch upon. Enthusiasm for it, and indifference to any outcome, must become our credo. And this is the case for all that one meditates upon in action as well, yes? Om, and Peace!

How Nature arises from the Mind.... (Pada 1, Lesson 17, p. 211)

QUESTION 2: “Does Nature as/in harmony create, whereas Nature as/in being controlled by nature, although appearing as creation, does not? Is Chitta nature, or harmony, or seedless nature, or chaos of various forms when moving?”

ANSWER: Actually, nature creates, so to speak, when the gunas are out of equilibrium. This is called manifested Prakriti. When nature is in its unmanifested state, then all is held in abeyance and no external forms are seen. This is called a state of pralaya, or dissolution. As for chitta, being an aspect of mind, nature comes out of it — not the other way around. Mind will take all that is potential in the realm of nature/matter and bring it forth as manifested forms. There is a hidden harmony to all of this, that being up to the particular mind that projects and experiences, but an overall disharmony or chaos is present in the mind or minds that are left uncontrolled — as we have been studying about in the Yoga sutras. A peaceful mind, then, would fashion a peaceful world about it, and does, whereas a mind that is out of control picks up on the “chaos” around it and imbibes and projects that.

Convincing the mind how crucial spiritual practice is.... (Lesson 8, p. 92)

QUESTION: “I was wondering if you could advise me about how to remember how important practicing is to the realization of my goal. Is there something you can recommend that I could think on when I find my feet walking away from my cushion instead of toward it? What phrase could I keep on the top of my mind that would help turn my feet in the other direction? What have you found to be helpful, or have offered to other people that has helped them?”

ANSWER: It is not the feet, nor the cushion that are so important; it is the mind. The mind must be convinced of the crucial efficacy of spiritual practice in removing ignorance and aiding in the attainment of Yoga, and then must be engaged in willing participation for the rest of its life in all the practices that conduce to Yoga, in Yoga. That is, while walking away from the cushion, the mind must not be saying “I should go back and sit down and close my eyes in meditation,” but rather should think “I never left the cushion and am really meditating with eyes open while I act.” Yoga, union with God, is our birthright and our natural state, but due to desire-based

sankalpas of the mind (false mental projections) we project dream-worlds and live in them, surreptitiously, robbing ourselves of what is intrinsically ours.

The ultimate medicine... (Lesson 47, p. 596 - 597)

RESPONSE to a question from a student who is a doctor:

As to healing itself, there are several modes through which it proceeds. This reads according to the greatest “wholistic” healers among the seers — Patanjali and Vasishtha.

Ultimately, and this must be stated first and reiterated often, Atmajnan is the primary healer for all mental, intellectual, and spiritual disorders. Basically, delusion in the mind results in a cycle or sequence which begins with mental disease, proceeds through negative actions and karmic accrual, and ends in physical disease. Why do you think so many are ill in this day and age? Is it due to germs and exposure to the elements, etc.? Did God visit a curse or a pox upon them? Of course not. Germs and exposure makeup the physical cause only, the end of a chain. And anything that God “does,” even His curses, are really blessings. He/She is all good, all beneficence. So it is really people’s actions which make them sick or healthy, as the case may be. And *“thought is father to the deed.”* The point is: keep the mind absorbed in the wisdom teachings, saturated, as Sri Ramakrishna says, in the ocean of conscious Awareness. What malady can there be, and where its entry, for a mind that thinks of nothing but Divine Reality? It is distraction from Truth, what Patanjali refers to as klistha vrittis, which is responsible for the beginnings of all illness. Physical symptoms are only outer manifestations, and fall far away from the source.