

The Many Lives of Meditation

As meditation has been written about for thousands of years, from thousands of perspectives, practices and philosophies this manual will only cover the smallest of ideas, humbly written about and humbly offered. The practice of meditation itself is the constant union between the meditator and what is meditated upon. Meditation has been called a technique or method when in actuality it is *a state of being*, where the Self is realized in all things and the one meditating lives in this constant awareness. Buddha taught that to end suffering we must know and become one with our true nature. Yoga teaches this same principle, that to know the Self is to know God, in every form, in every moment. So when I write of meditation I write about the experience of *being* what is meditated upon, not simply about the techniques, although I will present various perspectives on this subject.

Dr. Frawley writes: “Dhyana is meditation, which is our capacity to sustain our attention without distraction. Meditation enables us to mirror reality and objectively perceive the truth of things . . . Meditation in the highest sense is not a technique. Meditation techniques more properly belong to pratyahara (right use of senses or sense withdrawal) or dharana (concentration.) True meditation is the natural state of awareness, not a method.” (*YA p. 54, parenthesis mine*) He continues in *Ayurveda and the Mind* to discuss the purpose of meditation. “Once the mind is able to focus on an object, it automatically receives knowledge of that object. Whatever we give our attention to will gradually unfold its meaning for us. Dwelling on that knowledge is meditation.” (*AM p. 289*)

What is relevant for us is that meditation is a state to reach through the others limbs of Yoga, especially practices like pranayama, pratyahara and dharana (breath/prana control, sense withdrawal and concentration.) In the West we have come to know meditation as the techniques used to attain the state of awareness needed to sustain meditation. So let us look at some methods used and taught.

Perhaps the most powerful meditation technique is Mantra, or using sacred vibrating sounds to focus, still and open the mind. Again Dr. Frawley writes, “If we carefully examine all the different yogic paths from devotion and knowledge to Hatha and Raja yogas, we will discover that mantra is the most common yogic practice. We could say that yoga is mantra. While the asanas or postures for the body may be more evident mantras are equally important as postures for the mind. Just as asana gives health and flexibility to the body, so mantra provides well-being and adaptability to the mind. Mantra, energized sound or the sacred word, is the basis of all religious traditions, scriptures and prayers.” (*YA p. 273.*)

And a whole book has been dedicated to the preparation for and cultivation of Samadhi using meditation and mantras. Swami Vishnu Devananda, one of Sivanand's main students and transmitters of Yoga in the West wrote a book titled *Meditation and Mantras*. In the preface he writes,

Real meditation is liberation from the clutches of the senses and lower mind. By definition it is transcendental, the word not being used as an advertising slogan, but to convey the beauty of meditation, in which all fears, desires, longings and negative emotions are transcended. The meditator reaches the super-conscious state in which he or she is able to identify with the all-blissful Self. In this transcendental state there is no awareness of body, mind or duality, and the knower becomes one with the knowledge and the known.

There is no need for mystery or secrecy about Mantras or any other accessory to meditation. There are no special injunctions against discussing one's Mantra. A Mantra is a mystical energy encased in sound structure. Its vibrations directly affect the charkas, or energy centers of the body. It steadies the mind and leads to the stillness of meditation. (*MM* pp. xiii-xiv)

Because of the enormous volumes of work on the practice of Mantras I will not spend time writing particular prayers or sacred sounds here. Please spend some time researching mantras that work with you, with your karma and body type. Each mantra is specific in purpose and can serve to aid in your healing of both body and mind.

So in Yoga mantra is considered an extremely important practice for meditation and reaching samadhi, because the utterance of these sacred sounds cause the shaking and wavering of the mind to cease and allows for the arising of Kundalini through the main nadi. And Ayurvedically speaking, Mantras themselves are healing for both body and mind, since each mantra restores the elements in the body back to balance and the disharmonies of the mind into its original blissful state. Ayurveda uses mantras to strengthen Prana, Tejas and Ojas, while balancing the doshas. A practitioner would offer specific mantras to aid in the healing of specific ailments, depending on that particular imbalance in body or a psychological issue in the mind. Depending on the clients interest, a yantra can be given with its mantra to aid in a particular mental disorder.

Another important aspect of the process of meditation is the consideration for the space, time, location and the "stuff" needed for the practice. A quiet, clean and simple space is needed for meditation. Like I wrote before, you wouldn't want the cat litter to be in the same room! A room suitable for inner work means no mess to walk through, colors in the room are soft and subtle in nature, there are pleasant and light smells, perhaps using appropriate incense for your doshic type, and maybe there are sacred images on altars or hung on walls. The time of day is also important. Generally it is said that before dawn, the time of Brahman, is best for the mind, as well as right before bed. Vata dominant times of sunrise and sunset are also appropriate since it is during these times when the mind is generally clear and free from thought (since work has not yet begun, or has just ended.) In regards to the stuff needed, using a cushion or chair will help ease the body into the practice of meditation with less stress on the joints and muscles. Having blankets during winter months will keep the body warm and the mind less distracted by the cold. Some teachings recommend using mala beads to count mantras or keep the mind focused on the feeling of fingers against wood. It is generally best to keep these considerations in

mind when preparing for meditation. For more detailed and traditional approaches about preparing for meditation please read the section in *Yoga and Ayurveda* on “Meditation and the Mind,” as well as read the chapter titled “The Basics of Meditation” in *Meditation and Mantras*.

From the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, Part 3:

“Bhrigu went to his father, Varuna, and asked respectfully: ‘What is Brahman?’
Varuna replied: ‘First learn about food, breath, eye, ear, speech, and mind; then seek to know that from which these are born, by which they live, for which they search, and to which they return. That is Brahman.

Bhrigu meditated and found that food is Brahman. From food are born all creatures, by food they grow, and to food they return. Not fully satisfied with his knowledge, Bhrigu went to his father, Varuna, and appealed: ‘Please teach me more of Brahman.’

‘Seek it through meditation,’ replied Varuna, ‘for meditation is Brahman.’

Bhrigu meditated and found that life is Brahman. From life are born all creatures, by life they grow, and to life they return. Not fully satisfied with his knowledge, Bhrigu went to his father, Varuna, and appealed: ‘Please teach me more of Brahman.’

‘Seek it through meditation,’ replied Varuna, ‘for meditation is Brahman.’

Bhrigu meditated and found that mind is Brahman. From mind are born all creatures, by mind they grow, and to mind they return. Not fully satisfied with his knowledge, Bhrigu went to his father, Varuna, and appealed: ‘Please teach me more of Brahman.’

‘Seek it through meditation,’ replied Varuna, ‘for meditation is Brahman.’

Bhrigu meditated and found that joy is Brahman. From joy are born all creatures, by joy they grow, and to joy they return.

Bhrigu, Varuna’s son, realized this Self in the very depths of meditation. Those who realize the Self within the heart stand firm, grow rich, gather a family around them, and receive the love of all.” (*TU* pp. 146-147)