

Mind your mind

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Dhyana-Yogah/ Topic of meditation (Chapter 6...continued)

It's very interesting to note that Krishna starts this chapter on meditation by comparing *sanyasa* and *karma yoga*, but since we have handled that in a lot of posts I'm not going into that here. Sometimes he does equate meditation with *sanyasa* because, in meditation also, you are dropping all thoughts, you are dropping all roles, which is what *sanyasa* is about anyway (although meditation is something you do only for a few minutes every day.) So there is a similarity. And in an important verse, the third one, he says that for one who wants to climb the horse of yoga –yoga here means meditation or owning up this knowledge or mastering this knowledge– action is the key, because it is action that leads to your growth.

Aruruksor muneryogam karma karanam ucyate

Yogarudhasya tasyaiva samah karnam ucyate (Ch 6, verse 3)

For the discriminating person wishing to attain (the contemplative disposition of the) yoga (of meditation), karma-yoga is said to be the means. For the person who has (already) attained (this) yoga, total renunciation alone is said to be the means.

Remember that the meditator is as important as the meditation and so he should be one who has taken care of certain things in his life, and that is achieved by *karma yoga*. Therefore, he says, action is the key. For one who has lived the life of *karma yoga*, he says action is no more the key now, it is quietening the mind that is the key. In all these verses in the sixth chapter, he gives a great amount of importance to the meditator. *E.g. we think we are meditating to get a quiet mind, but the truth is that if you have a certain quietude of mind then meditation is a natural result and it's not the other way round.* Here Krishna says that you will enjoy a relative amount of quietude as a result of your lifestyle. Most of the time we are worried about what is going to happen to us. Worry and anxiety are always connected with the future, with the achievement of our goals, but if you live a life of *karma yoga*, that worry and anxiety are taken care of.

Similarly, we use a lot of time over regrets, over what we have done in the past or what we believe we were to receive from people in the past. In these cases too, some amount of psychological work has to be done. Even applying the *karma yoga* attitude retrospectively in my life and having an acceptance of all that happened in my life will make my mind calm and peaceful. Then all the meditation involved is about centering on myself, which I spoke of in our post on preparatory meditation. Really speaking, the meditator becomes important.

In the fifth verse he makes another important statement.

Uddhared atmanatmanam natmanam avasadayet

Atmaiva hyatmano bandhuratmaiva ripuratmanah (Ch 6, Verse 5)

May one lift oneself by oneself, may one not destroy oneself for the self alone is one's benefactor (and) the self alone is one's enemy.

The foundation of what the Budha presented later on as the middle path is presented right here in the *Gita* as the path of moderation, as a life of awareness, awareness of what is happening inside you as well as

outside you

He says 'You must lift yourself by yourself'. In other words, you must have healthy self-esteem. Remember, we are not trying to discover some small little thing here; we are trying to discover the infinite being. One needs to have the guts to try. If one believes that one is useless and good for nothing, there is no way one is even going to try to know oneself as the infinite limitless being. *Therefore, he says, develop your self-esteem which is about how you live, the way you think, how purposeful you are, how aware-ful you are, how pro-active you are in your life...*All these qualities that we discussed earlier in *karma yoga* become important if you want to meditate...And he also says, 'One who has conquered one's own mind, for that person there is nothing that is not achievable'....He says if you have conquered your mind you are your own friend otherwise you are your own enemy, because the mind which is supposed to help you tyrannizes you, makes you run around doing things you don't want to do. Therefore, mastery of the mind becomes an important step before you even start meditating. Again, to master the mind, cultivation of *sama, dama*, and other qualities we talked about earlier become important. So if you look at the whole process which he talks about in the sixth chapter, the meditator becomes more important.

Swamiji, we are also taught that 'moksha' is for grim, bearded, austere people going through tough penances and not for worldly people like us....and that's why most people believe that this is the exclusive domain of sanyasis and other 'chosen ones'....

That is a myth. It is true that *sanyasis* seek it full-time, and they may be bearded but are not necessarily grim and serious. I know a lot of jolly ones too ! *Moksha is for everyone who wants to get rid of one's sense of limitations, one's existential issues as a human being irrespective of the fact that he is a sanyasi, a householder, a student or a retiree, a healer or a warrior.*

Then Krishna also talks about a lifestyle in terms of what is popularized as the eight-fold path by Budha. In the 16th verse he says that this lifestyle is not possible for one who works too much, who is a foodie, or one who is fasting all the time....In fact, in the 17th verse he talks about the one who has a balanced view of life...

Natyasnatatu yogo'sti na caikantam anasnatah

Na cativapnasilasaya jagrato naiva carjuna (Ch 6, Verse 16)

Meditation is not for one who eats too much or for one who does not eat at all; nor indeed, Arjuna (it is) for one who sleeps too much or who is always awake.

Yuktaharaviharasya yuktacestasya karmasu

Yuktasvapnavabodhasya yogo bhavati duhkaha (Ch 6, Verse 17)

For one who is moderate in eating and other activities, who is mindful in all activities, (and) to one's sleeping and waking hours, (for such a person) meditation becomes the destroyer of sorrow.

...Meaning you are eating healthy but not stuffing yourself and neither are you starving yourself all the time, you are not on a permanent diet or on a permanent food trip. Why? Because if you are overeating and being a glutton then you won't have enough blood supply available for your brain to meditate.

Swamiji, how has this concept of fasting and starving oneself become so popular among certain people and communities?

Fasting is OK if you want to develop your will-power but not if you want to meditate. If you're starving yourself all the time, not enough glucose is available to your brain for meditation. Brain food is glucose and that comes from complex carbohydrates. Even the modern body-builder theory of all proteins and no carbs is not healthy, because you need a certain amount of carbs as well. Similarly, one who is sleeping 10 to 12

hours a day will not be able to meditate and neither will the person who doesn't sleep at all or sleeps less because he's a workaholic.

The foundation of what the Budha presented later on as the middle path is presented right here in the *Gita* as the path of moderation, as a life of awareness, awareness of what is happening inside you as well as outside you. Because, in meditation, there's a word: 'enhanced self-awareness and self-knowledge.' For that you need the relative self-awareness of day-to-day living. I must be aware of my thoughts, my feelings, I must learn to handle them, I must be aware of my environment. In short, I must live an alert, deliberate life. The foundation of meditation is there. The act of meditation is very simple. Krishna gives some very simple descriptions—you need to sit comfortably, your base should be comfortable, your spine straight....

You don't need to sit on a mat of kusa grass as is mentioned in the *Gita*?!

Not necessary! In olden days, if the floor was damp, kusa grass took care of that....But you can also sit on a chair and meditate equally well. There are people who stand and meditate.

You mentioned that you should become aware of your thoughts. Can you give an example? E.g. if one is trying to meditate, you have a thought and then you follow that thought and that takes you to another thought....

If you are jumping from thought to thought, there is no way you can be aware of what you are thinking. Also, what am I feeling in certain situations? If I am not aware of that, I wouldn't be able to handle my own responses. My own mind can hijack me...I need to get hold of that before I can even sit and meditate. What is important is to be able to get a quiet mind that one can command at any time...

There's an interesting Zen story that highlights this well.....It is often narrated as a joke but it is not a joke. A student goes to his master and asks, 'Sir, can I eat an apple while meditating?' The master replies, 'Of course not'....The second student asks the master, 'Can I meditate while I'm eating an apple?' The master says, 'Of course you can'...It's usually told as a joke but there is more to it. In the second case, the mind is calm and peaceful irrespective of what you're doing but not so in the first case. In the first case eating an apple is a disturbance, in the second case the mind is already quiet and contemplative so nothing is a disturbance. This is what 'preparatory meditation' is all about. We try to command the quiet and peaceful mind irrespective of what we are doing. If your practice culminates in this, then your meditation has worked for you, then you can command a quiet, peaceful mind whenever you want.

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