

WHAT IS MEDITATION

The practise of concentrating the mind and developing a calm, steady continuous intensity of awareness without distraction leads into the mental state of meditation. The moment you become attracted to the changes within the mind, they influence your awareness and your concentration is distracted as you begin to follow a stream of thoughts. Meditation is the silent witness state of knowing the mind thoroughly. Every corner of the mind both negative and positive must be known and also the behaviour and reaction of the opposites in thinking should be fully understood. Meditation is the way to achieve the knowledge of mind.

The desire for happiness and contentment is natural and we strive to achieve our dream. We are attracted to pleasure and reject unpleasant confrontation hoping to avoid pain. Each of us has identified with a way of living that has its own philosophy and material aims. Money gives us power over physical ownership, but our mental and emotional experience is still unstable. Education and training empowers us with skills to earn material wealth but the life of inner feelings and mental confusion is always changing. Work, lifestyle, marriage, children, sensual pleasure and power over others has no permanent effect on the on the personal state of mind and emotions.

Happiness is always a momentary feeling that comes with a sense of achievement and recognition. It is only a brief mental association with pleasure and is nothing more than a transition between satisfaction and dissatisfaction. In fact all the ideas that exist within the mind about pleasure and pain, happiness and sorrow, joy and sadness are only concepts or ideas of the mind. They only exists as long as we identify with them and can associate the physical world with our mental / emotional imagination. When we try to control the external world we are following a belief in the mind that ownership and control, or abandonment and rejection will bring the happiness we seek. But this is never going to happen. Until we can understand the mind and restructure our mental thinking so that we are free of longing and fear permanent joy and happiness will never be established. As long as the mind is restless and unstable with more than one point of view, it will not be possible to achieve mental, emotional nor physical peace.

It is essential for anyone who wants to achieve success in their efforts of mental discipline to first understand the principles and practice of yoga.

WHAT IS YOGA

If you desire anything an effort is required to attain success in satisfying your desire. Simply thinking about chocolate cake and feeding your desire with imagination will not be enough for you to be able to eat it. There is a method that requires action and involvement by you to bring that chocolate cake into a real life experience. You can bake the cake and for that you must purchase ingredients and combine them into a recipe. Of course you may also decide to purchase a cake that has been created by someone else. Still, whichever action of fulfilment you decide, an effort is required and every effort becomes successful only if you know the method or way to achieve it.

Yoga is a variety of methods and techniques that are efficient and very effective. The proper application of yoga will certainly result in a successful effort by you to experience a deeper understanding of yourself. The goal of yoga is an involved and complex topic, but in simple terms, it is possible for you to transcend the limitations of your emotional, mental and physical experience. If you believe that the pain and discomfort you feel in your body is final and that you must suffer and endure without hope, you are not aware of the complete possibilities. Emotions of anger, jealousy, pride and selfishness etc are fuelled by fear and insecurity. We are not free from emotion instability. In one moment we are excited and in the next depressed. You are caught within the net of conflicting mental states where one belief is rejected by another. Positive and negative points of view are subjected to unstable erratic behaviour because we identify with every mental condition, reacting to our beliefs with an emotional impulse that in the end have a very strong influence on the body. Yoga has two definitions simply because we live in a world of duality. Even as a complete day is divided into two portions so yoga is understood from two perspectives.

The method and techniques of yoga practice when applied with effort will definitely result in your desire to transcend the limited mental, emotional and physical personality. This is the first definition of yoga. To transcend the patterns of mental conditioning that cause emotional and physical dis-harmony.

When you are free of the mind, then what kind of experience will exist for you? Only those enlightened beings that have become masters in the practice of yoga can explain the experience beyond mind. They have succeeded in the effort through yoga and are able to qualify the truth of scriptures and saints. The transcendental state is the second definition of yoga. When you no longer identify with the changing patterns of consciousness, you are able to recognise your own essential nature. The union of awareness with spirit (own essential nature) is experienced as an absolute eternal surrender into a permanent blissful state of contentment. This union and effulgence of bliss is yoga.

WHY IS EFFORT REQUIRED IF BLISS IS OUR OWN ESSENTIAL NATURE

Any effort that you make in yoga should be relentless and continuous. Every effort that is sincere and follows the method of yoga with the appropriate techniques is called Sadhana. Spiritual effort and practice in yoga is necessary to break free of the mind and all mental conditioning.

Mental conditioning is confusing the awareness and appears to be stronger than spiritual consciousness which is communicating to you via the intuitive mind of the witness or observer..

The essential nature of food is to nourish the body, but we have become attached to the sensation of taste and eat to satisfy our mental and emotional desire. It is our own involvement with mental anxiety, restlessness and desire that has changed the relationship we have with food. Every particle of existence within the physical world is impregnated with some degree of consciousness. This applies to the reality of quantum physics, just as it does for everything that is seen in the reality of the material world. In an effort to know itself, consciousness had expanded from an invisible force through the realm of physics into an uncountable number of different images we call the real physical manifest world. A simple plant has not developed an ability to know its own essential nature. The consciousness of a plant is compelled by instinct to propagate, grow and reproduce. Awareness is active within the plants consciousness but it is limited. A flower is not aware of its beauty and our attraction to the flowering plant is conscious only of water and the process of living. The awareness of the plant is completely involved in the effort of living and survival. It will react to sour or sweet soil. It may even react to love and affection but the response of blooming into a splendid flower is a simple instinctive reaction. The combination of nutrients and suitable conditions can facilitate the effort of a flower, but to change the effort.

Let us say that the flower does not know about us and completely identifies with the limited world of plants. In the same way we have identified with the experience of living. Pain and pleasure is real to us and we strive to make an effort of attraction (dwesha) and rejection (raga). When our reactions are impulsive and extreme we are completely ignorant of even having awareness. We become caught in the experience of pain and identify with what we think is the cause and solution. We fight against the cause and misunderstand the more subtle awareness of our reactions. We cling to pleasure hoping to avoid pain. This is ignorance (avidya) and very quickly we identify with everything we believe to be good and pleasant. The more power we have to stay in the pleasurable experience and our ability to keep painful confrontations away from us is ego. We think that we are successful but still we suffer. Definitely our ignorance has developed into an ego of illusion and arrogance. There is a deep-seated fear of death (abhinesha) and the whole personality is confused and uncertain.

Sadhana of yoga develops the awareness of subtle changes and influence. Slowly the understanding of how we are all hypnotised by what we believe in the mind dawns. This awareness develops with intensity of effort and eventually we are able to realize that the whole reality in every dimension was just an illusion. In an effort to know itself, consciousness became involved in creation and forgot that existence of its own essential nature. It is all a rather silly thing, but at one level of awareness, consciousness is eternally blissful and infinite. On the other hand, the same consciousness has become caught up and involved within the experience of living. Awareness has become attracted to the object of experience and forgotten who it really is.

Therefore, even though you may believe that I have spoken the truth about spirit and consciousness, it is only an intellectual belief. You still feel pain and reject it. You are still full of judgement and ego. Your faith is weak and you suffer probably more than you enjoy. It is the same for all of us. An effort is required and unless you have the correct method and skills, you will not be able to even begin the effort. Yoga is the method, and if you desire to know your spiritual nature then please find a suitable teacher and begin to learn the skills required to be successful in your effort.

IS THERE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A TEACHER AND A GURU

Yes! Anyone can teach a skill if they understand it thoroughly. The techniques of yoga are like any other skill and you can learn them from a good, competent teacher. However, skills are not enough. The method of applying those skills and even ways to simplify the method are not known to a teacher. In school you can learn mathematics and how to calculate, but what is the point if you do not have a method of application. Depending on your own individual personality (jiva) you will have to choose an interest of mathematical science. Suppose you choose physics! Well, a teacher or professor can explain what is already known about physics by discussing the views of successful scientists and repeating their experiments. But if you want to explore the unknown physics, you must seek the experience of a master. Einstein was a Guru of physics and we follow his example, and advice. Today there are new Gurus with even greater knowledge and they lead the way into the unknown.

When it comes to spiritual knowledge and transcendent states of consciousness, yoga has always been successful in the achievements of spiritual Gurus. The main difference between a teacher and a Guru is that first a teacher recommends rules and disciplines within the practice of yoga without being able to reach the spirit within you. A Guru will first touch your spirit and then when you are convinced of the Gurus higher wisdom, and at your request, the Guru will recommend the method of yoga to practice.

HOW DOES A GURU TOUCH YOUR SPIRIT

There are certain events in the history of your life which were moments of inspiration and insight into your spiritual awareness. Perhaps you have forgotten them? Once you believed that leaving home and having the independence to make your own decisions would make you happy. Somewhere in your life there was a moment when you realized that independence was not enough. Whatever that moment was, it certainly involved intense pain or pleasure, and all of the details concerning that moment are dormant in your mind as a memory (smriti). One way for the Guru to touch your spirit is to remind you of that moment in such a way that you realize that a Guru knows the most intimate secrets of your life without ever having been involved in them. There are other ways of touching the spirit, and a Guru has the ability to use any way they choose. The eyes can convey our intentions and desires. If you want to reveal to the opposite sex that you are attracted to them, then a simple expression of the eyes can invite them to approach you. In the same way a Guru can convey his mental instructions via several different methods, and all of them are so intimate that only the spirit is touched. The methods of projecting mental instructions are through sight (eyes), touch (body), dreams (mind), voice (tone), initiation (mantra and name), fulfilment of your desires and physically appearing unexpectedly when you are thinking of them. All of these methods involve a transfer of energy and is called shakti path.

WHAT IS ENERGY CALLED SHAKTI PATH

Yoga has many aspects of practice and all of them are intended to develop personal self-discipline. Any effort by you to introduce a personal discipline requires willpower, faith, memory and consistent practice. These four attributes are easily forgotten when you are deeply involved with your mind of liking and disliking. The effort of overcoming obstacles, ignoring distractions and resisting temptations generates a great force of inner strength, mental focus and emotional stability. You may not realize it now, but when you are determined and disciplined in achieving a goal you have set for yourself, that force is experienced also as a lightness and clarity of mind, with a feeling that you are powerful and full of vitality. The energy of vitality is prana.

The subject of prana is a complete study of its own, and yoga has a detailed science of theory and practice dedicated only to prana. Some yoga practitioners become experts of this science and are capable of controlling all of the body's metabolism and mental activities. They can live without foods and generate intense heat so that even when naked, they melt the snow. But remember, that extraordinary physical feats are not the goal of yoga, but only a demonstration of that power. The same yogi can also use that prana to overcome any difficulty and heal sickness. So it is important to understand that even though yoga is a practical science of self-discipline, there are also very honourable spiritual values that must be observed. The aim of yoga is to transcend the mind and experience the transcended consciousness of universal spirit. For a yogi, spiritual life is not religion, but rather by religious and disciplined effort; you can achieve a spiritual awareness of what is truly divine. For the benefit of all, a Guru uses his prana to heal and elevate students and disciples out of compassion.

Prana is known as shakti, and depending on the particular science of yoga, you practice different variations and names are used to describe it. Prana shakti is also known as kundalini shakti, maha shakti, devi shakti and by many other names. The term shakti is common to all and shakti path means to transfer, channel or direct the prana shakti from one source to another.

HOW MANY DIFFERENT METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

Yoga is a scientific exploration of the mind in search of a spiritual identity. The nature of mind has many characteristics and attributes. It is restless, impatient, obsessive (see Patanjali), imaginative, lazy, insecure and undisciplined. Mind serves to long for peace and contentment and at the same time is erratic, resisting control. We are all able to recognise these descriptive mental behaviours because they are common to our mind as a phenomenon. You must now understand that the intensity and influence of the mental states do vary in each individual. Personality is a mixture of the different mental states combined with our education and experience in this life.

One personality may be predominantly lazy and disinterested but still experience in a limited way the other state of mind. Some have discipline but are obsessive, other imaginative but restless and insecure. Because the mind of each personality can have different attributes that are predominant, yoga has a very practical and systematic solution.

Emotionally sensitive personalities can practice Bhakti Yoga, a devotional method of worship, prayer and service to the divine. Intellectual minds need to analyse and dissect each mental state so Gyana Yoga is the psychology of mind. Personalities that have concentrated awareness with good learning skills and visualization are suited to Raja Yoga, the path of mental discipline and meditation. Spiritual seekers who are deeply attached to the pleasures in life follow Karma Yoga, the way of performing action without expectation of the results. Hatha Yoga is a physical discipline complimentary to all mental states.

CAN YOU GIVE MORE DETAIL ON THE DIFFERENT PATHS

The Bhagavad-Gita is a classical text and one of the great books on the wisdom of yoga. It is written as a record of a conversation between Arjuna, a yogi, and a prince who is overwhelmed by the apparent conflicts of interest within his mind. Arjuna presents questions to his friend and Guru, Krishna, who explains the nature of the mind, divinity and the different paths of yoga.

Another recommended text is Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, which deals with the mind and spiritual practice. This book however, is not for beginners, as the complex philosophy requires an experienced yogi to expand it into a simpler form. I shall try to explain the different paths in a basic, simple way, and you will have to study further to gain a proper understanding through practice and satsang (listening to the teachings of a master).

Bhakti Yoga is considered to be the highest expression of yoga because it requires a complete submission of the mind and personal will. When you are able to control the mental states and achieve personal disciplines, then all desires for selfish satisfaction slowly subside. It is a gradual process, but it is possible to transcend our own need for love and security. In Bhakti Yoga you have a natural compassionate nature to care, protect and love others. You see the divinity in everyone and become devoted to that divinity. You have forgotten

your own fears and desires because you are completely immersed in a relationship with the creative divine force. To reach this state of Bhakti there are many yoga techniques that are practiced to cultivate the Bhakti consciousness. Devotional singing (kirtan and bhajans) is perhaps the easiest and most common. Prayer and worship or ritual (pooja), chanting the Lords name (mantra) and so many other daily practices are also common to yoga as they are to all religions also..

Karma Yoga is the way of living, working and acting in the world. Everyone is subject to karma and if we have the right understanding about how we are affected by our attitudes and behaviour, we can act in the right way. Right action is to fulfil the need of the work or moment without reacting to what is happening around us. This is very difficult and mostly we react to situations creating more karma, which is then a continuation of our confused mental, emotional and physical experiences. If you react to another person's behaviour with opposition, then they will resist also. This is a reaction to each other. The result is no one can co-operate with each other because they are all reacting. That is karma. To live with awareness of the complete environment and to have personal discipline over your lower nature of mental and emotional reactions is the life of a karma yogi. By practicing Karma Yoga you slowly recognise the unstable nature of your own mind and gain control of the misconceptions you have. When you no longer identify with the limited mind of liking and disliking, you are able to realize or glimpse the higher mind of divine will. This is the beginning of surrender to the highest yoga of bhakti. Therefore karma yoga is essential to understanding your deepest inner self and transcend the limited mind of selfishness and experiencing the diving love of bhakti.

SUCCESS IN YOGA

Whatever effort in spiritual practice you make in the beginning, it is a physical effort of willpower, determination and consistency. This leads you into an intellectual understanding about the relationship you have with yourself. Eventually an awareness develops of the deep sentiment you have with the nurturing nature of your most intimate personality. You transcend fear with an awakened self-confident knowledge that is wisely understood as knowing the great force behind the mind. Out of awe and respect, Bhakti is born. You are intoxicated with love for a divine force that is not affected by our mental inventions and forgetfulness.

Bhakti cannot be practised because it is an expression of your own (swaroop) loving nature. The ritual worship, devotional singing of mantras, and the careful preparation of your sacred space is your beauty manifested. If you live in a beautiful space and find contentment in any service to the divine, the bhakti has awakened within you. A simple work of preparing food, or teaching yoga is bhakti. Attentive awareness to the needs of others and whatever is required within the moment is bhakti. Joyfully calm without interference in total support of the universe is bhakti. Unconditional love for the sake of love is bhakti.

Yoga is bhakti and you will know it when you finally unite undivided in awareness of the divine mind, heart and body. This is the unity of yoga and it is who you truly are.

WHAT LEVEL OF COMMITMENT IS REQUIRED

When you are filled with desire for something that you want, the more you think about it the more intense your desire becomes. If the mind is restless and you cannot concentrate you will also find that many thoughts of pleasure arise in the mind. You become involved in these thoughts and start to think about the objects of desire. Chocolate becomes an obsession and you leave your work to purchase chocolate thinking that this action will settle your mind and satisfy you. In this example your commitment to work was interrupted by your commitment to the satisfaction of your desire. The same effort made for chocolate can be applied to silence and mental stillness.