

CHAPTER 6

STATES OF MIND IN MEDITATION

1. The Temple of Yoga

One could liken yoga to a temple comprised of eight floors, of which the *yamas* and *niyamas* would constitute the basement and ground floors, *asanas*, *pranayama*, *pratyahara*, *dharana* and *dhyana* would constitute the first, second, third, fourth and fifth floors respectively. The sixth floor would be *savikalpa samadhi*, and *nirvikalpa samadhi* would be the seventh floor.

Worldly seekers as well as renunciate seekers enter this temple of yoga in order to reach the highest floor. But seekers with worldly desires cannot reach the sixth and the seventh floors because their desires do not permit them to progress. They may have to be satisfied with the experiences of the lower stages such as *tandra* (yogic drowsiness), *nidra* (yogic sleep), and *murcha* (yogic swoon). However, the sages lead them towards the fourth and fifth floors and encourage them to make all possible efforts to reach them.

The seeker who is a renunciate or who is free from worldly desires tries to attain mastery over each of the floors of the yoga temple, one by one. They study and practice yoga scientifically under the guidance of an able guru and make steady progress on the path of yoga to reach the highest state of *nirvikalpa samadhi*. However, if you have not earned the favor and blessings of a guru or of God, you will just swoon or faint at some stage during meditation instead of reaching the state of *samadhi*.

2. Various Mental States in Meditation

Broadly speaking there are four major states of mind through which a seeker passes before reaching the final state of *nirvikalpa samadhi*, or the state of non-mind. These states are *tandra* (drowsiness), *nidra* (sleep), *murcha* (swoon), and *samadhi* (super consciousness).

3. *Tandra*

The first category of mental states is *tandra*. From early on the seeker undergoes the experience of *tandra* during meditation. When the released *prana* energy begins to work subtly in the deeper regions of the internal organs, the body of the seeker starts becoming further relaxed and loose. Drowsiness sets in and yawns come in quick succession. One's eyelids are weighed down heavily and the body has difficulty in remaining straight and upright. The mind becomes slothful and unable to do willful thinking, but the seeker experiences peace and does not like to come out of this state of *tandra*.

After *tandra*, the state of *nidra* develops, and as this happens the state of *tandra* vanishes slowly. It is only after transcending the state of *tandra* that one is established in the state of *nidra*, or yogic sleep.

4. Nidra

The sleep resulting from meditation is called *yoga nidra*, or yogic sleep. During meditation, first of all the *prana* drives the external organs or limbs to perform numerous movements. When these external organs become fatigued and inactive, the *prana* begins to do subtle work in the internal organs generating *tandra*. Finally, when the internal organs are also fatigued, the *prana* stops working and becomes stabilized, generating *nidra*.

It is not true that *yoga nidra* is generated only as a result of fatigue. It is also generated when the *apana vayu* (one of the five vital airs located in the lower *cakras*) moves upwards into the regions of higher *cakras*. Often after undergoing the activities of *sakticalana* or *khecari mudras* the *apana vayu* is lifted up and this may also result in *yoga nidra*.

During *yoga nidra*, the mind remains in deep introversion. Sometimes this introversion is so deep that there is no existence of thought generating the dreamless state of sound sleep. However, if the introversion is not so deep, it creates dreams, even in yogic sleep. But the mind remains more focused in the dreams of yogic sleep, as compared to those of ordinary sleep. Moreover, like the ordinary dream state, the dream of yogic sleep can be *tamasic*, *rajasic*, and *sattvic*. It depends upon whether the mind is carried into the flow of *tamas*, *rajas*, or *sattva* qualities during such yogic sleep.

5. Difference between Ordinary Sleep and Meditation

As sleep is natural rest, meditation also is the state in which one obtains natural rest. In that case, yogic sleep during meditation can be called a deeper natural rest. If both sleep and meditation offer natural rest, why should one meditate if one obtains rest through ordinary sleep? The reason for this is the difference between the qualities of rest provided by each.

In the normal wakeful state, the mind controls both *prana* and the physical organs. Hence it goes on working and remains active. Its activity keeps the whole nervous system tense. Furthermore, it is affected by the success or failure of its schemes and thereby experiences pleasure or pain, happiness or misery.

In ordinary sleep the mind does become introvert, but it is not detached from the *prana* and the bodily organs. Therefore a high degree of introversion is not attained. To some extent the state of mind remains dependent upon the states of *prana* and of the body.

On the other hand, due to the release of *prana* during meditation, the mind becomes detached from the body and from the *prana*, so its state is not dependent upon the states of *prana* or of the body. Therefore the mind can gain deep introversion.

6. *Murcha*

As the seeker progresses further and transcends the state of *yoga nidra*, they enter the state of *murcha*. In the beginning, the seeker is not able to differentiate between *nidra* and *murcha*. However, one understands the difference between the two in due course. The major clue is that *nidra* comes on slowly and so the seeker can anticipate it, but *murcha* occurs and vanishes so abruptly that it cannot be anticipated.

Ordinary swoon is the result of a physical disorder, while yogic swoon is the result of inadequate cleansing of the *susumna* (median) passage. During meditation, as the *prana* moves up into this passage, it gets obstructed due to the impurities blocking its upward movement. This generates yogic swoon.

Ordinary swoon can also be caused by emotional excitement or disturbances. For example, a mother on seeing the dead body of her son laments and out of emotional excitement or disturbance may swoon. Certain medicines and intoxicating substances like wine, opium, hemp, etc. may also cause swoon.

The state of swoon experienced during meditation is far superior to such ordinary swoons created by physical disorders, emotional excitement or intoxicating substances. Yogic swoon is created when the besieged *prana* does not find its proper upward course due to the impurities in the passage of the *susumna*.

7. *Samadhi*

As the seeker progresses further and one's *susumna* is gradually cleansed, one transcends the state of *murcha* and enters into the state of perfect concentration, which is known as *sabija samadhi*. Thus swoon is the result of the impurity of the *nadis* (bodily passages) and *samadhi* is the result of the purity of the *nadis*.

It should be pointed out here that the concentration attained after transcending the state of *murcha* in meditation is very much different from and superior to the ordinary concentration with which artists do their work. The reason for this is that, just as a strong emotion can make many divergent thoughts flow in a single direction, resulting in concentration, so the perfect concentration of *sabija samadhi* is supported by strong devotion on the part of the seeker.

8. *Murcha* Mistaken for *Samadhi*

Some seekers, especially those who have not received the grace of guru or God, mistakenly believe *murcha* to be *samadhi*, and go on practicing it for a long time. After continuous practice they are capable of remaining in a swoon for a long enough time to

call it *nirvikalpa samadhi*. But this is mere illusion. In truth, *nirbija samadhi* is very different from and superior to *murcha*. This mistake in judgment results from the fact that the body of the seeker in *murcha*, like that of the yogi in *nirbija samadhi*, does not move. Further, the minds of both are in thoughtless states. From these apparent similarities the seeker misinterprets *murcha* as *nirbija samadhi*. But there is one major difference between the two, and that is the level of consciousness which each has. A seeker who swoons becomes unconscious, while a yogi in *nirbija samadhi* attains super consciousness.

The seeker who has experienced only swoon does not attain *divya sarira* (divine body), purified by *tapas* (yogic austerities). Nor does one attain *rtambhara prajna* (the highest wisdom) or *para vairagya* (complete detachment). But all these are attained by the yogi who has experienced *nirbija samadhi*. Only this yogi is fit for attaining salvation in one lifetime.

9. Categories of Murcha

In *Yoga Darsana*, the commentary on Sage Patanjali's yoga aphorisms, two different kinds of swoon are mentioned. The first is *videhalaya*, which is of a lower level where there is no physical awareness but only identification with the astral body. The second is *prakritilaya*, which is of a higher level where there is no physical or astral awareness but only identification with the casual body. In both kinds of swoon, the mind is devoid of any thought and the seeker feels that he or she has attained the state of bliss. However, soon after coming out of the swoon, one's mind is again full of thoughts, dualities, and desires.

There is no doubt that the experiences one has undergone in these states are quite pleasant, encouraging and beneficial. They do offer considerable mental peace to the seeker. But such a seeker can attain liberation only by stages, that is, after many births.

10. Changing States of Mind

Meditation has a great impact on *citta* (mind-stuff), as a result of which continuous changes occur in the state of the seeker's mind. Experienced yogis have pointed out five distinct states of mind. They are *ksiptavastha* (state of distraction), *mudhavastha* (state of stupefaction), *viksiptavastha* (state of serenity), *ekagravastha* (state of concentration) and *nirodhavastha* (state of restraint).

In the first stage, *ksiptavastha* (state of distraction), the seeker is distracted or bewildered. This happens primarily when, during meditation, the *kundalini* is awakened. If the seeker has no guide or guru he faces the possibility of insanity at this point. Even the seeker who is blessed with the grace of the guru or of God experiences distraction during this period, but he is able to bear it with this grace. However, if he is frightened or actually goes mad, he forsakes the practice of yoga. One who gives up the practice of yoga in this way is known as *yoga bhrasta* (one fallen from yoga). One has to wait until their next birth to continue their spiritual journey.

One who somehow crosses the first stage of *ksiptavastha* proceeds further to enter the second stage, *mudhavastha* (state of stupefaction). In this stage he becomes even more perplexed. This is as it should be because the path of yoga is full of obstacles and the mettle of the seeker is tested at every step. One is stupefied by these frightening experiences and is at a loss to decide how to proceed from there. If one succeeds in finding his way, he enters *viksiptavastha* (state of serenity); otherwise he loses courage and patience and ultimately falls away from the path of yoga. *Unmada* (the delirious state) can occur to a seeker either during *ksiptavastha* (state of distraction) or *mudhavastha* (state of stupefaction).

The seeker who reaches the third stage, *viksiptavastha* (state of serenity), slowly comes out of the agitated state of mind and experiences tranquility or serenity. His scattered mind begins to attain composure, which leads him further towards the fourth stage *ekagravastha* (state of concentration), the state of concentration. It may be noted here that it is possible for a seeker to reach even the beginning of *ekagravastha* and still become a *yoga bhrasta* (a fallen seeker), since the path of yoga is very difficult throughout.

The first three stages: *ksiptavastha* (state of distraction), *mudhavastha* (state of stupefaction), *viksiptavastha* (state of serenity) are the basis or prerequisite without which *ekagravastha* (state of concentration) cannot be attained. This *ekagravastha* (state of concentration) itself is known as *sabija*, *savikalpa* or *samprajnata samadhi*, or *prasantavahita* (composed state of mind). *Samprajnata samadhi* is the stage in which one attains real knowledge about the final goal of the spiritual path. It is also called *niskama karma yoga* (yoga of desireless action), through the practice of which the body and the mind of the seeker are purified.

Ultimately, the seeker transcends even the state of *ekagravastha* (state of concentration) to reach the fifth and final stage of *nirodhavastha*, in which the mind ceases to think or becomes non-mind. This state of complete restraint of mind is called *nirbija*, *nirvikalpa*, or *asamprajnata samadhi*, in which there is no longer any distinction of knower, knowledge, and known. At this stage, the yogi becomes *urdhavareta* (a perfect celibate) and obtains *divya sarira* (divine body). He also attains *para vairagya* (total detachment) and final emancipation.

11. Jada (Static) Samadhi

Here it is appropriate to mention *jada samadhi*, a kind of *samadhi* in which the body remains static and the mind becomes unconscious. It is closer to swoon than to *samadhi*. But the ordinary *murcha* does not last for a long time, while *jada samadhi* may last for a longer time, as does real *samadhi*. Moreover, in ordinary *murcha* the body of the seeker falls on the floor, while in *jada samadhi* it becomes static in the same position in which one enters that state. Thus, though it is a sort of *murcha*, outwardly it resembles the real *samadhi*. That is why it is given the name *jada* (static) *samadhi*.

Static *samadhi* is mostly attained by those seekers who practice meditation without the release of *prana*. They do not practice the active or dynamic type of meditation which is practiced by those seekers whose *prana* energy is released through *saktipata* initiation. Instead they practice static meditation by keeping their bodies straight and stiff and by willfully concentrating on the region between the eyebrows. During such meditation they are coercing the body, the senses, the mind, and *prana*, as a result of which, at some point, they faint. Later on they go on practicing such a state of swoon for long durations, mistaking it for real *samadhi*.

Those who practice this *jada samadhi* can remain in that state continuously for a few days or even a few months. It depends on how much practice they have put into it. Since they are in a kind of coma, they do not feel hunger, thirst, etc., for the duration of the *jada samadhi*. Breathing also stops in such *samadhi* which permits the seeker to remain buried under the ground or closeted in a room while the swoon lasts. Like any other kind of *murcha* even *jada samadhi* does not qualify seekers to attain either *rtambhara prajna* (the highest wisdom) or *divya sarira* (divine body). Obviously, these seekers also do not qualify for liberation, neither do their cycles of life and death cease.

12. Breathing during *Nidra*, *Murcha*, and *Samadhi*

In the initial experiences of *nidra* and *murcha*, a seeker often fails to recognize what is happening to him. But as his experiences of *nidra* and *murcha* are repeated, he is able to identify them by observing their characteristics. I myself was able to recognize *murcha* a year and a half after its first occurrence. So, it is advisable that the seeker remain alert in recognizing these experiences. The earlier one recognizes them the better it is for him. This helps him in avoiding illusions and progressing on the right path.

One of the main characteristics through which a seeker can recognize these states in meditation is the breathing process. In *yoga nidra* the breathing of the seeker becomes very slow. This is the case in the initial stages of *yoga nidra*. But as the seeker advances in the practice of *yoga nidra* he finds that the breathing becomes so slow that it seems to have more or less stopped. Subsequently, at times it does stop. Not only that, but after experiencing a considerable amount of *yoga nidra*, one finds that his breath stops sometimes even during ordinary sleep at night. However, it should be noted here that the experience of cessation of breath even during ordinary sleep occurs only to the seeker who has reached the last stage of *sabija samadhi*.

In the case of *murcha*, however, the breathing process comes to a halt abruptly and not gradually as in the case of *yoga nidra*. But as the seeker enters into and comes out of *murcha* all of sudden, he or she does not have the opportunity to observe the process of breathing. This is one of the reasons why a seeker often fails to recognize the experience of *murcha* immediately after its first occurrence. However, after repeated careful observations one can verify the cessation of breath in *murcha*.

In the state of *samadhi*, initially the breathing becomes very slow. This is characteristic of *sabija samadhi*, where there is concentration of mind. Since the mind exists in this stage

of *samadhi*, the yogi can watch the movements of the breath. But later on, in the state of *nirbija samadhi*, the mind itself dissolves. In such a state, in the absence of mind, how can one make observations about the breathing process? However, judging from the specific characteristics of the physical and mental states after coming out of *nirbija samadhi*, one can say that the breath does cease.

Lastly, one important clarification that should be made is that the cessation of breath in *samadhi* is due to the purity of the bodily passages, facilitating the dissolution of both mind and *prana*. But in *nidra* and *murcha*, it is, rather, impurities in the bodily passages which cause the *prana* to be obstructed, resulting in the stoppage of breath.