

## CHAPTER 3

### PRIOR PREPARATION AND TECHNIQUE OF MEDITATION

#### 1. Where to Meditate?

A renunciate seeker, one who desires liberation would prefer to meditate in a solitary place like the peak of a mountain, a cave, or a river bank. Practice of meditation becomes steadfast with less effort if one meditates in a place which has natural beauty and is very quiet and suitable in all seasons.

How can one imagine the existence of flies or mosquitoes in such places?

Even if such a place is available, one will have to leave it or reject it if one finds difficulty in procuring food and bare necessities. Finding no such difficulty, one should establish a small hut there, keeping only the minimum requirement of things.

If, by chance, more than one seeker is inhabiting that place it is all the better because they will have the opportunity to discuss scriptures and exchange their experiences with each other.

Now let us think about the seeker who is not a renunciate but lives in society. Among such worldly seekers, those who are rich having palatial buildings and all material facilities easily available, there is no need to worry. But those who are of the middle or the poor class may have to face the problem of getting a separate room for meditation. The house may not have adequate facilities, or the facilities may prove to be of no use because of the large family. Some may hardly be able to afford to obtain a room or two for the whole family. In such a situation, how can one manage to sit for meditation in a separate room or in isolation?

It is true that a silent, holy, and isolated place is preferable for meditation, but such a place is not easily available to all. However, this should not worry the seeker. Enthusiasm to meditate is the main thing and if such enthusiasm is there, the place becomes secondary. The imperfections of the place may be overcome by creating silence, by ignoring completely the external sounds, and by believing firmly through the introversion created that one is meditating. One can also generate a holy atmosphere by remembering guru and God.

Love for meditation itself makes the mind introverted, and it can not be made extroverted by any disturbance.

Lamps lighted with *ghi* (clarified butter), incense, fragrant flowers, and images of those in whom one has faith are effective in creating an atmosphere in the meditation room which will inspire the seeker. However, again, one should not worry if such things are not available. Love does not need any exterior materials because what is required by it is found within itself.

It should never be forgotten that inconvenience is the only convenience and that convenience is the only inconvenience. Inconvenience is inevitable for development and it should be taken as the grace of God. Great enthusiasm for meditation, unparalleled devotion to God, unlimited love for the guru, faith in scriptures, knowledge, renunciation, and self-confidence are the basic requirements for a seeker. These should be called real conveniences. Without them, all other conveniences available have no value for success in meditation.

## **2. Time for Meditation**

The seekers who live a worldly life find it difficult to devote adequate time to meditation. Those who cannot devote enough time or observe regularity do not succeed. The seeker should work out a convenient daily not forgetting to include the possibilities of exceptional circumstances. Only after that should they begin to practice meditation regularly, otherwise they will get discouraged due to interference.

Morning, noon and evening are the most favorable periods for meditation and as far as possible, one should practice during these periods. The reason is that the natural silence affects the internal state of the seeker and helps one to meditate more easily. The seekers leading a worldly life and doing willful meditation should meditate daily for fifteen minutes to one hour, according to their convenience. At other times, whenever possible, they should mentally repeat the name of God. That will keep up their devotional spirit. However, such seekers, if they are practicing spontaneous meditation, should devote one to one and a half hours in one sitting. They should also fix a convenient time, keeping in view their circumstances.

The renunciate seeker practicing spontaneous meditation should meditate in three sittings every day. In the beginning, each sitting should be of one hour to one hour and a half. After every fortnight, half an hour can be added to each sitting. Finally, they should reach the duration of three hours for each sitting. It is enough to meditate for nine hours daily. After that they should study scriptures in their extra time.

## **3. Environmental Conditions and Meditation**

A renunciate seeker usually resides in a solitary place and his main activity is spiritual practice. His environmental surrounding does not generally create

problems. It is true though that sometimes one undergoes physical or mental disturbances, but they do not last long.

The problem of the seeker leading the worldly life, however, is acute. Usually one gets tired due to the external worldly activities and surroundings at home which also may be noisy. Moreover, their worldly worries as well do not allow them to have mental peace. In this condition, they may not feel interested in meditation. If such a disturbed situation arises only occasionally, it is better not to meditate at that time. Instead, one should read scriptures, say prayers, chant mantras or sing hymns according to one's liking. But if the environmental conditions always remain unfavorable, one should try to ignore them. Otherwise one can never practice meditation.

#### **4. Prior Preparation Necessary for Meditation**

In preparation for meditation three things are essential: physical fitness, eagerness to meditate, and mental pleasure. Otherwise meditation becomes routine and the mind remains extroverted. To maintain bodily fitness, one must keep the body clean by bathing regularly, particularly prior to meditation.

Too much food and insufficient exercise to aid digestion, promote sickness, while generating sleep and idleness; this condition also dulls the mind and increases sensual desires. Whereas food taken in less quantity is quickly digested and this helps keep the body fit, the mind calm, and the sensual desires reduced. As sensual desires decrease, self-control increases and the intellect is sharpened.

By pouring cold water on the head tired with too many thoughts, the mind becomes calm and mental unrest, worries, etc. diminish. *Rajoguna* (activity) and *tamoguna* (inertia) will also decrease.

One should, of course, go to the toilet before meditating so that one is not disturbed by such matters. However, if such needs arise during meditation, one should attend to them and then continue with the meditation.

After doing these things, one should try to remember the guru or God in whom one has great faith; consequently, the mind will become eager to meditate. However, if one has little faith, the mind will not be able to concentrate easily. In fact, the mind must have strong attraction towards the object upon which one intends to meditate. In order to create such attraction, it is necessary that one understand the importance of the object of contemplation.

If one makes the prior preparations mentioned above, one's mind will become engrossed in meditation quickly, and as the practice matures, one will begin to undergo divine experiences.

#### **5. Technique of Meditation**

The seeker should consider the room for meditation to be the temple of God and should enter it with love, faith, devotion, enthusiasm and delight. Both body and mind are important in spiritual practice. If he is not energetic, he may not get the desired results out of the practice.

It is best for the seeker to sit on a mattress which is at least as wide as a bed. It should be neither too thick nor too thin. It should also not be too soft. It should be spread on an even floor. Having sat on the mattress, the seeker can begin meditation keeping the following instructions in mind:

**a) First of all, one has to sit in a comfortable position and pray**

For meditation, one has to sit only in that *āsana* (posture) which is easiest and in which one can sit comfortably for a long time. Having decided on the *āsana* in which one intends to meditate, one should remain quiet for a few moments. Then one should pray to one's *guru* or God, in whom one has great faith. One may say the following prayers with much devotion:

O Lord,  
Lead me from illusion to reality,  
from darkness to light,  
from death to immortality.

O Guru,  
You are the trinity of the LORD.  
The creator, the maintainer and the destroyer:  
You are the ultimate cosmic SELF  
At thy holy lotus feet, I prostrate.

O Lord (or O *Guru*),  
Through Thy grace help me to meditate upon thee,  
in the very best way possible.

One can also say any other prayer of one's choice.

Whenever anything is done with self-confidence, the mind experiences natural peace, which in turn helps in keeping the mind absorbed in the task at hand. Prayer said with self-confidence and faith purifies the mind and fills it with love and devotion. Prayer is an unfailing device for bringing introversion of mind.

**b) One has to meditate continuously for one hour and not open the eyes at all during this time.**

Many seekers may not be accustomed to sitting and meditating, and for them, it may be inconvenient and even tedious to sit for two or three minutes. They will think: "How is it possible to sit and meditate for one hour in the same position without opening the eyes?" They need not worry about it. It may seem formidable from their point of view, but it is quite a trifling matter. They should not forget that they are able to do many things, even without practice.

Mind enjoys doing what it is interested in. No sooner does it become enamored than it is directed towards the subject of its liking. A seeker's mind will surely be interested in the technique of meditation which is shown here. Hence there will not arise any problem about inconvenience or boredom. Not only that, but the seeker will find that one hour's time seems short for meditating.

Because one is more easily disturbed or distracted through the sense of sight than through any of the other senses, a beginning meditator should keep his eyes closed all the time while practicing meditation. It is essential that the eyes be kept closed for attaining introversion. Of course, one can eventually keep them open after doing considerable practice of meditation with closed eyes. However, if that proves too distracting, it is better to meditate with closed eyes.

**c) External noises are to be ignored and one should keep from thinking about what is happening around you.**

The sense of hearing comes next to the sense of sight in causing disturbance during meditation. By closing the eyes the seeker escapes the disturbance caused by sight; but what about the disturbance caused by sound? Of course, ears can be closed with the fingers, but that is an ordinary remedy. If the seeker controls the sense of hearing by not indulging in external sounds or by ignoring them completely, his mind is not disturbed in spite of the noisy surroundings. His firm determination to meditate helps him in ignoring the noises and attaining introversion.

As a log tied with a big and heavy stone sinks deep into the water, while tons of stones filled in a wooden boat do not sink, likewise, internal attraction makes the seeker introvert and external attraction makes him extrovert. If one often hears external sounds and thereby remains aware of what is going on around him, he must believe that he is not yet properly settled in meditation. Hence, one should not allow the mind to go towards the external sounds and surrounding activities. Only then is it possible to go down easily into the depths of the *ātman* (soul). Even if the seeker is meditating in

very noisy surroundings, he must forget about its existence, open the closed doors of the temple of the mind, and enter into it with delight.

Apart from the sounds, one should not concern himself with even flies or mosquito bites. One has to ignore such disturbances. If one keeps his mind attached to the body by responding to such external disturbances, one may not be able to reach the depths of the *ātman* (soul).

**d) After the prayer, one has to do fifteen to twenty *dīrgha prāṇāyāma* (slow deep breaths) during which the body should be straight but not tight, and the gaze of the closed eyes should be mentally directed to the tip of the nose.**

One should begin counting the breaths in the following manner: While inhaling one may mentally say (*Rāma* and count 'one' while exhaling. Like this one may continue saying and counting *Rāma*-one, *Rāma*-two, *Rāma*-three, and so on, trying to keep the mind engrossed in it. At the same time, one should try to establish which organs are being affected by the air during inhalation. Of course, in the beginning, it is difficult to determine whether the movement of the air is shallow or deep. However, as one continues with the practice, one's observation becomes more acute and then it will be easier to make this judgement.

If one forgets to count the breaths, one should start again: *Rāma*-one, *Rāma*-two, etc. It is interesting to note that one will make mistakes in counting as the absorption of mind becomes deeper. Ultimately one begins to experience the state of *tandrā* (slumber) and counting stops automatically.

Any other *mantra* may be used instead of *Rāma*, such as *Aum*, *Soham*, *Kṛṣṇa*, *Śiva*, etc. This type of meditation is easy and well known and is variously called *Ajapā Gāyatrī*, *Hansa Mantra Japa*, or *Ajapajapa*.

When a seeker gives importance to Japa and repeats the mantra (or God's name), he considers God's gross or subtle form to be subsidiary. In the same way, when one attaches importance to God's form and meditates on it, one considers *japa* to be subsidiary. The seeker chooses either way in accordance with their liking. Therefore, it is not specifically instructed whether one should do *japa* or meditate on God's form.

If repeating God's name assumes the form of *dhāraṇā* (fixity of mind), it results in concentration of mind and if it assumes the form of *mantra*, it becomes *japa*.

In *dīrgha prāṇāyāma*, inhaling and exhaling should be done very slowly through both nostrils simultaneously, and in such a way that the faint whisper of the breath is audible from the throat region. This whisper-like sound is created due to the rubbing of air inside the throat. Moreover, it should be ensured that the breath is long and deep enough to reach the navel region. The breath should not be inhaled or exhaled in haste, and it is not to be retained either inside or outside. After long practice, the breath becomes deep enough to reach the *mūlādhāra cakra* (basal plexus). At that time, the three locks: basal lock, stomach lock, and chin lock, occur automatically. But a beginner should not bother about these locks. They should concentrate only on deep breathing.

While doing *dīrgha prāṇāyāma*, one should keep the spine straight yet loose, not tight or stiff, so that the air moves in and out easily without any resistance. By doing so, the air moves into the *suṣumṇā* (median path). There are two paths of the *suṣumṇā*: *pūrva madhyama* (front median path) and *paścima madhyama* (rear median path). Both these paths pass through the regions of various *cakras*, i.e., *mūlādhāra*, *svādhiṣṭhāna*, *maṇipura*, *anāhata*, *viśuddhākhyā*, *ājñā* and finally reach the thousand-petalled lotus in the crown of the head. However, the front median path proceeds through the anterior side of the body, while the rear median path passes along the posterior side, through the spinal column. The air does not flow through the middle passage of *suṣumṇā* as long as one's body is full of impurities. When the breath flows through this middle channel, concentration of mind is generated.

The mind usually remains diffused before meditation. It is dragged into various divergent currents of desires. In order to overcome such diffusion of mind, *dīrgha prāṇāyāmas* prove very useful.

Modern anatomy accepts eight bodily systems: circulatory, respiratory, digestive, excretory, reproductive, nervous, skeletal and muscular. Out of these, the respiratory system being of vital importance to life and even to death or disease can be called the driving force of the body. It has an equally great impact on the mind. Peace or unrest of mind are very much dependent on the condition of the respiratory system. Respirations are the strings of the musical instrument of the mind. By attuning these strings properly, the mental instrument will resound the melodious music of

peace and will make even the miserable life full of eternal happiness.

Thus *prāṇāyāmas* are extremely useful for the spiritual seeker. In fact, there is no better penance than the practice of *prāṇāyāmas*, through which the impurities of the mind are removed and the real knowledge dawns.<sup>1</sup> As the dross of metals like gold is removed by heating them in the fire, so also the dirt of all the senses is removed by the practice of *prāṇāyāmas*. *Dīrgha prāṇāyāmas* also helps the beginner in achieving purification and stability of mind.

Meditation may begin even without first doing any *prāṇāyāma*. However, if meditation is practiced after *dīrgha prāṇāyāma*, the body will be much less tense and the mind calm. Regular practice of *prāṇāyāma* prior to meditation not only aids and increases the power of concentration but also generates deep feelings of peace; both of these will greatly hasten one's progress. When *prāṇāyāma* is regularly practiced independent of meditation, one need not spend additional time on it at the time of meditation. Three to five deep breaths should be more than enough. Instead of *dīrgha prāṇāyāmas*, one can choose to do *anuloma-viloma* (breathing through alternate nostrils) or *bhastrikā* (below blowing) *prāṇāyāma*.

**e) Keep the body relaxed and make the *prāna* (vital air) free from the control of the mind. Do no stop any physical activity if it is generated spontaneously.**

After the *prāṇāyāma* or deep breaths, meditate by keeping the body straight but relaxed. The body is not held tight but kept relaxed and comfortable. Withdraw the control of the mind over the *prāṇa* and allow the *prāṇa* or life force to move through the body with full freedom. Then, one has not to bother if the body bends or falls down in any direction. In other words the relationship between the body and the mind is broken, giving full freedom to the *prāṇa* which will try to keep the body continuously in comfortable positions. Therefore, all that one has to do is to relax the body and leave the subsequent functions to *prāṇa*, which is the guiding vital force or the protecting energy residing in the body. Through this very technique, one will be able to experience bliss.

If one tries willfully to keep the body straight by holding it tight, the mind cannot go into the depths of *ātman* (soul) or become introvert. One cannot hope to cross the river by rowing an anchored boat. So also one cannot attain introversion by keeping the mind attached to

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<sup>1</sup> *Yoga Bhāṣya, Sādhanpāda, 53*



the body. Hence the connection between the mind and the body has to be severed by releasing the *prāṇa* energy.

After the release of *prāṇa* energy, spontaneous bodily movements occur. As a result, the seeker's body changes various postures (*āsanas*) instead of remaining steady. Of course, such movements are favorable to introversion of mind and not obstructive. A person changes position two or three times during sleep, but he is not aware of it. Similarly, in the waking state, artists and those people who have become so engrossed in their work will change position without being aware of it and without disturbing the concentration of the mind. In the same way, the seeker whose *prāṇa* energy is released may also change posture (*āsana*) automatically and not be aware of it. When this happens, one should not stop it. At the same time, one should not change the posture with one's will, since this will be done by the all-wise protecting energy residing in the body. Moreover, when such changes are taking place, one should not pay any attention to them and thereby allow the meditation to be disturbed. Yet while changing the posture, if the mind does happen to come to the surface and becomes concerned with the activities of the body, one should quickly try to return to the original state of introversion. However, it may be remembered that during meditation on the eighteen vital parts of the body<sup>2</sup>, one must keep the mind steady on those parts only in order to achieve the necessary concentration.

Actually, one can meditate while sitting, standing or lying down either on the back or stomach. When the meditation is automatically generated, a seeker in a sitting position might lie down, one in a lying position might get up, and one in a sitting position may even stand up. Once such experiences take place, know surely that the meditation has begun. After the release of prana energy when the *kuṇḍalinī śakti* (serpentine power) awakens and takes possession of the seeker's body, one will begin performing *āsanas*, *mudrās*, *prāṇāyāmas*, *pratyāhāras*, *dhāraṇās*, etc. automatically. One will also dance, sing classical songs or *Rāmadhuna* (repeated chanting of *Rāma mantra*), shout, laugh loudly, speak meaninglessly like a neurotic person, or weep so tragically as to move one's heart. One will also visualize various pleasant and frightening scenes and yet, all the time, be in deep meditation. These experiences are varied and specialized. Therefore, it is difficult to describe what will happen and what will be seen during meditation.

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<sup>2</sup> The eighteen parts of the body are: big toes, ankles, calves, knees, thighs, anus, perineum, genitals, navel, heart, back, neck, throat, palate, nose, mid-point between the eyebrows, forehead and crown of head.

It will do if one simply calls it the play (*līlā*) of God. Only when this play of God subsides does the body remain steady and the head and chin become erect. Subsequently, the real concentration of mind, or the state of *praśānta-vāhitā*, *saṁprajñāta*, *savikalpa* or *sabija samādhi* is generated.

One who adopts this technique of meditation and practices it precisely and regularly will soon find it to be very interesting. He may start loving meditation which he may not have liked previously. One enjoys it to the extent one sticks to the instructions or the method prescribed. Within a short time, one's prana energy will be released and one will undergo various spiritual experiences. Such experiences prove to be very helpful in enhancing the seeker's enthusiasm for spiritual upliftment.

## 6. Some Additional Instructions

One who practices this technique of meditation should keep the following additional instructions in mind:

- (1) One should practice this type of meditation daily for an hour in the morning and an hour in the evening.
- (2) The mat or the padding for meditation should be of bed size so that one can meditate even while lying on it.
- (3) The mat should be kept in such a place that even if physical movements take place, the body does not strike against a wall or any piece of furniture or any other object in the meditation room.
- (4) Burning objects like candlesticks, butter lamps, incense sticks, etc. should be kept on the altar at a safe distance to avoid a fire accident.
- (5) After the release of *prāṇa* energy, one should meditate in isolation.
- (6) Meditation should not be ended abruptly. One should come out of it by establishing mind's control over the body and making the mind slowly extrovert.
- (7) One may keep a diary in which the daily experiences of meditation are noted regularly. It should be written in brief and only true experiences should be noted. One should not include imaginary experiences in order to impress others.
- (8) The experiences of meditation should not be discussed with any other person except one's *guru* or a brother/sister disciple who also practices (this) meditation.
- (9) One should talk about the spiritual experiences to other seekers only if and when it is necessary. They should be narrated in their true form and without any exaggeration. The reason for narrating the experiences should be to remove the other person's doubt, fear, or ignorance and not just to satisfy their curiosity, nor to enhance one's own importance. Otherwise, both will be led astray.
- (10) Whenever necessary, one is directed to obtain guidance from a *guru* in whom one has great faith. It is not advisable to seek guidance about this from more than one *guru*.
- (11) At the end of every meditation session, one should sit for sometime with closed eyes and sing *dhūna* (chant) or hymns.

## 7. Should One Meditate in a Group or Individually?

Group meditation, though of a primary type, is advantageous to the seeker in the initial stage. Group meditation, when done with correct technique, also results in spiritual experiences. Some persons have such experiences earlier, while others have them later. In group meditation, those who gain experience earlier provide examples and, as a result, the discouraged seekers are encouraged to continue with their practice. The green sticks of wood are also reduced to ashes when burnt with the dry ones. In the same way, the seekers of ordinary caliber can meditate at their best when they participate in group meditation along with advanced seekers.

Through group meditation, a seeker qualifies himself for practicing individual meditation. However, there is no hard and fast rule that one cannot meditate in isolation without having first practiced in a group. On the contrary, a seeker of a higher caliber need not practice group meditation, but if one does, their meditation experiences may provide strength and encouragement to novice practitioners.

Sometimes, in individual meditation, one may become lazy or have frightening experiences. As a result, one may lose enthusiasm. Through participation in group meditation, one may make quick progress while facing less difficulty. Also, one may thereby gain courage to fight against the difficulties which do arise later.

Thus, group meditation is beneficial to all. However, after having made certain progress with a group, one needs to meditate in isolation. If a very evolved *yogi* presides over a session of group meditation, it is worthwhile joining in, since it is very fortunate to have the opportunity to meditate in the presence of such a person. It can be considered that one has obtained fitness (*adhikāra*) just to be in the presence of an elevated soul or to stand in line with those who seek liberation.

An experienced *yogi* makes the methods, techniques and secrets of meditation clearer through demonstration. This, in turn, enhances the faith, enthusiasm and liking for *yoga* among the seekers, thus creating a zeal to continue to practice.

Even a favorable glance from an evolved *yogi* is good enough to get the *prāṇa* energy of the seeker released. This is known as *śaktipāta* or the transmission of spiritual energy from a *guru* to a disciple. *Śaktipāta* can be transmitted not only to an individual, but also to a group or even to a large mass. However, the result will much depend upon the stature of the presiding *yogi* and the receptivity or fitness of the seekers participating in the group or mass meditation. Genuine interest and eagerness on the part of the seekers can produce wonderful results and all the participants of group or mass meditation can experience the release of their *prāṇa* energy. Thus all can enter into meditation at once.

There will, of course, be exceptions because the mental states of those participating will not be the same. Some will be just below the external level of the mind; others will be somewhat deeper, while others will be at a much deeper level. Yet the entire group or mass will appear to be in the depth of meditation. The facial expression of a seeker who is in deep meditation will appear to be innocent and serene, while the face of one in a less profound state will be somewhat stiff, though pleasant; but the face of the seeker whose meditation is at a superficial level will appear serious and somewhat dull. During deep meditation, one undergoes spiritual experiences. A less profound type of meditation will also give pleasure, while a light or surface type of meditation will create faith in the seeker that he is making progress.