



# The Spiral Path...

The Theosophical Society, American Section — Quarterly Circular — Summer Solstice 2024 — #18

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*Oh my Divinity! Thou dost blend with the earth  
and fashion for thyself Temples of mighty power.*

*Oh my Divinity! Thou livest in the heart-life of all things  
and dost radiate a Golden Light that shineth forever and  
doth illumine even the darkest corners of the earth.*

*Oh my Divinity! Blend thou with me, that from the  
corruptible I may become Incorruptible;  
that from imperfection I may become Perfection;  
that from darkness I may go forth in Light.*

Katherine Tingley

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## Concentration - Contemplation - Meditation - Mindfulness

We think, we dream, we meditate, we concentrate, we are mindful of all different kinds of thought in our daily lives. Some of it is worldly and perhaps some of it is other-worldly — not outside reality, but simply not of this materialistic sphere we see around us. We use thought in various ways, and if we use it for good, we use it to contemplate the Oneness of Being, the Unity of Humanity, the singularness of All things. *Tat tvam asi*. THAT thou art. The universe, really the kosmos, is One Life, and we may act as such.

**Meditation** The attempt to raise the self-conscious mind to the level of its spiritual counterpart, to unite manas with a ray from buddhi. It is a positive attitude of mind, a state of consciousness rather than a system or a time period of intensive thinking. It corresponds in its more perfect form to the ecstasy of Plotinus, which he defines as “the liberation of the mind from its finite consciousness, becoming one and identified with the Infinite.” It is silent prayer in one real sense, for the heart aspires upwards to become freed from all desire for personal benefit, and the mind frames no specific object, but both unite in the aspiration; not my will, but thine, be done. When engaged in at the outset of the day, or on retiring to sleep, it often takes the form of reflecting profoundly and impersonally on spiritual teachings, as well as self-examination, attuning of the mind and heart to calm and unselfish thought and feelings, as well as the endeavor to realize in consciousness one’s highest ideals of duty, purity, and truth, and inducing thereby a general harmonizing and one-pointed adjustment of the whole nature.

**“Meditate all the time** — nothing is so easy and so helpful. Far better is this for most students than to have a set period: quiet, unremitting thought on the questions you have, continuing even when the hands are busy with the tasks of the day, and the mind itself quite absorbed by other duties. In the back of the consciousness there can still be this steady undercurrent of thought. It is likewise a protecting shield in all one’s affairs, for it surrounds the body with an aura drawn forth from the deeper recesses of the auric egg...” (FSO 39).  
From: *Encyclopedic Theosophical Glossary*



All of us know what is unworthy of ourselves. Striving to gentle the untamed propensities in our character is a type of purgation, a purification we can go through every day. This is what Paul meant when he said to the people of Corinth, “I die daily” — day after day he sought to be “reborn” interiorly. This is the “daily initiation” — life itself, with its manifold joys and sorrows. Both have their temptations and trials, good fortune so called being often more difficult to handle than are the day-by-day frustrations and disappointments. The constant demand upon us to choose between the greater and the less, the selfless and the self-centered, brings us face to face with ourselves.

Grace F. Knoche

All beings are souls on the pathway of unfoldment. The evolution of humanity takes place against the background of a living earth and a living cosmos. Reincarnation gives us insights into this panorama, for it pictures each person as an immortal pilgrim with a spark of the divine in his heart of hearts. All the potentials of this divine source reside within each of us — and also in all other beings, even forces and worlds: in the bird winging its way through the blue sky, in the lightning and the storm, and in our beautiful earth so patiently nourishing its kingdoms. The knowledge of our divine ancestry and the brotherhood of all life brings with it responsibilities. Those of this persuasion have put their feet on a path, and the first step on this path is to live not for ourselves, but to benefit mankind.

John P. Van Mater

## Culture of Concentration

Dara Eklund

Concentration, contemplation, and meditation all involve focus, and a knowledge of both the Known and the Knower. Concentration focuses the direction of our thoughts; meditation focuses the direction of our lives. According to the *Bhagavad-Gītā* the highest knowledge is that “wisdom which perceives in all nature one single principle, indivisible and incorruptible, not separate in the separate objects seen” (ch. 18). As Krishna expounds: “In this path there is only one single object, and this of a steady, constant nature; but widely branched is the faith and infinite are the objects of those who follow not this system” (ch. 2).

In his interpretation of Patanjali’s *Yoga Aphorisms*, William Quan Judge defines concentration as the “power to apply the mind, at any moment, to the consideration of a single point of thought, to the exclusion of all else.” Yet Patanjali tells us that “At the time of concentration the soul abides in the state of a spectator without a spectacle” — a seeming paradox. He also states that the “practical part of concentration is for the purpose of establishing meditation and eliminating afflictions.” These afflictions, arising from the senses and tumultuous lower mind, prevent the tranquility of every aspect of our being which is needed to focus thought. Even memory may be a hindrance in that it does not let go of a train of thought. Therefore we first must learn to concentrate, or at least contemplate. Contemplation can range from vague brooding on a particular problem or idea, to deliberate reflection upon it. Unlike reverie, contemplation allows us to sift through our chains of thought and experiences, or give due consideration to any one of them. It is more akin to meditation with an emphasis on a seed thought or idea.

Of what use are such practices? In his *Meditations* Marcus Aurelius advised his readers:

Acquire the contemplative way of seeing how all things change into one another, and constantly attend to it, and exercise yourself about this part of philosophy. Nothing is so apt to produce magnanimity. Such a man has put off the body, and as he sees that at any moment he must go away from among men and leave everything here, he gives himself entirely up to just actions, and... resigns himself to the universal nature. But as to what any man shall say or think about him or do against him, he never even thinks of it, being himself contented with ...acting justly in what he now does, and being satisfied with what is now assigned to him;... he lays aside all distracting and busy pursuits, and desires nothing else than to run the straight course... — ch. 10

The straight course has to do with the “examined life,” upheld by Pythagoras and Plato. To run the straight course one must bring under control the untrained stallions of the mind. Even Arjuna, though a precise archer, is troubled by the restlessness of the mind. Krishna acknowledges its restraint to be difficult, but not impossible. By controlling the desires which arise in his heart and soul, man attains to perfect devotion. Krishna describes that devotee as “He who closeth all the doors of his senses, imprisoneth his mind in his heart... undiverted to any other object” (*Gītā*, ch. 8). To know the true Self one must transcend, or shed, the veils which hide Reality.

This requires some form of mind development, beginning first with concentration. Which types are advisable and safe? Christmas Humphreys wrote that **the right motive for mind development is**

**the enlightenment of all life.** In this motive lies our protection. In *Concentration and Meditation* (p. 4) he states that the steps he outlines can be hastened by an understanding of the purpose of evolution, right motive, and the use of the will. Judge comments in his preface to *Yoga Aphorisms* that “Will is a spiritual power... present in every portion of the Universe.” H. P. Blavatsky often repeated that behind will stands desire. How do we transform the desire principle into a servant of the dedicated life? When the will is freed from the domination of passion, it is able to subdue the mind, which has a tendency to diffuseness. The focused or calm mind receives all desires like the ocean receives all streams.

Aside from developing will power by redirecting the desire principle, Blavatsky and Judge recommended raja yoga. Raja yogis seek to control the mind itself. When the mind is stilled, its modifications are stilled. Will and mind are only servants for the real Self, and the goal of raja yoga is union with Īśvara, the spirit in man, which gradually raises the lower self to higher planes. This process involves meditation, which HPB called “silent and *un-uttered* prayer, or, as Plato expressed it, ‘the ardent turning of the soul toward the divine’” (*Key to Theosophy*, p. 10). Damodar K. Mavalankar in his article “Contemplation” agrees that meditation “is the inexpressible yearning of the inner Man to ‘go out towards the infinite,’ which in olden time was the real meaning of adoration.”

Patanjali in his *Yoga Aphorisms* provides three distinct steps for meditation:

1. Fixing the mind on a place, object, or subject is attention [*dharana*].
2. The continuance of this attention is contemplation [*dhyana*].
3. This contemplation, becomes meditation when the object of attention alone radiates, and the mind loses awareness of itself [*samadhi*]. — Book III

As Swami Krishnananda summarizes it: “If Dharana is the drop, Dhyana is the river. Many concentrations make a meditation.” (*The Yoga System*, ch. 11) When the river unites with the ocean, that is called samadhi. Swami Vivekananda describes this highest state as the giving up of all forms.

In the *Gītā* Krishna extols gaining purity of motive by placing one’s attention in the act itself rather than in any ensuing reward. This can be done in everyday life without postures or mantras. A childhood memory verse teaches, “Act for and as the Self of all creatures.” Krishna tells Arjuna: “I am the Ego seated in the hearts of all beings” (ch. 10). He instructs Arjuna to fix his mind on the true Self: “to whatsoever object the inconstant mind goeth out... subdue it, bring it back, and place it upon the Spirit” (ch. 6). In time this becomes easy, since Krishna declares that he himself is “the power of concentration in those whose minds are on the spirit” (ch. 10).

A Mahâtma is quoted by A. P. Sinnett as saying that personal feelings and ties will one day “become blended into one universal feeling, the only true and holy, the only unselfish and eternal one — Love, an Immense Love for humanity as a whole” (*The Occult World*, p. 152). We see here that concentration is much more than a mental practice, but requires unremitting and lifelong discipline and dispassion. This is why the sages dwell on attaining calmness, charity, and love which “casteth out all fear.” Thus raja yoga focuses on altruism, not postures, astral projections, or psychic recipes for the meager lower self. The virtues pave the way towards a future lifetime when the real practice of concentration may begin. Judge writes: “Some day we will begin to see why not one passing

thought may be ignored, not one flitting impression missed. This we can perceive is no simple task. It is a gigantic work" (*Echoes of the Orient* 1:72).

Exercises for modern laymen appear in several recent books, such as Roger Walsh's *Essential Spirituality*. Among the "Seven Central Practices to Awaken Heart and Mind" that this book enjoins, the fourth practice — to concentrate and calm our minds — involves numerous useful ideas. First Dr. Walsh shows that Western psychologists for the past century did not believe one could contain the "meandering" mind. They accepted William James' conclusion that "attention cannot be continuously sustained." This came on the heels of the Freudian dilemma that we are victims of unconscious forces within us. The religions of the ages, however, while recognizing that the "Restless mind is as difficult to control as the wind" (*Gîtâ*, ch. 6), taught it can and *must* be subdued. That is why the Buddha taught mindfulness and why the Dalai Lama holds that the purpose of religion is to train the mind. True religion binds us back to our source; it teaches non-attachment, the equanimity which allows balanced minds, choices, and acts. We *can* turn attention to what is just, wise, and honorable. Dr. Walsh insists that "unwise attention" is to be avoided, as our mental diet affects mental health. What we concentrate upon, we become.

Dr. Walsh's steps to developing a peaceful mind begin with several simple practices. One is to do only one thing at a time. Similar to the Zen idea of "When I sweep, I sweep," we can give each task our full attention: not talking on our cell phones while we cook or drive, or listening to the radio while we read the newspaper. In time we allow each task to become a sacred ritual. Even the simple act of opening a door can be done with loving care, not bolting through, but softly closing it as well. Walsh suggests we start welcoming interruptions instead of getting irritated or disdaining them: when listening to a friend on the phone, we can give our total attention.

Contemplation and meditation are as much skills as learning to play an instrument. They require constant practice. Bringing our minds to tranquility is the spiritual discipline of the *Gîtâ*. It refines the senses by relinquishing attachment to them. Walsh reminds us that "As the capacity for concentration matures, the ability to give care and attention to each moment becomes increasingly steady and continuous" (p. 169). In the *Gîtâ* we find it described as "That power of steadfastness holding the man together, which by devotion controls every motion of the mind..." (ch. 18). This transforms living into an uninterrupted yoga.

Further steps outlined by Walsh "turn work into service." When we embrace generosity and the joy of service, we give of the self, not just material objects. We may adopt a means of giving anonymously, such as the Talmud describes when generous folks leave food at the doors of the poor during the night, without seeking notice or reward. Mother Teresa summarized this by saying "Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier." These are the higher reaches of generosity. We can begin by transforming our motives and by dedicating our activities to others.

Nor should we omit the fine practice of silence, urged by all scriptures. For example, the Sufi teachings as well as the Torah admonish: "Be still, and know." The skill by which we align ourselves with Eternity, the Taoists call living in harmony with Tao:

In stillness the mind becomes clear.

In clarity, it becomes bright — and this brightness...  
is the radiance of the Tao within.

— *The Shambhala Guide to Taoism* by Eva Wong.

Confucius applied this precept to living in harmony with nature and society. The Sufis, Quakers, American Indians, and Camaldolese monks all seek that "still small voice within." For, as Black Elk asked, "Is not silence the very voice of the Great Spirit?" With silence the mind is calmed. Master KH wrote:

It is upon the serene and placid surface of the unruffled mind that the visions gathered from the invisible find a representation in the visible world. Otherwise you would vainly seek those visions, those flashes of sudden light which have already helped to solve so many of the minor problems and which alone can bring the truth before the eye of the soul. It is with jealous care that we have to guard our mind-plane from all the adverse influences which daily arise in our passage through earth-life. — Letter No. 11, *The Mahâtma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, p. 64

From a lecture given at Theosophical Library Center,  
Altadena, California, on April 6, 2001  
From *Sunrise* magazine, June/July 2001;  
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Will and Desire lie at the doors of Meditation and Concentration. If we desire truth with the same intensity that we had formerly wished for success, money, or gratification, we will speedily acquire meditation and possess concentration. If we do all our acts, small and great, *every moment*, for the sake of the whole human race, as representing the Supreme Self, then every cell and fibre of the body and inner man will be turned in one direction, resulting in perfect concentration.

William Q. Judge

Genuine concentration and meditation, conscious and cautious, upon one's lower self in the light of the inner divine man and the Paramitas, is an excellent thing. But 'to sit for Yoga' with only a superficial and often distorted knowledge of the real practice, is almost invariably fatal.

H.P.B.

Let the Silence within Speak...

This quarterly circular is issued by the American Section National Secretary. Material, subjects, or ideas for potential publication in this circular are welcome from the membership. Let me know if you do not wish to receive this circular.

From the Editor

H.P.B. during her work with the "Inner Group" in London, related a model for thought or concentration during 'meditation:' our *moment by moment mindful awareness*. It was written down by a member, who checked the notes with HPB at the next meeting. The "diagram" did not surface until years later, when it was published. The intent is to hold these thoughts in mind constantly, not simply during a specific time. It is as follows:

Fraternally,  
Scott J. Osterhage

## H.P.B.'s "Diagram" of Meditation<sup>1</sup>

- First conceive of UNITY by Expansion in space and infinite in Time. (Either with or without self-identification).
- Then meditate logically and consistently on this in reference to states of consciousness.
- Then the normal state of our consciousness must be molded by:—

### ACQUISITIONS:

- Perpetual Presence in imagination in all Space and Time. From this originates a substratum of memory which does not cease in dreaming or waking. Its manifestation is courage. With memory of universality all dread vanishes during the dangers and trials of life.
- Continued attempt at attitude of mind to all existing things, which is neither love, hate nor indifference. Different in external activity to each, because in each the capacity alters. Mentally the same to all. Equilibrium and constant calm. Greater ease in practicing the "virtues,"<sup>2</sup> which are really the outcome of wisdom; for benevolence, sympathy, justice, etc., arise from the intuitive identification of the individual with others, although unknown to the personality.
- The Perception in all embodied beings of Limitation only. Criticism without praise or blame.

*Acquisition* is completed by the conception "***I am all Space and Time.***"

Beyond that...(It cannot be said).

### DEPRIVATIONS:

Constant refusal to think of reality of:—

- Separations and Meetings. Association with Places. Times and Forms. Futile longings. Expectations. Sad memories. Broken-heartedness.
- The Distinction. Friend and Foe. Resulting in absence of anger and bias. (Replaced by judgement.)
- Possessions. Vanity, Remorse. Greed, Selfishness, Ambition.
- Personality. Vanity, Remorse.
- Sensation. Gluttony, Lust, etc.<sup>3</sup>

These deprivations are produced by the perpetual imagination — without self-delusion\* — of "I am without;" the recognition of their being the source of bondage, ignorance and strife.

\* *There is no risk of self-delusion if the personality is deliberately forgotten.*

*Deprivation* is completed by the meditation: "***I am without attributes.***"

General Note:

All the passions and virtues interblend with each other. Therefore the diagram gives only general hints.

[TSP Editor's Notes:

1. "Apparently the diagram was part and parcel of esoteric instruction of H.P.B." as recorded by E. T. Sturdy.

See *The Inner Group Teachings of H. P. Blavatsky*, p. 130. Reformatted from original. Bolding added.

2. The PÂRAMITÂS: *Dâna* (charity and love immortal), *Śīla* (harmony in word and act), *Kshânti* (patience sweet), *Virâg'* (indifference to pleasure and to pain, illusion conquered), *Vīrya* (dauntless energy, fighting to supernal TRUTH), *Dhyâna* (ceaseless contemplation of BE-ing), *Prajñâ* (which makes of a man a god, a Bodhisattva).

See *The Voice of the Silence*, pp. 47-48.

3. The Seven Deadly Sins: Pride (vanity), Greed, Wrath, Envy, Lust, Gluttony, and Sloth.]