
LIVING MEDITATION

6. Unceasing Vigilance

The 'seeing' is the 'doing'

The last time, we spoke about change being the cause and not the effect or results that it brings about in time. Change therefore is immediate and not in time process whereas, its effects appear visible over time.

When the inner intelligence sees things as they are and responds by doing what needs to be done - all without the interference of thought—it is called vigilance. Till there is this second part of 'doing what needs to be done' and not 'what suits me best' is fully empowered—there is neither awakening nor vigilance—one is still asleep. The test of awakening is not only the willingness to act but enthusiasm to act.

Just how can it be otherwise? For example, friends on the north eastern shore board are just recovering from the super storm that ravaged the area. During the storm, the seeing of the danger was acting in safety and if one did not act or do something—the danger was not seen or felt to be true. You cannot say, "I see the danger, but...". There are no 'buts' one sees—you either get it or you don't—as discussed earlier, you only 'get it' if you get 'it'. There is no ambiguity here and tremendous self-honesty is required.

Vigilance in life

Seeing things as they are should result in doing what needs to be done. The Sixth Chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, which is the chapter dealing with meditation, opens with this great flourish, "Without regard for result, do what needs to be done". If we are unable or rather unwilling to 'see things as they are' and respond with 'what needs to be done' till this becomes natural—plunging deeper in seated meditation will be a mental process at best.

These two, seeing and doing are not two, they are the understanding's response to life or living meditation. We shall get into vigilance in seated meditation just a little later. Now, let us stay with living meditation as it is the foundation and fuel for seated meditation.

In life, we actually see things sort of tangibly—someone, something or some condition that presents itself in front of us. Thought or conditioning rises insisting what we see is 'that' and not what actually is. If someone has rubbed us wrong yesterday, when we see him today, 'Oh, *that* person is coming'—but, 'that person' is not coming, '*this* person', the one who is walking towards me is coming. Seeing '*that* person', I have a preprogrammed response—walk away, ignore or be rude. But, seeing '*this* person', the one who is walking towards me coming, I can find out what

the matter is and take it from there. When we give unnecessary importance to thought or conditioning (which are one and the same thing), we put the inner intelligence to sleep.

We've talked about this before and it may seem that we are stuck in a groove, but my friends, if we cannot separate thought from action—how will we be see the difference between thought and being in meditation?

Life is action and every situation has the potential to weaken thought by using the inner intelligence instead. There is no suppression or use of logic—your full attention to each situation is what is required. The key to attention is interest and if you have awoken or seen the danger in living carelessly, which is by reliance on thought or conditioning—interest and attention are not a choice. You've seen the danger and this 'seeing' itself rouses interest, attention and vigilance ensues.

Vigilance must have both components; seeing things as they are and responding in the best way, and, this must lead to effortless avoidance of wrong perception and its resulting flawed response. In yoga, these are called abhyasa which is seeing clearly and exerting wisely, and, vairagya or avoidance of flawed perception and action by seeing their inherent shortcomings.

There are times in each of our lives when conditions cause us to awaken but that awakening is more like a stirring in bed—not really awakening. If our awakening or vigilance is triggered by things going wrong, we slip right back to the grip of habit once the going gets good—perhaps tighter. This because, what seemed to be an awakening or vigilance, was an effect of things going wrong and when the cause is absent, vigilance once again gives way to habit. Each time we do this flip-flop based on conditions, we dull the inner intelligence by using it when convenient till ignorance tries to make intelligence its tool. My friends, this just does not work.

Vigilance that is roused by your examination of things is not an effect, it is like waking from a dream in a way. You were seeing things one way based by relying on colored perception of things and now, the colored glasses are set aside and you see directly. This vigilance that rises from your own direct observation of things lasts and is necessary for seated meditation.

Before moving on, allow me to restate that it is essential to separate thought from action before seeing our distinctness from thought or the separation of thought from consciousness. Life is where thought, conditioning or habit grew strong and it is in the field of life where they are weakened best. Living carelessly led to the build-up of conditioning and living wisely will lead to its weakening by disuse.

Thinning the mind

In the first talk in this series we said that the purpose of yoga, meditation or spiritual life is the removal of impurities so one's true nature can be seen. This makes living expertly essential as ceaseless vigilance itself will burn the dross of conditioning while we live our normal lives. Rajas

or the energy infused in the mind in the form of our likes and dislikes has to be squeezed out of the mind like one would squeeze the last remains of toothpaste out of its tube. When we discover how to live without the interference of thought, its energy will gradually exhaust itself by rising and falling and not being used or given any new energy. Put simply; thought patterns, habit or conditioning has gained strength by repeated use, it will weaken by disuse.

Along with the weakening of thought from its hold on awareness or consciousness, the center of gravity or that which we identify with has also shifted and we no longer rest on thought but on that awareness which is aware of thought and all else seamlessly. Thought begins to revert to its rightful place as a function in consciousness and this makes seated meditation a task that does not involve struggle. Effort is necessary in any task but struggle is not.

Vigilance in meditation

There are a lot of diets in the market today—how about a mental diet? This is a two-part program; the first involves living in vigilance as we have discussed above. The second part is what happens in meditation and when the mind is observed like the ocean would watch a wave within it—conditioning is on the treadmill and thinning of the mind results.

We will be discussing vigilance in meditation which involves the use of the mantra that we have discussed earlier. First, you repeat the mantra and listen to the mantra. Your attention is on repeating and listening to the sound of the mantra, though it is taking place mentally within you. Soon, other thoughts begin to rise—let them. Be aware of the moment or their rise without being distracted by them and they will fall on their own. Your being aware of the mantra will retain the subject impulse and thoughts which had assumed subjectivity earlier will begin to be seen as objects of awareness.

The momentum gained from living vigilantly will continue in meditation and with each rise and fall without identification—thought will lose some of its energy. This continued non-identification is very important as it is this that prevents any new energy to conditioning which now operates on dwindling supplies of residual energy.

Do not take this too casually as the mind has tremendous energy and never feel that some moments of quiet are a victory or mark of progress. The mind conserves its dwindling supplies and waits in ambush knowing that it is easier to perhaps to burst forth in life than in seated meditation where observation is acute. If however, you have other weak spots like the inability to hold your posture without moving for an extended period of time, are not regular or do not take care of your health and are unable to practice persistently—your efforts will be blown over to your surprise. There is no need to be over-confident or under-confident—just to want to know your true nature most sincerely will guide you well.

The Yoga Sutra¹ tells us: disease, dullness, doubt, carelessness, laziness, inability to turn the attention away from obstacles, perverted or distorted vision, inability to find firm ground for spiritual investigation and even when such ground is found, the unsteadiness of the mind—these are the obstacles or distractions for they bring about and constitute the apparent fragmentation of the mind-stuff.

In the next verse², we are told: by the presence of the following symptoms can be understood the extent to which the mind is disturbed and distracted - sorrowful mood, psychological despair, the motions of the body and inhalation and exhalation. By being attentive to these factors, it is possible to arrive at an understanding of the degree of seriousness of the obstacles—for they coexist with the distractions of the mind.

A good attitude towards everyone and everything, a carefully laid out practice and a well-balanced approach with a little of each type of yoga should address each area cited above so that we reduce our vulnerabilities and soft-spots which are always the Achilles heel.

Repeating the mantra and listening to the mantra within us while still being aware of the moment of rise of thought will weaken thought and raise awareness or consciousness further. When we feel we can continue with the mantra without being distracted by frequent thought surges, we should begin inquiry into the mantra.

Inquiry is not asking and does not involve the thought or intellect at all. If you have been attentive to the mantra being repeated and heard within, a question should arise naturally as to 'how this is taking place within me?' 'I am one and within this oneness, there seems to be a subject-object relationship where I am aware of something happening within me—'just how is this happening?' This natural prompt leads to inquiry into the mantra in trying to find out 'where the mantra is being heard' and 'what the mantra is made of'.

Inquiry is looking directly within without creating space like I am here and mantra is over there someplace. There is no spatial separation where all this is happening so don't create any space. You have to still yourself completely and try to feel this intuitively as the ocean may want to know about a wave within it.

When consciousness realizes the substance of the mantra, meditation takes on another dimension. The waves of the mind have been stilled because you have thoroughly and completely understood thought. Now, that which has been aware of and understood thought must become self-aware—realize itself. For this, inquiry changes direction and flows unto itself. Each will have different experiences during self-inquiry.

Closing thoughts

¹ From 'Enlightend Living' (I.30) by Swami Venkatesananda, published by the Chiltern Yoga Trust.

² From 'Enlightend Living' (I.31) by Swami Venkatesananda, published by the Chiltern Yoga Trust.

Friends, we have covered a lot of ground today and much of what has been said today has been said before. What I have tried to bring front and center today is the need for unbroken vigilance through our normal day-to-day living as this becomes the tinder for the fire of meditation.

The only qualifications are feeling somehow bound by thought, conditioning, habit—call it what you may and wanting to be free or to realize one's essential nature. If this feeling is real and has gripped your heart, you will want to practice—both in life and on the mat. All of life becomes yoga or a movement towards purification and self-discovery.

Some talk about the sacrifices a life of yoga calls for but there are none if what you seek is far greater than what you leave behind—just what is the sacrifice? When a snake casts of its slough for new skin that has already formed, is it sacrificing anything? This ties into 'hunger for change' we spoke about the last time: change is always inner, its effects or results are seen externally over time but change is not in time. When inner change happens and it can happen just now, it will take hold of the wheel of life and steer one right. When we mature from 'hunger for change' to 'hunger to change'—all that we would like to change is our own inner self, our understanding and that can and must happen 'now' or never. This change at the core is real change, all else are the effects or results—they will come, no need to chase after them.

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