

Dialogue Series

Happy New You

Swami Suryadevananda

Renewal

Renewal is 'making new' but just how do we renew ourselves? The body has been aging steadily and it is natural, take care of it but it will still age. We sometimes age the body prematurely by not taking care of it or by pampering it—by which indulgence brings the mind into play. The mind may start centered around the body, but it quickly centers around itself as it assumes entityship—and here lies the root of many physical, mental and emotional problems. The outer world of things as they are does not correspond to the inner world of things as we would like them to be. Renewal is an inner return to our *original nature* by first living amongst outer things *just as they are* without the interference of the urge to change things—and then that indivisible mind discovers its source.

The original mind or total mind is incorruptible, indivisible and never needs renewal. Though this is the mind we are born with, it itself is unborn and beyond corruption in any way. The mind that we generally function with or functions as us is a thin sliver or abstraction of the total or indivisible mind. We know this by our direct experience, as no matter what you experience, you are also aware of it—this awareness is the original mind.

Unfortunately, we have gotten so caught up with the little mind—the ego—that the original, indivisible mind seems to be just a concept. We have turned the tables on ourselves; the little mind or ego is a concept, just as waves are to the ocean, and we identify with this false abstraction so completely that we are ready to defend it at any cost.

The little mind or ego cannot be renewed at all, as it being a false abstraction, can only be attempted to be renewed by another false abstraction which will be its own creation. This is why so many new year's resolutions do not last, because the resolution is made by a part of us that is not so happy with some other part—not realizing that all parts are manufactured of 'the part' we are trying to renew. This little mind divides itself endlessly and makes each fragment appear as the full picture.

The need for inner order

First to realize that an ungoverned inner life is not fulfilling but chaotic. Order must come in the mind that directs life and all of life will be orderly. Without inner order, the outer life will be an

attempt to fulfill a stream of desires that can never be fulfilled and which only results in an improvised mind and exhaustion.

We are orderly when it comes to doing certain things or in certain aspects of our life or with certain people, but we are not inwardly orderly of an enduring and stable nature. Self-discipline is self-government and not suppression of any sort—it is simply directing one's attention and energies towards that which one feels is best. Facing the best in attention and energy, turns one away from any and all other factors and there is no need for any suppression. It is a movement from inner clarity which manifests itself externally without any worry about outcome.

How to Renew?

The original mind or total mind is pure awareness. Not only do we know, but we know that we know, and this background is pure awareness—the total mind. I mentioned that this is incorruptible and it is so—but the error is not in its corruption but in our identification with a series of wrong notions till we live as if we are this totality of errors called 'personality'.

Broadly speaking, renewal has three stages. These are not steps or solid divisions but it helps to have an outline as long as we know that these are only pointers to what needs to be done and refrain from making these divisions and getting caught up in them.

Renewal is neither difficult nor easy. It is challenging in the earlier stages only because of the force of habit. We have taken wrong turns too often and they have become natural and second nature. There will be slips and falls, but victory *will* be yours if you only will.

“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; because there is not effort without error and shortcomings; but who does actually strive to do the deed; who knows the great enthusiasm, the great devotion, who spends himself in a worthy cause, who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement and who at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly. So that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.”

—Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919), 26th U.S. President, 1901-09

1. Increase Innate Goodness

The total mind is the indivisible mind and cannot be returned to by one with preferences and wishes to further personal interests, is self-centered or selfish, as these require division. So, this calls for tremendous inner adjustment and eternal vigilance. We must act as not only part of

the whole but *as* the whole—and this includes every thought, feeling, word and action, which are all forms of expression.

The expression itself is the experience and if we are to experience wholeness which is real holiness, our every expression must be whole or holy—without selectiveness. Swami Sivananda calls this simultaneous action: 'Attach-Detach'—the attaching to wholeness is itself a turning away or detaching from division.

The Need for Self-Discipline

Naturally, this requires self-discipline, a word that has over time come to be associated with some form of punishment. Discipline is rooted in the word 'disciple' or one who wishes to know or understand and is not punitive but positive.

When one clearly sees that the present condition is not where one feels one should be, and is fully prepared to change (*not change things*)—discipline is the catalytic fire that enables lasting inner change.

Self-discipline is not punitive but positive in that it is wisdom empowered or the *inner intelligence that acts* when we do not interfere. This inner intelligence can efficiently walk the path of good instead of faltering in the sating of desires, whims, fancies and mood swings that lead nowhere except to weakness and exhaustion.

Immediate gratification may seem promising but it exhausts resources, weakens inner strength and increases craving. Like a rudderless boat one drifts from longing to longing and stays longing. There is no central idea or principle that guides such a life and this results in confusion at every point, as choices seem too many and resources few. Stagnation and drifting are inevitable, as there is always indecision and never firmness in resolve or action.

Self-discipline is the ability to make yourself do what you should do, when you should do it, whether you feel like it or not.

—Elbert Hubbard

Not where one feels one should be: This is not a state of dissatisfaction, as dissatisfaction can never bring satisfaction. Rather, when one clearly sees a better way and faces it—one's back is at once turned to where one was.

If the roads do not feel right while driving, there is no dissatisfaction—just a inner feeling of not being where one should be and this rouses the inner awareness and somehow, adjustments are made. You may look at the map, your GPS or stop and ask someone and then there is a return to the correct direction of travel. There is no struggle, suppression or loss in self-correction as the feeling of not being where one should be has the energy for self-change.

Fully prepared to change: When one faces the better, one leaves whatever was earlier—and the ability to be able to do this is self-discipline. This 'fully prepared' is not some sort of 'okay, I'll give it a try' but a feeling that this—the better direction—is the way, the only way. All of oneself has to be on board without a rear view mirror.

The heart has to want to change, not to change anything but to change. Struggle is proportionate to wanting change but not wanting to change.

Effort is essential and it may take time for the external to reflect the internal, but effort is not struggle and never a load that we carry, as each step is movement towards the better.

Small steps to big change

An inner ideal: Conceiving and enshrining an inner ideal is giving healthy direction to all action or life. This enshrining of an inner ideal is also called 'resolve' but it is mostly taken lightly as a statement to oneself on the surface and hence, it just does not work. This enshrining of an ideal or resolve will only work if it is established at the inner center or core of one's being—where passion rises from.

Passion, is the fire which manifests, which among other things, as a desire to change and possess, is rooted in inner understanding and resolve and must take seed at that level or deeper in being itself. The difficulty is in the seriousness with which we feel the need for change, not to change things but to change.

Control of passion: The control of passions that have earlier controlled you is accomplished only when one sees the danger in leaving them uncontrolled. Suppression does not work, only understanding passion by direct observation and good inner governance—which instead of feeding passion, selects what is best and will increase innate goodness. Passion will weaken and healthier alternatives will be chosen—suppression does not come into play. This goes not only for food and drink but also to bring a check on thoughts, feelings and words.

Mere denial may not work, as once conditions are favorable, the seeds will burst into full bloom. Passion is a stubborn, unjustified craving that has pushed aside reason and taken hold of one's being. The absence of passion is accomplished by empowering reason to not only see and know clearly but is essential for this inner clarity to itself act.

Virtue, the absence of passion: Virtue is the exact opposite of passion. Passion causes restlessness and turns off the light of reason bringing about loss of clarity—the conditions in which we make many mistakes. Mistakes repeated become habits and habits repeated become character. Character reaps destiny and it all starts off at not seeing clearly. Virtue is an insistence on better and healthier choices. We are not virtuous because it is socially valued but because virtue itself is the greatest gain.

Virtue takes passion out of the heart without so much restraining but by empowering the inner intelligence which makes better choices—and passion simply runs out of energy which it must have. Passion does not only need energy, it is a concentration of energy that is centered around selfishness that disallows reason or scrutiny. The presence of passion is inner bondage and the absence of peace; and the presence of virtue is the absence of passion, inner tyranny and great peace. Virtue is inner purity and goodness and naturalness in the absence of passion.

Inner purity is strength: Purity has become a very loaded word with all sorts of notions associated with it. A good dictionary defines 'pure' as: 'unmixed with any other matter, free from dust and dirt, untainted, free from harshness or roughness, free from fault...'. Passion or desire always seeks to change or possess the outer and rises from taint, which is the absence of purity.

Theories, explanations and words, whatever be their source, cannot bring about an inner revolution which necessitates seeing directly that inner fragmentation insists on outer fragmentation or division, and that all forms of fragmentation and division are impurity itself.

Purification happens when we first stop mixing conditions with desires or passions which result in repeated attempts to change the outer to conform to the inner. Seeing things just as they are without interference of thought and then doing what needs to be done instead of what is thought to suit 'me best' weakens inner fragmentation which is the seed of impurity.

Inner purity results in a calmer mind from which more energy is available and this brings tremendous inner strength. Resolves made with a pure or calm mind at once take seed and act, as now the calm mind has definitiveness and strength in purpose.

The water of the valley stream
Never shouts at the tainted world
“Purify yourself!”
But naturally, as it is
Shows how it is done

—Ryokan (Zen Master and Poet)

Difficulties, trials and tribulations

These are experienced when the external does not in adequate measure reflect the internal that has already changed. Internal change is immediate as it is the heart that changes and neither time nor effort is involved in inner change which is real change.

If, for example, you would really like to get healthy—the moment this is felt in every cell of one's being—change has happened and you are healthy. The body and lifestyle will have to go

through changes to reflect inner change which is instantaneous, and it must be or there is no change—only wishful thinking which is impotent and can never accomplish anything except suffering. Now, you eat right, get some exercise daily and adjust your lifestyle with healthy alternatives and treading the path of better will reflect in outer change. But, inner change has already happened and it is the better itself that simply chooses better alternatives as one goes along.

Difficulties are experienced when the heart is not onboard and the mind is driving change. Struggle necessitates resistance and resistance requires an opposing force. If all of one's being is on board, 'the better' there cannot be struggle. It is important to separate struggle from difficulty, as we tend to lump these together and see all struggle as difficulty.

Difficulties are different, they are just moments of choice to stay the path of the better. Let's go back to the quest to be healthy. You have started eating healthy, exercising and implementing healthy choices in your life and here comes winter. If you feel the cold and snowy days or the rains are difficult to exercise in or the holiday season is difficult to eat right in—just where and what is the difficulty?

If you see choice here as a difficulty, you have not chosen 'better' with all your being earlier, or this feeling has weakened as it was never really with heart or all being. If you chose health with all being, this choice or inner change will very efficiently navigate through the maze of conditions smoothly. There will always be effort but without struggle. When you drive and need to be someplace at a given time, you navigate through traffic and select roads and means that will make that happen. Perhaps, you've left home earlier to compensate for unexpected delays. Where is the difficulty? Now, if there is a multiple car pile-up and you are caught in traffic unexpectedly in spite of all precaution—why should there be difficulty? You've done the best possible and simply make whatever adjustments are needed. If you encounter traffic and come to realize that each day at this time must be the same, you've learnt something about driving this road at this hour and this will guide you well the next time. What is the difficulty?

Faltering inwardly

Faltering inwardly or realizing that one's resolve was more a wish is the only difficulty there is. It is not a difficulty if we awaken to the truth of where the problem is, only a difficulty if we avoid self-accountability.

One extreme is to accept many of our own self-excuses and self-justification, the other is external accountability without internal accountability. The core which lacks self-discipline or will-power stays untouched and gets weaker each time we revert to either extreme.

Relinquishment

What can you relinquish except the waywardness of the mind? Our mental baggage or conditioning is the only thing that is 'ours', so to say, all else is just picked up and will be someone else's quite soon but conditioning stays unless abandoned. Desires initiate and sustain conditioning and bring tremendous confusion which is absolutely unnecessary and can be dispensed. Sorrow that has not come can be avoided and sorrow that has come can and should be gotten rid off. Relinquishment is renunciation of indeterminate and wayward thinking or conditioning.

Eliminating desires: The wider one's desires, the greater the suffering, as desire is itself suffering. Why are desires necessary to enjoy anything at all? Enjoyment and desires are really two different things. Many joys and pleasures come each day naturally, but our inner restlessness does not even recognize them—goading one on as they do from one fulfillment to another, keeping one in continual disarray.

If one observes what actually happens in the cycle of desire, one sees desire as but a thought desiring another thought. A part of the mind that desires is seeking to unite with another part of the mind which it sees as the object of fulfillment. Thought, which is an abstraction in awareness, is seeking another abstraction that it has itself constructed. This, then, is objectification—the tendency to see a thought as an object and feel the need to respond to it *as if faced with the thing in itself*. This is why satisfaction is experienced even when we feel the object is 'ours' as the objectification within ceases.

When one sees that the rise of desires and craving is itself the restlessness that brings about more restlessness and sorrow when entangled with, one sees all these as thought charged with energy we infuse it with and there is instant deflation of value. When value is removed from the mechanism of craving itself, wanton thinking slows to a halt and thought resumes its place as a *function in awareness or consciousness* instead of trying to play the role of entity or yourself.

Elimination of thought does away with all desires, but not thinking. Thinking is the mind used in a determinate, useful way—whereas *wanton thought expresses itself as desire* and resulting confusion. A mind without desires is a calm mind, free of desires. The psychic energy wasted in wanton thought is recycled and made immediately available for the mind and body.

Avoiding confusion: When one's life is governed by one single aim, the inner clarity or intelligence *itself acts*. This needs firm resolve, as lack of resolve fuels confusion. The inner awakened wisdom is perfectly capable of guiding one, self-discipline is making sure it stays empowered, and untrustworthy whims, fancies and inclinations are kept out of action.

Wisdom and reason, when empowered, erase doubt and confusion and bring tremendous clarity. Psychic energy wasted in *indecision fueled by desires* is returned for reuse in bodily repair and action.

Into practice

Indolence consists of giving the body more sleep and ease than it requires and is a great barrier which, if not removed, results in laziness, procrastination, neglect and inability to complete things well. Awaken early and do not lie in bed once you are awake as you will start expanding thought. Freshen-up and sit for meditation without being pulled towards any other activity. Finish each task to your fullest satisfaction before taking up another. Meditate before going to sleep and go to bed to sleep and not to think.

Avoid overeating or eating for enjoyment and take what is best for the body—not the mind. Try to eat at regular times and avoid distraction while eating. You will be attentive to just what the body needs and know when you are full if you are attentive.

Give the body some exercise each day, it is an excellent investment in yourself. Exercise in the fresh air, sunlight, ... drink pure water—these things can go a long way towards your well-being.

Avoid gossip, idle conversation, talking about the private affairs of others and such irrelevant conversation.

If there is unbroken vigilance, these things will be natural and you will avoid inner and outer pitfalls by simply choosing better alternatives in each case. In choosing the better, earlier habits will be left behind without the need to suppress them, but you have to want the better for your own self.

2. Separate Thought from Action

This is the good self-governance in the outer field or the field of activity. We spend far more time in relationships than we do alone and every moment is an opportunity to realize or make real by experience the original mind which is free from all sorrow and confusion or to strengthen it.

It is difficult to see the ego but we know just where and how the ego works, as like a whale, it must surface for air—the air being the field of action. Mental action is real action; and originating or gaining momentum in itself, it seeks expression and experience. For this, thought, which is a fragment of awareness, must assume entityship or 'you'—one small strand of thought has to become you and act.

Long periods of self-centered, selfish living have empowered thought tremendously and it seems almost impossible to realize that we are *not* thought. When thought thinks, we feel we are thinking. When thought feels strongly about something, we feel that we are having the experience. Thought has gained strength only by frequent and prolonged visitation and repetition and it will weaken by disuse. Suppression does not work with any lasting results and only increases one's sorrow.

Life is a stream of challenges in action, each asking for a response. Each moment we are faced with some situation or the other: 'Do I do something here or not—and if so, in what manner is best?' Situations do not ask for a response that suits our selfishness, whims and fancies, these personal interests exist in the minds and hearts of the person only and are the root cause of most of the stress and tension in our lives.

Why is it not possible to do what needs to be done and do it very well, without personal agenda, and still make our livelihood? Satisfying personal greed at the cost of inner ruin is a very steep price tag—as what you are, so is your world and never what you feel you own. You can never own anything at all except your thoughts and mind. What we feel is without is but a reflection of the within, as the outer is but a reflection of the inner. Sooner or later, time will reveal the inner world by the inevitable law of reaction.

To use thought is wise, to be used by thought is not. Let us examine how we can first keep from being used by thought by looking into how to keep thought out of action, but rather letting action involve thinking as it becomes necessary.

Action should not be initiated by thought

From morning to night, we are faced with different situations. Action is our response to actual situations and should not be a response of thought or you are then caught in the trap of being used by thought instead of using thought. Fear, anger, worry, anxiety and such are results of being *used by thought*—thought starts thinking and you, being identified with it, feel subjected to worry unnecessarily.

To face each situation wholly requires a mind that knows well the danger of distraction. If you leave the front door wide open and a thief walks in to do his business—is it really his fault? Especially today, we are more distracted than ever and so much so that concentration is abnormal unless there is some personal gain. You cannot call this concentration as it is initiated and sustained by selfishness or greed. This is why it is so difficult to concentrate when there is no tangible personal gain. Thought, which is a fragment of being, has become the initiator of action and has entrenched itself as yourself—there is a thief in the house.

If and only if the danger of carelessness and callousness is seen as a price too steep to pay, will inner vigilance be roused into action. This inner awareness does not work selectively or follow two rulebooks: one for your well-being and the other for your appetite—it is either fully empowered or else the little ego thrives in the driver's seat—the choice is yours.

When vigilance is empowered, all of us faces all of what is out there from moment to moment, and situations requiring a response get the best response without interference of thought. Action or our response to situations results from the situation itself and not from thought or personal agenda.

Action should not be sustained by thought

Thought in the form of selfish interests will try to interfere in the middle of action. Suppressing thought does not work, it only makes thought stronger. If every action has your fullest attention, thought or conditioning of any kind cannot act, as attention is a subjective impulse and thought must assume subjecthood in order to act.

When you are attentive, you are the subject while thought is an object of your awareness, just like objects outside – such as an apple or tree – cannot act. The fire of attention is the greatest purifier, in that by its very nature, it disallows interference—not by rejecting but by *being* subject. *The fire of attention is the subject itself.* If you need to think, fine, think determinately; but indeterminate thinking or wanton mental activity is of no use. Think as needed but do not be used by thought.

When actions ends, thought ends

Life is a *stream* and situations come and go; they do not linger except in our minds, and only if we are careless. Since situations and action are inseparable, action being a response to situations—why should we continue to think about action when the situation has faded away? This thinking about action and situations strengthens the thought world of conditioning and creates great havoc in every way. As situations change, actions rise and fall in response, and thought is used—and once used, should not linger. Again, this is not accomplished by suppression of thought but by giving the next situation your full attention—and just why should you not?

Into practice

Attention is the antidote to distraction and interest is the fuel of attention. If you are interested in each and every situation as it comes along, the attention will stay right there. You will always see the very best response and having responded, you will naturally, smoothly and efficiently shift attention to the next situation not by effort but as a natural course.

"Do one thing at one time and do it well," is an old maxim that we should return to. Computers today have several processors, but for the human to process multiplicity, the mind must fragment, and these divisions will sooner or later clamor independence from the union of yourself—is this okay with you?

Doing one thing at one time without any distraction is becoming concentrated or gathering the scattered rays of being back into union and the path of recovery. Your response in each and every situation will be a masterstroke—and regrets and doubt will find no room when concentration (not you) takes the reins. Inner strength and confidence fills your being without accompanying arrogance but rather, with a sense of grace and humility, as arrogance is seen now as an agent of division and never allowed part in anything.

Life becomes *living meditation* and you discover a way to live that weakens existing conditioning by disuse and does not accumulate any further conditioning in its response to situations and not through agendas driven by thought. Actions, just like situations, arise and fall naturally, playfully, as natural expertise in the way of perfect fit between response and situation is discovered. You realize just how joyful it is to do what needs to be done thoroughly without the dictates of thought and its resulting stressors.

The mind becomes lighter, more transparent, and as wayward and wanton thought have been removed, this mind takes to deeper meditation naturally. Just like seeds take to fertile, well-tilled and watered soil, the undivided mind will take to self-discovery in the depths of meditation.

3. Separate Thought from Consciousness

This is the field of spiritual practice focusing on meditation but not to the exclusion of all practices which must include meditation.

"Meditation is the vigorous search for the true identity of the 'me' and the 'world', not a psychic jugglery nor a technique for deep relaxation."

—Swami Venkatesananda

We call spiritual practice 'practice' after a full attempt was made toward realization, and if the mark was missed or there was not perfect realization. To look at spiritual practices as 'practice' in terms of something that will build-up incrementally will miss the point completely as it factors in impediments. Every effort must be a full effort where interest and attention are essential.

Interest

The most important item in bringing about any change or success is unwavering interest.

Conditional interest: Usually, we get interested in things like yoga and spirituality after some condition or set of conditions points us in this direction, but this often does not last. Once conditions change favorably, (that is, the ego is satisfied), one will quickly revert back to the old ways until the next bump in the road. One may be drawn to change by conditions, but wisdom recognizes this and goes beyond conditions, as change requires unwavering interest.

Awakened interest: If we are awake and alert in life, we will grow and strive to bring about inner change as the most important thing, seeing the utter futility in changing things or people.

There is a beautiful verse in the Bhagavad Gita where Krishna tells us, "...raise the self by the self". When we make yogurt, a little starter which has live cultures is introduced into warm milk and tasked with the duty to transform the rest of the milk to be like itself. Wisdom interest is very similar in that the awakened wisdom is empowered with making more of itself. Just like

with making yogurt, where we are to not interfere with the container, thereby letting the cultures cultivate the rest of the milk, so also, we are to not mess with wisdom—that of original being—or positive change cannot happen. Each time we interfere with the mighty work of wisdom, we empower foolishness.

Effort

There is usually a lot of enthusiasm when first approaching meditation, but one soon realizes that it requires both deep unwavering interest *and* uncompromising effort. Struggle is not a part of the equation and any struggle experienced should throw up a warning flag that something is very wrong.

The different ways of meditation are different approaches to raise and maintain awareness and then for awareness to become self-aware instead of being aware of objects as external and real. I will not go into techniques of meditation here but rather offer some notes on meditation that may be useful.

A few notes on meditation

Meditation can be done with an object (medium of attention) or without one, but the latter is difficult for a mind that is not very steady to begin with. It is not fair to think of meditation with an object as being any less meditation, as the object merely keeps the rudder of attention on an even keel and then falls off if one does not lose awareness and alertness.

If the object of meditation stays localized or does not involve inquiry, the depths reached will commiserate with the limitations accepted. An object of meditation does not diminish anything if the object is internal, as one will understand the true nature of the object, raise awareness to a fuller bloom, and then this raised awareness will turn on itself to know itself.

Overcoming the subject-object tangle: The object of meditation is not outside you, it is within—and once the mind is relatively steady, one can begin inquiry into the truth or substance of the object of meditation. Here, theological explanations, stories and all dogma have to be set aside, because all explanations and theories, regardless of their source, are theories—mere words, and we are not seeking words or explanations.

The object of meditation steadies the mind and one gains directly, understanding the difference between the object or thought and awareness. Then, one begins direct inquiry into the nature of the object—free of any theory or explanation. What is this thing? How come its presence is felt as an object when it is within the mind? What is it made of? If one is at all serious, the moment the mind is steady or relatively steady, one or more of these questions will arise naturally and awareness will be roused into action to know.

In the quest to understand the object, the false subject, little mind or ego tries to assert itself vehemently in its struggle for every nano-inch of concession being sustained by residual energy.

Let it! It will exhaust itself as awareness continues. Any resistance strengthens conditioning, as existing conditioning will grab and make its own energy that has been offered by resistance. On the same note, one should not get distracted or start thinking rising thoughts. If one is aware of distraction, one is not distracted. The awakened awareness will become aware of the source of these distractions.

Each time the mind throws up thoughts, it is using up its sustaining energy. Just make sure you do not get involved in thinking or expanding on those thoughts. Let all the distractions in the world be there, what is the problem? You should be concerned in the most interested way in direct inquiry on the object of meditation. What is this and what is it made of? Where do I experience it? How come I experience this in me? These questions should arise naturally only to begin direct inquiry or awareness facing the object of meditation till it expands as energy is reabsorbed back into consciousness.

Awareness facing the object in direct inquiry is like the ocean looking at the little wave intently to know. Intellectually, we can solve this with an explanation that the object is a construct of thought, but that does not accomplish anything as the word 'thought' is just a word and a word is never the thing. If you accept the word then I may ask what thought is—and then we get into more and more words. Words cannot satisfy your appetite when you are hungry, words of cure cannot heal a sickness, and words cannot dispense with ignorance either. One must know by *direct contact*—awareness—the inner intelligence must become directly aware of what it is. When one thought is directly known, all thoughts are known and there is mastery of mind. One knows by direct realization: 'this is thought' and it rises and falls in me but *I* am not in thought. With this direct realization, one is out of the sway of surges of thought and conditioning, and existing conditioning gradually loses its energy and reverts to mere impressions without the energy of impulses.

Indeterminate or wanton activity of the mind slows tremendously and all the energy wasted in useless thought is returned to the body for repair, recovery, healing and doing things. Health improves and the body reflects much improved inner health. One has more than adequate energy to do things and does not need as much sleep.

Self-awareness: The awareness or intelligence that has been roused into action is free from confusion of thought being taken for reality, and no longer feels the need to dwell on them, recognizing them as waves in itself.

Awareness can then be turned on itself to become self-aware, and here commences the last leg of the journey back home—a return to our true nature. Awareness becomes aware of itself—and here, there is no crutch at all. It is not wise to begin this leg if the mind is still not calm, as though it requires effort in terms of sitting regularly, there should be no struggle at all.

Without any crutch in meditation, the inner intelligence gets roused into action, as the little mind cannot be aware of all things including itself and realizes its inadequacy first, and its ignorance gradually. Awareness does not require energy as there is no movement and it is the natural quality of being or existence. Being is aware and pure awareness is being or simply 'is'.

Thought, any and all thought, not only requires energy, it is the movement of energy in consciousness and needs recharge or it will weaken. Instead of worrying about the amount of charge old thought patterns or conditioning have, be concerned with living in such a way that does not strengthen existing conditioning and does not pick-up new conditioning. Here, we go back to keeping thought out of action, or our natural response to life which we discussed earlier.

Into practice

All techniques only enable you to look within; the path has to be discovered each for oneself as the inner activity will differ in each. If the mind is at odds with the others, conditions or one's own self—meditation is not possible. This is why yoga insists on healthy adjustments in our relationships with all, not just on the surface as social niceties but at the deeper level of understanding and being, as it is here that meditation happens.

The 'Be Good' of Swami Sivananda includes all of the yama in raja yoga or avoidance of unhealthy choices, and his 'Do Good' includes all of the niyama in raja yoga or healthier choices instead. Spiritual life is a better way and not a way out of anything and this must reflect in healthier hearts and minds. Each step is an insistence on what is better, not selfishly for one's personal interests but the best response as part of each situation. When you feel part of everything, everything will be a part of you. When you are selfish and self-centered, everything will stand outside you and your world will be much smaller. Giving up the little 'I' is not a loss, it is the greatest gain, as the 'I' alone separates you from all and everything.

Inward tensions in the form of hopes and desires, however subtle, will generate tremendous mental activity as hopes and desires and what is hoped for or desired are mind fragments and the divided mind cannot meditate. Meditation is the discovery of the indivisible mind which must become self-aware.

In Closing

The sculptor does not add on but chisels away, and each blow of the chisel and hammer is designed to remove what does not belong and reveal what he already sees in his mind's eye. Similarly, if you are at all serious about renewing yourself or returning to the original nature, each action in your life—and this means each thought, feeling, word and action—must be a masterstroke aimed at weakening existing conditioning and acting or responding to life without picking-up any new conditioning.

Spiritual practice gives depth to insight and this depth is applied in the canvas of our life which is width. Living the spiritual way weakens conditioning and this allows one to go deeper in meditation. The depths attained in meditation themselves act in life and lines blur between meditation and life. When meditation enters life, life enters meditation.

Secular life does not compete or oppose spiritual life, as these separations just do not exist. We have made these divisions as concessions for our weaknesses, and as long as they linger, we will falter in the quicksand of our own making. Unless there is brutal self-honesty, any real progress is not possible and we will continue to flounder at the water's edge where only broken shells are to be found. For pearls, you will have to dive deep!

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