
LIVING MEDITATION

1. Sharpening the Edge

We start with sharpening the edge of the instrument which is our own self. Integral or well-rounded development is essential, not only to improve the body, breathing and general state of wellness but as discovery and a direct hit on the ego from the very beginning. We are used to doing as an accomplishment but give less importance to 'being' and often do or accomplish at the cost of being—the cost of our own self. This is why it is important to insure that all of what we do is geared to discover and cultivate being.

If you only do those things and practices 'you like' or are 'good at' - you strengthen the like and dislike mechanism and the hold of thought or conditioning. The sincere seeker will not make these mistakes and give a little focus on different practices with equal enthusiasm. Swami Sivananda's 'Yoga of Little' or 'Yoga of Synthesis' allows; balanced and well-rounded development; the ability to stay fresh and avoid becoming mechanical or stagnant; increased attention as you work on those areas where you are not so comfortable with; and; when you are unable to do one practice for whatever reason, having a wide array of practices, you can quickly shift gears into other practices.

Among the many benefits of a well-balanced approach, doing a little of those practices which you are not so good at or comfortable with is the most important as this will require and therefore cultivate your attention. Things that we are good at, often quickly become mechanical. One of the causes of lack of real inward progress or development is mechanical or stagnant practice. It may take years to realize this and at that point, you may not have the energy and time to start afresh which is what you will have to do. This because there will be outer gains such as doing asanas better or singing in some charming way or even the ability to quote texts and teach as a learned one but, inward progress is not known by these things. Old ways must fall away and natural goodness must blossom in the inner garden naturally and vibrantly. There must be a real transformation and life is the laboratory and proving ground for this. We must therefore start with the wisdom that a balanced approach is best and thus, take on the ego right from the start.

Understanding is the heart of the person and it is from here that our responses to life come forth. We are not talking about our clever and calculated responses of the shrewd but what arises in the mind naturally when we are faced with different conditions. We often never tackle this as we have become quite good at hiding it. The promptings may be how we really feel but it may not be in our favor to manifest raw so we find ways to disguise our true intentions and feel all is well as it ended well. You cannot dislodge this inner mechanism by packaging it

cleverly as the packaging may fool others but you know and this hypocrisy strengthens conditioning which increases bondage. We must strike at the very root of our errors and problems in adopting a way of seeing things and acting that is closer to the true nature of things which is not standing apart from things.

The yamas and niyamas of yoga (avoiding some choices for better choices instead), are suggestions on ways to universalize understanding. Asanas and pranayama bring steadiness to the mind and body as well as give a window the energy that allows them which is the energy of consciousness. The same energy that allows and enables the asanas and breathing also powers thought. Awareness of thought awakens the inner intelligence and that begins the inward shift from thought to the inner intelligence and makes attention possible. Attention is an interest to know for which one has to be free of thought somewhat at least. This wanting to know rouses the inner intelligence and concentration becomes natural.

Outer benefits like improved health just come; they should not be the main focus. Inner cultivation is essential and if this is the focus, outer development will happen along with it. These earlier limbs sharpen the edge and bring about integral development towards self-discovery.

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