
LIVING MEDITATION

2. Thought and Action

Today, I would like to talk a little about thought so we can know for ourselves if its importance is justified. We will also go into the field of action which is life and see if there is a better way to live and just how.

As each situation looks at us questioningly, we decide whether it requires our response and if so, what should be done. But, we may not have paused to consider just what goes into making these decisions. We may think that we look at things squarely and decide what is best but all this is worth a closer look. We may physically face the situation outwardly but inwardly, we are facing our notions about the things that we face so much so that what stands before us becomes a front or occasion to reinforce what lies within us.

When we continue to give the inner world unjustified importance, it begins to feel very much part of the outer world so much so that soon, the outer world does not correspond with the inner world very much. Naturally, this gives rise to great concern and we begin building our own little world we call our life not realizing it is more a track we will run in. What we call the 'rat-race' is just this and it is not out there but within. If it were really out there, we would never be able to get out of it, especially if we continue to reside in the same area. Let me share with you two funny things I've heard about this rat-race, perhaps you've heard it too, "The only problem with the rat-race is that even if you win, you're still a rat" and, "Just when you think you're winning in the rat-race, the price of cheese goes up". Now, I know you're probably wondering just why and how this swami is talking about these things but it is good to be light and most important to be relevant to the issues we face as we must start just there and go beyond. Let's take it a little further...

To build this inner world requires money, so we work hard so we can have things that correspond and appease the inner demands and this extends from things to people we call 'our people' and all this begins to form 'our life'. When things get shook-up a little, we feel shaken-up because all things classified as 'our...' has everything to do with us. It is precisely this identification that rouses the self-preservation instinct which is a very old instinct into action. 'Our...' is threatened so we feel threatened and so, must find ways to preserve and protect these things as we feel one with them.

We may never have stopped to examine the utter foolishness of defending any label or brand name. Have you ever seen a large cattle ranch? They brand their cattle there as they must move to graze across different pastures and sometimes, they graze jointly with other herds.

Please be a little objective here and see where we are going with this without undue importance to illustrations as they point to something beyond them. It is one thing to brand cattle or even mark what you call your property but to brand yourself is a travesty as you reduce yourself from not only one with everything but everything itself to something very small and petty and even worse, you begin to oppose your own larger self. This unexamined mischief is at the root of much of our troubles, problems and stresses—it is absolutely unnecessary and can and should be abandoned. The many conflicts we see in this world from personal conflicts to more involved ones may have inner world colliding with or being threatened by each other at their root.

This labeling creates division where division is not—it all happens psychologically and the content of these divisions is thought. I can understand if real tangible divisions set things apart somehow but the divisions that cause our problems are not out there and not created by others—they are within, self-created and self-sustained. All this mischief happens because of lack of attention to actual situations. Each situation calls for a response and when we are not attentive which is not only facing things physically but psychologically and with all being—conditioning takes over and responds as our lack of attention is its carte blanche and silence is consent. As a result, the inner intelligence goes to sleep as you have no use to know since you already know or chose to see conditioning which is ignorance as knowledge. Over time, we have come to depend and thus defend thought or our feelings about things as more important than actual situations and retire the inner intelligence by giving rights to thought patterns.

There are two kinds of thought: data and feelings about that data or conditioning. Data is like a screen capture of some situation—just a snapshot of some details as they were perceived without the interference of thought or our conditioning. This happens automatically and is useful but this is not all that happens beneath the hood. Lack of attention as we have discussed results in existing notions conditioning what is seen so it does not register as is first conditioned by the ego and then presented to us with strong suggestions of how we 'must act' as there is 'much at stake'. When we are not attentive, we look but do not see as we are seeing this inner vehement presentation of ignorance and are vehemently urged to act to its tune. So our perception is far from accurate and now thought interferes in decisions by telling us what is best and we act. Each time we act on thought, we give a tranquilizer to the inner intelligence till it becomes all drugged-up and goes to sleep. This is perhaps what is meant when we hear of the call to 'awaken'.

Conditioning obscures (conditions) observation and generates responses that are based on existing disposition and never the actual situation. This is why it is called conditioning—it shapes the condition into something other than what it actually is. This is not natural as thoughts are not a part of nature but our own creation. Unless we abandon this ruthlessly, we

continue to reinforce the walls that prison us and whether we have golden bars or iron ones—bondage is still bondage only.

So, what do we do about all of this? In the last talk I mentioned interest being the key. The interest in things as they happen or each and every situation, regardless of 'familiarity' only comes when one sees the danger in staying the course. When something is clearly seen as 'not healthy', we should easily be able to embrace what is healthy without resistance.

Clear perception of any danger at once releases energy for change and this energy rouses the inner intelligence from the slumber we ourselves have imposed. The interest needed is not of a casual 'I'm looking into it...' or 'Checking things out...' but an immediate switch from being distracted to being fully attentive just as if your house was on fire or a deadly cobra in the room. This interest does not fade but must become steady as in the fire of attention, one sees the danger very much like an iceberg—the bottom is immense and unfathomable. But not to despair as even the frozen arctic melts to life sustaining waters under the heat of the sun.

When the danger is thus clearly seen, interest climaxes into a level of attention which awakens and empowers the inner intelligence. The little clarity sees it cannot quite do the job of lasting change and awakens its bigger brother who was retired prematurely and this is the beginning of self-surrender. Please understand that surrender is not giving charge to get out of some hot situation and then taking charge again or only giving up outwardly but never inwardly—that is self-deception and will surely worsen things. Surrender is when one feels trapped and one must be free, one realizes the error and is enthusiastic about cooperating with the inner intelligence towards it. One must be ready and enthusiastic to put forth unrelenting effort towards dismantling thought's super-structure or one has not awakened yet.

The inner intelligence has to be empowered to deal with perception and action, which is to see and know each and every situation as it unfolds without standing outside things and to do what needs to be done without importance to what suits 'the little me' best. Life becomes a process of assimilation into its wholeness or integration and we start feeling one with all things. The Upanishad says, 'Where there is other, there is fear' and when we start standing together with things, we learn how dispose of many of our problems and lighten the mind and heart.

Deep abiding interest is the key to attention and attention a requisite to ignite awareness or consciousness. Without awareness or consciousness, we must rely on thought which strengthens conditioning, bondage and our problems. To have attention in all things, we must have equal interest in all things and therefore there are no mundane things or things of the world and things spiritual—these distinctions do not exist. Every activity has equal value of the angle of vision is kept high. Life is not a hindrance but valuable in inner growth but we must want this inner growth with all our heart.

So, where do we start? Right at the water's edge with totally abandoning distraction and thus, taking full interest in every action, no matter how trivial we've seen it before. One thing at one time and done to the best standards possible. Nothing left undone that could be done and when something is over physically, it must not continue psychologically or in thought. Why should it? If your attention is on the next thing to be done, even if it be talking a nice walk or having a cup of tea under the sun—why should your mind and heart not be just there? Why should you not really enjoy the beautiful walk or refreshing tea? See, we can't even enjoy simple pleasures if we are not attentive and thought takes the fun out of such simple things too. Unless one is ready to be ruthless with thought and the mind's deception—the danger escalates and the stakes get higher.

You may have to slow down a little as the so-called earlier speed was based on thought which is pre-packaged responses and not reality and it takes some time for a new mechanism to be fully empowered only because of residual resistance not because it is not up to the job. We struggle with letting go because of so many reasons which I will not get into here as it will be long and drawn out—perhaps some other time. But, we are the only resistance in our lives and we must overcome this by being our biggest supporter or friend.

It is good to have a plan for the day and week, not to make life mechanical but as a check that keeps unwanted, mood-fired activity out by insisting on things we ourselves have deemed as best for us. I have found this not only very useful but necessary and it does not dull or mechanize life as some may lead you to believe. You are simply making sure you do what you find in your best interests just like a shopping list at the grocery store or a budget you must stay within. There must also be ways of accountability if any item on the list or diary is not done or if any misstep is done instead. Not some foolish physical punishment but what is wrong with giving up a meal to use that time to do what you yourself have deemed as important or an immediate act of charity? You cannot change the mind by reasoning with it, pleading with it or threatening it—all this is foolishness and it just does not work. The mind has become what it is by misusing it; it must be set right by good and efficient use. This mind is conscious that has taken a wrong turn or limitation and stays unchanged at its core till you are ready to abandon limitation.

Change requires effort but not struggle. Struggle is an indication of not being fully aboard or not fully wanting it. Examine it, see for yourself. We are never fazed by effort but no one likes struggle and so we must be clear about the danger of staying the course and struggle is at once dispensed with.

Now to the heart of the matter, separating thought from action. We have already discussed in great detail the importance of doing so, now we must do it. Ruthlessly abandon all means of distraction which include eating and reading or checking your mail etc. One thing at one time till you've done it well, without hurrying and in the best way and then let it go mentally as it

completes physically. This is not robotic living as the mind may try to suggest, it is full of tricks. This is efficient and enlightened living or a way of living that has clarity and purpose.

Be aware of the movement of thought but not at the cost of ignoring what is in front of you or that calls for your attention. You have to bring all thought into the same field of observation (as it really is) as things outside. There is no spatial distance between where things outside are known and the movement of thought is known though it seems so. All knowing or perception takes place in the undivided mind like ripples or waves rising and falling in the wide ocean.

That which observes all of this, also observes things outside or things in life and can do what needs to be done while still observing thought. That which knows can do also. There is no real difference between energy and intelligence. Just think, when you are thirsty, the inner intelligence at once releases the energy and takes you to get a glass of water. You do not feel real thirst and then give a command to the body and take it there. Once you feel thirst and the need for water—the rest happens. This is not mechanical at all. You feel to hug your child after a game played so well or some performance and you express love too without trying to be too proper etc. Energy is the power of intelligence only and when the inner intelligence is empowered, surrender begins and your focus continues to be on how to stay out of the way of this immense thing called intelligence-energy which is your true nature. You learn to trust intelligence while not quitting life and every effort of cooperation is a step towards self-knowledge.

But, you cannot be selective and empower the inner intelligence when it is convenient and use self-centered selfish thought at other times. This deception does not and will not work. No deception is allowed in the inner ascent. If you still want to walk the path of pain, you are free to do so but if you have truly had enough, there is another way, a better way and a way where there is no loss, only real gain that endures.

I read someplace, "There are no extraordinary things, just ordinary things done in an extraordinary way". When you use an extraordinary approach, all things become extraordinary as the extra of inner cultivation gets tied into every activity and the activity and its results is just a bonus as your focus was and continues to be inner cultivation and growth. We will return to some of the nuts and bolts of vigilance in the sixth talk on 'Unceasing Vigilance'.

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