

Meditation - Culmination of all Yoga practices

Mahaveer Khetawat

Yoga is getting extremely popular all over the world. Millions of men and women are practicing Yoga and reaping the health benefits at the gross body level and also the subtle body level i.e. at the level of mind and intellect. Along with Yoga, lately Meditation is also getting equally popular. Lot of people are inspired by the fact that the science of Raja Yoga (psychic control) can take one to the highest state of perfection namely the transcendental state of spiritual consciousness also spoken of as Nirvikalpa Samadhi. Quite often the complaints about meditation are also heard saying no visible results are obtained even after practicing meditation for several years. This needs a detailed investigation into the step by step process of Yoga leading to meditation.

Yoga philosophy has been given to us by its father founder sage Patanjali 2500 years ago by way of the Yoga sutras. Entire process has been defined as Ashtang Yoga or 8 limbed yoga. A brief description of each of these 8 limbs is given below.

1. Yama (Regulations) : There are 5 Yamas :
 - a. Ahimsa (Non violence) : At the levels of all 3 i.e. body, mind and speech
 - b. Satya (Truthfulness) : Perfect synchronization of thoughts words & deeds
 - c. Asteya (Non Stealing) : Non covetousness for anything that does not belong to us or not legitimately earned by us.
 - d. Brahmacharya (Celibacy) : Having perfect control over desires for sensual pleasures.
 - e. Aparigraha (Non possessiveness): Non accumulation of wealth or unnecessary articles, live with bare minimum necessities of life.
2. Niyama (Rules) : There are 5 Niyamas :
 - a. Saucha (Cleanliness or purity) : Both internal & external. Internal purity is more important as compared to external.
 - b. Santosa (Contentment) : Give up the vain desires for materialistic possessions. Not to be mixed up with complacency with regard to the progress towards the real goal of Yoga.
 - c. Tapa (Austerities) : Self discipline with activities like fasting etc.
 - d. Swadhyaya (Self study) : Study of scriptures & recitation of sacred Mantra.
 - e. Isvar Pranidhana (Total surrender to God) : This itself can lead one to the highest state or the final goal namely Samadhi.
3. Asana (Posture) : Perfect firmness of the body, steadiness of the intelligence and benevolence of the spirit.
4. Pranayama (Control of Prana) : Science to cleanse, balance and gain control over the universal or cosmic life force known as Prana.
5. Pratyahara (Turning the mind inwards): Withdrawal of the senses, mind and consciousness from contact with external objects and then drawing those inwards.
6. Dharana (Concentration): Fixing the consciousness to a single point or region by eliminating wanderings of the mind altogether.
7. Dhyana (Meditation) : A steady, continuous and uninterrupted flow of attention towards the same point or region
8. Samadhi(State of Transcendence): Super conscious state with total absence of ego

Intellectual understanding of the above 8 limbs constituting the Ashtang yoga is not at all difficult for a person of average intelligence with so much literature being available in today's world by competent

Yogis. But practicing and attaining perfection in each one of the above 8 limbs may need an entire life time or even that may not be enough. Sequence of these 8 limbs is extremely important. Without attaining perfection in the initial 2 steps i.e. Yama and Niyama practicing other steps like Pranayama and meditation may not be of much use. Without attaining internal and external purity, not much success in Yoga can be expected. As Swami Vivekananda said in one of his lectures on Raja Yoga **“Living an unethical and immoral life and practicing Pranayama can lead one to a state of insanity.”** If that is true of Pranayama, we can imagine how much more difficult it would be to gain perfection in Meditation without having attained the purity as discussed in the 1st two steps i.e. Yama & Niyama.

Another frequently asked question about meditation is, it is extremely difficult to focus the mind to a single point or thought. This question was asked on our behalf by Arjuna 5000 years ago to Lord Krishna, (Bhagvad Gita 6.34). Lord Krishna’s answer (Bhagvad Gita 6.35) is most relevant even today

चञ्चलम् हि मनः कृष्ण प्रमाथि बलवद् दृढं, तस्याहं निग्रहं मन्ये वायोरिव सुदुष्करं

“Verily, the mind, O Krishna, is turbulent strong and unyielding; I regard it quite as hard to achieve its control, as that of the air.”

असंशयं महाबाहो मनो दुर्निग्रहं चलम्, अभ्यासेन तु कौन्तेय वैराग्येण च गृह्यते

“Undoubtedly, O mighty armed, the mind is restless and difficult to control; but through practice and renunciation, O son of Kunti, it can be achieved.”

Thus Lord Krishna is giving us 2 powerful tools to control the mind, namely Practice and Renunciation. We know it very well that for mastering the art or science on any secular subject like music etc., how much practice and renunciation is needed. The students sometimes have to forget their regular activities such as food, entertainment etc in order to attain the perfection in that subject. How much more of these shall be needed for attaining the highest goal of human life through meditation, can be well imagined.

Sage Patanjali in his Yoga Sutras, after defining Yoga as (P.Y.S. # 1.2)

योगश्चित्तवृत्ति निरोधः (Yoga is the cessation of all the movements in the consciousness) suggests several ways how to accomplish this. The very 1st method he suggests is (P.Y.S. # 1.12).

अभ्यासवैराग्याभ्यां तन्निरोधः (Practice and renunciation are the means to still the movements of consciousness). This interestingly concurs with What Lord Krishna suggested to Arjuna much earlier.

The basic requirements of the meditation process are given by Lord Krishna (B.G. 6.13 & 6.14)

समं कायशिरोग्रीवं धारयन्नचलं स्थिरः, संप्रेक्ष्य नासिकाग्रं स्वं दिशश्चानवलोकयन्

“One should firmly hold his/ her body, head and neck erect and still, (with eye balls fixed, as if) gazing at the tip of one’s nose and not looking around.”

प्रशान्तात्मा विगतभिः ब्रह्मचारिव्रते स्थितः, मनः संयम्य मच्चित्तः युक्त आसीत् मत्परः

“With heart serene and fearless, firm in the vows of celibacy, with the mind controlled and ever thinking of Me, let him or her sit in Yoga having Me as the supreme goal.”

The goal of meditation is not to attain or acquire something that we do not have right now. Goal is to manifest the divinity, the pure consciousness which is our true nature. Goal is to become our own true self by discarding all the non self, layer by layer deposited in this life and thousands of previous lives, termed as **“learned ignorance”**. As Patanjali says in the very beginning of the Yoga Sutras (P.Y.S. # 1.3):

तदा द्रस्तुः स्वरूपे अवस्थानं (Then, the seer dwells in his/ her own true splendor)

While answering a question from a devotee “Sir, what happens to a person after God Realization”, Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa said **“He does not grow two horns on his head. He becomes his own true self”**. Look at this inspiring declaration from **“Astavakra Samhita”**, a conversation between Sage Astavakra and King Janaka, both of whom were Brahma Jnanis (realized souls) :

मयि अनन्त महम्भोधौ जगत् वीचिः स्वभावतः, उदेतु वा अस्तमायातु न मे वृद्धिर्न च क्षतिः

“In me, the infinite ocean of pure consciousness, let the waves of the world rise and dissolve by their own nature. This does not cause any growth or decay in me.”

Swami Vivekananda made a similar declaration in one of his talks **“I am the infinite ocean of that pure consciousness in which Krishna and Christ are the waves rising and dissolving from time to time.”**

This kind of realization comes to us if we are able to attain to last step of the Ashtang Yoga i.e. Samadhi a state of transcendence. There is no practice involved in the last step. It comes by attaining perfection in the previous 7 steps. Therefore meditation can be termed as the **“Culmination of all Yoga practices”**. In fact it would not be an overstatement if we call meditation as the culmination of all spiritual practices.