

Chapter XIII. Developing One-pointedness

The wayward mind wanders hither and thither, but it is possible to fasten it on one fixed point by means of steady discipline and persistent training in spiritual discipline. This condition is called one-pointedness (*eka-gratha*). It is also referred to as single-mindedness (*dharana*). The uninterrupted flow of oil from one vessel to another is a fine symbol of the mental process called single-mindedness.

For novices in spiritual practice, concentration appears to be very difficult to attain because, after some progress is won, they do not usually keep up the practice. Instead, they give it up; even though they do not have peace of mind on days when they desist from spiritual practice.

Concentration endows one with divine joy, wisdom beyond measure, inner vision, insight into the deeper truths, clearer understanding, and unison with the Godhead. This science of spiritual discipline (*sadhana*) is more wonderful than the three worlds!

Monkey meditation: harmful to spiritual progress

The mind plans and executes innumerable deeds and roams over vast expanses, all in the twinkling of an eye! It operates with unimaginable speed. It conceives an object and dallies with it a little, but it soon discards it for another more attractive object toward which it flees and about which it begins to worry!

The spiritual aspirant has to be ever watchful of this tendency of the mind. When the mind flits from object to object, it must be brought back to the right path and the right object. That is the correct spiritual practice, the path of concentration and meditation. If, however, the aspirant does not struggle to achieve this one-pointedness but leaves the mind to itself, following its vagaries from this to that and that to this, the process deserves to be called monkey-meditation (*markata dhyana*) —a type of meditation that is indeed very harmful to spiritual progress.

Force the mind to be one-pointed

In short, the chief purpose of concentration and meditation is to minimise the travels of the mind and force it to stay in one place. Holding it on that fixed stage, one should continue the spiritual practice for a long time. Then there is no limit to the peace and joy that one can have. For example, when you meditate on a table, your thoughts dwell on the wood, the size and measurements, the style, the mode of manufacture, etc. No other thought pertaining to anything else should be allowed. If the thought hovers round a cot, the idea of a table becomes hazy, and the cot is also imagined incompletely. Both get confused. The state of mind must be single-pointed. So too, when the Lord's form is meditated upon, the mind must dwell upon the form of each part and its beauty and splendour, and these ideas must be coordinated and combined into the complete picture.

That is the *modus operandi* of meditation. Persistent performance of this meditation will result in the emergence of a particular form. Contemplating on that form, looking at it and seeing it for days and days, finally a stage will be reached when the form will disappear and you will forget yourself. That is the super-conscious (*samadhi*) stage. In that stage, if one feeling or ideation alone persists, it is called the superconscious state with ideation (*savikalpa-samadhi*). If no feeling or thought persists, it becomes what Patanjali, in the text on *raja-yoga* (*Rajayoga-sastra*), designated as the end of ideation (*bhava-nasana*).

While doing meditation, the mind should not be allowed to wander away from the target. Whenever it flies off at a tangent, it must be led back to the form meditated upon. Finally, if you so desire, all things can be subsumed in that form itself. Nevertheless, only one form has to be meditated upon in the beginning. You should not change daily from one to another. Again, during the spiritual practice, you should not indulge in thoughts about things you do not like, that cause pain, or that shake your faith. If any such peep in, learn gradually to welcome them as beneficial and seek to grasp the good in them, instead of the bad.

The inert mind reflects the intelligence

Of course, the mind is inert (*jada*). Just as when water, inert matter, begins to shine when it is placed in the sun, the inert mind borrows effulgence from the *Atma* and appears as if it has consciousness (*chaithanya*). The intellect (*buddhi*) gets reflected in the mind, so it looks as if the mind is also intelligent, that is all. Its real nature is ignorance. The mind is not self-effulgent, like the *Atma*. The mind's splendour is as the luminousness of insects in the rainy season. The *Atma*, however, is the sun of suns, the effulgence of effulgences, the Supreme Light (*Param-jyothi*), the self-effulgent (*swayam-jyothi*).

Control the senses as well as the mind

The senses can do nothing by themselves. They are not independent. If the mind is brought under control, the senses can also be controlled. Some people undergo mere asceticism of the senses in order to control the mind! They are ignorant of the real discipline that is necessary. The real discipline is the destruction of desire.

However vigilant warders may be, a clever robber can still steal in a hundred amazing ways. So too, however skillfully you may try to control the senses, the mind will drag them to its side and execute its desires through them. Note how the sage Viswamitra, in spite of his austerities, fell before the wiles of the celestial nymphs (*apsaras*) sent by Indra to tempt him.

If only the outer door is closed and the inner door is left unbolted, calamity is certain. But if both the exterior and the interior doors are safely bolted, you can sleep peacefully, for no thief, however clever, will find it easy to enter and do harm. Therefore, the aspirant should establish mastery over the external senses. Then, the mind, immersed in the continuous succession of subject-object (*vishaya*) relationship, has to be controlled by means of peace (*santhi*) and renunciation (*vairagya*). When that is done, one can experience real spiritual bliss (*ananda*) and visualise the *Atma*, in its real form. That is why Krishna once told Arjuna, "Those who aspire to have mastery over the senses must have full faith in Me."

The senses are always extrovert in nature; they are greedy for external contacts. Therefore, they drag the ignorant perpetually toward external objects. So the spiritual aspirant, endowed with discrimination and renunciation, must place obstacles in their outward path and suppress their outbursts, just as the charioteer, wielding the whip and the reins, does to the raging steeds. Uncontrolled senses cause great harm. People in their grip cannot engage themselves in meditation, even for a single second.

Cultivate good habits before concentration

Form (*rupa*) is fundamental for concentration and meditation. Even in the absence of the form in front of you, you should have the capacity to visualise it. This is not so difficult for those whose concentration is correct. But

some practise concentration without first cultivating good habits and right conduct. That is a sign of incomplete knowledge. Concentration must have the pure qualities (*sathwa-gunas*) as the basis. The mind has to be purified by proper treatment of the character through good habits. Concentration has to follow this purification process, not precede it. All effort for concentration without cleansing the mind is a sheer waste of time. Many great men have ruined their careers by aspiring early for concentration, without the discipline of good habits.

Make slow but steady progress

Again, in concentration you must be careful not to have as the object something your mind does not like, for however hard you try, your mind will not stay on it. Therefore, in the beginning, have some object that is a source of joy.

Sit in the lotus (*padmasana*) pose and fix your eyes on the tip of your nose. In the beginning, for a minute; then for three minutes; some days later, for six; and after some time, for as long as nine minutes. Thus, the concentration has to be strengthened gradually, without undue hurry. In this way, it can be held for even half an hour, with the lapse of time. But do not force the pace. Slowly and steadily, the discipline must be developed.

With practice, the mind will get fixed and the power of concentration will increase. To attain concentration and acquire one-pointedness, you must undergo exertion to some extent. You must fasten your mind on the Lord and keep off all other thoughts from the mental plane. By constant exercise of this type, your vision will be firmly fixed on the Lord residing in your heart. That is, verily, the goal; the full fruition of meditation.

Concentration, according to *yoga* scriptures, is the fixing of the mind on one object, without any deviation. Concentration alone can make meditation successful. Its very nature is one-pointedness; its power will negate hesitation. It is caused by spiritual bliss. The name is essential for meditation, for that alone can insure quick success. Even if complete faith is not forthcoming quickly, the practice must not be given up or changed, for practice will certainly yield victory. Meditation is spiritual strength, the strength that will keep off the disease of worldliness (*samsara*).