LIFE MANTRA

Internal focus helps you overcome obstacles

B.K. MISHNI

If you have the power of concentration, then you have the ability to be free from obstacles. Concentration is of two kinds. One is intellectual concentration, and many people, working in fields such as information technology and science, are able to have very deep, focused concentration.

However, there is another kind of concentration, which is spiritual concentration. Even if we try to concentrate and feel that we are doing so, subtle thoughts and feelings emerge. So, what do I have to do, on the subconscious level, to make my concentration pure, clean and free from influences?

This means going beyond these kinds of influences and being internally focused.

We have to create a deep stage of stillness, a silence. We can stay very still inside, very calm, and create that kind of experience, like a very still, clean, body of water. When water is like that, you can even see through it — it is transparent.

When we are stable in this way, emotions and feelings cannot disturb us. When we make spiritual efforts in this manner, it means that we are able to take less than a moment to create a stage like this. It is based on the quality of our thoughts.

We use thoughts to practise this and it is thoughts that are able to create this stage. Thoughts of being a spiritual being, consciousness, are the practice, but it is the deep experience of being this, and not the body, that brings this deep inner calm.

This is a wonderful spiritual aim to have. Sometimes though, there is an actual need to be in this stage of consciousness. For example, when we have bodily pain, or when we are confronted by something fearsome. So, first we need to practise and then accumulate the experience, and then we can emerge that state of being with just one thought.

Then, how one responds to these situations will be very beautiful. We notice then how differently we are responding, from how we used to respond.

For example, the ability to use the power of tolerance. Often, we are aware of our 'tolerance' – in other words we tolerate, but it feels like an effort, a burden. Once we have practised and accumulated, then it just feels easy and natural, it has become a part of me. If I practise being cheerful, whatever the circumstances, then it will become a natural, easy way to behave and respond to life's challenges.

So, how do we do this? One way is to take one thought and ponder over it, and practise it for some time each day. We can all be peaceful some of the time, but not all the time. We can take the thought of peace, think of what it really means, practise it in quiet contemplation.

When we practise that with the Supreme Ocean of Peace, God, in meditation, then we will absorb that virtue, that quality, and it will become part of us. Not only that, it will have become such a part of us that everyone around us will benefit from that vibration of deep peace.

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DISCOURSE

BE HONEST TO DRAW GOD'S LOVE

DADI JANKI

Love is connected to virtues. Virtues create love, within the self and within others. When virtues reduce, the quality of love also reduces. When all virtues are present, there is complete and pure love.

Out of all the virtues, the main one is honesty. If we feel someone is not being honest with us, our love breaks. Whether it is our mother, father, husband, wife or friend, if we feel that they are being dishonest, love breaks. In terms of our relationship with God, if we are honest with God, we will draw His love. If we are not, that love will break. Even if we have no other virtue than this one of honesty, we will be able to draw God's love. So, see the importance of being honest. The first kind of honesty is honesty with myself. If I am honest with myself, there need be no situation in which I am not honest with others.

TRUE SELF

THINGS ONE MUST AVOID ON A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

B.K. GEETA

Some travellers on the spiritual path make admirable efforts – they have a lofty aim, work with zest and sincerity, and are loved and respected by many. However, after some time, they appear to be totally different people.

Those who were galloping on the right path until yesterday look to be moving in the opposite direction today. Gone is their spiritual joy and angelic demeanour; they seem to be caught up with more earthly concerns.

While earlier their minds were occupied solely by God, now their attention is engaged by a number of people, whose company has changed them.

A lot of people have such an experience. In the beginning, when they have a spiritual awakening, they are very happy – they forget their sorrows, find peace and contentment, discover their inner strength, and tirelessly engage in serving others with enthusiasm.

However, after some time, they are not so content with their efforts and service. They wonder why they have lost the spark and energy of before, and instead of moving forward they feel they have stopped.

The reason for this is loss of focus. Many spiritual aspirants start with the single-minded purpose of achieving a high aim. As they move along, however, they begin to get distracted. They look at their fellow travellers on this path, make comparisons with them, and forgetting their goal, start copying what others are doing.

When they are cautioned about going astray, they justify themselves by pointing out that others are doing the same. Instead of watching their step, they try to correct others, and sometimes come into conflict with them. Abandoning eternal principles, they begin to behave as others do.

Some become attached to the role they have been given, and measure their worth by it. Some others start having expectations – of recognition, praise and material things. When these are not forthcoming, their zeal to serve is dulled.

Spiritual attainments and the quality of our effort determine our value, but some people develop conceit about their task or talents and get stuck on the respect and adulation they receive because of these. "I work very hard", "I am in charge here", they think. Even the service they do becomes conditional on being offered extra regard or hospitality. This blocks their progress.

Then what happens is that such individuals start competing with each other, engaging in one-upmanship to prove their worth. "That one is doing this, so I will do something more, I will show them", they say. "Why should I be left behind?"

They do not stop at even belittling others: "You are not experienced in this, I am experienced"; "You are not educated, but I am educated."

Rather than work to overcome their weaknesses, they expend their energy in trying to get the better of one another. In the process they become weak and fall from their elevated status.

Engrossed in looking at others instead of being introspective and meditating, these misguided seekers lose their connection with the Divine, the source of spiritual power. With their mind engaged in comparing, competing and correcting others, they no longer experience peace and happiness as before.

So, if we become similarly dissatisfied during our spiritual journey, we need to check if we have taken to the wrong path, and change course if necessary.

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MEDITATION MATTERS

Discovering your spiritual power

CHARLIE RIDD

If you were asked what you needed most in life, how would you respond? Most people say, inner strength, spiritual power.

When we go a little deeper, it seems that people want to be in more peace and deal with any internal negativity, but do not know how to acquire the spiritual strength to do so. People want to let go of an anxious, critical mind, but do not know how to harness the strength needed.

In fact, spirituality is really the journey to this inner power. Sadly, in today's world the word 'power' conjures up 'force', 'domination', 'control'. That kind of power could be called, 'hard power'. This is very different to 'soft power', or in other words – spiritual power.

This power is the power of love, of humility, of the power to offer compassion, the power to forgive. This spiritual power cannot influence by force – it can only influence by virtue. It is the power that uplifts and transforms.

On a spiritual journey one of the things that helps one more forward is to ask questions of the self. In this context, of spiritual power, a good question to ask is, 'Who is powerful in my life?' Is it other people and their opinions? Is it my emotions? Is it the storytelling of the past in my thoughts? Or, is it that I constantly analyse the situations I find myself in? Or, is it my sense of self, my sense of self-value, my inner spiritual power?

If I do not create for myself some internal spiritual power, then from time to time, my mind goes into an absolute spin! My thoughts go into overdrive over some very little thing that is said or that happens. Then, the result of that is that all my inner strength goes.

Another question to ask is, 'What fills me with power, and what drains me of power?'. This kind of internal audit does not take up too much time; I can check when I am not feeling good, 'What are the thoughts that created that feeling?' and conversely, when I am feeling very good, 'What are the thoughts that are creating that feeling?'

Happiness is very powerful. One can work for hours and hours in a state of happiness and not feel tired. However, if I feel upset and unhappy, how much energy do I have?

Thoughts that fill us with power are in fact those thoughts of love, compassion, forgiveness. The thoughts that drain us are of two kinds. One, those of anger and fear, and secondly of negativity.

Where does all this game of empowerment and disempowerment take place? The venue for life is my mind. My whole life happens in my mind. Make your mind a sacred space. A useful image is a crystal-clear bowl of water. In its original state, the mind is serene, so still, so clear, so pure.

The reason why meditation is so very powerful is that in a state of meditation, I stop 'reacting' to things I hear, or see, and begin to create the thoughts I want. Then, little by little, I begin to make my life exactly how I want it to be.

Charlie Ridd, based in Sydney, has been a daily meditator with the Brahma Kumaris for 45 years.

A THOUGHT FOR TODAY

Collect moments of peace. When I take a deep breath, hold it for a quiet moment and offer a sweet smile to myself, I bring a drop of peace to my world. Each precious moment of peace adds a drop to the pond. Drop by drop, a pond becomes a lake, then an ocean of peace for the world. Today let me add a drop of peace to my world.