

# HOW TO KNOW GOD

(Consisting of Articles from *The Mystic's Vision*,

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## Mystical Experience

Nearly everyone comes to the conclusion that there is a divine Reality that is our Source and Father, the Ground of our being, an all-embracing One, Lord and Ruler over all existence, permeating and coordinating all. One may arrive at this conclusion through the exercise of one's logical intelligence, or one may *experience* this reality directly as a 'mystical' experience or revelation. The intellectual formulation of this knowledge through logical analysis is capable of providing a basis for a reasonable certainty of the basic premise outlined above, but the direct 'mystical' experience of the One brings a person to the conscious *awareness* of that One as the immediate reality of one's own being, one's ultimate identity.

The question that many feel it is necessary to ask is, 'How does one attain to that direct 'mystical' experience of the One?' And I have had to confess that I have no idea how to answer that question—except to say that the one thing you can be absolutely certain of is that *you* can't make it happen. Only the eternal Lord of all can make it happen. Therefore, learn to rely upon His unfailing will. If He wishes to draw you to Him, He will reveal it as a divine urge, an implacable yearning, guiding you from within your heart. So be true to your own heart, and you can't go wrong. A guru or teacher may serve as the instrument by which the knowledge of God's presence is awakened in you, but it is God Himself who kindles the flame of heavenly desire within you, and who leads you to union. We may be able to reduce all multiplicity to two: I and Thou; but only He can reduce the two to one. And so, it is not to a human teacher that you must turn, but it is to Him within yourself that you must turn.

It seems He has unique plans for each of us, and He brings each of us along the journey's path according to His own design. No one can know how or when He will lead a person to His presence. You must make your intimate acquaintance with Him entirely by your own efforts within your own consciousness. Needless to say, even your own efforts are prompted by His Grace. So, just follow His inner promptings. Know that He is aware of your desire—in fact, He has initiated it; and He will eagerly meet you in the still of your heart when the time is right. Keep your mind on Him and He will continue to be mindful of you. And, when the time comes, when He has brought you to the purity of heart that is required, then He will bring you into His pure land, and you will be filled with His presence and know unlimited Being.

This is without doubt the greatest attainment possible in this life, providing complete and unremitting inner fulfillment. To be sure, it will not bring you wealth or worldly success; in fact, it is much more likely that you will experience economic privation and social isolation. But it is the greatest attainment possible in this life, and it will fill you with gratitude and provide you with unending peace and abundant happiness.

### **Amazing Grace**

God comes into our lives of His own accord and wakens us to His ever-presence. For each of us, it is a unique experience, an experience that leaves its lasting imprint on our souls, providing inspiration for courage in our lives and solace in our troubles by reminding us of God's mercy and of our true home in His heart. Every instance of God's Grace is a great and valuable gift to the soul who receives it, but I would ask you to consider the special merits of a very special Grace with which only a relatively few fortunate souls are familiar, and yet which I feel is uncommonly worthy to be regarded as *amazing*:

It is the gracious revelation of one's divine Identity, the soul's sudden realization that it is in God, is made of God, and is nothing else but God. It is this revelatory Grace which was visited on Heraclitus and Lao Tze; and it is the experience of that Grace that enlightened the Buddha, causing him to exclaim "I am Father of myself". It is that interior Grace that revealed to the Upanishadic *rishis* the truth that "Thou art That!" And it is the experience of that Grace that illumined Jesus when he was baptized by the Spirit in the

river Jordan, leading him to declare, “I am in God and God is in me. I and the Father are one!” It is the Grace that awakened Plotinus to the unitive vision of God, and also revealed to Meister Eckhart his oneness with God; it was also that “amazing” Grace that revealed to the Sufi mystic, Ibn Arabi, his own eternal Self; and there are those of us who experience this very special Grace even in these present days.

Here, please listen for yourself to the words of these various representatives of diverse religious and philosophical traditions as they tell of their own experience of that ‘amazing Grace’:

**VEDANTA/HINDUISM:** *Here are some words about that Divine revelation from various authors of the **Upanishads** (ca. 1200 B.C.E.):*

“He cannot be seen by the eye, and words cannot reveal Him. He cannot be reached by the senses, or by austerity or sacred actions. By the grace of wisdom and purity of mind, He can be seen indivisible in the silence of contemplation.”<sup>1</sup>

“What cannot be thought with the mind, but That whereby the mind thinks: know That alone to be Brahman. ... It is not what is thought that we should wish to know; we should know the thinker. ‘He is my Self!’ This one should know. ‘He is my Self!’ This one should know.”<sup>2</sup>

“When a sage sees this great Unity, and realizes that his Self has become all beings, what delusion and what sorrow could ever approach him?”<sup>3</sup>

“When awake to the vision of one’s own Self, when a man in truth can say: “I am He,” what desires could lead him to grieve in fever for the body? ... When a man sees the *Atman*, his own Self, the one God, the Lord of what was and of what shall be, then he fears no more.”<sup>4</sup>

“When a man has seen the truth of the Spirit, he is one with Him; the aim of his life is fulfilled, and he is ever beyond sorrow. ... When a man knows God, he is free; his sorrows have an end, and birth and death are no more. When in inner union he is beyond the world of the body, then the third world, the

world of the Spirit, is found, where man possesses all—for he is one with the ONE.”<sup>5</sup>

And from the author of the *Bhagavad Gita* (ca. 500 B.C.E.):

“When the mind of the yogi is in peace, focused on the Self within, and beyond all restless desires, then he experiences Unity. His mind becomes still, like the flame of a lamp sheltered from the winds. When the mind rests in the prayerful stillness of yoga, by the grace of the One, he knows the One, and attains fulfillment. Then he knows the joy of Eternity; he sees beyond the intellect and the senses. He becomes the Unmoving, the Eternal.”<sup>6</sup>

“... In this experience of Unity, the yogi is liberated, delivered from all suffering forever. ...The yogi whose heart is still, whose passions are dissolved, and who is pure of sin, experiences this supreme bliss and knows his oneness with Brahman.”<sup>7</sup>

**BUDDHISM:** *Here is the way that revelation was spoken of by the Buddha* (ca. 500 B.C.):

“Monks, there is an Unborn, Unoriginated, Unmade and Unconditioned. Were there not the Unborn, Unoriginated, Unmade and Unconditioned, there would be no escape from the born, originated, made and conditioned. Since there is the Unborn, Unoriginated, Unmade and Unconditioned, there *is* escape from the born, originated, made and conditioned.”<sup>8</sup>

“...There is, O monks, a state where there is neither this world nor any other world, nor is there any Sun or moon. There is neither a coming nor going, nor remaining, nor passing away, nor arising. Without support, without movement, It is the Foundation of everything.”<sup>9</sup>

And this from a later Chinese Buddhist:

“In learning to be a Buddha, ...man should purify his mind and allow his spirit to penetrate the depths. Thus, he will be able to

wander silently within himself during contemplation, and he will see the Origin of all things, obscured by nothing. ...His mind becomes boundless and formless, ... all-illuminating and bright, like moonlight pervading the darkness. During that absolute moment, the mind experiences illumination without darkness, clarity without stain. It becomes what it really is, absolutely tranquil, absolutely illuminating. Though this all-pervading Mind is tranquil, the world of cause and effect does not cease; though It illuminates the world, the world is but Its reflection. It is pure Light and perfect Quiescence, which continues through endless time. It is motionless, and free from all activity; It is silent, and self-aware. ...That brilliant Light permeates every corner of the world. It is This we should become aware of and know.”<sup>10</sup>

**CHRISTIANITY:** *Here are some words attributed to Jesus*  
(ca. 30 C.E.) regarding the realization of his unity with God:

“Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me.”<sup>11</sup>

“Jesus said, ‘I am the Light; I am above all that is manifest. Everything came forth from me, and everything returns to me. Split a piece of wood, and I am there. Lift a stone, and you will find me there.’”<sup>12</sup>

**Meister Eckhart** (1260-1328), a Christian prelate, said this about his own unitive experience:

“As the soul becomes more pure and bare and poor, and possesses less of created things, and is emptied of all things that are not God, it receives God more purely, and is more completely in Him; and it truly becomes one with God, and it looks into God and God into it, face to face as it were; two images transformed into one.”<sup>13</sup>

“I am converted into Him in such a way that He makes me one being with Himself—not a *similar* being. By the living God, it is true that there is no distinction.”<sup>14</sup>

“In this breaking through [of consciousness], I find that God and I are both the same. Then I am what I [always] was; I neither wax nor wane, for I am the motionless Cause that is moving all things.”<sup>15</sup>

“I found in me all things forgotten, my own self forgotten and awareness of Thee, alone, O God. ... I found myself with Thee, being Thy being and speaking the Word and breathing the spirit.”<sup>16</sup>

“Here, one cannot speak of the soul anymore, for she has lost her nature yonder in the oneness of divine essence. There, she is no longer called soul, but is called *immeasurable Being*.<sup>17</sup>

“...Some people think that they will see God as if He were standing there and they here. It is not so. God and I, we are one.<sup>18</sup>

“The eye by which I see God is the same as the eye by which God sees me. My eye and God’s eye are one and the same—one in seeing, one in knowing, and one in loving.”<sup>19</sup>

**NEOPLATONISM:** Here’s a little of what the great Egyptian sage, **Plotinus** (205-270 C.E.), said about the experience of unity:

“The soul naturally loves God and yearns to be one with Him, just as a noble daughter naturally loves her noble father... And suddenly, [she] is uplifted and sees, without ever knowing how; ... the Supreme has come to her, or rather has revealed Its presence. She has turned away from everything around her and has readied herself, having made herself as beautiful as possible and fashioned herself in likeness with the Divine by those preparations and adornments which come unsought to those who grow ready for the vision. And she has seen that Divine presence suddenly manifesting within herself, for now there is nothing between herself and the Divine. There is now no longer a duality, but a two-in-one; for, so long as that presence continues, all distinction between them is dissolved. The longing of a lover to unite with his [human] beloved is a longing for a mere imitation of that Divine and perfect union.

“...In this state of absorbed contemplation, there is no longer a relationship between a subject and an object; the vision itself is the one continuous Being, so that seeing and seen are one thing; the object and the act of vision have become identical.

“...It is a knowing of the [eternal] Self restored to its original purity. No doubt we should not speak of *seeing*; but we cannot help speaking in terms of duality, such as “the seer” and “the seen,” instead of asserting boldly that it is the attainment of absolute Unity. In this *seeing*, we neither regard an object nor perceive distinctions; for there are not two. The man is altered, no longer himself nor belonging to himself; he is merged with the Supreme, sunken into It, one with It. ...Duality exists only in separation; by our holding ourselves apart from It, the Supreme is set outside of us. This is why the vision cannot be described; we cannot separate the Supreme from ourselves to speak of It, for if we have seen something separate and distinct, we have fallen short of the Supreme, which can be known only as one with oneself.

“... [In this vision] there are not two; beholder is one with the beheld ... The man who has experienced this mingling with the Supreme must—if he but recalls It —carry the memory of Divinity impressed upon his soul. He is become the Unity, and nothing within him or without can create any diversity. Nor is there any movement now, or passion, or outreaching desire, once this ascent is attained. Reasoning is suspended and all intellection as well, and even—to dare the word—the very *self* is gone. Filled with God, he has in perfect stillness attained isolation, aloneness.

“... This is the life of the gods and of the godlike and blessed among men, ...the passing of the alone to the Alone.”<sup>20</sup>

**ISLAM:** *And here are some words from the Sufi sage, Ibn Arabi (1165-1240), on the unitive experience:*

“When the mystery of the oneness of the soul and the Divine is revealed to you, you will understand that you are no other than God. ... Then you will see all your actions to be His actions and all your attributes to be His attributes and your essence to be His essence. ... Thus, instead of [your own] essence, there is the essence of God and in place of [your own] attributes, there are the attributes of God. He who knows himself sees his whole existence to be the Divine existence but does not experience that any change has taken place in his own nature or qualities. For when you know yourself, your sense of a limited identity vanishes, and you know that you and God are one and the same.”<sup>21</sup>

“...There is no existence save His existence. ...This means that the existence of the beggar is His existence, and the existence of the sick is His existence. Now, when this is admitted, it is acknowledged that all existence is His existence; and that the existence of all created things, both accidents and substances, is His existence; and when the secret of one particle of the atoms is clear, the secret of all created things, both outward and inward, is clear; and you do not see in this world or the next, anything except God.”<sup>22</sup>

“On Him alone we depend for everything; our dependence on other things is in reality dependence on Him, for they are nothing but His appearances.”<sup>23</sup>

“The eye perceives nothing but Him; only He is to be known. We are His; by Him we exist, and by Him we are governed; and we are, at all times and in all states, in His presence.”<sup>24</sup>

“Nothing but the Reality exists; there is no separate being, no arriving and no being far away. This is seen in true vision; when I experienced it, I saw nothing but Him. When my Beloved appears, with what eye do I see Him? With His eye, not with mine; for no one sees Him except Himself.”<sup>25</sup>

“It is none other than He who progresses or journeys as you. There is nothing to be known but He; and since He is Being itself, He is therefore also the journeyer. There is no knower

but He; so, who are you? Know your true Reality. ... He is the essential Self of all. But He conceals it by [the appearance of] otherness, which is “you.”<sup>26</sup>

“If you hold to multiplicity, you are with the world; and if you hold to the Unity, you are with the Truth. ...Our names are but names for God; at the same time our individual selves are His shadow. He is at once our identity and not our identity...

Consider!”<sup>27</sup> In one sense the Reality is creatures; in another sense, It is not. ...Whether you assert that It is undivided or divided, the Self is alone. The manifold [universe] exists and yet it does not exist.”<sup>28</sup> “Therefore, know your Self, who you are, what is your identity...<sup>29</sup> “He who knows himself knows his Lord; ...indeed, He is his very identity and reality.”<sup>30</sup>

“If men knew themselves, they would know God; and if they really knew God, they would be satisfied with Him and would think of Him alone.”<sup>31</sup>

These are the testaments of a few of those to whom God has revealed Himself; perhaps He’ll reveal Himself to you as well. It’s all about your heart, you know: He’s no fool; you must truly come to know that without Him you are nothing, and wholeheartedly offer Him your life and work. If all conditions are just right—if it is your time and place, and He has brought you to His love and Grace, perhaps He’ll draw you into His heart and give you a taste of eternal bliss. It’s worth a try! Have a talk with Him tonight.<sup>32</sup>

## NOTES:

1. *Mundaka Upanishad*, III.1; Juan Mascaró, *The Upanishads*, Middlesex, Penguin Books, 1965.
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3. *Isha Upanishad*, I.7; *Ibid.*
4. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, IV.4.25; *Ibid.*
5. *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, II.1; *Ibid*
6. *Bhagavad Gita*, 6:18-21; Mascaró, Juan, Middlesex, Penguin Books, 1962.
7. *Bhagavad Gita*, 6:23-27; *Ibid.*

8. The Buddha, *Udana, Patalgam* 8.3., from G.M. Strong, *The Udana: The Solemn Utterances of The Buddha*, trans. by Dawsonne Melancthon Strong, 1902; p. 115. Reprinted 2010 by Forgotten Books.
9. The Buddha, *Udana, Patalgam* 8.3., from G.M. Strong, *The Udana: The Solemn Utterances of The Buddha*, trans. by Dawsonne Melancthon Strong, 1902; p. 115. Reprinted 2010 by Forgotten Books.
10. Stryck, L. & Ikemoto, T., *Zen Poems, Prayers, Sermons, Anecdotes, Interviews*, Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday Anchor Books, 1965.
11. *New Testament of The Bible, Gospel Of John*, 14:11.
12. Robinson, James M., *Gospel Of Thomas*, 77, (trans. by Thomas O. Lambdin), 1977; p. 135.
13. Meister Eckhart, Treatise A.2, Colledge E. & McGinn, B. (trans.), *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, Ramsey, N.J., Paulist Press, 1982; p. 222.
14. Blackney, R.B., *Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation*.
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16. de B. Evans, C., *op. cit.*, *Sermon XXI*.
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18. Meister Eckhart, Sermon 18, Blackney, Raymond B., *Meister Eckhart, A Modern Translation*, N.Y., Harper Torchbooks, 1941; p. 181.
19. Meister Eckhart, Sermon 23, *Ibid.*, p. 206.
20. Plotinus, *Enneads*: VI:7.34, 36; VI: 9.5-11.
21. Landau, Rom, *The Philosophy Of Ibn Arabi*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1959; pp. 83-84.
22. *Ibid.*; p. 83.
23. Austin, R.W.J. (trans.), *Ibn Al-Arabi: The Bezels Of Wisdom*, N.Y., Paulist Press, 1980; p. 98.
24. *Ibid.*; p. 137.
25. *Ibid.*; p. 108.
26. *Ibid.*; p. 136.
27. *Ibid.*; pp. 126-127.
28. *Ibid.*; p. 88.
29. *Ibid.*; p. 126.

30. *Ibid.*; p. 153.
31. Landau, Rom, *The Philosophy Of Ibn Arabi*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1959; p. 79.
32. Anyone interested in reading my own account of the unitive experience, simply go to my website: [www.themysticsvision.com](http://www.themysticsvision.com), and click on the “Read or Download Books” page. There, you will find a listing for my book, *The Supreme Self*. It is in that book that I describe my own experience of “amazing grace”, and this book, as well as my other books, may be downloaded at no charge in a PDF format. Enjoy.

## **Self-Reliance**

For spiritual aspirants, there is a great deal to be said for living in a focused spiritual environment such as a monastery, ashram, or temple; but oftentimes a life so lived is at the cost of one’s intellectual and moral freedom, and this is detrimental. To limit oneself to a specific tradition, with determined hierarchies and specific unquestionable narratives, is always detrimental to the freedom of thought. And if that tradition demands an unswerving devotion, not to the divinity within you, but to the words and divine authority of some book or historical person, so much more is the limitation and the detriment.

Of course, living unprotected in the world is dangerous also. There are many temptations to avoid, and the peace required for meditation and contemplation is hard to find. Also, the absence of the companionship of like-minded souls makes for a lonely existence. But it seems to me that despite the loneliness and the hardship, an earnest soul has the strength, courage and inner resources to forge a spiritual life in the world. She finds companionship in the presence of God and knows the added advantage of living free of confining restrictions to her intellectual and moral freedom.

I am a great believer in freedom, and therefore recommend to all spiritual aspirants the path of independence, non-affiliation, and self-rule, which allows freedom to evolve. Even if conforming to the herd appeals to your desire for belonging to a community or for the possible attainment of some measure of authority; resist it; be your own master—even if it means you must deal with some loneliness and struggle. The greatest attainment is freedom—the freedom to give your heart entirely to God within you, and to think and act in accord with the dictates of your own divine Self. At the end

of a long and productive life, nothing will savor so sweetly to you as the satisfaction of being and having been wholly true to your Self.

### We Who Have Been Blessed

If we reason clearly and correctly, we must come to the acknowledgment of our utter dependence on God's blessings. We have no power, no intelligence, no sweetness, and no illumination of our own; all that we know as ours is in fact the gracious gift of God. For that reason, we cannot claim to have earned spiritual wisdom or vision by some worthiness of our own making. Whatever comes to us does so of His power and His grace. And so, though I would gladly offer instruction and advice in the endeavor to assist others in joining their soul to God, I am too clearly cognizant of the fact that He alone can bring each soul to His embrace; and that He alone, whose Light illuminates all, can peel away the blinders of the illusory ego, and show Himself as the true and everlasting Self of all.

So, what am I to say to those who ask the way to God? 'Follow the noblest that's in you; that will lead you home to Him. Revere silence, solitude, reflection, and deep thought. Read the lives and words of those who found their way to His door, and thus purify your heart. Above all, converse with Him; He'll guide you from within and lead you every inch of the way. Rejoice often in His great love in looking after you and all good souls. He is the inner life, the inner heart, of you; and He seeks only what is your highest joy and light. Turn your face to Him, your mind to Him, your heart to Him; and nothing else at all needs to be done. When it is your time to know your eternal identity, the whole universe, including the stars in the heavens, will conspire to bring about your awakening. Do not fear; no one will be forgotten or left behind.'

### Trust In God

It is not entirely agreed upon by humankind that the universe was created and is governed by a single divine Mind, but after centuries of careful examination of the evidence, the great majority of thinking people have accepted this hypothesis as the correct one. As this divine Mind is taken to be unborn and without progenitors, it is also accepted that He has no 'given' name but is referred to by various names according to the language of custom in various regions of the earth. Therefore, He has been called by

many different names, all of which are equally valid for the purpose of communing with Him, since He is ever-present as our very Soul and breath. Some call Him “Lord”, “Hari”, “Adonai”, or “Rahim”. I will refer to Him as “God”, a name said to be of Germanic or Gothic origin, and commonly accepted today by all English-speaking people.

God is not only the Creator and Governor of the universe, He is the Foundation of existence, being both the conscious Ground as well as the substance of the universe, and so comprises both our mind and our body, and all else that exists. All is contained in Him, and partakes of Him, and nothing has Being or existence other than in Him. This being so, we must ask ‘How is it possible for one to connect to God? How does one experience His presence?’ This question is like that of a wave on the ocean asking how it may connect to the ocean; or how it might experience the Ocean’s presence. As a wave is contained in the ocean, we are contained in God, and therefore we are able to know His presence both within and without. What more is there to be said?

Be still and know the One who is, the One who lives you. Trust in Him. Every moment He is watching over us all. Though turmoil and anxiety fill many hearts, and fear and distrust are rampant in the world of men, trust in His inscrutable will; He will unfailingly bring us to the wellspring of His love and the refuge of eternal peace.

## Reach Out To God

My own revelatory experience of the Divine Reality forms the basis for my assumption that any other devout human being is also capable of experiencing such a transcendent revelation—that, in fact, those who have experienced such a revelation in the past were, like me, ordinary beings and not divinely begotten children or special incarnations of the supreme deity—at least no more so than anyone else. This notion flies in the face of the customary religious suppositions of a large number of people, I know; but old customs must eventually give way to proven experiential knowledge. The acceptance of mystical experience, and the recognition of its misinterpretation through the ages will certainly not come overnight; but eventually human evolution requires the expansion of human understanding through the acceptance of accumulated experiential evidence.

There is no shortage of evidence to show that many people throughout the world and throughout history have experienced the interior revelation of their own divine being; and if you are unaware of this evidence, please see my *History of Mysticism*, a well-documented account of that evidence (available as a free download from my website). Though, from the perspective of history, so many have testified to the occurrence of that revelation in their lives, it is, for us, a sad fact that, in our daily lives, so relatively few seem privileged to experience that revelation. In that regard, it is an experience that seems to be both common and yet rare. But it must be accepted as indisputably true that we are, each one, the manifestation of God's bounty, and are capable, each one, of knowing Him as our immortal Self through prayerful contemplation and a focused and mindful intent. His will is paramount; but if, by acting in accord with His will, you can affect, or in any way influence the course of His will, you must do so. Beg for His favor, implore His merciful gift of light, give your heart unreservedly to Him, surrender your life in His service; see all creation as His manifestation, and know your oneness with Him.

You will have noticed that I do not speak of temporal conditions in the world; I do not propose solutions for the worldly ills that are so apparent to all of us. These things will be remedied on their own if only we, the people, become transformed in heart and mind to focus on God's loving presence in our own hearts. Surely, then, He will bless you and many others with the interior revelation of His ever-presence, and free you forevermore from all confusion, worry, and sorrow. Reach out to Him with all the power of your mind and heart and soul, and He will surely grant your heart's desire.

### **The Path of Divine Love**

Whenever the question arises regarding the path to the awareness of God, one's own Divine Self, we inevitably discover that there are two separate and distinct paths vying for our allegiance. One says, "When you realize God, you will realize that that eternal Self is your true and lasting Identity; therefore, why don't you identify with That, and not with the ephemeral appearance of the ego-mind and body. Remain always identified with that pure Consciousness which is the eternal witness of the mind and body and be free." This is the call to the path of knowledge, or *jnan*.

But there is another point of view, which also asks to be heard; this is the view of those who extol the path of Divine Love, or *bhakti*. Those who

follow this devotional path say: “Oh, it is indeed true that your real Identity is the eternal Self, but how can you hope to become aware of that pure and perfect Self without first making your heart and mind pure? First you must foster in your heart the habit of love, and then you may become aware of the One who is unconditional Love.

“Foster in your mind the thought of oneness with all beings; then you may become aware of the One who is Unity itself. Your separative ego, your sense of individuality, keeps you apart from the awareness of the one Self; therefore, humble your ego before the eternal Self in the manner of a servant before his master, or a child before a parent, or a lover before her beloved. Then you will be prepared and able to experience the Infinite, the eternal Self.”

Which of these two approaches to Self-realization is correct then? The path of knowledge or the path of love? The knower says, “There is but One; identify with That, for in truth you *are* That!” The lover says, “That may be so, but so long as there is the appearance of a separate self, make it subservient to the universal Self, until it is truly merged in and dissolved in the Divine.” Clearly, they are both true, both correct, both valid and proper paths for the sincere aspirant to Self-realization.

There is a saying that the path of devotion and the path of knowledge are like two men, one blind and the other lame. Neither are able to get about on their own. The devotee without discrimination can’t see where he’s going; and the man of knowledge without love is unable to progress along the spiritual path. However, if we put the two of them together, they manage very well; for then, the man of knowledge rides on the shoulders of the devotee, and the devotee becomes his legs, while he serves as the devotee’s eyes. So, this is what we also must do with the two complementary sides of our own nature; we must utilize them both; that way we have the benefit of both knowledge and devotion.

Oftentimes, the faculty of devotional love is characterized as being the feminine side of our nature; and the sober, discriminative intellect is thought of as being a masculine trait. It is the feminine side of us, which is capable of tenderness, compassion, emotional love, self-effacement through service, etc. And it is the masculine side of ourselves, which allows us to be coldly analytical, logical, dispassionate, unattached, etc. But, clearly, both of these

“aspects,” present in everyone to some degree, are necessary to our progress in the spiritual life.

If we were to examine the lives and characteristics of the saints and sages of all the various religious traditions whom we have known, we would no doubt find that some were more devotional, some more discriminative. However, I am certain that, in all cases of genuine spiritual greatness, we would find that the intellect and the heart played equally essential parts; for, like the blind man and the lame man, the heart and the intellect are insufficient without the other.

The heart without discrimination falls into the pit of sentimentality and sensuality; the intellect without the sweetness of the heart remains a dried-up cripple, unable to enjoy life in the world. It is my considered opinion that if a person is to reach the highest perfection possible to man, there must be a balance of heart and mind. There must be both the knowledge of the Self, and at the same time, the love of God.

All the great scriptures of all the world’s religions extol in one way or another the focusing of the mind on God. This is what is known as “devotion.” Listen to how two different sages have defined it: Narada, who was the epitome of the devotee of God, defines devotion in his *Bhakti Sutras* as “the constant flow of love towards the Lord, without any selfish desire.” Shankaracharya, who was chief among the followers of the path of knowledge, says in his *Crest-Jewel of Discrimination* (*Vivekachudamani*), “Devotion is continuous meditation on one’s own true Self.” It will be evident to the intelligent person that whether we focus our minds on God or on the Self, it is the same; for devotion to God is nothing else but meditation on the Self. In either case, we must transcend the individual ego, the false sense of selfhood.

In the Upanishads, we find a description of how the universe came into being: “This world,” it says, “arose from Bliss, lives in Bliss, and will eventually merge back into Bliss.”<sup>1</sup> This word, “Bliss,” is synonymous with the word, “Love.” Love is God. And Love is the universe. The supreme Lord has manifested Himself as this world out of Love. Existence is nothing but the loving throb of the Divine. I have seen that all this universe is the out-flowing radiance of God’s Love. Man, therefore, is nothing but a flame of Love. Within us is the Divine Love that is God. However, if we are not experiencing that Divine Love, we must ask

ourselves how we may discover, experience, and manifest that Love, that Bliss. Those who know, say that Love is attained by loving.

Whether we regard ourselves as the worshiper or the worshiped, there is nothing here but the One, playing both of these roles. Whether we call our intrinsic nature by the name of "Bliss" or "Love," its taste remains the same. We may call the Eternal by whatever name we like; we may sing it out to our heart's content. Whether we are gamboling in the streets or sitting quietly in our meditation room, we are always God playing within God. To remember Him is our only happiness; to forget Him our only sorrow.

Meanwhile, we experience His grace in many different ways; and we should recognize that it is God's grace that is working through us. Perhaps the first grace, the first taste we have of God's presence in our life, is the grace of aspiration, the desire to understand the nature of our own existence. This grace may occur to us while we are still children, or it may occur when we are older, and have already put behind us all other desires. Such grace may involve the pain of severance from old ties and allegiances; but it is grace nonetheless, and it is drawing us toward the light of our true, eternal Self.

Then comes the dawning of the light of understanding. This is a very special time, a great gift of grace. The mind is suddenly filled with a new and wonderful understanding, which had hitherto been hidden from it. All becomes clear, and all one's past life is seen to have been leading inexorably toward this present clarity of mind, this new awareness of the unity of Existence.

But this dawning of light is but the beginning. It comes only to whet our appetite. And along with this little bit of light, He also puts before us some obstacles to the keeping of that light, so we might come to understand what those obstacles are that pull the mind away from the clarity of vision. So, we learn to practice patience and to make greater effort to remember Him. He nurses us along in His infinite wisdom, knowing precisely what is needed for each of us to inch along toward perfection. And there will be many inches gained and then lost, only to be regained.

Even in times of great trouble, God's grace is there. His grace comes to us in two ways: (1) In fulfilling our needs, both spiritual and worldly; and (2) in placing obstacles before us, so that we can grow strong in faith and strong in perseverance. He brings us occasions of trial and dryness so that we may

have the victory over all adversities, and thereby become confident in the power and goodness of God within us.

Then there is the grace of devotion, the grace of Love. It is a very special gift of grace and is sought by all the saints who've ever lived. It is the one thing needed to wend one's way to God Himself. And, so, to win this great gift is something much to be prized and prayed for. This is how Krishna, speaking as the incarnation of God, advised his disciple in the *Bhagavad Gita*:

"Give Me your mind and give Me your heart; give Me your offerings and your adoration; and thus, with your soul in harmony, making Me your supreme goal, you shall truly come to Me."<sup>2</sup>

And again:

"Only by love can men see Me, and know Me, and come unto Me. He who works for Me, who loves Me, who regards Me alone as his supreme goal, who is free from attachment to all things, and with love for all creation, he in truth comes to Me."<sup>3</sup>

In my own case, the grace of love for God came upon me very suddenly and spontaneously. And the more I read of the lives of the saints, the more completely I was convinced that I had no other goal in my life but God, and day by day the grace of love increased in me. For me, there is no doubt that it was God's grace, which drew me lovingly to Himself, and made me to know my oneness with Him. Listen also to what some other Western seers have said about the power of God's grace:

*Philo Judaeus*:

"Without Divine grace, it is impossible to leave the ranks of mortality; [but] when grace fills the soul, it is possessed and inspired, ...and hastens to that most glorious and loveliest of visions, the vision of the Uncreated."<sup>4</sup>...The soul, stirred to its depth and maddened by heavenward yearning, [is] drawn by the truly existent Being and pulled upward by Him."<sup>5</sup>

*Plotinus:*

"When the Divine in us stirs us, then the soul becomes filled with a holy ecstasy; stung by desire, it becomes Love. ... When there enters into it a glow from the Divine, the soul gathers strength, spreads true wings, and however distracted by its proximate environment, speeds its buoyant way to something greater; its very nature bears it upwards, lifted by the giver of that love. Surely, we need not wonder that It possesses the power to draw the soul to Itself, calling it back from every wandering to rest before It; [for] from It came everything; nothing is mightier." <sup>6</sup>

*St. John of the Cross:*

"Desire for God is the preparation for union with Him. If a person is seeking God, his Beloved is seeking him much more. And if a soul directs to God its loving desires, God sends forth His fragrance by which He draws it and makes it run after Him." <sup>7</sup>

In a time known only to Him, God sends His grace of revelation; He reveals Himself to His lover. And the lover then knows that God is his own Self. He reveals that there never was anything other than God; that nothing at all exists but God Himself. The lover who obtains this grace knows full well that it was God's grace and nothing else that brought to him this vision. All who have obtained it declare to all the world that they realized God by His grace alone. Listen to what some seers from the East have had to say about it:

*Dattatreya:*

Truly, it is by the grace of God that the knowledge of Unity arises within. Then a man is released at last from the great fear of life and death." <sup>8</sup>

*Shankaracharya:*

"Teachers and scriptures can stimulate spiritual awareness. But the wise disciple crosses the ocean of ignorance by direct illumination, through the grace of God". <sup>9</sup>

*Sri Ramakrishna:*

"You may try thousands of times, but nothing can be achieved without God's grace. One cannot see God without His grace. But God *can* be seen the moment His grace descends. He is the Sun of knowledge. One single ray of His has illumined the world with the light of knowledge. This is how we are able to see one another and acquire various kinds of knowledge. One can see God only if He turns His light towards Himself. "<sup>10</sup>

Yet even this, the vision of God, is not the end of His graces to His devotees. After this, He bestows many wonderful graces, leading Jesus of Nazareth to say, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, then all the rest shall be added unto ye." All that follows upon the grace of vision is just so many lessons on how to live in absolute freedom; in other words, how to be one with God while eating, sleeping, walking, sitting, while giving, while receiving, while enjoying, and while suffering. This is the grace of freedom, of unity, of perfect contentment. Such continuously ongoing peace and happiness cannot be had without much grace. That grace comes from the Self, from God within us. There is no final grace; it just goes on giving forever.

The author of the *Svetasvatara Upanishad* said it well when he said:

"He is indeed the Lord supreme whose grace moves the hearts of men. He leads us unto His own Joy and to the glory of His Light."

### **Meditation**

The love of God is sweet, O friend! Please do have a taste of it. Call on Him, your compassionate Father, with a true and yearning heart, and He will fill your body and your mind with the nectar of love.

Look up and reach to Him; beg for His embrace. Can a father refuse to draw his child to his breast? Cry for Him, and He will certainly lift you to His heart.

Turn your attention upward within yourself; it is there He lives. Call to Him and feel the rapture He bestows upon your soul. Delicious caresses He bestows upon the yearning heart! The spine tingles with the rushing fountain of joy that flows upward toward Him. O friend, the love of God is sweet! It is nectar to the thirsty soul. Please don't hesitate; the cup is brimming full. O friend, the love of God is sweet!

### NOTES:

1. *Taittiriya Upanishad*, 3:6.
2. *Bhagavad Gita*, 9:34.
3. *Ibid.*, 11:54.
4. Philo Judaeus, *On Drunkeness*, 145f.; Winston, David (trans.), *Philo Of Alexandria—The Contemplative Life, Giants, and Selections*; Ramsey, N.J., Paulist Press, 1981, p. 152.
5. Philo Judaeus, *Who Is The Heir?* 69f, *Ibid.*
6. Plotinus, *Enneads*, 38:6:22-23; Turnbull, Grace, (Ed.) *The Essence Of Plotinus*; N.Y., Oxford University Press, 1934; p. 199.
7. John of the Cross, *The Living Flame Of Love*, III:26-28; Kavanaugh, K. & Rodriguez, O., (trans.), *The Collected Works Of John Of The Cross*; Wash. D.C., ICS Publications, 1973; p. 620.
8. Dattatreya, *Avadhut Gita*, I:1; Abhayananda, 1992, p. 15.
9. Shankara, *Vivekachudamani*, III:37; Prabhavananda & Isherwood, 1978, p. 112.
10. Sri Ramakrishna; Nikhilananda, Swami (trans.), *The Gospel Of Ramakrishna*, N.Y., Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1942; pp. 173-174.
11. *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, III:12.

### How To Meditate On The Self

First, we must ask ourselves what is this Self on which we are going to meditate? The answer to this question, which we find in the Upanishads, is,

“The Self is the Witness of the mind. ...It is not the thought, but the Thinker one must know. It is not what is seen that should be known,

but it is the Seer which must be known.”

This, of course, is why the Self is so hard to get a handle on; we are used to tackling the task of “knowing” by focusing on the object to be known, but, in this case, it is the knowing Subject, which we are attempting to know. It is the Ground, the very Consciousness that is the background of knowing, the Screen, as it were, on which the thought-images appear.

To make matters even more difficult, this Self has no qualities, no characteristics whatsoever by which one is able to describe It. It is as empty and as uncharacterizable as the vastness of the sky. It is the Source of everything that exists, but It is, Itself, nothing—void. It is called by the Vedantists: “*Sat-chit-ananda*.” It does not exist; It is Existence (*Sat*). It is not conscious; It is Consciousness (*Chit*), unstained, unwavering, eternal. It is perfect, unchallenged Freedom, since It alone is; and for that reason, It does not feel bliss; It is Bliss (*Ananda*). We, who are manifestations of that Satchidananda, are not different from It. Our body, our physical existence, is That; we can experience our oneness with the universal Energy. We can know It as Consciousness—the very consciousness that is our self-awareness, the silent Witness of all our various states of mind. When we come to realize that we are That, that we are none other than the one undivided Reality, then we experience the infinite, carefree Freedom that is devoid of any obstacle, or any *other*; then we experience the Bliss.

Another way of understanding the Self is by examining the physical, the mental, and the spiritual aspects of our own reality. We possess a body, but, inwardly, we experience ourselves as a bodiless soul; yet, ultimately, we are nothing but the one Spirit—i.e., the Self. And we identify sometimes with one aspect of our being, and at other times with another aspect of our being. This is clearly illustrated in a story, which appears in the famous Indian epic, called the *Ramayana*. In it, Rama, who represents the eternal Self, has a monkey-servant, named Hanuman, who represents the mind or intellect. At one point, Rama asks Hanuman, “How do you regard me?” And Hanuman replies, “When I regard myself as the body, I’m your servant; when I regard myself as a soul, I’m a part of you; but when I regard myself as the universal Self, then I am one with you.”

Now, a great truth is pointed out in this saying of Hanuman’s: namely that our relationship to God, and our spiritual practice as well, is entirely dependent upon how we regard ourselves, upon what we believe ourselves to be. Because there are these different ways of thinking of oneself, there

are also differences in the way one might approach God, the eternal Self. Notice that, in the first two ways in which Hanuman identifies himself, there is a separation between the subject and the object of reverence. Whether identifying himself with the body or the soul, Hanuman regards himself as having a separate identity from Rama. In the one case, he relates to Rama as a servant, and in the second, he relates to Rama as a part to a whole; but in the third case, there is no separation, no relationship: Hanuman sees himself as not different from Rama.

And so, as we have seen, there are these three different attitudes regarding not only God, but one's own identity as well. Basically, however, there are really only the two different approaches to God: (1) as an individualized identity (ego) separate from the supreme Identity, or God; and (2) as pure Consciousness, identical with God, the supreme Self. Let's look more closely at these two approaches, or methods, for they are found to be the methods adhered to in every single religious tradition: some adhering to the one, some adhering to the other, accounting for the apparent incompatibility of the various religious traditions.

In the path of the separate individual soul, the relationship of the soul to God is as the relationship of a thought to the mind from which it sprang, or as the relationship of a wave to the ocean from which it rises, or as the relationship of a ray of light to the Sun from which it streams. The wave wishes to be dissolved back into the oneness of the Ocean; the thought wishes to be dissolved back into the one mind; the ray wishes to be reabsorbed back into the pure source of all light. These are some of the metaphors used to describe the relationship of the soul to God. And in each of these cases, there is a distinction between the part and the whole. The ray experiences its separateness from the Sun; the thought feels isolated from the mind; the wave wonders, "Where is my father, the ocean?" None of these is really separate from its source, of course; but the *sense* of separation is there. Each *feels* separate and apart from its originating principle, and it will not be satisfied until it becomes fully aware of its oneness with its source.

We, as souls, are in the same fix. We are not truly separate from our eternal Self; but, so long as we are not aware of our infinite and eternal Identity, we suffer, and go on seeking ways to become aware of our Source, our real Self. Until we do, we cannot feel complete and fulfilled. Even though, ultimately, this separation of the soul from its source is purely imaginary, still, it is real so long as we suffer the pains and anxieties accompanying this imaginary

plight.

So, what to do? The soul turns all its attention to the Self. It loves the Self as a child loves its father or mother. It longs for the embrace of the Self as a lover longs for her beloved. It offers all its thoughts and actions in the service of the Self, as a devoted servant offers himself to his master. A soul endeavors to close the gap between itself and its God by setting aside time to think lovingly on the Self. To wash away all other distracting thoughts, it continually sings in its heart its mantra: the name of the beloved Self. It sings songs of love, it prays, it meditates, it languishes, it agonizes, it becomes pathetic.

At last, all the clouds of ego, or error, are dispersed, and the bright light of the Sun shines through; the Self reveals Itself resplendently in the consciousness-sky of the soul; and the soul cries out: “O my God! I am you and you are me! All along, there has only been this one Mind, playing the game of ‘I’ and ‘Thou.’” The ray realizes it is only sunlight, and has never been apart from its true self, the Sun; the thought-image realizes it is nothing but mind and has never been separate from the mind; the wave realizes it is only ocean and has never been separate from the ocean.

That is the way of the soul, the way of *bhakti*, or “devotion.” It is also called the way of duality, because, in this path, there are two: the soul and the Self—until, of course, the soul is graced with the realization that it is, and has always been, none other than the Self.

There is another pathway, however: that way that is mentioned by Hanuman when he said, “When I identify with you, then you and I are one.” This is the way of Non-Duality, or Unity. It is also referred to as the path of *jnan*, or “knowledge.” This path takes as its starting point the knowledge that the soul is none other than the Self, that nothing else exists but that One, and the meditation on the Self is therefore devoid of any relationship such as exists on the path of *bhakti*, or devotion. There is no babbling of the soul crying out, “O Lord, O Lord! Pity me, Thy poorest and most worthless servant!” No, not at all. Nondual meditation is the absolutely silent awareness by the Self of Itself.

But how, you may wonder, is it possible to experience the Self by the Self? What is one to do with the exuberantly effusive mind? Does one continually repeat in one’s mind, “I am the Self! I am the Self!”? No. The method of

mantra repetition is helpful, and even necessary, in the early stages of devotional practice; but, in the path of nondual meditation, it is not helpful. Certainly, repetition of a mantra is the way to occupy the mind and force it to pay attention to one single thought to the exclusion of all else, but nondual meditation is intended to go beyond the process of thought. The Self is pure Consciousness, absolute Awareness; does it make sense then for one who wishes to experience this awareness to give it a name and call out to it? This is like painting the words, “blank wall,” on a wall in order to reveal the blankness of the wall; or like using black paint to color a house white. The active thought-producing mind is exactly that which stands in the way of your awareness of the Self. To use it to produce even more thought-forms is not the way to become aware of the Self. It is like flashing more and more words on a screen instructing you to look only at the screen until the screen cannot be seen at all.

How, then, does one meditate in the nondual path, the path of *jnan*? In this path, the awareness is not focused on some *other*, such as a God, or some Divine form or mental image, but rather on one’s own being. It is an inward turning of the awareness, so that it is focused upon itself. That is the state of a mind in meditation on the Self. The Shaivite scripture, *Vijnana Bhairava*, says, “Meditation is not concentrating on a form. True meditation consists of uninterrupted awareness, without any image or support.”

Here is an exercise for meditation: Concentrate on the sound of your own breath, as it comes in and goes out. Draw the breath in with the sound, *So*. Release the breath out with the sound, *Ham*. As you breathe, the *prana* (the subtle breath) is drawn upward, through the spinal column, the cervical vertebra, and into the cranial region. Consciously draw the breath all the way to the top of the head. As you exhale, feel the *prana* descend down the front of the head, neck, chest, abdomen, and to the perineum, from whence it ascends on the next inhalation. Feel the muscles of the perineum contract as the new subtle breath is drawn upward. As you breathe in, allow the diaphragm to relax outward for maximum breath intake, and expand the soft palate so that the air rushing upward makes a jet-like sound inwardly and causes your inner ears to pop. It may be that your breath will comfortably remain suspended upward for quite a while; or it may remain suspended *after* you have exhaled. Or, after breathing in this way for a while, your breath may become very shallow, and spontaneously cease, becoming balanced in perfect stillness. In such a state, consciousness becomes focused and clear, and it is possible that the Self will reveal Itself.

Concentrate on this process and think of nothing else. Aspire to lift your consciousness to the crown of the head, while breathing in with the sound, *So*, and out with the sound, *Ham*. This is the famous *Hamsah* mantra, which is sounded as *So-ham*. The phrase, *So-ham*, consists of two Sanskrit words: *Sah*, “That,” and *aham*, “I am.” Let its meaning permeate your awareness as you rise into the light at the crown of your head. Become aware, “I am That!”

Aspiration, whether it is the longing for God, or for the realization of the Self, lifts the consciousness above the ego-involved mind. Just as, on a mountaintop, the air becomes thinner and purer, so, as the mind focuses its intent upward toward the supreme Consciousness, it transcends the hill-country of deliberate thought, and enters the high atmosphere of pure Spirit, where reigns the silence of the clear blue sky of sweetness, peace, and light.

There, no world, no thought, exists; from the top of the mountain, the gaze is fixed upward, into the silver, silent sky of God, or the Self. That is meditation. And if, from there, we are drawn inside His mystery, above that sky, to know His perfect identity in ourselves, then that is His most wonderful Grace. If not, we nonetheless absorb from that sky some of the radiance of His Light, some of the nectar of Self-awareness, to keep in our minds and hearts; and we offer thanks to Him and pray for His continued presence in our conscious life.

By repeated practice, we learn to identify more and more with the witnessing Self, and less and less with the thought-activity of the mind; and the various habitual traits of the mind have less and less power to uproot us from our natural peace. Meditation is not meant only for those times when one is formally “sitting”; meditation is really a state of awareness that can be stretched to include all of one’s time, during all of one’s activities.

During the time of sitting, the mind is filled with the blissful awareness of the Self; this is the practice of Truth. As that practice permeates our awareness more and more, it will be carried into more and more of our active life as well. Listen to what the great 13<sup>th</sup> century mystic, Jnanesvar, who had wholly incorporated Self-awareness into his life, had to say about this:

“One who has drunk of the nectar of Self-awareness may

say whatever he likes; his silent contemplation remains undisturbed. His state of actionlessness remains unaffected—even though he performs countless actions.<sup>1</sup> Whether he walks in the crowded streets or remains sitting in his room, he is always at home. His “rule of conduct” is his own sweet will. His meditation is whatever he happens to be doing.”<sup>2</sup>

Now, there are times when, as a soul, you will feel the desire for God, as a lover for her beloved. The love in your heart will bubble up to express itself as devotion to the Lord of the universe. This is the noblest and best path for the soul, to focus on God within itself with true humility and love, in simple prayer and worship. Even after the supreme realization that your true Self is the universal Self, still you will joy in the singing of His name, and in serving Him in all His creatures and in remembering His presence at every moment in every place.

And there will also be times when you will become intensely focused and quiet, and your breathing will become shallow and soft, and you will taste something of the certainty of your eternal and limitless Selfhood. And you will rest in that quietude, that solitary joyfulness—without thought, without movement, aware only of your own infinite presence.

Because the one Reality is both subject and object, both the personal soul and the Impersonal Self, both the manifest and the Unmanifest, and because both of these aspects are contained within man, both of these paths, or methods, of Self-awareness are perfectly valid and equally true. Just as a ray of sunlight is both distinguishable from and also identical with the Sun; as a thought-image is both distinguishable from and yet identical with the mind; as a wave is at once distinguishable from and yet identical with the ocean; we too are both distinguishable from and identical to that one Self. Whether we turn to It as particularized souls, or as Consciousness to Itself, we are looking toward the one Light.

We should come to understand ourselves so well that we can worship God with heartfelt love at one moment and know Him as non-different from ourselves at another moment, and not feel the slightest contradiction in so doing. This whole world of creation is God’s, and it is also Himself. If God in the form of His creature lovingly worships God, the Creator, the inner Controller, the Self—who is going to object? Once again, listen to Jnaneshvar:

"Everything is contained in the being of God. If a desire for the Master-servant relationship arises, it is God alone who must supply both out of Himself. Even the devotional practices, such as repetition of God's name, faith and meditation, are not different from God. Therefore, God must worship God with God, in one way or another."<sup>3</sup>

"...God Himself is the devotee; the Goal has become the path [in order to enjoy the journey]. The whole universe is one solitary Being. It is He who becomes a God, and He who becomes a devotee. Yet, in Himself, He enjoys the kingdom of utter Stillness."<sup>4</sup>

I'd like to say a few words about the benefits of meditation: Everyone knows that it is through meditation that we are able to know the Self; but there are also many side benefits. Peace of mind lends itself very beneficially to health of body. When the mind becomes focused on God, and all your energies are focused upward, the brain becomes infused with energy and the light of Consciousness. Whatever you focus on in your daily endeavors will be illumined by the increased clarity and intensity of your intellect, and you will easily find solutions to all your problems. You won't need to jog ten miles to feel healthy. Just by raising that conscious Light within your body, you will feel like a god. And you will radiate that light of health to all around you.

According to the *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, the first fruits of meditation are: "health, little waste matter, and a clear complexion; lightness of body, a pleasant scent, and a sweet voice; also an absence of greedy desires."<sup>5</sup> But, above all, of course, meditation enables one to become centered in the eternal Self; to rise above all the vicissitudes of life, and to remain established in peace and goodwill, attuned to the inner joy of the Eternal, while seeing the one God in all creation.

Here are a few suggestions to those who may be new to meditation: First, find a convenient time for your regular practice. In the Vedantic tradition, the times for meditation are spoken of as the *brahmamuhurta*, the times just after the Sun goes down and just before the Sun comes up. Most people find it difficult to meditate during the brightest of the daylight hours, as at those times the mind and body are most inclined to activity.

Second, have a regular place in which to meditate where it's quiet and you

will be undisturbed. Sit in a comfortable position. Yogic texts recommend various postures, but always insist on a straight spine, so that the subtle energy (*prana*) may flow freely to the head.

Third, the length of time for sitting will vary with the depth of your practice. Beginners and even long-time practitioners may find it difficult to concentrate intensely for longer than one hour.

Fourth, don't let the mind just wander; you will only get into bad habits that will be difficult to break. Use one of the two methods or paths, which I talked about. If you're able to sit peacefully, absorbed in the Self, by all means do so. But when, because of the forces of nature, which are always in flux, your mind becomes very active or agitated, then put it to work singing God's name. Be very strict with your mind. Tell it, "Please sing God's name with love, O my mind! Please chant His name with a voice that is sweet with love!" If you try to quiet your mind by force of will, it will only become more agitated and antagonistic. But, if you lead it gently toward God with love, it will rush to bathe in the sweetness of devotion. It will quickly soar with emotion to the heights of Divinity and become absorbed in God.

Fifth, whatever you do, never become disgusted with yourself—not even in a dream! Always respect your Self. Love your Self. Contemplate your Self. Your Lord lives within you as you. Never forget that you are the Divine Self of all, ever-free, ever-blissful, the One in all.

### **Meditation**

O my Lord, Father of the universe! Let me put aside all thoughts and concerns, all activities of the body or mind, and let me sit silently in Thy presence. Let my mind be stilled in adoration and let all voices within me be stilled. Thy language of intimacy is silence, for my soul most nearly approaches Thy state when it is silent. O my Father conform my mind to Thy peace. Still me in Thy calming glance. Rest me in Thy cradling wings. Dissolve me in Thyself.

How wonderful, Lord, is Thy stillness!! In quietude, I know fulfillment. In nothingness, I know release. How good Thou art, O God of gods, to rest me in Thy peace, to grant me from within this taste of Thee, of Thy bliss. What a great wonder it is that I can find Thee and touch Thee and enjoy Thee when I am empty and still! How happy this, our silent, laughing Self!

**NOTES:**

1. Jnaneshvar, *Amritanubhav*, 9:20-21; Abhayananda, 1989, p. 207.
2. *Ibid.*, 9:31, 34; p. 208.
3. *Ibid.*, 9:38-41; p. 209.
4. *Ibid.*, 9:35-36; pp. 208-209.
5. *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, 3:12.

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