

Meditation

Practicalities and Pitfalls



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By bridging the known with the unknown, a pure and focused mind may catch a glimpse of the Truth of truths

As a person having seen one in a dream, recognizes him afterwards; so does one who has achieved proper concentration of mind perceive the Self.

— *Gems from the East*¹

Concentration is devotion of an entire lifetime to a given end. Meditation implies “the cessation of active, external thought.”

Spiritual culture is attained through concentration. It must be continued daily and every moment to be of use. The “Elixir of Life” (*Five Years of Theosophy*) gives us some of the reasons for this truth. Meditation has been defined as “the cessation of active, external thought.” Concentration is the entire life-tendency to a given end. For example, a devoted mother is one who consults the interests of her children and all branches of their interests in and before all things; not one who sits down to think fixedly about one branch of their interests all the day. Life is the great teacher; it is the great manifestation of Soul, and Soul manifests the Supreme. Hence all methods are good, and all are but parts of the great aim, which is Devotion. “Devotion is success in actions,” says the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. We must use higher and lower faculties alike, and beyond those of mind are those of the Spirit, unknown but discoverable. The psychic powers, as they come, must also be used, for they reveal laws. But their value must not be exaggerated, nor must their danger be ignored. They are more subtle intoxicants than the gross physical energies. He who relies upon them is like a man who gives way to pride and triumph because he has reached the first wayside station on the peaks he has set out to climb.²

Psychic powers are far more subtle intoxicants than the gross physical energies.

“For instruction in Practical Occultism it is necessary to have acquired power of concentration, and then to receive certain definite directions.”

. . . This power should be cultivated and trained in the Lower Degrees, and it is to this end that the Rule ordering daily meditation was laid down. There is no other way of attaining the power of concentration, and without this power, largely developed, no progress can be made in Practical Occultism, no beginning even of it being possible.³

¹ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (GEMS FROM THE EAST) XII p. 447; [21st May]

² *Judge Letters*, I (x) p. 31

³ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (E.S. INSTRUCTION No. V) XII pp. 702-3; [on the Spinal Column.]



Nature strives to contain Spirit and detain it here on earth, but Spirit ever strives to be freed from its earthly prison and return to its divine abode.

Like despondency, like doubt, like fear, like vanity, pride, and self-satisfaction, these [psychic] powers too are used by Nature as traps to detain us. Every occurrence, every object, every energy may be used for or against the great end: in each, Nature strives to contain Spirit, and Spirit strives to be free. Shall the substance paralyze the motion, or shall the motion control the substance? The interrelation of these two is manifestation. The ratio of activity governs spiritual development; when the great Force has gained its full momentum, It carries us to the borders of the Unknown. It is a Force intelligent, self-conscious, and spiritual: its lower forms, or vehicles, or correlates may be evoked by us, but Itself comes only of Its own volition. We can only prepare a vehicle for It, in which, as Behmen says, “the Holy Ghost may ride in Its own chariot.”⁴

Only True philosophy, or Wisdom of Love can help remove the weeds of dogma and correct the errors of human fancy. She is Penelope-Sophia, the loyal wife waiting for Odysseus-Christos’ return.

For the path to which his meditation is confined, and upon which his contemplation travels, is too narrow, too thickly covered with the weeds of dogmatic beliefs — the fruits of human fancy and error — to permit the pure ray of any Universal truth to shine upon it. His is a blind faith, and when his eyes open he has to give it up and cease being a “Christian” in the theological sense. The instance is not a good one. It is like pointing to a man immersed in “holy” water in a bathtub and asking why he has not learned to swim in it, since he is sitting in such holy fluid. Moreover, “unfading *enthusiasm*” and “*emotional* prayer” are not exactly the conditions required for the achievement of true theosophic and spiritual development. These means can at best help to *psychic* development. If our correspondent is anxious to learn the difference between *Spiritual* and *Psychic* wisdom, between *Sophia* and *Psyche*, let him turn to the Greek text (the English translation is garbled) in the *Epistle of James*, iii, 15-16,⁵ and he will know that one is *divine* and the other terrestrial, “sensual, devilish.”⁶

⁴ *Judge Letters*, I (x) p. 31

⁵ [Cf. (15) Η σοφία αὐτή δεν είναι ἀνώθεν καταβαίνουσα, ἀλλ’ είναι ἐπιγεῖος, ζωώδης, δαιμονιώδης (16) διότι ὅπου εἶναι φθόνος καὶ φιλονεικία, ἐκεῖ ἀκαταστασία, καὶ παν ἀχρεῖον πρᾶγμα. (17) Η ἀνώθεν ὁμῶς σοφία, πρῶτον μὲν εἶναι καθαρὰ, ἐπειτα εἰρηνικὴ, ἐπιεικὴς, εὐπειθὴς, πλήρης ἐλέους καὶ καλῶν καρπῶν, ἀμερόληπτος καὶ ἀνυπόκριτος. — ED. PHIL.]

⁶ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (CORRESPONDENCE) IX pp. 170-71



The correct apprehension of Philosophy can help devotees to Duty and Truth to distinguish between Spiritual and Psychic wisdom.



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Meditation proper is Spiritual seership. It leads to conscious realisation of the Truths that underpin and sustain Cosmos and Man, Ideas and forms.

(1) Nowhere in the theosophic teachings was it stated that a life of entire devotion to one's duty alone, or "a contemplative life," graced even by "fine unselfishness" was sufficient in itself to awaken dormant faculties and lead man to the apprehension of final truths, let alone spiritual powers. To lead such life is an excellent and meritorious thing, under any circumstances, whether one be a Christian or a Mussulman, a Jew, Buddhist or Brahmin, and according to Eastern philosophy it must and will benefit a person, if not in his present, then in his future existence on earth, or what we call *rebirth*. But to expect that leading the best of lives helps one — without the help of philosophy and esoteric wisdom — to perceive "the soul of things" and develops in him "a physical command of the forces of nature," *i.e.*, endows him with abnormal or adept powers — is really too sanguine. Less than by any one else can such results be achieved by a sectarian of whatever exoteric creed.⁸

The aim of meditation stated in the most general terms is to realize the reality or truth which is hidden behind any form, idea or ideal conceived only on the plane of the intellect. Its essential nature consists, therefore, in going behind outer appearances and knowing things as they are in truth and reality. Meditation has, therefore, to deal with two things. First, with the outer form which represents or embodies an inner reality, and second, the inner reality itself which though indicated by the outer form is hidden behind this form and can be known only by transcending the form. There are other minor purposes or aims of meditation such as training the mind, or building up required traits in one's character but these are all secondary and are meant merely to prepare the ground for and subserve the main and essential purpose.⁹

⁷ Thought (1886) Auguste Rodin, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

⁸ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (CORRESPONDENCE) IX p. 170; [responding to a question submitted to the Editors of *Lucifer*: "Most of us know Christians who . . . fail to rise out of Christianity into Theosophy; they remain for ever limited to, and satisfied with the narrow space they move in. . . . (1) . . . there do exist . . . men, and particularly women, leading lives both of spiritual meditation and of unselfishness, to whom nevertheless is not vouchsafed a clearer view of the great universe, a larger apprehension of Theosophic truth, nor any increased physical command of nature."]

⁹ Taimni IK. *Gayatri*. Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1978 (3rd ed.); pp. 176-77



**It is reasoning from the known
to the unknown.**

. . . let us now see what kind of contemplation (or meditation) the *Elixir of Life* recommends for the aspirants after occult knowledge. It says: —

Reasoning from the known to the unknown meditation must be practised and encouraged.

That is to say, a *chela's* meditation should constitute the “reasoning from the known to the unknown.” The “known” is the phenomenal world, cognisable by our five senses. And all that we see in this manifested world are the effects, the causes of which are to be sought after in the noumenal, the unmanifested, the “unknown world”: this is to be accomplished by meditation, *i.e.*, continued attention to the subject.¹⁰

Contemplation bridges “the known” or phenomenon, with “the unknown” or noumenon, and instructs inwardly focused minds to identify with All, work with Nature, and live for All.

In short, contemplation, in its true sense, is to recognise the truth of Éliphas Lévi's saying: —

To believe without knowing is weakness; to believe, because one knows, is power.

Or, in other words, to see that “KNOWLEDGE IS POWER.” The *Elixir of Life* not only gives the preliminary steps in the ladder of *contemplation* but also tells the reader how to *realise* the higher conceptions. It traces, by the process of contemplation as it were, the relation of man, “the known,” the manifested, the phenomenon, to “the unknown,” the unmanifested, the noumenon. It shows to the student what ideal he should contemplate and how to rise up to it. It places before him the nature of the inner capacities of man and how to developed them. To a superficial reader, this may, perhaps, appear as the acme of selfishness. Reflection or contemplation will, however, show the contrary to be the case. For it teaches the student that to comprehend the noumenal, he must identify himself with Nature. Instead of looking upon himself as an isolated being, he must learn to look upon himself as a part of the INTEGRAL WHOLE. For, in the unmanifested world, it can be clearly perceived that all is controlled by the “Law of Affinity,” the attraction of one to the other. There, all is Infinite Love, understood in its true sense.¹¹



Lilac by Rafal Olbinski

¹⁰ Eek S. “CONTEMPLATION III.” In: *Dāmodar and the Pioneers of the Theosophical Movement*. Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1965; pp. 398-99

¹¹ *Ibid.* pp. 399-400



The aim of Contemplation is Theurgy or White Magic: Iamblichus' Manteia, Apollonius' and Plotinus' "Union to the Deity,"

Now Iamblichus shows us how this union of our Higher Soul with the Universal Soul, with the Gods, is to be effected. He speaks of Manteia [*μαντεία*] which is Samādhi, the highest trance.¹² He speaks also of dream which is divine vision, when man re-becomes again a God. By Theurgy, or Rāja-Yoga, a man arrives at:

It is Theosophy's Rāja-Yoga, the Ishvara of the ancient Yogin, the Samādhi of the modern.

(1) Prophetic Discernment through our God (the respective Higher Ego of each of us) revealing to us the truths of the plane on which we happen to be acting;
(2) Ecstasy and Illumination;
(3) Action in Spirit (in Astral Body or through Will);
(4) and Domination over the minor, senseless Demons (Elementals) by the very nature of our purified Egos.

But this demands the complete purification of the latter. And this is called by him Magic, through initiation into Theurgy.¹³

"Meditation is silent and unuttered prayer, or, as Plato expressed it, "the ardent turning of the soul towards the divine";

. . . not to ask any particular good (as in the common meaning of prayer), but for good itself — for the universal Supreme Good" of which we are a part on earth, and out of the essence of which we have all emerged.¹⁴

"To whom am I to pray? I do not, for I am myself Parabrahm. I only contemplate. Contemplation is a state of mind."¹⁵

Prayer and contemplation added to asceticism are the best means of discipline in order to become a Theurgist, where there is no regular initiation. For intense prayer for the accomplishment of some object is only intense *will* and desire, resulting in unconscious Magic.¹⁶

Contemplation uplifts lower minds to higher realms of pure consciousness . . .

Samādhi is a state of abstract contemplation, defined in Sanskrit terms each of which requires a complete sentence to explain it. It is a mental, or, rather, spiritual state, which is not dependent upon any perceptible object and during which the *subject*, absorbed in the region of pure spirit, lives *in the Divinity*.¹⁷

¹² *De Mysteriis*, p. 290, lines 15-18 *et seq.*, caps. V & VII.

¹³ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (E.S. INSTRUCTION No. II) XII p. 560

¹⁴ *Key to Theosophy*, p. 10

¹⁵ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (PARABRAHM, DEFINED BY VEDANTINS) IV p. 450; [a Chela of a Vedantin Sannyasi of Benares addressing Ramji Mall Pandit on God.]

¹⁶ *Ibid.* (SIMON AND HIS BIOGRAPHER HIPPOLYTUS) XIV p. 116

¹⁷ *Ibid.* (THE BEACON OF THE UNKNOWN) XI p. 250 *fn.*



. . . by catalepsy of the physical body. Then, by suspending the brain's mechanical action, the Adept can see as clearly as Truth Itself.

But despite of the name, clairvoyant vision is nothing but clear.

When the body is in the state of *dhāranā* — a total catalepsy of the physical frame — the soul of the clairvoyant may liberate itself, and perceive things subjectively. And yet, as the sentient principle of the brain is alive and active, these pictures of the past, present, and future will be tintured with the terrestrial perceptions of the objective world; the physical *memory* and *fancy* will be in the way of clear vision. But the seer-adept knows how to suspend the mechanical action of the brain. His visions will be as clear as truth itself, uncolored and undistorted, whereas, the clairvoyant, unable to control the vibrations of the astral waves, will perceive but more or less broken images through the medium of the brain. The seer can never take flickering shadows for realities, for his memory being as completely subjected to his will as the rest of the body, he receives impressions directly from his spirit. Between his subjective and objective selves there are no obstructive mediums. This is the real spiritual seership, in which, according to an expression of Plato, soul is raised above all inferior good. When we reach “that which is supreme, which is *simple, pure, and unchangeable, without form, color, or human qualities: the God — our Nous.*” . . . This is the state which such seers as Plotinus and Apollonius termed the “Union to the Deity”; which the ancient Yogins called *Ishvara*,¹⁸ and the modern call *Samādhi*; but this state is as far above modern clairvoyance as the stars above glow-worms. Plotinus, as is well known, was a clairvoyant-seer during his whole and daily life; and yet, *he had been united to his God* but four times during the sixty-six years of his existence, as he himself confessed to Porphyry.¹⁹

“Inactivity of the physical body (sthula sharira) does not indicate a condition of inactivity.”

. . . either on the astral or the spiritual plane of action. The human spirit is in its highest state of activity in *samādhi*, and not, as is generally supposed, in a dormant quiescent condition.²⁰

¹⁸ In its general sense, *Ishvara* means “Lord”; but the *Ishvara* of the mystic philosophers of India was understood precisely as the union and communion of men with the Deity of the Greek mystics. *Ishvara-Prasāda* means literally, in Sanskrit, *grace*. Both of the *Mīmāṃsās*, treating of the most abstruse questions, explain *Karma* as merit, or the *efficacy of works*; *Ishvara-Prasāda*, as *grace*; and *Śraddha*, as *faith*. . . .

¹⁹ *Isis Unveiled*, II p. 591; [*dhāranā*'s meaning here is somewhat different from that in the *Voice of the Silence*. — ED. PHIL.]

²⁰ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (MORALITY AND PANTHEISM) V p. 338; [on “the physical inactivity of the Yogi or the Mahatma.”]



Such a deliberate withdrawal of consciousness is a magical skill.

One phase of magical skill is the voluntary and conscious withdrawal of the inner man (astral form) from the outer man (physical body). In the cases of some mediums withdrawal occurs, but it is unconscious and involuntary. With the latter the body is more or less cataleptic at such times; but with the Adept the absence of the astral form would not be noticed, for the physical senses are alert, and the individual appears only as though in a fit of abstraction — “a brown study,” as some call it.²¹

“And leads to the contemplation of celestial powers,” in the words of a Hellenised Jewish Philosopher.

Magic was considered a divine science which led to a participation in the attributes of Divinity itself. “It unveils the operations of nature,” says Philo Judaeus, “and leads to the contemplation of celestial powers.”²²

Now, “Withdraw into yourself and look.”

. . . And if you do not find yourself beautiful yet, act as does the creator of a statue that is to be made beautiful: he cuts away here, he smoothes there, he makes this line lighter, this other purer, until a lovely face has grown upon his work. So do you also: cut away all that is excessive, straighten all that is crooked, bring light to all that is overcast, labour to make all one glow of beauty and never cease chiselling your statue, until there shall shine out on you from it the godlike splendour of virtue, until you shall see the perfect goodness surely established in the stainless shrine. . . . When you know that you have become this perfect work, when you are self-gathered in the purity of your being, nothing now remaining that can shatter that inner unity, nothing from without clinging to the authentic man, when you find yourself wholly true to your essential nature, wholly that only veritable Light which is not measured by space, not narrowed to any circumscribed form nor again diffused as a thing void of term, but ever unmeasurable as something greater than all measure and more than all quantity — when you perceive that you have grown to this, you are now become [that] very vision: now call up all your confidence, strike forward yet a step — you need a guide no longer — strain, and see.²⁴



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²¹ *Isis Unveiled*, II p. 588; [summarising the Principles of Magic.]

²² *Ibid.* I p. 25; [& quoting Philo Judaeus’ *De specialibus legibus*, 4.]

²³ [Vision] by Jonathon Earl Bowser

²⁴ Plotinus: *Ennead* I, vi, “Beauty” ¶ 9 (tr. MacKenna & Page)



Meditation: practicalities and pitfalls

[The Path of *Bhakti*] is far superior to Karman [Path of Action], Jnana [Path of Knowledge], and Yoga [of Patanjali or Path of Mystical Contemplation].

— Narada

The contemplation of celestial things will make man both speak and think more sublimely and magnificently when he descends to human affairs.

— Cicero

A Master of Wisdom advises Concentration upon the Higher Self within the Heart.

The Eastern Secret School knows each minute portion of the Heart, and has a name for each portion. It calls them by the names of the Gods, as Brahmā's Hall, Vishnu's Hall, and so on. Each of these corresponds with a part of the Brain. The student will not begin to understand why so much stress is laid on the Heart in connection with meditation, and why so many allusions are made in old Hindu literature to the Purusha in the Heart. And so with regard to concentration the Blessed Master Koot Hoomi writes:

Your best method is to concentrate on the Master as a Living Man within you. Make His image in your heart, and a focus of concentration, so as to lose all sense of bodily existence in the one thought.

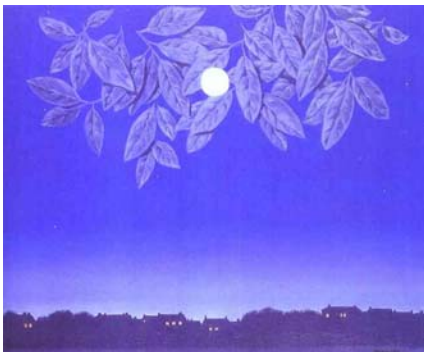
So again He says:

The great difficulty to be overcome is the registration of the knowledge of the Higher Self on the physical plane. To accomplish this, the physical Brain must be made an entire blank to all but the Higher Consciousness.

When the Brain is thus rendered a blank, an impression from the Heart may reach it and be retained; and this is what is spoken of on p. 618, with regard to the Chela, who is able to hold only parts of the knowledge gained. The above-quoted letter says:

In acquiring the power of concentration the first step is one of blankness. Then follows by degrees consciousness, and finally the passage between the two states becomes so rapid and easy as to be almost unnoticed.

He who can do this at will has become an Adept, and can “store the knowledge he thus gains in his physical memory.”²⁵



The Blank Page (1967) René Magritte

²⁵ Blavatsky Collected Writings, (E.S. INSTRUCTION No. V) XII pp. 696-97; [on the Heart.]



Place your love, trust, and confidence in your heart, and retire there “when the battle grows fierce.”

In his hours of silent meditation the student will find that there is one space of silence within him where he can find refuge from thoughts and desires, from the turmoil of the senses and the delusions of the mind. By sinking his consciousness deep into his heart he can reach this place — at first only when he is alone in silence and darkness. But when the need for the silence has grown great enough, he will turn to seek it even in the midst of the struggle with self, and he will find it. Only he must not let go of his outer self, or his body; he must learn to retire into this citadel when the battle grows fierce, but to do so without losing sight of the battle; without allowing himself to fancy that by so doing he has won the victory. That victory is won only when all is silence without as within the inner citadel.²⁶

You may begin by setting a fixed time in a private place for reflection upon the study text of the day, self-examination, and self-study.

Each member [of the E.S.] is expected to set apart a certain time of the day or night, or not less than half an hour's duration, for meditation upon the instructions received, for self-examination and self-study. If possible, the place selected for this should be used by no other person, nor for any other purpose;²⁷

But unless your mind is calm and unruffled, elementals will billow up and cloud insight.

In dreams, and also whenever we calmly sit for any sort of meditation, one of the first things to happen is that the Elementals begin to present to our inner eyes pictures of all sorts, and the kind of picture presented will be the result of the prior thoughts and also of the state we are in both mentally and physically. For if we are disturbed or harassed in any way in thought, the pictures will be more and more confused in fact, though sometimes having no appearance on the surface of being in confusion.

The student must therefore guard his thoughts, regarding them as the generators of action. *Five minute's thought may undo the work of five years.* And although the five year's work may run through more rapidly the second time than it was the first, yet time is lost.²⁸

²⁶ *Blavatsky Collected Writings, (THE GREAT PARADOX) VIII pp. 127-28*

²⁷ *Ibid.* (E.S. INTRODUCTION) XII p. 496; [Rule 16.]

²⁸ *Ibid.* (E.S. INSTRUCTION No. V) XII p. 693; [on the “automatism” of the Body. Cf. “In sense dreams the Lower Manas is asleep; the animal consciousness, when a sensual tendency has been impressed on it by desire, is more easily impressed by Kāma with pictures from the Astral Light, and thus the tendency of such sense-dreams is always towards the animal. We should therefore train ourselves to awaken directly we begin a dream that tends in the sense direction; and the instantaneous rejection of impure thoughts during the period of waking consciousness will tend to set up a habit of rejection which will act automatically in sleep.” *Ibid.*



“Practise the habit of careful and constant concentration of mind upon every duty and act in life.”

In order, also, that the student may receive as much benefit as possible, it is absolutely essential that the superficial and inattentive habits of thought, engendered by Western civilization, shall be given up, and the mind concentrated upon the instructions as a whole as well upon every word in them. To this end students are required to practise the habit of careful and constant concentration of mind upon every duty and act in life they may have to do, and not to reserve their efforts in that direction for the consideration of these teachings only. The student must make all his desires lean to, and centre upon, the acquirement of spiritual knowledge, so that the natural tendency of his thought may be in that direction. He must, therefore, in every moment of leisure revert to these subjects, as well as have a special time set apart for their consideration.²⁹

And one day you might be able to kindle the Sacred Fire.

By concentration on Idā and Pingala is generated the “sacred Fire,” and these are the “sentries on either side” (p. 606), by the action of which alone the Sushumnic current can be roused into activity. [But this concentration cannot be done without details not yet given.]³⁰

But unless you are capable of unremitting devotion to truth and virtue, and of guarding Self against self, you are more likely to loose your way in the forest of shadows than to see any real light or gain insight.

. . . just as the physical body requires incessant attention to prevent the entrance of a disease, so also the *inner man* requires an unremitting watch, so that no conscious or unconscious thought may attract atoms unsuited to its progress. This is the real meaning of contemplation. The prime factor in the guidance of the thought is WILL.

. . . Without that, all else is useless. And, to be efficient for the purpose, it must be, not only a passing resolution of the moment, a single fierce desire of short duration, but *a settled and continued strain, as nearly as can be continued and concentrated without one single moment's relaxation.*

The student would do well to take note of the italicized clause in the above quotation. He should also have it indelibly impressed upon his mind that

[Continued overleaf.]

²⁹ Blavatsky *Collected Writings*, (E.S. INTRODUCTION) XII p. 493

³⁰ *Ibid.* (E.S. INSTRUCTION No. V) XII p. 702; [on the Spinal Column.]



It is no use to fast *as long as one requires* food.
. . . To get rid of the inward desire is the essential thing, and to mimic the real thing without it is barefaced hypocrisy and useless slavery.³¹

Those who wallow in the mire of exotericism, know not what it is to live in the world and yet be not of the world.³²

Without realizing the significance of this most important fact, any one who for a moment finds cause of disagreement with any one of his family, or has his vanity wounded, or for a sentimental flash of the moment, or for a selfish desire to utilize the divine power for gross purposes — at once rushes in for contemplation and dashes himself to pieces on the rock dividing the known from the unknown. Wallowing in the mire of exotericism, he knows not what it is to live in the world and yet be not of the world; in other words to guard *self* against *self* is an incomprehensible axiom for nearly every profane.³³

Which, then, of the Two Paths wilt thou choose, O Lanoo?

Which wilt thou choose, O thou of dauntless heart? The Samtan of “eye Doctrine,” four-fold Dhyâna, or thread thy way through Pâramitâs, six in number, noble gates of virtue leading to Bodhi and to Prajna, seventh step of Wisdom?³⁴



³¹ Eek S. “CONTEMPLATION I.” In: *Dāmodar and the Pioneers of the Theosophical Movement*. Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1965; p. 391; [quoting from “The Elixir of Life.”]

³² See “Hermes & John on the Father of things in the World” in our Mystic Verse and Insights Series.

³³ *Ibid.* p. 392

³⁴ *Voice of the Silence*, frag. III vs. 98, p. 45



For the uninitiated, yoga is invariably fatal

In the New Age movement of the 20th century, Meditation came to mean anything else but what the mystic term Dhyana purports. Every day fools in their millions rush headlong to occult exercises that are not only of dubious efficacy but are fraught with unsuspected perils. Manly Hall³⁵ describes with clarity and precision the objectives, advantages, and pitfalls of the continuum of dharana-dhyana-samadhi, or concentration-contemplation-ecstasy, and inter alia warns (p. 64) that:

Under no condition should a person who is concentrating begin by making his mind a blank.

Hall gives no reason for this warning. Blavatsky did, when she alerted her own inner circle of the dangers of this practice:

Genuine concentration and meditation, *conscious and cautious*, upon one's lower self in the light of the inner divine man and the Pāramitās, is an excellent thing. But to "sit for Yoga," with only a superficial and often distorted knowledge of the real practice, is almost invariably fatal; for ten to one the student will either develop mediumistic powers in himself or lose time and get disgusted both with practice and theory. Before one rushes into such a dangerous experiment and seeks to go beyond a minute examination of one's lower self and *its* walk in life, or that which is called in our phraseology, "The Chela's Daily Life Ledger," he would do well to learn at least the difference between the two aspects of "Magic," the White or Divine, and the Black or Devilish, and assure himself that by "*sitting for Yoga*," with no experience, as well as with no guide to show him the dangers, he does not cross daily and hourly the boundaries of the Divine to fall into the Satanic. Nevertheless, the way to learn the difference is very easy; one has only to remember that *no esoteric truths entirely unveiled will ever be given in public print*, in book or magazine.³⁶

This automatism of the Body — spoken of sometimes as habit — renders it possible for us to have both good and evil experiences in dreams. This is another reason why we should be careful of the impressions we make on the Body, especially as to impressions in which Kāma takes part. In sense dreams the Lower Manas is asleep; the animal consciousness, when a sensual tendency has been impressed on it by desire, is more easily impressed by Kāma with pictures from the Astral Light, and thus the tendency of such sense-dreams is always towards the animal. We should therefore train ourselves to awaken directly we begin a dream that tends in the sense direction; and the instantaneous rejection of impure thoughts during the period of waking consciousness will tend to set up a habit of rejection which will act automatically in sleep. In dreams, and also whenever we calmly sit for any sort of medita-

³⁵ See Hall's defining essays "Concentration and Retrospection," pp. 59-66 "The Practice of Meditation," pp. 103-9, in: Hall M.P. *The Phoenix: An Illustrated Review of Occultism and Philosophy*. (1st ed. 1931); Los Angeles: The Philosophical Research Society, Inc., 1975

³⁶ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (E.S. INSTRUCTION No. II — IS THE PRACTICE OF CONCENTRATION BENEFICENT?) XII pp. 603-4



tion, one of the first things to happen is that the Elementals begin to present to our inner eyes pictures of all sorts, and the kind of picture presented will be the result of the prior thoughts and also of the state we are in both mentally and physically. For if we are disturbed or harassed in any way in thought, the pictures will be more and more confused in fact, though sometimes having no appearance on the surface of being in confusion.

The student must therefore guard his thoughts, regarding them as the generators of action. *Five minutes' thought may undo the work of five years.* And although the five years' work may be run through more rapidly the second time than it was the first, yet time is lost.³⁷

In past meetings the dangers of mediumship for the medium and those involved even indirectly with necromancy have been aired. Eleven years before *The Secret Doctrine* was first published, HP Blavatsky had summed up the fundamentals of Oriental philosophy in *Isis Unveiled* (II, pp. 587-90), so that “the principles of natural law involved in the several phenomena hereinafter described”³⁸ could be comprehended. Here is what she had to say about mediumship in particular:

Mediumship is the opposite of adeptship; the medium is the passive instrument of foreign influences, the adept actively controls himself and all inferior potencies.³⁹

The Masters of Wisdom behind the Theosophical Society and Blavatsky herself have been unforthcoming about of meditation as a subject and as an occult method of training the mind. A diligent search of their extant writings will hardly fill couple of pages on the topic. Even the “Diagram of Meditation” that Blavatsky dictated to ET Sturdy was intended for a select group of students under the direction and supervision of Master M and herself — not for ordinary members of the Society or other parties. (Incidentally, this diagram had not been incorporated in the Minutes of the Inner Group.)

Only those who are intellectually and morally fit can begin to engage into meditation proper, consciously and cautiously as Blavatsky advises and, even then, under the guidance of an authentic spiritual teacher. Otherwise, they are likely to develop mediumistic tendencies and suffer inauspicious consequences, as well as adversely affecting those with whom they come into contact. One should always ignore promptings such as “empty your mind” and reject those who issue them as humbug. If one is not au fait with Practical Occultism,⁴⁰ karmaphalatyaga, *i.e.*, brotherhood in action or putting the interest of others not only *above* self but *instead* of self, remains the only safe and effective means of *Living Theosophy* and expanding Consciousness within the remit of the Divine Plan.

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³⁷ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, [E.S. INSTRUCTION No. V] XII p. 693

³⁸ *Cf. Isis Unveiled*, II p. 587

³⁹ *Ibid.* p. 588; [6th of 10 Fundamental Laws of Occultism.]

⁴⁰ One can make a start by studying and assimilating PRACTICAL OCCULTISM in: *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, IX pp. 155-62 & 285-86, and OCCULTISM VERSUS THE OCCULT ARTS, *ibid.* pp. 249-61.



Dangers of “sitting for yoga”

What you seek at Ulubrae you' ll find,
If to the quest you bring a balanced mind.

— Quintus Horatius Flaccus⁴¹

**Beware, O Lanoo! Read
“Nature’s Finer Forces.”**

Knowing that some of the members of the E.S.T. try to follow a system of Yoga in their own fashion, guided in this only by the rare hints they find in Theosophical books and magazines, which must naturally be incomplete, I chose of the best expositions ever written upon ancient occult works, “Nature’s Finer Forces,” in order to point out how very easily one can be misled by their blinds.⁴²

**There are no extant works on
effective and safe practice and
those purporting to be
are full of blinds.**

Now, what I have to say here is addressed especially to those members who are anxious to develop powers by “sitting for Yoga.” You see, from what has been already said, that in the development of Rāja-Yoga, no extant works made public are of the least good; they can at best give inklings of Hatha-Yoga, something that may develop mediumship at best, and in the worst case — consumption. If those who practice “meditation,” and try to learn the “Science of Breath,” will read attentively “Nature’s Finer Forces,” they will find that it is by utilizing the five Tattvas only that this dangerous science is acquired. [. . .] the two higher Tattvas and their correspondences are ignored and excluded; and — as they are the chief factors in Rāja-Yoga — no spiritual or intellectual phenomena of highest nature can take place;⁴³

**“ . . . I strongly advise you to
give up all yoga practices,
which in almost all cases have
disastrous results unless
guided by a competent
teacher.”**

. . . The concussions and explosions in your head are evidences that you are in no fit condition to try yoga practices, for these effects result from lesions of the brain, *i.e.*, from the bursting of the very minute brain cells. I am glad you have written to me upon this matter, that I may have an opportunity of warning you. Also, I advise you to discontinue concentration on the vital centres, which again may prove dangerous unless under the guidance of a teacher. You have learnt, to a certain degree, the power of

⁴¹ Horace: *Epistolæ* 1, 11, 28; (Quod petis hic est, est Ulubris, animus si te non deficit æquus.) — *King’s quotation* 4780

⁴² *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (E.S. INSTRUCTION No. III) XII p. 606

⁴³ *Ibid.* (E.S. INSTRUCTION No. III) XII pp. 612-13



concentration, and the greatest help will now come to you from concentration upon the Higher Self, and aspiration toward the Higher Self. Also, if you will take some subject or sentence from the *Bhagavad Gītā*, and concentrate your mind upon that and meditate upon it, you will find much good result from it, and there is no danger in such concentration.⁴⁴

For the uninitiated, “sitting for yoga” is invariably fatal.



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Genuine concentration and meditation, *conscious* and *cautious*, upon one's lower self in the light of the inner divine man and the Pāramitās, is an excellent thing. But to “sit for Yoga,” with only a superficial and often distorted knowledge of the real practice, is almost invariably fatal: for ten to one the student will either develop mediumistic powers in himself or lose time and get disgusted both with practice and theory. Before one rushes into such a dangerous experiment and seeks to go beyond a minute examination of one's lower self and *its* walk in life, or that which is called in our phraseology, “The Chela's Daily Life Ledger,” he would do well to learn at least the difference between the two aspects of “Magic,” the White or Divine, and the Black or Devilish, and assure himself that by “*sitting for Yoga*,” with no experience, as well as with no guide to show him the dangers, he does not cross daily and hourly the boundaries of the Divine to fall into the Satanic.⁴⁶

It encourages mental passivity which, in turn, aids the development of mediumistic states where one can readily fall prey to the “caprice and malice of mischievous embryos of human beings.”

Of course, contemplation, as usually understood, is not without its minor advantages. It develops one set of physical faculties as gymnastics does the muscles. For the purposes of physical mesmerism, it is good enough; but it can in no way help the development of the psychological faculties as the thoughtful reader will perceive. At the same time, even for ordinary purposes, the practice can never be too well guarded. If, as some suppose, they have to be entirely passive and lose themselves in the object before them, they should remember that by thus encouraging passivity, they, in fact, allow the development of mediumistic faculties in themselves. As was repeatedly stated — the Adept and the Medium are

⁴⁴ *Judge Letters*, II (ON OCCULT PHILOSOPHY) p. 115

⁴⁵ *The False Mirror* (1928) René Magritte

⁴⁶ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (E.S. INSTRUCTION No. III) XII pp. 603-4; [on whether concentration is beneficial.]



DOWN TO EARTH SERIES
COMMON MEANINGS OF MEDITATION AND CONTEMPLATION

the two Poles: while the former is intensely active and thus able to control the elemental forces, the latter is intensely passive, and thus incurs the risk of falling a prey to the caprice and malice of mischievous embryos of human beings, and — the Elementaries.⁴⁷



⁴⁷ Eek S. "CONTEMPLATION I." In: *Dāmodar and the Pioneers of the Theosophical Movement*. Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1965; pp. 393-94



Common and other meanings of meditation and contemplation

There are subtle differences between the two terms but, in practice, they are often used interchangeably and with additional words to denote the *prolonged, effortful thinking* which is implicit:

- **Consideration** Gr. θεωρησις | L. considerare, perhaps originally a term of augury, from con- and sidus, sideris, star. | The process of giving careful thought to something. *Chambers English Dictionary & World Web*
- **Contemplation** Gr. διαλογισμός, balancing of accounts, calculation, consideration, debate, argument, discussion. *Liddell & Scott* | L. contemplari, -atus, to mark out carefully a templum or place for auguries, from con-, signifying completeness, and templum. *Chambers English Dictionary* | 1. A long and thoughtful observation. 2. A calm, lengthy intent, consideration. *World Web*
- **Meditation** Gr. διαλογισμός (v.s.) | Gr. στοχασμός, aiming at, endeavouring after, guessing. *Liddell & Scott* | L. meditari, probably cognate with mederi, to heal. *Chambers English Dictionary* | 1. Continuous and profound contemplation or musing on a subject or series of subjects of a deep or abstruse nature *i.e.*, “the habit of meditation is the basis for all real knowledge.” 2. Contemplation of spiritual matters, usually on religious or philosophical subjects. *World Web*
- **Musing** | Fr. muser to loiter, in oFr. to muse; perhaps originally to hold the muzzle in the air, as a dog that has lost the scent; perhaps influenced by Muse. A calm, lengthy, intent consideration, to reflect in silence, to be mentally abstracted or absorbed in thought, contemplation. *Chambers English Dictionary & World Web*
- **Recollectness** Gr. περισυλλογή, αναπόλησις | [L. recolligere, to gather again or gather up, from colligere. To recall to memory. *Chambers English Dictionary*
- **Reflection** Gr. συλλογισμός, αντανάκλασις | L. reflectere, reflexum, from flectare, to bend. A calm, lengthy, intent consideration. *Chambers English Dictionary & World Web*
- **Syllogism** Gr. συλλογισμός | Metaphorically, collectedness or presence of mind. Contemplation, calculation, reasoning, & Aristotle’s deductive argument in three propositions: two premises and a conclusion. *Liddell & Scott*



Esoteric terms for meditation proper summed-up

- **Ardent turning of the soul towards the divine** of Plato.
- **Book of Dzyan** or knowledge through meditation.
- **Dan**, now become in modern Chinese and Tibetan phonetics *ch'an*, is the general term for the esoteric schools, and their literature. In the old books, the word *Janna* is defined as “to reform one’s self by meditation and knowledge,” a second *inner* birth. Hence *Dzan*, *Djan* phonetically, the “Book of *Dzyan*.” (*Secret Doctrine*)
- **Dharana**, is the intense and perfect concentration of the mind upon some one interior object, accompanied by complete abstraction from everything pertaining to the external Universe, or the world of the senses. (*Voice of the Silence*)
- **Dhyana** or contemplation. In Buddhism one of the six Paramitas of perfection, a state of abstraction (of which there are four degrees), which carries the ascetic practicing it far above this plane of sensuous perception and out of the world of matter.
- **Ecstasy** of the Philaletheians.
- **Epopteia**, or personal view, the perfect contemplation of Plato.
- **Ishvara** of ancient Yogins.
- **Karuna-Bhawana**, meditation of pity and compassion in Yoga.
- **Manas Sanyama** or perfect concentration of the mind, and control over it, during Yoga practices.
- **Manteia** of Iamblichus.
- **Naljor-ngonsum** or “meditation by self-perception.”
- **Nimitta**, interior illumination developed by the practice of meditation.
- **Patanjali’s Yoga** minus the physical practices is akin to Raja Yoga or Theurgy.
- **Raja-Yoga** or Theosophy’s Royal Union.
- **Samadhi** or ecstatic contemplation of modern Yogins.
- **Samadhindriya**, the organ of ecstatic meditation in Rāj-yoga practices. “The root of concentration”; the fourth of the five roots called Pancha Indriyāni, which are said in esoteric philosophy to be the agents in producing a highly moral life, leading to sanctity and liberation; when these are reached, the two *spiritual roots* lying latent in the body (Atmā and Buddhi) will send out shoots and blossom. (*Theosophical Glossary*)
- **Samatha-vipashyana** or religious abstract meditation.
- **Samtan** or Dhyana, the state of meditation, of which there are four degrees. (*Voice of the Silence*)
- **Silent and unuttered prayer**. (*Key to Theosophy*)



DOWN TO EARTH SERIES
ESOTERIC TERMS FOR MEDITATION PROPER

- **Soul-contemplation**, frequent intercommunication with the Atman.
- **Tapas** or abstraction, meditation.
- **Tchung-kwan** or self-contemplation.
- **Theurgy** of Iamblichus.
- **Union to the Deity** of Plotinus and Apollonius.
- **Vijnana** or internal knowledge.
- **White Magic** or Theurgy.
- **Yoga** or mystic meditation.
- **Zhine-lhag thong** or religious, abstract meditation.



Further reading

- 1 Manly Hall's defining essays on "Concentration and Retrospection," pp. 59-66, and on "The Practice of Meditation," pp. 103-9, in: Hall M.P. *The Phoenix: An Illustrated Review of Occultism and Philosophy*. (1st ed. 1931); Los Angeles: The Philosophical Research Society, Inc, 1975. (Lending copy available upon request.)
- 2 Selections from E.S. INSTRUCTIONS NO. III AND V in: *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, XII pp. 603-6 & 691-94. They are presented in the same Series under the title "Meditation - Dangers, Part 1 of 2."
- 3 THE "ELIXIR OF LIFE" from a Chela's diary by G Mitford.
- 4 IS THE DESIRE TO "LIVE" SELFISH? by HP Blavatsky.
- 5 CONTEMPLATION, a three-part article by DK Mavalankar.

Papers 3 to 5 above cover inter alia meditation proper, the pitfalls of "sitting for yoga," the constitution of a Mahatma's physical body, and practical advice on contemplation. They are presented in the same series under the title "Meditation - Dangers, Part 2 of 2."

The first article, originally published in: *The Theosophist*, was excerpted from *Five Years of Theosophy: Mystical, Philosophical, Historical and Scientific Essays selected from "The Theosophist."* London: Reeves & Turner, 1885; reprinted Los Angeles, The Theosophy Co, 1980; pp. 1-32.

The second, first published in: *The Theosophist*, Vol. V, No. 10 (58), July 1884, pp. 242-43, has been republished in: *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, VI pp. 241-48.

DK Mavalankar's articles, first published in: *The Theosophist*, Vol. V, No. 5, February 1884, pp. 112-14; No. 7, April 1884, pp. 170-71; and No. 11, August 1884, pp. 267-68, have been republished in: Eek S. (Comp. & Annot.). *Dāmodar and the Pioneers of the Theosophical Movement*. Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1965; pp. 388-400.

- 6 Rāma Prasād's *Nature's Finer Forces*, first published in 1889, was republished by Samata Books, Chennai in 1998. (Lending copy available upon request.)

