

The Theosophical Path of *Meditation*

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The Theosophical Society was arguably the first organization in modern times to widely promote meditation in the West. Today more and more people are aware of meditation as an important aspect of the spiritual life, and when they get in touch with Theosophy they want to know what the recommended practice is. Although the Theosophical approach refrains from promoting any particular system of meditation for all people to follow, a wealth of teachings about meditation can be found in the Theosophical literature. In this article we will explore some of the methods recommended.

The Aim

People come to meditation for a wide variety of reasons. Many of them see in it a relaxation technique, or a method to reduce the stress caused by daily living. Others look at it as a way to generate pleasant emotional or psychological states, like peace, harmony, and joy. Others meditate in order to experience visions or to develop psychic powers. But from a Theosophical point of view, meditation has a more transcendental aim. Although its practice may produce some of the effects described above, its real purpose is, as I. K. Taimmi says, "to bring the lower personality in conscious touch with the Higher Self, thus making it increasingly aware of its divine origin, destiny, and nature" (Taimmi, 320). Once that aim is accomplished, its practice can take the aspirant even further. Geoffrey Hodson says: "The second objective [of meditation] is to realise that the Spiritual Self of man is forever an integral part of the Spiritual Self of the Universe" (Hodson, 3).

If one comes to meditation simply to derive physical or psychological benefits, a fairly simple practice can

bring the desired results. This kind of practice is frequently suitable for people beginning to explore meditation. Nevertheless, while it may build the foundation for a deeper approach, in and of itself it may not be enough to enable the aspirant to get in touch with his or her true spiritual Self. In order to attain such a high aim, the practice of meditation has to fulfill certain conditions, as will be presently discussed. In addition, the whole life of the aspirant has to be gradually brought in tune with this lofty purpose. This is why the Theosophical tradition sees meditation as only a part of spiritual practice, which must be accompanied by study, service, self-knowledge, and a general effort towards self-transformation.

Foundations

The first thing that most people ask when approaching this subject is what technique of meditation they should practice. This may not be the best place to begin. Before starting to walk, one should make sure that one is heading in the right direction. Hugh Shearman wrote: "The question, then, is not what technique of meditation is being used, but who is using it, what motivating selfhood has activated this process" (Shearman, 143). As has already been said, Theosophical meditation aims at transcending the personal self. If it is used as a means for personal aggrandizement, it may produce some results at this level, but it is unlikely to have any transcendent effect. It is important to give some thought to this question because spirituality is frequently approached like mundane life—as a process of acquiring. One may not be accumulating objects, but all the same one is trying to acquire virtues, peace, happiness, etc., as personal possessions. While it is true that the development of

virtues is necessary at a certain stage of our spiritual growth, virtues can flower only when they are pursued not for our personal enjoyment but because they are doors through which our real spiritual nature can express itself. Most people do not realize that the personal self is the real source of conflict. Letting go of it and discovering the true Self is the only way to real happiness. In fact, spiritual meditation begins when one is able to leave the personal self behind. Techniques are merely preliminary means to get to this point. One will never be able to reach that point if one comes to meditation trying to acquire something. As Annie Besant said: "Meditation means this opening out of the soul to the Divine and letting the Divine shine in without obstruction from the personal self. Therefore it means renunciation. It means throwing away everything that one has, and waiting empty for the light to come in" (Besant, *The Building of the Kosmos*, 119). Thus, in the Theosophical approach, the practice of meditation aims at leading the aspirant to a state where he or she must leave behind the personal self and all mental processes to get in touch with his or her spiritual nature.

All serious spiritual traditions talk about the need for physical, moral, and mental preparation in order to be able to meditate effectively. The Theosophical tradition also emphasizes as part of spiritual practice the gradual adoption of a pure and healthy lifestyle; the development of emotional maturity, which comes from moral living and lessening our attachments, passions, and lower desires; the cultivation of an understanding of oneself and the universe; and the development of an unselfish attitude. This, of course, does not mean that one cannot meditate starting right from where one is at this moment. On the contrary, when the approach is holistic, the practice of meditation will aid the efforts in these areas, and vice versa.

Methods

Meditation on Spiritual Concepts

In this approach, the practitioner chooses a relevant spiritual subject and employs all his or her mental powers to deeply ponder, inquire, and reflect on it. When a process of inquiry takes place with a very focused and calm mind, there is the possibility of awakening spiritual intuition. But for this to happen, there has to be an effort to grasp the truth of the subject in its more universal aspect. C. Jinarajadasa said: "As the mind contemplates the facts which have been brought into a framework of unity, there dawns on the mind the new faculty of intuition. Consciousness then understands the true and inner nature of all that is present before the mind" (Jinarajadasa, *The New Humanity of Intuition*, 23).

This is a good method for beginners. This deep inquiry stimulates the higher or abstract mind, which

perceives spiritual realities and receives the flashes of intuition. Thus meditation on spiritual concepts provides insights into the reality of life and into oneself, gradually producing wisdom.

Some central Theosophical themes to meditate on are the unity of all life, the law of karma, spiritual evolution as the purpose of life, the power of thought, and the real Self beyond the temporary vehicles of consciousness. One can also meditate on spiritual aphorisms. A collection of them may be found in books like *Thoughts for Aspirants*, *Gifts of the Lotus*, among others. There are also inspirational books like *At the Feet of the Master*, *Light on the Path*, and *The Voice of the Silence* that can be used for this purpose.

Meditation on Virtues

Theosophical literature explains that every thought and feeling one entertains attracts subtle matter that builds one's emotional and mental bodies. Through these bodies one thinks, feels, perceives the world, and reacts to it. Meditation on a virtue will gradually purify the subtle bodies and enable them to vibrate in response to higher and more refined emotions and aspirations. In addition, this type of meditation helps expand consciousness through insights into the nature of the virtues. Remember, however, that when we meditate on a virtue, we should do it with humility—out of love of, and devotion to, that particular expression of Truth, and not out of greed to acquire it.

For this type of meditation, you may choose any virtue that attracts you—a quality that you believe a spiritual aspirant should have. Alternatively, you may examine your character to identify a distinct shortcoming you want to be free of. In this case, you should not meditate on the weakness itself but on its opposite virtue. Thus, if you are irritable, you may meditate on patience. But you must examine yourself and try to go to the root of the problem. For example, if you are not truthful, you would naturally think you should meditate on truth. But if you are not truthful because you are anxious about being accepted by others, you may want to meditate on courage or on self-confidence.

Once you choose the virtue, you can meditate, first, by trying to realize its essence. Then try to perceive this virtue inside of you as well as the inner obstacles that are hindering its expression. Finally, you can meditate on how this virtue would express itself in your life, in general or in specific situations.

In addition to the above technique, there is a different approach that involves the use of imagination. Here, you visualize yourself as the embodiment of the virtue. Annie Besant describes this process: "One favourite way of mine—for I was very irritable in my younger days—... was making myself an embodiment of patience; you never saw such a saint as I was in my meditation; whatever I might have been outside of it during the day, I was

absolutely, completely, and perfectly patient in it! Then I brought up round me mentally all the most unpleasant and provoking people that I knew, and I heightened their power of provocation as much as I increased my own power of patience; and so I made a little mental drama, in which they provoked me in every possible way, and I answered as a modern Griselda" (Besant, *Man's Life in This and Other Worlds*, 61).

As Besant indicates, this technique requires that one strive to express that virtue as much as possible in daily life, so that the process of building the subtle bodies is not undone during the rest of the day.

Meditation on the One Life

One of the central concepts in Theosophy is that ultimately there is only one life and one Self animating everything in the universe. Although consciousness in most people is constrained to work through what they call "me," this limit is not intrinsic to consciousness itself. It is perfectly possible to perceive the one life as it manifests in any creature because there is no real boundary to consciousness, as many mystics have said.

At the beginning of the practice, the perception of unity may be mainly at an intellectual level, or at the level of the imagination. Gradually, this perception becomes more and more intuitive until an actual expansion of consciousness may be experienced.

A typical approach to this meditation involves an expansion of mind, in imagination, in all space, embracing larger and larger areas. As the mind expands, one tries to conceive and feel the unity with all, including every manifestation of the divine life.

You may start by imagining that you are looking at your house from above while trying to feel unity with all people that live there—whether you feel affinity for them or not. You can then include those who frequently visit the house, as well as other forms of life there, such as pets, birds, insects, and plants. Do not focus on the forms, but think of the divine life that is animating them all. Take your time in this step until you feel ready to go further. Then, as if zooming out, go higher, above the town you are in. Try to feel unity with everything that is there; with good people as well as with the ignorant, the unhappy, and the criminal; with both beautiful and ugly places. Again, disregard the outward appearances and try to identify with the one life that is struggling to express itself through all these different forms. As C. W. Leadbeater wrote: "During meditation one may try to think of the Supreme Self in everything, and everything in it. Try to understand how the Self is endeavouring to express itself through the form" (Leadbeater, 142). Remember that the universal Self is always perfect, pure, and divine, even if the form obstructs and distorts its manifestation.

In this same way, go higher until you include your country, then the whole world, then the solar system,

and finally the entire universe. But remember not to hurry through the different steps. You do not need to go through them all. It is more important to do your best to realize the unity at each step, including in your consciousness all the different elements that belong to each stage.

Meditation on a Divine Being

During this meditation the aspirant puts before his or her mental eye an ideal of perfection, embodied in the form of a holy or divine being. In the Theosophical tradition the object of meditation is usually a Master of Wisdom, or the Higher Self. But aspirants can also meditate on any deity, sage, or holy person toward whom they feel devotion.

For this meditation to be effective, it is necessary to be careful not to project one's own limitations, such as feelings of jealousy, partisanship, anger, or selfishness, onto the divine being. Otherwise it will not be possible to get in rapport with the divine. Mahatma Morya warns about "the magnetism and invisible results proceeding from erroneous and sincere beliefs." Thoughts are living things, and when an aspirant holds a wrong belief, it "attracts millions of foreign influences, living entities and powerful agents around them" that block spiritual influences (Barker and Chin, 95).

Theosophists were the first in the West to talk clearly and openly about the Masters of Wisdom, more than a century ago. Today there are all kinds of incompatible ideas about them. For example, the New Age idea of "Ascended Masters" has features that differ in very important aspects from the Theosophical one. While this is a complex subject, basically the New Age treats the Master as if he were an acquaintance of ours, but endowed with supernatural powers so that one can ask him things for one's personal needs. Thus, in this view one can summon him, visit him whenever one wants, and so on, as if the Masters were just hanging out on the inner planes. HPB once wrote a letter to certain members who had begun to conceive of them in this way, saying that they were desecrating the Masters by doing this. She contended that the Masters regard this physical plane as an illusion and do not care much about the personality. Their work is mainly at the level of the developing Higher Ego, and they engage with the physical plane in a very limited way, and only if it is really necessary. Consequently, in the Theosophical view their personalities (bodies, names, etc.) are not as important as they are in the New Age. The external attributes are taken just as the shadow of that magnificent state of consciousness that the Master really is.

To use the Master of Wisdom as the object of meditation, it is first recommended that one study about their nature as described in Theosophical literature. The first chapters of the book *The Way of the Disciple* by Clara Codd can be a good place to start.

For this meditation you can proceed in two ways:

Visualize the holy figure in front of you and concentrate your mind on the image with a feeling of love or devotion, or try to feel *one* with this being. If the feeling of devotion is not particularly strong, you may deeply ponder on the real nature of the divine being, while contemplating its image. If you are unable to form a clear and stable image, there are two additional options: either concentrate on the *feeling* of the holy presence before you, or meditate with your eyes open while looking at a picture, statuette, or symbol of the object of meditation.

Alternatively, the holy figure may be visualized in the region of the heart. Mahatma Koot Hoomi is reported to have said: "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" (quoted in Blavatsky, 12:696). The heart is highly regarded in most spiritual traditions. Blavatsky wrote: "The Heart is the organ of the Spiritual Consciousness . . . [It] is the abode of the Spiritual Man, whereas the Psycho-Intellectual Man dwells in the Head" (Blavatsky, 12:694). It is important to understand, however, that here the heart does not mean the physical muscle. It refers to a nonphysical center situated in that region of the body through which we can contact spiritual consciousness. The figure can be visualized either in the cavity of the heart or just outside the body, at the level of the physical organ, where the subtler etheric center is found.

Meditation on the Subtle Bodies and Beyond

The last method that will be explored is based on the Theosophical teaching of the subtle bodies. Therefore, a fairly good grasp of this subject will greatly help the process of meditation. According to Theosophy, besides the physical body human beings possess several subtle bodies: the emotional, mental, and causal. The physical, emotional, and mental bodies compose the personal—or lower—ego. Beyond the personality there is the causal body, which is the vehicle of the individual soul, also called the *Higher Ego*. Even beyond the causal body there is the spirit or *Monad*, the divine spark in

each person that is one with the universe. In his *Meditation on Life*, N. Sri Ram wrote:

The first object in meditation is to discover one's own Spiritual Selfhood as distinct from the personal vehicle, physical, emotional, mental, and the consciousness active within them. So we begin with an exercise in dissociation seeking both to realize the distinction between the Immortal Spiritual Self and the mortal changing personality. We then come to realize that the Spiritual Self of man is forever an integral part of the Spiritual Self of the universe, the All-Pervading Supreme Lord. Man is One with God and through THAT with All that lives.

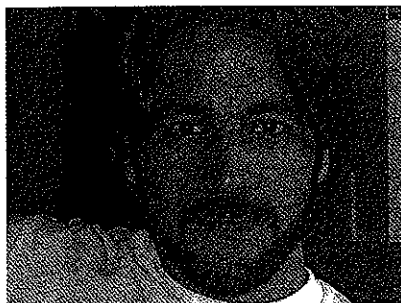
There are two general approaches to this type of meditation, which can be called "positive" and "negative." The positive approach seeks to generate the highest possible vibration in each body so as to progressively raise the level of consciousness. For example, first try to generate a sense of health and harmony at the physical level; next go to the emotional level and feel peace and love; and then go to the mental level and think of any spiritual concept that is appealing. Now go even further and picture yourself as being the Higher Ego in the causal body. Feel that your real Identity is beyond the body, emotions, and mind. Finally, try to realize that you are an inseparable spark of the divine fire, and dwell on the feeling of unity.

The negative approach, as its name suggests, is based on a process of negation. With this practice, try to realize that you are not the lower principles, leaving behind one body after the other. Realize that, since the physical body is not eternal, this cannot be your real Self. Do the same with your emotional and mental bodies, leaving behind emotions and thoughts. Finally, stay in the highest possible state without picturing anything, but waiting for the higher consciousness to arrive.

This meditation helps generate the habit of identifying yourself with the higher. This should be complemented in daily life with an effort to perceive things beyond the personal point of view.

This article offers just an overview of a few methods of meditation recommended in the Theosophical literature. For further information and material you can visit the Web site www.dyzantheosophy.org.

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