



Meditation

A Short Course to Higher Consciousness

by Stephen Knapp

This booklet provides an essential description of the process of meditation, from its basic purpose to the preparations and techniques, asanas, pranayama exercises, the use of mantras, and the means for enlightenment and ultimate liberation. It also gives information about which processes are most recommended, and gives the average person a quick understanding on how to begin and what to expect, and how to get the most out of it.

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Chapter 1

The Purpose of Meditation

Everyone is looking for happiness in some way. It is our natural state of being. However, we need to understand that the real source of fulfillment lies within us. We may try so many ways to attain external happiness for the mind and senses, but that means of success is always elusive.

The Self exists within all of us in purity, peace, bliss, and knowledge, and is free from mundane and temporary forms of happiness, sadness, or any mundane conditions. To attain that inner state we must turn inward, and one of the prominent ways of doing that is through meditation.

There are numerous ways to meditate, and each school of thought seems to have a different system. These can include the Buddhist process, such as the Noble Eight-fold Path for reaching nirvana. Or there is the raja-yoga process, the ashtanga-yoga process, the kundalini-yoga system, and so on. It also seems that new systems are being developed on a regular basis these days, not only for achieving peace of mind, but to develop such things as one's creativity, prosperity, or mental clarity.

However, we are going to focus on the ultimate goal of meditation, which is to reach a higher consciousness for realizing our true spiritual identity and awareness of God. Meditation can help accomplish many things. But without understanding the true and full purpose of meditation, it is like digging a well for water without being aware of the fact that you are sitting next to a river. In such a state, you do not know the full potential you really have through the meditative process. Deep meditation that is free from the affects of the mind culminates in self-awareness and spiritual realization. That is the ultimate and age old purpose of meditation.

The meditation process begins with the means for calming the mind. That is the first principle of consideration. It is the state beyond the influence of the mind in which a person can first begin to perceive the spiritual dimension. Meditation is meant to bring our outward awareness, which always focuses on the activities of our senses, inward toward the Self. This is our true identity and source of consciousness, and a part of the unlimited Absolute Truth.

Too much focus on the external world keeps you from your inner Self, from your spirit. The doorway to discovering a new you, a new dimension of your Self, is within. You have to learn how to go within and then keep practicing to go deeper. Often times we look outside ourselves for completion--a new object, a new career, a new relationship, a new outlet of creativity. But that will never make you a complete and whole person if you are not already complete and whole within. Furthermore, you will never be fully satisfied with your life if you are not full within yourself.

When we talk about being happy, sad, or peaceful, that feeling exists primarily in the mind. As it is said, it is the mind that is the cause of either our freedom or our bondage to material existence. The attitude and demands of the mind are what has brought society into great levels of progress, as well as into horrible eras of wars and terror. Meditation is a way to gain some control over the restless mind and direct its energy into constructive channels of purpose, or toward a spiritual object or higher understanding and awareness.

Many people look to meditation to achieve peace of mind. This benefit takes place when the constant internal dialogue that goes on within us begins to die down. That happens when our attention becomes increasingly focused within, toward a single object or level of awareness. The contentment and happiness we feel comes from the inner awareness of our real identity that increases the deeper we go within. Therein we can also become free from the problems that go on around us. We can free ourselves from the drama that we may too often accept as our real identity.

So meditation starts with calming and centering the mind, turning it within to bring it home. Thereafter it is the process of connecting to your inner Self and getting to know the real you, and to make inner realities a part of everyday life. It leads to infinite possibilities waiting to be discovered, waiting to emerge from within us. It can help clear away the emotional blues, limitations and hang ups. As you tune in you'll be able to see a fuller spectrum of life and its possibilities. A new energy can come into your life for inspiration and transformation.

Meditation can undo the complexities that bind and twist our lives, and make us feel less than full and fulfilled. It can give us the insight to perceive more clearly our place in the universe and our connectedness to all things. It can bring spiritual harmony and contentment within us that helps us find a self-sufficient happiness wherever we go. Yoga and meditation is the way we can gain insights and answers through experience rather than mere mental speculation or philosophical research. Tapping into new possibilities and perspectives in this way also gives us the chance to open the door to more ideas about our situation or problems at hand.

As the center of the senses, the mind's business is to always look for happiness by deciphering what is pleasant or unpleasant, happy or sad, comfortable or uncomfortable, wanted or unwanted, and to dream of what is desirable and think of how to avoid what is undesirable. When the mind acquires what it wants, it and the senses are often satisfied for a while. It is like being totally diverted by the taste of a good meal. Or when you are fully focused on the story in a movie, all other thoughts are gone, or simply not allowed entrance into your consideration. But when the meal or movie is finished, the mood of the mind changes and then it wants something else. For example, you first may feel that the stomach needs filling. It wants to eat. Then it thinks of what it wants to eat. Maybe a pizza. Then the intelligence kicks in to plan how to get it. Then once it gets the pizza, the stomach, tongue, and mind are content. But then it wants something to drink, not just anything, but a drink that tastes good and supplies tingle to the tongue. Once you get that, then there is some satisfaction for the tongue and mind, which are dictating to you what you should get. Plus, they also translate the sensation on the tongue as to whether it is pleasant or exciting enough. If it is, then maybe you feel happy. Or is it merely the mind being temporarily calm that makes you feel a little content? But then after the pizza and drink are finished, the mind begins to suggest something else, like maybe some ice cream. Wouldn't that be nice? And away you go again. Another thought develops into a desire, and then another desire needs to be fulfilled. It never ends.

So meditation is the process of reaching that source of joy, happiness and contentment that is within you that does not require the constant pleasing of the mind. This process can help us learn how to live in peace.

The first step is concentration which is a focused or even forced awareness of something. Then comes meditation, which is a natural flow of thought and absorption toward an object or state of being.

When one becomes successful at meditation, you can reach that state of consciousness that is completely beyond the effects of the mind. This is a state of super consciousness, beyond mind and the influence of time, space, body and ego. Or beyond the sense of separation from ourselves and the object of meditation.

Meditation also helps heal the mind of imbalances and habitual thought patterns that need to be corrected. Regular practice of meditation helps streamline one's energies towards the true understanding of life and our spiritual purpose. It helps us separate ourselves from the illusory drama that goes on all around us, and realize that we all are a higher identity. It is through this means that we unveil the layers of ignorance that cover our own divinity.

I have always said that the doorway to higher levels of exploration is there within us. They are only waiting for us to open them. Meditation is that gate which helps open us to the Infinite.

Ultimately, the purpose of yoga and meditation is to discover and realize our true spiritual nature. It is not merely to keep the body fit or enhance our material life. This, however, takes place automatically with the sincere practice of yoga, but it is only a sideline to the spiritual realizations that is the real goal. Cutting through the layers of ignorance and lack of understanding who we really are, and realizing our eternal and blissful spiritual identity, is the real purpose of any spiritual path, especially of yoga and meditation. It rids us of the inherent feelings of fear, inadequacy and insecurity that we often encounter while living in this unstable world.

TWO TYPES OF MEDITATION

When it comes to meditation, there are two basic types, the Saguna (meditating on something with qualities like a mantra, a deity, a yantra, a picture, symbol or object) and Nirguna (something without qualities like a concept of the Absolute). Nirguna meditation is more difficult. Even Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavad-Gita* explains that advancement for one who meditates on the impersonal aspect of the Absolute is very difficult and not advisable. That is because, in essence, our spiritual and material nature is individual. We are parts and parcels of the Supreme, the same in spiritual nature. In that respect we are all one in spiritual quality, but we do not have the same quantity or potency as the Supreme.

PROBLEMS IN THE MEDITATION PROCESS

Problems that most people have in being unable to make satisfactory progress in meditation usually comes from a lack of seriousness, sufficient purity, and especially a lack of sense control. The downward tendencies from uncontrolled senses and wrong habits in life make the mind too disturbed and restless. A person may sit down to meditate, physically unmoving, but the mind may be in a whirl, thinking of so many issues, and protesting and straining against doing meditation. This is what often makes it a frustrating and tiring experience.

For such people it may be better to go on to mantra meditation and focus the mind on something in particular, like the mantra, rather than trying to completely still the mind in order to achieve stable and fixed concentration

for self-reflection and inward meditation. Mantra meditation is also an extremely beneficial form of meditation and is actually recommended in this age of Kali-yuga more so than the form of meditation we are presently discussing. So we will discuss mantra meditation more thoroughly later in this book.

MANTRA MEDITATION

Most people that are new to meditation may sit, go through the steps for preparation, try the techniques, and still remain focused on feelings of the body, thoughts and ideas, or sounds that are heard. In fact, it is understood that most people in this age of Kali-yuga can hardly sit quietly for even ten minutes or calm their mind. That is why it is recommended that they use the process of mantra meditation to more easily focus their mind and attention on something, like the vibration of the mantra, and then, by placing their focus on the mantra, remove their attention from distractions and sensual inclinations or stimuli.

The word "mantra" means to deliver (*tra*) the mind (*mana*), and it is one of the easiest methods to use. The mantra itself, depending on which one used, often incorporates a vibrational formula to call various energies or powers to oneself, or to awaken one to higher states of awareness and perception and realizations. In this way, layers of illusion and confusion are peeled away giving one clarity and focus. So a few techniques of mantra meditation are included later.

STARTING THE PROCESS

When you feel you are ready to begin a spiritual discipline, you have to ask yourself if you are serious. Have you decided that you really want to be spiritually awakened during this lifetime? Are you ready to be committed? Is spiritual progress the primary importance in your life? Are you ready to change your lifestyle in the necessary ways to assist in whatever mental, psychological, intellectual and physical transformations are necessary? If so, then begin with steady determination.

When beginning to engage in meditation, one of the first experiences you may have will be an attractive state of mental calm. As one engages in regular sessions of meditation, it may provide a private but privileged form of refined pleasure that will bring the distaste toward the more mundane forms of happiness in material existence. With a higher sense of Self awareness, one may attain a higher set of values. Thus, it becomes easier for a person to follow a more balanced and wholesome way of life, and avoid those actions that may cause distractions and lack conduciveness to spiritual advancement.

The spiritual path is often one of inner singleness of purpose and may thus require one to appear as if alone and independent from the influences that affect so much of the rest of society. This does not mean that one will be lonely, but one must be determined to fulfill the real purpose of life. We have to understand that people who are completely absorbed in material affairs are in need of awakening with spiritual knowledge from holy beings. Most people will not be interested, but we need to help bring such light and wisdom to humanity. And we have to make the decision to be one those people.

Furthermore, we should not feel that we need to be recognized for whatever spiritual progress we make in our practice. We should know that our spiritual awareness will contribute to the collective human consciousness throughout the world. It is said that to move one grain of sand on a beach is to change the face of the world. Similarly, we may also do outward activities to help humanity, but the consistent upliftment of our own consciousness can certainly and subtly affect the world, especially those within our sphere of our activities.

Of course, it can be difficult at times to deal with normal frustrations or problems of existence, as well as with people who are spiritually stagnant and unawake, or who have dismal attitudes toward life. However, with applied spiritual knowledge and growth, living a constructive life with a positive attitude, in spite of whatever challenges come our way, will be a natural by-product of our inner development.

If we are successful on the spiritual path, we will become aware of what we really are and have been all along. As we attain higher states of consciousness, there will be revealed new ways of knowing ourselves, and loftier ways of perceiving and relating to the world around us. We may ultimately uncover our own divine Self. It is merely a question of becoming free of the wrong and distracting and misleading thoughts, feelings and actions. Those are things which keep us tied to the wrong image of who we are, and the temporary and fleeting level of reality. You simply need to apply yourself with faith to the *sadhana*, the spiritual practice at hand. And do not judge yourself by your progress or how much or how little you have attained in realizations or awareness. Do not expect to be seeing bright lights and hearing cosmic sounds as a means to judge your progress. Such things may mean you are on your way, but that is still not the goal. You have to reach much further than that. We often progress in simple ways more than we have realized. Most people will merely slide quietly into perfection with little notice of any miracles or spectacular results. It is like eating a meal and afterwards you simply know, without much thinking about it, that you are no longer hungry.

Meditation becomes easier and more joyous when there is sure and simple faith and love for God. After all, any success in spiritual life depends not only on our own determination and sincerity, but also on the grace of the Supreme. In all your spiritual progress, including meditation, devotion to God is one of the most profound aids to your success and direction. It helps keep your spiritual purpose in focus, and helps prevent you from becoming self-serving and egotistical in the view of yourself. The more humble your devotion is to God in your practice will certainly result in a more complete level of realization.

It's been said that the mind is like a pond. When the concentration is on one object, it is as if one throws a single stone into the water and you observe beautiful rings expanding out from one point on a smooth surface. When there are a multitude of thoughts, it is like many stones hitting the surface of the lake, and ripples are going all over, running into each other, making any sort of clear reflection off the surface of the water impossible. Similarly, when the mind is full of thoughts it is impossible for any deep awareness to manifest, or any deeper reflection about oneself to take place. And this is the way the mind exists most of the time. In that condition, all we can do is attend to one thought before another breaks through, whether we like it or not. Thus, we are continuously forced to deal with the constant agitation of the mind, as if it is pulled by our senses, desires, goals, dreams, attachments, aversions, or attempts to serve the demands of others. In such a situation, where is there any peace?

So the basis of meditation is to reach a state of being free from this agitation, to calm the mind, like allowing the surface of the pond to become smooth after stopping the throwing of any stones into it. Then once the surface becomes smooth, we can begin to see the reflection on the surface of our Self, our true nature of *sat-chit-ananda*, eternity, full knowledge and bliss. However, the real goal of meditation is to not only see the reflection, but to go deep enough wherein we make direct contact with our real, spiritual identity. Steady contact with the Self is not only meditation but becomes *samadhi*, an uninterrupted absorption in our real constitutional position of being a spiritual being, *jivatma*. Then we actually begin to enter into that higher and eternal awareness of who and what we are and where we are going in this life.

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Chapter 2

Preparation for Meditation

The beauty of meditation is that you need no special equipment. You do not need to go anywhere special, or be a member of a fitness club or have certain machines to work with. You only need your own mind.

First we hear about who we are from higher authorities, such as a spiritual teacher. Then we reflect on what we have heard and understood. Then we engage in meditation to allow the knowledge to unfold or manifest in our awareness. In this way, meditation acts as a channel to allow contact between the individual soul and the Supersoul, Paramatma, within us.

In the first few weeks or months of meditation, the mind may not be willing to cooperate. You may have to spend time disciplining it. As you observe your concerns and the turbulence that goes on within the mind, you may be surprised that you even have such thoughts. Later, however, the mind will become more easily subdued, with fewer thoughts. And finally, after some experience, it may not take any time at all for you to calm and quiet the mind, which will become more accommodating for you to go beyond its influence.

If you have your own house or apartment, it will be nice to have a separate or special room in which you do your meditation, yoga, or prayers and worship. Keep it sanctified with holy pictures, incense, maybe some candles, or flowers. Use it only for this purpose. Then go in when you have the proper time to engage in serious yoga, prayers or meditation. Only allow into it those who share the same interest and vibrations as you. Keep the vibration of holiness in it. Get so that whenever you enter the room, that vibration will uplift you. Furthermore, when you have practiced your sacred activities in the room and imbibed the holy atmosphere, learn to carry that holy vibration with you throughout the day.

Beginners can practice meditation 2, 3 or 4 times a week until they get accustomed to the routine and the habit of taking time out just for themselves. Then you can practice everyday, even twice a day. It is the time to be with yourself everyday.

WHEN TO MEDITATE

Traditionally it is accepted that the best time to engage in any spiritual practice is before sunrise, during the *brahma-muhurta* hour as it is called. This is the time when you are often the most clear, and before you begin the course of the day and the mind becomes cluttered with concerns and activities. It is often quiet at this time, and your mind is also the most peaceful. Furthermore, early meditation prepares you for whatever else may happen through the day.

However, for beginners it can be best to do your *sadhana* or spiritual practice whenever you can. Evening meditation can also be very good, especially to calm yourself after a busy day and realize or bring yourself back to the real you, that you are only within the body and separate from the seemingly crazy drama that goes on around you.

The main point is to try and pick a time once or twice a day and be consistent about it. It should be a discipline that becomes a normal part of your day. This makes for steady spiritual progress, in spite of whatever else may happen. It is also the way to train the mind to conquer itself and enter increasingly deeper states of awareness and concentration.

OVERCOMING THE IMPEDIMENTS

The *Bhagavad-gita* explains that there are six major impediments to meditation, or spiritual progress in general, that reside within each of us. It requires self-inquiry to see where these obstacles affect us the most. These are *kama* (sensual desire), *krodha* (anger), *lobha* (greed), *moha* (delusion), *mada* (pride), and *matsarya* (jealousy). Again, these are functions or feelings that exist within the mind. When we are functioning only on the *mayic* plane, under the influence of the mind and senses, these feelings are at constant play to varying degrees. Spiritual progress means that these must be controlled and not controllers of us. However, we cannot falsely suppress these, or they will crop up in some other more damaging manner. But we must explore how they affect us and why. We must sublimate them by rising above their influence. This can be done by using meditation to perceive the difference between our mental existence and our internal and spiritual existence. The more spiritual we become, the less we are affected by these six enemies of spiritual progress, and the less we need to exist on the mental and sensual plane, which is also like the instinctual or habitual level.

The habitual thought patterns that are so often given free reign are the impulses which make us act with little thought behind it. This is what needs to be corrected. Observance of such thoughts and meditation to rise above it is the process to overcome such a base level of existence.

BASIC ELEMENTS OF THE PRACTICE

The basic practice of meditation also incorporates the eight steps known as *yama* (restraints), *niyama* (positive developments), *asanas* (postures), *pranayama* (breath and psychic energy control), *pratyahara* (withdrawal of the senses), *dharana* (focused attention), and then comes *dhyana* (meditation) followed by *samadhi* (a perfect flow of attention on something that provides a superconscious experience).

To explain each of these briefly, *yama* is moral discipline. This also consists of a series of steps that include *ahimsa* (nonviolence toward all creatures), *satya* (truthfulness in thought, word and deed, and not hurting anyone by one's words), *asteya* (nonstealing and avoiding that which is harmful to spiritual merit), *brahmacharya* (control of sensual passions in thought, word and deed), and *aparigraha* (the renunciation of that which is not necessary).

Niyama means to cultivate *shaucha* (cleanliness), *santosha* (contentment with what one has without undue endeavor), *tapas* (voluntary austerity and tolerance in body, mind and speech for a higher cause), *svadhyaya* (scriptural study and reflection), and *ishvara-pranidhana* (offering the fruits of actions to God). *Yama* and *Niyama* together are like basic moral values that one must have if he or she expects to go further while expecting any genuine results.

Asanas are the disciplines of using steady and comfortable postures which will be suitable for meditation and toning the body for the correct flow of *prana*, or psychic energy. This is used with *pranayama*, the controlled breathing and holding of breaths in a systematic way. This helps to bring the mind under control, or calms the mind, and also builds or stores the *prana* or life-force within the body for preparing the consciousness for higher awareness. This process always uses what is called *rechaka* (exhalation), *puraka* (inhalation) and then *kumbhaka* (retention). This is a whole system by itself, but can be quite simple. So we have included a few basic *pranayama* exercises for you to use.

Pratyahara is next, which is the withdrawing of the senses from the external stimuli that often creates distractions in the mind and one's concentration. Once the senses are under control, or no longer providing input to the mind, or maybe we should say that when the mind is no longer accepting such input, then there can be *dharana*.

It is said that when there is the cessation of the ingoing and outgoing breaths, there is an unbroken continuity of *kumbhaka* or retention. This is the Gap in between breaths and body functions, and in between thoughts, in which there is the potential for full awareness outside the influence or affects of the mind. It is this Gap where there is freedom from any distractions and in which there is the suitable situation for *dharana*.

It is the activity of the mind which forces our interplay with the *mayic* plane of existence. Through the use of intelligence and wisdom, the individual must make the mind stable and tranquil. When the mind is no longer concerned with the past or future, but focused only on the present moment in an effortless way, then suffering and sorrow will vanish. It is this restraint of the mind's activities that will help bring about the freedom from further bondage to the wheel of time and material concerns.

Dharana is reached after the body has been prepared through *asanas*, and the mind has been treated with *pranayama*. *Dharana* is the fixed attention toward a single point or object, or state of awareness. This is the area that is probably the hardest for anyone to achieve in this day and age. The mind is accustomed to wandering about and to think or dwell on anything. So it is not easy to fix the mind on any one object or thought. Most people tend to give up on meditation at this level if it is too difficult. This is another reason why meditation may be easy to dabble in but most difficult to use for substantial spiritual progress. In *dharana* there may still be the sense of the person, the object of meditation, and the process of meditation. However, in *dharana* there is the potential for *dhyana*, real and absorbed meditation.

Dhyana takes place when *dharana* becomes sharpened. In *dhyana*, when the consciousness is free from the affects of the mind, it can begin to recognize the pure self, *shuddhatma*. When the flow of attention and thought is uninterrupted toward the object, this meditation is called *dhyana*. Therein a person enters a state that has no qualification. In his contemplation and focus on the Supreme Spirit, he may enter a state of supreme bliss. Then he sees the light of his own Self. He becomes filled with clarity regarding his own identity and position, and is secure in knowing who and what he really is. He feels and is filled with bliss from which he can never be shaken. He carries this consciousness and awareness wherever he goes. The next step is *samadhi*.

Samadhi is when the awareness is so deep that the identity of oneself becomes lost in the object upon which one is meditating. Sometimes a person also becomes oblivious to the outer world. The sense of ego, or of oneself, is now completely lost. The meditator or yogi is aware of only the object of meditation. There is no sense of his or her own identity, for the working of the mind has ceased, or ceased from being noticed. Then God, as the object of

meditation, will become the sole point of awareness. In this sort of *samadhi*, one begins to know God, and also begins to see nothing outside the energy or existence of God. There is only unlimited bliss and freedom to expand such bliss. The peace surpasses all that could describe it. Then also *bhakti* or devotion increases immensely so that one no longer sees anything as being separate from the existence of God. The person's love for God is ever-growing and ever-existent. There is no longer any *maya* in his awareness. Whatever he sees is all a display of the energy of God, Who is the source of all that is. In such a state of awareness, one is never outside the perception of the Supreme Being. Whatever beauty the person sees is but a reflection of the cause of its beauty, which is the Supreme Creator. In this awareness, a person is already in the spiritual domain. If one can maintain this level of *samadhi* at the time of death, then the person can achieve *kaivalya*, or liberation from material existence.

When we meditate, we want a continuous flow of concentration toward the point or purpose of our attention. This process essentially involves reaching a state of pure meditation in which a person enters an uninterrupted flow of contemplation on God. Then, as one proceeds, the meditator loses all awareness of the body and external or sensual stimuli. Then you can enter the freedom to experience superconsciousness.

Meditation and the performance of chanting mantras at particular times of the day is the way to open and prepare oneself for higher awareness and to perceive higher levels of reality and consciousness. Repeated practice of this process will cleanse the mental fields of habitual thought patterns of material desires and bring in increasingly deeper levels of illumination.

As a person practices and becomes more experienced, the preparation for meditation decreases. One can soon find that all that has to be done is sit in silence, breathe evenly, calmly, focus within, tune into a higher consciousness, and then away you go, immediately losing contact with the dictates of the mind and senses, and sailing into higher awareness or even new levels of awakening. However, this will take time to achieve, and it takes practice and experience to reach this level of familiarity with the process. So let us explain a few of these steps a little further for those who are interested.

ASANAS

The *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali defines *yoga asanas* as *sthiram sukham aasanam*, which means a position which is comfortable and steady. The *yoga asanas* are postures that are meant to train the body and mind to be disciplined and balanced. Used with the *pranayama* techniques, the *asanas* are meant to help charge the body with *prana* and life force to enhance one's meditative abilities and reach deeper levels of concentration and awareness. There are numerous books that describe many hundreds of *asanas*, but we will include a few which will be all you need in order to proceed with this course on meditation.

However, we must remember that we are trying to have a posture that is comfortable for sitting in meditation. So in spite of the descriptions that follow, we may also use cushions, folded blankets, or mats that can help in this way. They can be placed under us in a way that elevates the body by about two inches, with the legs resting lower on the floor. The legs and hips will be more relaxed this way, and without as much pressure on the pelvis. To help keep your back straight, you may even sit against a wall. If your legs are too uncomfortable even in this position, you can also use a straight back chair, or sit on the edge of the seat.

SUKHASANA

This is one of the most common of the *yoga asanas*. It means to sit down cross-legged in a comfortable position. *Sukh* means easy position. This is especially recommended for beginners for doing *pranayama* exercises and meditation. It is one of the best to relax the body's muscles for prolonged positioning. In the *yoga* tradition, a comfortable position is properly executed when one can maintain it for three hours and 48 minutes, with a sufficient inward focus. Of course, while this simple posture is easily done by Indians and yogis, it is not quite as easy for those of us who don't often sit on the floor.

PADMASANA

This is probably the most popular of all *asanas*. Many yogis use it and are pictured in this position, just as the Buddha is often viewed sitting in this posture. This *asana* can be regularly practiced, and many people can take to it easily. However, for beginners it is suggested to start slow as it may take the leg ligaments to grow into shape. It is another cross-legged position, but with the soles of the feet resting on top of the thighs, not below them as most people sit. The position has a calming effect on the mind and nerves, which is needed for long-termed meditation. The pose helps keep the spine erect and provides good posture. Keeping the body's joints flexible is another of its benefits.

SHAVASANA

Shava means corpse, and this is the corpse pose. It is one of the simplest to perform, and some of the *pranayama* exercises ask for this *asana* to be performed afterwards. Basically you lay down with the arms a little out from the body and the legs slightly separated. You relax completely, both in body and mind, laying motionless and with a perfectly quiet mind. However, it is also difficult because if you relax too much you are likely to go to sleep, which is not wanted. To avoid sleep it is suggested that if you notice yourself getting drowsy, you increase your rate of breathing. Many yoga sessions begin and end with the *shavasana*, which is generally done for about 10 to 15 minutes.

PRANAYAMA

Preparation in Breathing

Pranayama is the science of breath. It is part of the *hatha* and *raja* yoga systems. It consists of particular exercises to control breathing in ways that it will bring more oxygen into the blood and to the brain. It also helps control the flickering nature of the mind. *Prana* in Sanskrit means the energy of life, while *ayama* means stretch, extend, expand or lengthen. And that is the purpose of it: to manipulate the breathing to increase and manage the circulation of vital energy, *prana*, through the *nadis* or subtle nerve channels through the body. This assists in the health, vitality and longevity of the body. It is also said to awaken the cerebrospinal nerve centers to their full potential.

Most people take little notice of the way they breathe. Many breathe quick and shallow breaths, which is not healthy. Such breathing allows for only a small amount of oxygen to be accepted by the body in the upper portions of the lungs. This causes low energy levels and susceptibility to disease.

When one practices correct breathing, one must breathe through the nose and then do a full inhalation followed by a complete exhalation. A deep breath means that the abdomen expands along with the lungs, and the shoulders move back. A full exhalation means your abdomen contracts and chest moves in as your diaphragm moves up and may come close to touching the heart.

While doing *pranayama*, the correct breath should be that you first exhale, then inhale and retain the breath, then exhale completely. Exhalation is the most important part.

However, *prana* is the energy that is imbibed by the blood, not only through breath but also through food, water and even sunlight. *Pranayama*, as well as yogic *asanas*, help amplify the *prana* and increase the amount we take in. This, of course, increases our own energy, and also helps pave the way for increased awareness and brain activity, as well as the means for perceiving deeper levels of reality and consciousness. *Prana* exists and moves primarily through the subtle or astral body in the *nadis*, or nerve channels. The *asanas* are especially for opening the *nadis* and *chakras* to allow for an increased flow of *prana* through the system.

The main *nadi* is the Sushumna that flows along the spine. On either side are the *Ida* (connected with the left nostril) and *Pingala* (connected to the right nostril), the two smaller *nadis* near the spinal ganglia which spiral around the Sushumna. The *Ida nadi* is the moon current, the influence of which is cooling and calming, while the *Pingala nadi* is the sun current, which is warming and stimulating. The dominant air currents usually change from one nostril to the other about every one hour and 50 minutes. When the right nostril and *prana* current dominates, a person tends to be more lively, outgoing, and intellectually active, and more left-brain oriented. When the left nostril or *prana* current dominates, a person tends to be more inward, quieter, imaginative, and meditative, and more right-brain active. When both nostrils and *prana* channels flow equally, it indicates that both sides of the brain are interacting equally. This is a good time for meditation.

Entering meditation can help harmonize the flow of the *prana* through the *Ida* and *Pingala* channels. However, practicing *pranayama* can help do that, which also helps balance the mind and body. This is how you can regulate the flow and accumulation of *prana* in the body.

THE UJJAYI PRANAYAMA TECHNIQUE

In preparing for a meditation session, doing some *pranayama* beforehand can be most helpful to quiet the mind. If you have ever been to a yoga class, then you have probably done this common technique. If not, then here is a description of one that has been used for many hundreds of years.

This is one of the most basic techniques for doing *pranayama*. You sit comfortably in the lotus or cross-legged position. Keep your back straight, but lower the head to the chest with the chin touching the place between the collar bones. Then stretch the arms out to the knees and rest the back of the wrists on the knees. Keep your fingers straight but for joining the tips of the index fingers to the tips of the thumbs. This is known as the *Jnana*

(pronounced as gyana) Mudra, meaning the sign of knowledge. The index finger represents the individual soul while the thumb represents the Universal Soul. The tips of the finger and thumbs being joined represents the exchange of knowledge.

1. Now close your eyes and focus inward.
2. Exhale completely, bringing your stomach in.
3. Now take a slow deep breath through the nose, allowing it to make a sound, until the lungs are full, but not allowing the abdomen to expand.
4. Then retain the breath for a few seconds.
5. Now exhale slowly and evenly until the lungs are emptied completely.
6. After a few seconds, gradually relax the diaphragm.
7. Wait another few seconds (*bahya kumbhaka*) and now take another slow and deep breath through both nostrils.
8. Repeat this cycle five to ten times.
9. When finished lie on the floor with legs slightly separated from each other, and arms slightly away from the body (in the Shavasana *asana*). Relax for a few minutes.

THE KAPALABHATI BREATHING TECHNIQUE

This is basically a way of doing a forced exhalation. The way this works is that you sit comfortably, cross-legged on the floor or mat or somewhere. Breathe normally for a few breaths, and then,

1. Exhale quickly and deeply by pulling the abdomen in with your stomach muscles, and letting the air out through the nostrils with an audible sound.
2. Relax your abdomen and let the air enter the lungs again. The inhale should be twice as long as the exhale.
3. Again pull in the abdomen and exhale with a quick gasp through the nose.
4. Do this 20 times or so. You should do two or three of these per second.
5. Then end this session by inhaling slowly and completely.
6. Retain the breath as long as comfortable.
7. Then exhale slowly and deeply.
8. You can repeat this process another 2 times or so.

This exercise helps clean the lungs of all stale air, allowing for a full inhalation of clean oxygen. The name Kapalabhati means "skull shining" in reference to the additional oxygen that helps clear the mind and consciousness. The movement of the diaphragm also tones the internal organs like the stomach, liver and heart.

THE ANULOMA VILOMA BREATHING TECHNIQUE

This is also a common technique but quite beneficial. This is for breathing through alternate nostrils. The left nostril is connected with the *Ida nadi*, the path of the *Pingala nadi* is the right nostril. Throughout the day, if you will notice, your breathing changes from one nostril to the other. Breathing through the right or solar nostril indicates the time for action, doing things. While breathing primarily through the left or lunar nostril indicates a time for thought or meditation. As previously mentioned, this change usually happens about every one hour and fifty minutes when we are healthy. However, most people experience disturbances in this pattern. So this technique helps restore a balanced flow.

When ready bring your right hand up to your nose and use the thumb and ring fingers. Fold your index and middle fingers toward the palm. This is called the Vishnu Mudra. Then

1. Take a deep breath and exhale completely two times.
2. Then inhale and block your right nostril using your thumb.
3. Exhale a slow complete breath through the left nostril.
4. Inhale through the left nostril.
5. Hold your breath while closing both nostrils.
6. Close the left nostril with your ring and little fingers and breathe out a slow and complete breath through the right nostril.
7. Keep the left nostril closed and breathe in through the right nostril.
8. Hold both nostrils closed and retain the breath.
9. Now close the right nostril with the thumb and breathe out through the left nostril.
10. Now start again from # 2, and do this routine several times for one session.
11. Gradually, slow the breath to a 5 second inhalation and a 10 second exhalation.
12. End the session by bringing down your hand and inhaling through both nostrils.

13. Exhale completely.
14. Sit quietly, aware of the energy going through your system.

A variation on this technique is that all inhalations are through both nostrils, and exhalations are through alternating nostrils.

THE BRAHMARI, SITKARI AND SITHALI BREATHING TECHNIQUES

Three other simple techniques are the Brahmari, Sitkari and Sithali. In the Brahmari you partially close the glottis in your throat while you inhale through the nostrils, producing a snoring sound. Then as you exhale slowly, produce a humming sound which helps slow the exhalation. Repeat several times.

The Sitkari is when you press the tip of the tongue to the roof of the mouth and slowly inhale through the open mouth, producing a hissing sound. Retain the breath as long as possible and exhale through the nose. Repeat several times.

Both of these techniques cool the body and stifle hunger and thirst, while the Sitkari is said to also increase one's beauty.

The Sithali breath is when you stick your tongue out a bit and curl the sides of it. Then you suck the breath in as if sucking it through a straw. Then close your mouth and hold your breath and exhale slowly through the nose. Repeat several times.

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Chapter 3

The Meditation Process

There are many techniques for meditation these days, and many levels of awareness we can reach. Many meditation techniques incorporate the basic requirement of focusing on our breathing. Our breathing also reflects our mental state. For example, when we are excited or angry, our breathing is often rapid, uneasy or shallow. When we are calm, our breathing is more slow and deep. Control of the breath automatically affects the mind, and begins to calm it. This can prepare it for deeper thoughts and awareness. It helps bring our awareness to the Self within, or the observer of our thoughts and actions.

The mind will naturally focus on objects of its liking. The senses will drag the mind toward the objects with which they want to engage. The mind works in the *mayic* realm and is not equipped to rise above the area or awareness of the senses. It is the mind which interprets the stimuli and makes demands of the senses. It is the intelligence that then makes the plans to fulfill the wants of the mind. And the mind interprets what is favorable or unfavorable. So for one to reach the area of perceiving a higher reality, one must rise above the influence and limitations of the mind.

Meditation on the path of knowledge and enlightenment is to focus the mind on the Ultimate Reality, the Supreme Being.

If you have had problems or troubles during the day, try not to take them with you to your place of meditation, or into your mind while trying to meditate. It will only further distract you when trying to reach higher states of awareness, free from mental impulses or habitual thought patterns.

If, however, you plan to meditate for guidance or solutions, feel that God is aware of your concern or situation. Make your prayers to God before you meditate so that as you go into meditation you can listen for answers or awakenings. Know that God manages the whole universe, and though we have free will to do as we like, if we are sincerely seeking help, then God can let us know in due time, and in the way we need to learn our lessons, what we should do for our progress. No problem is unsolvable, but only needs a plan or some insight to deal with it or understand it. You are a spiritual being whose real identity is beyond mundane or material situations.

The best times to meditate are at dawn and dusk. You should sit facing the east, or the north. This takes advantage of the subtle influence of the earth's magnetic field. For sessions of deep meditation, I personally like to meditate in the dark, before sunrise or after sunset, all lights out, with no noise. Then, even when eyes are open, there is no sensual distraction from hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting or feeling. Then I can go as deep as I like.

The first step is to sit cross-legged but comfortably on the floor, and sit on a mat, a cushion, or even on the edge of a chair. This is after you have done some *pranayama* and breathing exercises, if you choose to, beforehand to help prepare for the meditation session. You may also want to turn off the phone. Also, wear loose clothes to allow for ease of sitting and not to impede your smooth and natural breathing. It is important that you can sit without any difficulties or feelings of constraint. Simply keep your spine tall and straight. Let your hands relax, resting on your thighs or knees, palms up with thumbs and index fingers joined at the tips, in the Chin or Jnana Mudra. Or they can be folded in your lap. Broaden your shoulders so you can breathe deeply.

Now close your eyes. Remember, this is time for your Self. So let go of all outer concerns and let yourself relax while keeping the back straight.

ONE MEDITATION TECHNIQUE BASED ON OUR BREATH

So now begin to observe your breathing as it adjusts itself automatically to your position and relaxed state of mind. As you relax, release yourself of all stress. Turn your attention more inward, and deepen your inhalation, taking your time before you give a longer exhalation. Inhale easily and if you count to 4 on the inhale, give a count to 6 while you exhale. Let the breath bring in energy to heal, sooth, and give light to all parts of the body. Enter an increasingly calm state of mind.

As you continue to breathe, extend your breaths as it is comfortable to you. So if you breathe in at a count of 5, hold your breath within for a count of 5, and then exhale slowly for a count of 10. This is when your breathing becomes *pranayama* and allows the mind to increase in calmness and inward perception, and heightened awareness. Keep breathing like this for several minutes. This prepares you for continued inward focus.

Now begin to breath as is most natural for you, without counting, and in whatever way is most easy for you. And sit straight but easily.

Now simply sit in awareness of your being for a few minutes. Keep your eyes closed. Focus on being the observer, watching and listening to your inner attention on whatever you are aware of. Start with listening to the sounds outside of you. This may be birds, the wind, or something else. Keep your mind at peace if this causes an inner dialogue to begin, or if the sounds start your thought processes. Stifle your thinking and simply remain the observer. Remember, if thoughts enter your mind as reactions to what you hear, simply observe them coming and going, knowing they are not you but merely reactions to sense perceptions. Just watch your thoughts as if they are but the flow of water in a river, or clouds in the sky that form, change shape and later disperse. You are the observer. As you watch this, focus on who is doing the observing. This is the Self within the body, deeper than the mind, deeper than the intelligence.

Now bring your awareness even deeper, more inward, and listen to what is inside you. Maybe you can hear your heartbeat, or just listen to your breathing. If your mind wanders as you listen to your breath, quiet it and bring it back to center. Do not let it go one way or the other.

At this point you can use your meditation to focus on your breathing as a means to get closer to the Divine. View your breathing as a means of offering all that we are to the Supreme as we exhale. Then as we inhale, we bring into our body the higher life energy of the Divine. We perceive our very breath as the energy of God that supports us, enlivens us. We see that God is life all around us as well as our life force within us. This life force is the cause of all creation, the cause of all life, and the center of all bliss and eternity, of which we are a part. In this way, we become more in tune with the Supreme that manifests throughout the creation. We are dovetailed in our

purpose to become and remain more united with the energy of the Divine. As we become absorbed in this awareness, it dissolves the thought forms from our consciousness along with the seeds of desire that keep us here. This is one way we can use our breathing in meditation and to bring ourselves closer to God in the process.

Now, when you are ready, go deeper, and as you breathe, you will notice the space between your breaths. Similarly, as you watch your thoughts, notice the space between thoughts, between the end of one and the start of another. Meditation is the focus on that space or Gap between thoughts. It is the process of lengthening that space. It is within that space wherein we can become free of the influence or input of the senses and mind, and more aware of our deeper selves. Therein we can become aware of a deeper dimension, and the realm of spirit, if we can go deep enough.

As you continue to focus on the space between the breaths and thoughts, let it deepen even more. Let it widen. Let it open up to the point where you are no longer even aware of your breathing, or of any thoughts. Let this space open until you are absorbed in it. That is when you can go beyond the mind. That is the doorway into another realm wherein you can get in touch with your higher Self.

This new experience beyond the mind may itself give you an initial feeling of bliss or wonder, a feeling of new possibilities that could unfold before you. But remember, this is merely the beginning, and there is much farther to go. There is also the need to become steady at this technique through practice if you are to truly attain the results that are possible.

As you free yourself from outside influences, be open to Infinity, to the omnipresent God both within you and all around you.

Be alert to exploring the higher consciousness you experience or find yourself in, or the awakenings and realizations you have. When you enter higher states of awareness you are bound to have moments of clarity that allow you to reassess your identity, your position in the universe, and the possibilities that are available to you.

Now, in this deeper level, just meditate on being, on awareness. As you focus inward like this, as you go deeper, observe how what has happened outside in the world of the senses, the exterior drama, is no longer a distraction or disturbance. You are at peace. We see ourselves as beings of light, in harmony with the flow of the universe. The seeds of suffering dissolve. You are your own person, you are whole, full of light, love, energy, and unlimited possibilities. In this state of consciousness you have access to unlimited intelligence, clarity, and the energy or vibration for healing, and for inspiration and guidance.

It is said that prayer is like petitioning God for guidance or blessing, while meditation is listening for the answer. It is in this higher state of inner awareness in which we may hear or sense the answer, or attain the guidance. Sit quietly, your awareness focused inward, and realize your wholeness, the joy available to you, and the completeness that is always there within.

At this point, if there was something in particular you had a question about, or some quality you need to have in the outer world, now is the time when you may address that issue. If you need something like a better outlook, improved dealings with others, or a higher sense of self-assurance in yourself, now is the time to use an affirmation if you want, and to bring that back to the outer world as you begin to come out of your state of meditation.

Feel that quality throughout your whole being, as if it is blessing every part of you. When it has penetrated every cell and every corner of your mind, when you are full with this new or helpful quality or perception, and you feel empowered, then you can begin to bring your attention back first to your breath, then to listening to what is around you, and then feel your body and your surroundings.

Or if you have a particular question about which you seek guidance, you may also start the meditation session with that in the back of your mind. Then dwell on that a bit during your state of deep awareness, and take a sense of clarity about it with you as you come out of your meditation. Spend some time in this level of awareness in your meditation. When it is enough, then prepare to slowly return to the outer world. [If you are ready to go deeper or are not concerned with questions or guidance, then proceed to the Deep Meditation Section.]

ENDING YOUR MEDITATION

As you prepare to leave your higher state of consciousness or end your meditation session, feel yourself to be more closely in tune with the Divine will, the Universal Consciousness, and that the higher energies of God are flowing through you. Feel that you are connected to everything in the universe and especially connected with God, always. The closer you get to God, the more closely God will guide you and inspire you with proper ideas, motivation, inspiration and action. Feel that you have been rejuvenated on every level, physically, mentally and spiritually. Visualize yourself as being completely whole, a vehicle of positivity, wishing the highest good for yourself and

everyone else, like a reflection of God's love on anyone, and that every living entity is a part of God. Spread your vision to encompass the whole universe and pray that peace prevails through an enlightened society.

When you are coming out of your meditation, remain conscious of the presence of God, and the sense of your spiritual identity. Be aware that through the grace of God you will be assisted in whatever transformations you need to develop. The deeper you go in this awareness, the more you will become sensitive to the idea that everything is in balance. That everything that is happening to you, and throughout the world, is taking place through cause and effect. And to change the effect starts with altering the cause, or the initial action that starts the reaction. The point is to balance external actions with internal knowings. Thus, meditation becomes a process of working within your own consciousness to reach a higher state of spiritual perception that manifests in your everyday life. When a perfect balance is reached, you will feel a sense of completeness, a higher sense of purpose, a clearer sense of where you are going and where you want to go.

Once you have regularly practiced this, you can go deeper each time. You can also move to that deep space within you more quickly. Such a session may last only 15-20 minutes, or if you really get into it, it can be much longer. I've had sessions for 2 hours and came out of it thinking I'd spent only 30 minutes in meditation. The time is up to you, as well as how much time you can give to it. You may also do this technique once a day, preferably in the morning before the day begins, or anytime, even twice a day, morning and evening.

The more you practice it, the more you take that feeling of wholeness, self-sufficient happiness, completeness and confidence with you wherever you go. You'll see it adds quality to your life and enhances your attitude toward the world and realigns your position in the universe and your perception of who and what you are. It also helps increase the possibilities that are available to you and what you are capable of at both the outer and inner levels of your being.

DEEP MEDITATION

In doing deep meditation, instead of ending our meditation session as we did in the previous description above, we continue to go even deeper. We go so deep that we lose all contact with our bodily identification. We become only awareness and nothing else. In fact, if we can go deep enough, in this level of awareness when we observe our new identity that is separate from the physical body, we cannot even tell whether we are male or female. We are not connected with such an identity at all. We are only a spiritual being that is aware of our eternal and transcendental nature. We have no past, we have no future. There is only the moment, the NOW, completely independent of time and all temporary or *mayic* forms of existence. We begin to recognize the potency and eternity of the soul and its connection with the Supreme Divinity.

In this level of meditation, we are not concerned with attaining guidance or clarity, or even taking back certain perspectives or affirmations with us when we leave our meditation. It is the experience itself which gives us all the guidance and clarity we need. It is this level of awareness and perception that alone is enough to provide us with all the understanding we need to see things in a totally different and new or fresh way when we end our meditation. Our perception of our eternal nature, the blissfulness that is always within us waiting to be tapped by mere awareness, separate from any bodily condition, is all we need. This profound reality will cling to your consciousness, or open your awareness, in all aspects of your life once you have experienced it. This itself will change the way you view life forever. And you will more easily want to engage in meditation as a definite part of your life on a regular basis.

I have to confess that the first time I entered into this level of meditation, when I ended the session and came back to my senses, I was not sure if what I had experienced was real. Was it merely my mind, or was it a definite level of reality that I had entered, which is beyond the body and mind? But just afterward, a friend of mine had returned from Puerto Rico and had met someone who had a near-death-experience. He had fallen off the back of a truck and hit his head, and went into that altered state of consciousness. The description of what he had experienced in his near-death-experience was the same as what I had experienced, but I did it through deep meditation rather than falling off a truck. And his feelings and awareness afterwards was the same as mine. You simply do not look at life the same way. The things that you took so seriously are no longer that serious. The things that kept you from living more clearly and more aware are simply not worth allowing them to have so much control over you and your life. And the problems that took up so much of your mental energy are no longer so important. It is truly like getting a fresh start in life, a new perspective of who you really are and what your place is in this universe. The weight is off your shoulders. You know that the universe, God, will take care of you, and that you will meet whatever it is that will help take you along to a new level of growth. No matter whether it appears to be negative or positive, it is all positive because it is meant to give the lessons or support for you to develop yourself further.

I have not really described this before, and I usually keep such things to myself. So there is much more I could say about it, but in many ways it is indescribable, as I am sure you can understand. When it is an experience beyond the mind and senses, how can the mind and senses fully grasp what is being described? In any case, this level of deep meditation that I have now described is merely on the higher level of *sattva-guna*, the mode of goodness which is still within material existence. It is not complete for perfect spiritual development, or for attaining full entrance into the spiritual domain. There is more.

FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS ON MEDITATION IN BHAGAVAD-GITA

There are many more instructions on what needs to be achieved through the process of yoga and meditation as described by Lord Krishna in the Vedic texts, such as the *Bhagavad-gita* and *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. To begin with, Krishna describes the preliminaries of the process by relating that one should shut out "all external sense objects, keeping the eyes and vision concentrated between the two eyebrows, suspending the inward and outward breaths within the nostrils. Thus controlling the mind, senses and intelligence, the transcendentalist becomes free from desire, fear and anger. One who is always in this state is certainly liberated." (*Bg.5.27-28*) Herein it is described how one needs to suspend the breathing, which is obviously more difficult than many people realize. The breath itself is said to be the last obstacle of meditation. Just as it is the gap between thoughts that is the place in which one is freed from the mind, and is the doorway to spiritual perception, it is also the gap between breaths. This, of course, is rarely possible in this day and age, so we have to work around that as best we can.

Furthermore, in preparation for this sort of yoga, Krishna explains that one should always try to live alone in a secluded place, control the mind, and concentrate on the Supreme Self. He should also remain free from desires and possessiveness. He should then lay kusha grass on the ground, cover it with deerskin [which helps keep away snakes] and a soft cloth. The yogi should then firmly sit on it and practice yoga by controlling the senses and mind and fixing one's attention on a single point. Then hold one's body, neck and head straight in a line and gaze at the tip of the nose [with eyes half-closed but unfocused]. Thus, with the mind free from agitation and fear, and any desires for sex, one should meditate on Me [Lord Krishna] within the heart [as Paramatma] and make Me the ultimate goal of life. By such practice of controlling the body, mind and senses, and by the cessation of material existence, the mystic yogi attains the kingdom of God. However, there is no possibility of becoming a yogi if one eats too much or too little, or sleeps too much or too little. He must be temperate in eating, sleeping, working or recreation to alleviate all material pains through the practice of yoga. Only through such practice, when one disciplines his mental activities, remaining devoid of all desires of the senses, and becomes situated in Transcendence, is he said to have attained yoga. The yogi must remain steady in meditation on the transcendent Self, just as a lamp remains steady in a windless place. (*Bg.6.10-19*)

This is the stage of perfection called trance, or samadhi. At this point one has the ability to connect with the soul and see the self by the pure mind, and to relish and rejoice in the self. It is in that state wherein one enjoys himself through transcendental senses and experiences boundless spiritual happiness. When one is established in such a way, one never departs from this truth, nor does he think there is any greater gain. Once situated in this way, one is never shaken, even in the midst of great difficulty. This is certainly actual freedom from all miseries born from material contact. Therefore, one should practice yoga with undeviating determination and faith. One should abandon every material desire based on the false ego [the conception that one is the material body] and control all the senses by the mind. Gradually, step by step, and with full conviction, by means of intelligence, one should become situated in trance by fixing the mind on the Self alone. (*Bg.6.20-25*)

So, as Sri Krishna continues, in the practice of yoga, from wherever the mind wanders, due to its unsteady nature, one must bring it back under the control of the Self. In this way, for the yogi whose mind is fixed on Me attains the highest happiness. By his identity with Brahman [the spiritual strata], he is liberated, and his mind is peaceful, free from passions and he is freed from sin. Steady in the Self, and free from all material contamination, such a yogi achieves the highest happiness, in touch with the Supreme Consciousness. Thereafter, a true yogi perceives Me in all beings, and sees every being in Me. Indeed, the self-realized person sees Me everywhere. For such a person who sees Me everywhere and everything in Me, I am never lost, nor is he ever lost to Me. The person who knows that I and the Supersoul within all creatures are one worships Me and remains always in Me in all respects. He who sees the true equality of all beings, both in their happiness and distress, is a perfect yogi. (*Bg.6.26-32*)

After practicing yoga throughout one's life, the goal is then to become liberated from any further material existence. It is not enough that yoga can make one more thoughtful, increase one's awareness, or make one's body more healthy. There are so many other ways by which a person can do that. But the real goal of yoga is to return to the spiritual realm. How that is done is also described by Lord Krishna. He explains that at the time of death, one who fixes his life airs between his eyebrows and in full devotion engages in remembering Me, the Supreme Lord, will

certainly attain the Supreme Being. The destination of one who is learned in the *Vedas*, and who chants *omkara* (OM) and who are great sages in the renounced order, enter into the Brahman [the spiritual sky]. The process for accomplishing this requires the yogi to be situated in complete detachment from all activities of the senses. Closing off the doors of the senses and fixing the mind on the heart, and raising the life air to the top of the head, one establishes himself in yoga. Then, being situated as such and vibrating the sacred syllable OM, the supreme combination of letters, if one thinks of the Supreme Lord and quits his body, he will certainly reach the spiritual planets. (*Bg.*8.10-13) So this is the process of meditation by which the mystic yogi can reach the spiritual realm and be liberated from any further rounds of birth and death in the material worlds.

DIFFICULTIES TO REACH SPIRITUAL PERFECTION IN YOGA

However, even after hearing all about this system of yoga, Arjuna, who was being taught these things by Lord Krishna at the time, said that this system appears impractical and unendurable since the mind is so restless and unsteady. It is turbulent, obstinate and very strong. To subdue it is more difficult than controlling the wind. (*Bg.*6.33-4) Therefore, we must ask if Arjuna, who was a far more capable person 5,000 years ago than we are today, could perceive the difficulty of this system, then it behooves us to understand that it is also most difficult to use this system today and expect to reach perfection with it. The ultimate perfection with this form of yoga is that you become so focused on the Supreme within and around you that you attain liberation from any more cycles of birth and death in this material creation. However, now that we are in Kali-yuga, an age of quarrel, difficulties, distractions and discomfort, it is even harder for the majority of people to control the mind to such a degree as is expected through this system.

Nonetheless, Lord Krishna continued to advise Arjuna that even though it is very difficult to curb the restless mind, it is possible by constant practice and detachment. "Self-realization is difficult work for one whose mind is unbridled. But My opinion is that he whose mind is controlled, and who strives by the proper process, is assured of success." (*Bg.*6.35-36)

However, Arjuna was not so convinced and still questioned Lord Krishna. He asked what was the destination of someone who starts the process of self-realization but does not persevere, but gives up due to worldly-mindedness and does not attain success. Does such a person perish like a riven cloud, with no position anywhere? (*Bg.*6.37-38)

Here Arjuna is not merely asking about the Astanga or eightfold path of yoga. He is asking about any kind of genuine process of self-realization. What happens when a sincere person still cannot continue to reach the goal? Lord Krishna answers him that such a transcendentalist does not meet with destruction either in this world or in the spiritual world. One who does good is never overcome by evil. Even an unsuccessful yogi, after many, many years of enjoyment on the heavenly planets of the pious, is born in a family of righteous people, or a wealthy family of aristocracy [due to his pious credits]. Or he takes birth in a family of transcendentalists who are already on the spiritual path and great in wisdom. Yet, such a birth is most rare in this world. On taking such a birth, he again revives his divine consciousness from his previous life. Then he takes up the process again and continues to make further progress in order to achieve complete success. It is by virtue of the spiritual consciousness from his previous existence that he automatically becomes attracted to the yogic principles--even without seeking them. Such an inquisitive transcendentalist, striving for yoga, stands always above the rituals prescribed in the scriptures. But when the yogi engages himself with sincere endeavor, and being washed of all contamination, then, after many, many births and deaths, he ultimately attains the supreme goal. A yogi is greater than the ascetic performing austerities, greater than the empiricist philosopher, and greater than one engaged in karmic activities for fruitive results. So in all circumstances be a yogi. (*Bg.*6.40-46)

So herein Lord Krishna describes the positive opportunity that awaits anyone who makes any sincere endeavor on the path of spiritual advancement, even if they do not fully succeed in one lifetime. And then He concludes the real goal of yoga in the next verse, again pointing out the ease and need for the process of *bhakti*, loving devotion to Him. "And of all yogis, he who always abides in Me with great faith, worshiping Me in transcendental loving service [*bhakti*], is most intimately united with Me in yoga and is the highest of all." (*Bg.*6.47)

In a similar circumstance, after Lord Krishna explained the science of yoga to Uddhava, Uddhava had the same doubts as Arjuna. So he questioned it and said that he feared that the method of yoga that had been described by Lord Krishna is very difficult for one who cannot completely control his mind. So Uddhava requested Him to explain a simpler way of attaining spiritual perfection. Uddhava explained that many yogis who try to steady the mind experience frustration because of their inability to perfect the state of trance. Thus they weary in their attempts to control the mind. Therefore, swanlike men happily take shelter [through the process of *bhakti-yoga*] of Your lotus feet, the source of all transcendental ecstasy. But those who take pride in their accomplishments in yoga and karma fail to take shelter of You and are thus defeated by Your illusory energy. (*Bhag.*11.29.1-3)

In this way, it is best to understand what form of meditation works the best for the general mass of people in this age. So let us read the story of Narada Muni.

THE STORY OF NARADA MUNI

In our investigation into the process of spiritual realization and meditation that is recommended to work in this age, we can listen to the most interesting story of Narada Muni, as related in the *Bhagavatam* (Canto One, Chapters Five and Six) and hear how he achieved success, and what he also recommends for everyone in this age. However, he was someone who had become so perfect in meditation that He was completely God realized, and could directly see God. Nonetheless, even though the form of meditation that he used at first to achieve this enlightenment was similar to the one we have been describing so far, it was not the process he used in the end. So let us hear his story and find out what he recommends.

While giving instructions to Sri Vyasadeva, the great sage Narada Muni described his life and the process of his advancement to the level of spiritual and God realization. Narada Muni explained that in the last millennium he had been born as the simple son of a maidservant who was engaged in the service of brahmanas. They were devout followers of Vedanta, so they would settle as a group that would not travel in the rainy season. It was during this time that Narada was in the service of these Vedantists. Narada was a well-behaved boy and after some time the brahmanas gave him their mercy by once allowing him to take the remnants of their food. Taking the remnants of food from those who are spiritually advanced is sacred since their consciousness enters into the food and can help purify those who eat it. Once Narada had taken their food, he became purified in heart and he became attracted to path of the transcendentalists.

At that time he could also hear them talking amongst themselves about the nature of the Absolute, the Supreme Being. Narada became attracted to their conversations. Narada could then realize that it was only in his ignorance that caused him to accept gross and subtle coverings as his real identity. The sages also instructed Narada in the most confidential of spiritual topics.

After the sages left for other territories, Narada stayed with his mother. Since he was her only son, he looked after her. She wanted to take care of him, but she was a simple woman and could not do much. Then once when she was going out one night to milk a cow, she was bitten on the leg by a serpent. After she died, Narada traveled north. He went through many towns, villages, valleys, dark forests, gardens, and more. He finally became exhausted and then took a bath in a river. After drinking some water, he felt relieved and found a banyan tree in an uninhabited forest.

Then in the shade he began to perform deep meditation. He focused on the Supersoul within him, as he had learned from the sages that he had served. His mind became filled with spiritual love, tears rolled down from his eyes, and not long afterwards the Supreme Lord Sri Krishna appeared in the lotus of his heart. He became overwhelmed by feelings of happiness. Being absorbed in an ocean of ecstasy, he could see both himself and the Lord. But then he suddenly lost the vision of the Lord within him and got up, being perturbed. Despite his attempts to concentrate again and regain the perception he had, he could not recapture his meditation and the vision of the Lord. Thus he was much aggrieved.

However, the Lord then spoke to Narada from within. He said that He regretted that during this lifetime Narada would not be able to see Him anymore. But those who are incomplete in service and not completely free from all material taints can hardly ever see Him. Yet, the short vision Narada had of the Supreme was enough to increase Narada's hankering for Him. The more Narada desired to attain the vision of the Lord again, the more he would remain free from material desires. This would help in his progress. Such remembrance of the Supreme is itself a form of meditation. Through this sort of meditation one's intelligence becomes fixed and it becomes a means that helps take one to the transcendental world, out of the world of illusion. Then the Supreme Being, personified by sound but unseen by eyes, stopped speaking.

Narada then offered his obeisances to the Lord, bowing his head. Then, having experienced the unfruitful nature of his previous attempt to meditate, he started chanting the holy names of the Lord by repeated recitation. Thus he was able to experience the beneficial and auspicious nature of the chanting and remembering of the spiritual pastimes of the Supreme. By so doing, Narada traveled all over the earth, satisfied, humble and unenvious. In this way, he remained fully absorbed in thinking of the Supreme Being. Then, with no material attachments, Narada finally met with death, as lightning and illumination occur simultaneously. He thus quit the body made of the five elements, and then attained a spiritual body, fit for his transcendental consciousness, and befitting an associate of the Supreme.

Finally, at the end of the creation, all of the elements of the material manifestation were drawn into the form

of the Lord as Garbhodakashayi Vishnu, the expansion of Vishnu in each universe. This is described as the night of Brahma. Then when Lord Brahma again awoke from his night, he started the process of universal creation again. When the great sages reappeared in the world, so did Narada Muni. Since that time, Narada is the singing sage who travels everywhere without restriction, fixed in the devotional service of the Supreme Being, using his vina to accompany his songs. In conclusion to his story, Narada explains directly the benefit of the process of meditation that he now uses:

"The Supreme Lord Sri Krishna, whose glories and activities are pleasing to hear, at once appears on the seat of my heart, as if called for, as soon as I begin to chant His holy activities. It is personally experienced by me that those who are always full of cares and anxieties due to desiring contact of the senses with their objects of attraction can cross the ocean of nescience [illusory darkness] on a most suitable boat--the constant chanting of the transcendental activities of the Personality of Godhead. It is true that by practicing restraint of the senses by the yoga system one can get relief from the disturbances of desire and lust, but this is not sufficient to give satisfaction to the soul, for this [satisfaction] is derived from devotional service to the Supreme Personality." (*Bhag.* 1.6.33-35)

Herein Narada Muni described the benefit of the hearing and chanting of the activities and names of the Supreme Being. Such names and pastimes of the Supreme are often put into the form of verses and mantras. Thus, mantras can also give one the easiest means and benefits that are often too difficult to attain by the attempt at controlling the mind to enter a deep state of meditation. So in the following chapter we will look more closely into the ways and benefits of using mantras for our meditation.

OM SHANTI SHANTI SHANTI



Chapter 4

Using Mantras

If this basic form of meditation that has been described does not work so well, then it is time to try something else. The most important alternative to this kind of inner meditation is the use of mantras. In fact, many of the Vedic texts proclaim that in this age of Kali-yuga, mantra meditation is the most dependable process of meditation and deliverance to not only reach a higher consciousness, but to make contact with the Supreme Being.

Mantra-yoga is actually a mystical tradition found in almost every spiritual path in the world. It may involve the softly spoken repetition of a prayer or mantra for one's own meditation, or it may be the congregational singing of spiritually uplifting songs, prayers, or the sacred names of God. It all involves the same process, but in the Eastern tradition it is called mantra-yoga because it is the easy process of focusing our minds on the Supreme through His names, which helps spiritualize our consciousness. *Man* means the mind, *tra* means deliverance. Therefore, a spiritual mantra is the pure sound vibration for delivering the mind from material to spiritual consciousness. This is the goal of any spiritual path. Although all spiritual traditions have their own prayers or mantras, the Vedic mantras are especially powerful and effective in uniting us with the spiritual realm. However, a complete yoga process is generally a blend of a few yoga systems, such as bhakti-yoga with mantra-yoga. Therefore, bhakti-yoga also includes mantra-yoga, or the process of concentrating on the sound vibration within a mantra. This is especially important in this age of Kali.

Many years ago the brahmana priests could accomplish many kinds of wondrous deeds simply by correctly chanting particular mantras. Many of these mantras still exist, but it is very difficult to find those who can chant them accurately. This is actually a safety measure because if the wish-fulfilling mantras were easily chanted, there would no doubt be many people who would misuse them. But other mantras that are available can easily help purify one's consciousness, give spiritual enlightenment, and put one in touch with the Supreme.

Mantras often consist of eternal sound energies that have always existed, both within the universe as well as beyond it, and before its manifestation and after its annihilation.

When it comes to mantras, the *Vedas* mention three types: *vedic*, *tantric* and *puranic*. These can be further divided into *sattvic*, *rajasic* and *tamasic*. The mantras that are *sattvic* or in the mode of goodness, are chanted for light, wisdom, compassion, divine love or God realization. They help bring peace, destroy karma, and bring one to perfection after death. The mantras that are *rajasic*, or in the mode of passion, are chanted for material benedictions, like blessings for a healthy child, prosperity, and so on. However, such mantras do not help one rise above karma, but force one to take rebirth in order to acquire the results of their karma. The mantras that are *tamasic*, or in the mode of ignorance or darkness, are also called "black magic". These are used for the deliberate manipulation of the material energy for one's own purpose. Thus, they are sinful, and are often used to call spirits, or perform deeds that bring harm to others.

Some mantras hold certain powers in their vibratory formulas that are directly related to particular Deities. In fact, they may represent the Deity in full. When they do, they are considered non-different from the Deity and the sound vibrations are spiritual in nature. By the repetition of the mantra, the person who chants it invokes the energy and mercy of the Deity. Thus, the Deity reveals Himself or Herself to the *sadhaka*, who then overcomes illusion and realizes the spiritual position of the Deity and his or her relationship with the Deity. The six kinds of mantras used in this connection are:

1. Dhyana Mantras--mantras for meditation to mentally invoke the Deity's form, abode or pastimes.
2. Bija Mantras--the seed mantras for meditation and purification of the articles used in worship.
3. Mula Mantras--root mantras that are the essence of the Deity, used when offering certain articles during the worship to address the Lord.
4. Stutis and Stotras--mantras or prayers chanted before, during and after the worship to glorify the Lord's name, form, qualities and pastimes.
5. Pranama Mantras--prayers offering obeisances to the Lord at the end of worship.
6. Gayatri Mantras--Vedic or Pancharatrika mantras used to worship the Lord and for invoking different moods.

The Vedic mantras, such as those coming from the four *samhitas* of the *Rig*, *Sama*, *Yajur* and *Atharva Vedas*, are eternal or spiritual sound vibrations. They are not composed by any man at some particular point in history. They are part of the *shabda-brahma*, the eternal sound vibration. These mantras are like seeds of vast amounts of power and knowledge that are held within them. Thus, many scriptures explain that such powers cannot be fully revealed unless they have been received through the process of *diksha* or initiation from a spiritual master.

Besides this, the results of chanting a mantra depend on the chanter's conception or intent in the mind while chanting it. Thus, one must know the meaning or purpose of the mantra while reciting it. If one thinks the mantra is for attaining material goals, the person may get that. But if the inner purpose of the mantra is known to deliver one to the spiritual world, and a person chants it for that purpose, then that will be the reward rather than something minor.

Most Sanskrit mantras have several principles that you find in them. First they are often handed down or revealed by sages or authorities who have attained self-realization by its use. They also generally use a particular meter or rhythm. The mantra often represents a certain Deity. It also has a *bija* or seed word that gives it additional power, and the sound formula it contains has a special *shakti* or energy. And finally, constant repetition of the mantra will open or activate the key of it which then can reveal pure consciousness in the one who has been initiated into its use. The practice of repeating or chanting it for one's personal use is called *japa*.

The mantra is thus a point of meditation for the mind, but also a formula or transcendental sound vibration, like the holy name of God, that releases its energy into one's consciousness. Thus it prepares one for perceiving higher states of reality. With constant practice of the appropriate mantra, and with the proper pronunciation and devotional mood, the mantra can reveal the Absolute Truth to the practitioner as well as one's spiritual form and relationship that you have with the Supreme Being.

This is why it is best that one should receive and be initiated into the chanting of the mantra by a qualified guru. Then the mantra will be especially effective and powerful, and carry special means of invoking realizations

into the devotee who uses it.

Saguna mantras (those that describe personal traits) often are like prayers that invoke certain Deities or characteristics of the Absolute. *Nirguna* mantras (those that refer to the nature of the Absolute without qualities) describe the person's identification with the Absolute. The *bija* or seed mantras are derived from the 50 prime sounds, and are related to *om*.

Mantras can be used in different ways. They can be chanted in whispers, or out loud, or silently within the mind. Generally each mantra has a recommendation as to which way works best. Some mantras, like the Hare Krishna mantra, can be used in any of these ways, as well as sung as a song with a group or congregation. Generally this is done with a lead singer who sings the mantra in a particular melody, and then everyone else responds.

Some mantras are meant to be chanted only within the mind because their vibration or wavelength is beyond ordinary sound. So the silent method helps invoke the energy within the consciousness. However, to first whisper it or softly speak the mantra correctly may help one be able to chant it silently.

When doing *japa* meditation for any length of time, or for a certain number of repetitions, it is best to use a set of chanting or *japa* beads. These are usually strings of 108 beads, called *japa mala*, plus one central or head bead. With your beads in hand, you hold the *japa mala* between your thumb and third finger. You start chanting the mantra on the first bead next to the head bead, and chant the mantra on each one all the way through the 108 beads to make one "round". Then when you reach the head bead you do not chant the mantra on it, but you turn the beads around and chant on the beads in the opposite direction until you reach the head bead again for another 108 repetitions. This would be your second "round." It is usually prescribed that the mantra be chanted a certain number of times or so many "rounds" in a day. One such "round" of chanting a typical mantra will take an average of seven to ten minutes. There are many mantras on this web site (www.stephen-knapp.com). But we will take some time here to explain the techniques for the most important ones.

THE OM MANTRA MEDITATION



The *om* mantra is a most sacred syllable in Vedic culture. The *Vedas* glorify *om* as the origin of the *Vedas*, or the seed from which all of the *Vedas* grew. This is why *om* precedes every Vedic mantra. *Om* expands into the *vyahritis* (*bhuh*, *bhuvah* and *svaha*) which indicates the three planetary levels of the universe, or the whole creation. The *vyahritis* expand into the Brahma gayatri mantra, and this expands into all the Vedic literature.

Om is the sound substance of the Absolute, the seed of the universal manifestation, and connected to the infinite Brahman. It is also a name of God. It is composed of the letters A, U, and M. Several meanings for these have been written in the Sanskrit texts. "A" represents that which is observed in the state of wakefulness, or the experience of the body and senses. "U" represents that which is observed in the dream state, or the inner astral realm. "M" represents that which is in the state of deep sleep as well as that which is beyond the perception of the senses in the wakeful state. The silence, which is like the fourth letter of AUM, is the basis and underlying reality found in all states of consciousness, whether waking, dreaming or deep sleep. This is the Brahman, which is all that is manifested and all that is unmanifest.

However, *om* also reveals itself according to the depth of consciousness and realizations of the practitioner or *sadhaka*. For example, another interpretation by the Gosvamis of Vrindavana is that the letter A (*a-kara*) refers to the Supreme Being, Krishna, the master of all living beings and all material and spiritual worlds. He is the Supreme Leader. The letter U (*u-kara*) represents Radharani, or the pleasure potency or spiritual energy of the Supreme, otherwise known as the feminine aspect of God. The M (*ma-kara*) represents the living beings, the marginal energy of the Supreme. Thus, *om* is the complete combination of the Absolute Truth. In other words, *omkara* represents the Supreme Being, His name (Krishna), fame, pastimes, entourage, expansions, energies and everything else. Thus, *om* is also the resting place of everything and the full understanding of the *Vedas*.

Further information relates that *omkara*, as the representation of the Supreme Lord, delivers one back to the spiritual dimension if one remembers or chants it at the time of death. Srila Jiva Gosvami, in his *Bhagavat-*

sandarbha, says that *omkara* is considered the sound vibration of the holy name of the Supreme Lord. The *Srimad-Bhagavatam* also begins with *omkara*. Thus it is considered the seed of deliverance from the material world. Since the Supreme is absolute, then both He and His name are the same. Contact with the name is also contact with the Lord Himself.

The image of *om* looks something like the number 3 with an extra curve. The largest lower curve represents the waking state. The upper curve signifies deep dreamless sleep. The additional lower curve is the dream state. [Some say the large lower curve is the dream state, the upper curve is the waking state, and the side lower curve is the deep dreamless sleep.] The dot represents the Absolute Reality which is separated from the other curves (or states of consciousness) by a half-circle. This half-circle signifies *maya*, the illusion or material energy. It is *maya* which keeps us focused on various states of consciousness within the realm of the material manifestation which then veils the Absolute from our experience or awareness. The half-circle, open on top, indicates the infinite and unbounded nature of the Absolute, which is always separate from *maya*.

Om, therefore, is the indescribable reality. It is the encapsulated form of all that is. When it is pronounced properly, the "A" begins from the base of the spine, the Muladhara Chakra. As the sound moves up, the "A" or A-kar activates the area of the naval and the digestive system.

The "U" sound comes from the heart area, so our blood circulation becomes activated. The heart gets the extra supply of oxygen, which then spreads through other parts of the body. The sound of "U" is pronounced in the throat region, ending at the tongue's tip. The "M" is focused at the lips, or the end of the vocal mechanism. It goes in our head and comes out through our nose, which stimulates the vibrations in the brain. This also helps activate the pituitary gland and helps the over-all improvement of the body. Plus the psychic abilities are awakened. Thus, when *om* is chanted or pronounced correctly, it includes all the sounds or vowels of the alphabet.

In the last part of the mantra is the silence into which the *om* culminates. It is the *om* without the distinction of parts. It has no name and thus does not come under the purview of empirical usage. It is the self or pure consciousness, the *turiya*, which transcends all distinctions.

Om is also said to be the sound of the universe, or the sound of the energy which flows through it. Thus, to meditate on *om* in deep attention leads one's mind into profound states of higher consciousness.

OM MEDITATION TECHNIQUE

The correct procedure for chanting *om* is as follows:

1. Sit in your meditation posture with eyes closed and your mind at peace. The head, neck and spine must be straight. Prepare yourself appropriately with relaxation, deep breathing and *pranayama*,
2. When ready, take in a deep breath slowly until it reaches the naval, hold it comfortably,
3. Then begin to utter *om* with a long exhale, going oooooommmmm or aaaaauuuummmmm. You first chant the "A" or "aaahhh" sound during the main portion of the exhale, and then go to pronouncing the "U" or "uh" sound, and conclude with the "M" sound. The "A" is chanted through parted lips, slowly ascending in volume. The "U" is chanted through lips that are closer together. The time taken for chanting the "U" should be double the time taken for chanting "A". The last sound "M" is uttered through the nose with lips closed. The time for chanting "M" should be double that for "U". As you chant the "M" the volume of the sound should descend as slowly as it rose during the "A", taking as much time as it took to ascend.
4. Chant it like this several times for a total of at least nine times.
5. As you chant, do it more quietly until it is a whisper, bringing your awareness deeper within yourself each time.
6. Then chant even more deeply, but only mentally, not out loud. Let the sound pervade and resonate in your mind. It should be the only thing that you hear.
7. The last step is when this form of meditation gets more difficult. Now cease the mental chanting while still listening to the sound within your awareness. Let yourself flow into that sound, losing all other identity, and all other awareness. Nothing else exists. Only you and *om*, the vibration of God. Within that vibration is all there is. If you can reach this level of awareness, then for several minutes or as long as you can, if you are aware of time at all, sit in that awareness of God, the Absolute, the Pure, the Omniscient and Supreme Being.

To really reach the full perfection of this form of meditation is not easy. This is why some sages feel, and some references in *shastra* state, that this can be a nice preliminary form of practice, but should not be expected to take people to the deepest level of realization simply because most people in the age of Kali-yuga will find it too difficult. There are simply too many distractions to reach the desired success with it, and the mental strength and

concentration needed are rarely to be found these days. Thus, other mantras have been recommended for this age. So we will give a different mantra technique in the next chapter, one that is far easier and far more advantageous for this age.

HARI OM HARI OM HARI OM

OM SHANTI SHANTI SHANTI



Chapter 5

The Hare Krishna Mantra

In *Bhagavad-gita* (10.25) Sri Krishna explains that He is the transcendental *om* mantra and that the chanting of *japa* (chanting a mantra quietly for one's own meditation) is the purest of His representations and sacrifices. It is understood that by chanting *japa* and hearing the holy sounds of the mantra, one can come to the platform of spiritual realization. This is the process of *mantra-yoga*. Even though the mantra is powerful in itself, when the mantra is chanted by a great devotee, it becomes more powerful. This is the effect when a disciple is fortunate enough to take initiation from a spiritually powerful master who gives him a mantra for spiritual purposes. Then the disciple can make rapid progress by utilizing the mantra.

It is explained in the Vedic texts that in this age of Kali-yuga the process of chanting *japa* or mantra meditation is much more effective than practicing other spiritual paths that include meditating on the void or Brahman effulgence, or trying to control the life air within the body as in *raja-yoga*. Only a very few can become perfect at raising the *kundalini* force up through the various *chakras*, or moving the life air up to the top of the head for full enlightenment and then have it leave the body at the right time to achieve liberation. And meditating on the void becomes useless as soon as there is the slightest distraction, which in this age of Kali is a continuous thing. Therefore, the most effective means of focusing the consciousness is to concentrate on the sound vibration of a mantra.

There are two mantras that are especially recommended in the Vedic literature. One is *omkara* or the *om* mantra, and the other is Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare/Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare, which is known as the *maha* or great mantra. It is explained that these two mantras can deliver one to the realm beyond material existence.

The mantra that is especially meant to be chanted in this age is easy and is actually more directly connected with the Supreme than the sound vibration of *omkara* because it contains the direct holy names of the Lord. So the mantra for Kali-yuga is the *maha-mantra*, or great mantra for deliverance, which is Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare/Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.

CHANTING THE MAHA-MANTRA

There are many Vedic references which specifically recommend the chanting of the Hare Krishna *maha-mantra* as the most effective and advantageous means of reaching spiritual realization and counteracting all the problems of this age. Some of these verses are the following:

"These sixteen words--Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare/Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare--are especially meant for counteracting the ill effects of the present age of quarrel and anxiety." (*Kali-santarana Upanishad*)

"All mantras and all processes for self-realization are compressed into the Hare Krishna *maha-mantra*." (*Narada-pancaratra*)

"Chant the holy names, chant the holy names, chant the holy names. In this age of Kali [the age of quarrel and confusion] without a doubt there is no other way, there is no other way, there is no other way." (*Brihan-naradiya Purana* 38.126)

"In this age there is no use in meditation, sacrifice and temple worship. Simply by chanting the holy name of Krishna--Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare/Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare--one can achieve perfect self-realization." (*Vishnu Purana* 6.2.17)

"The self-realization which was achieved in the Satya millennium by meditation, in the Treta millennium by the performance of different sacrifices, and in the Dvapara millennium by opulent worship of Lord Krishna [as the Deity in the temple], can be achieved in the age of Kali simply by chanting the holy names, Hare Krishna." (*Bhag.*12.3.52) (Verses similar to this are also found in the *Padma Purana*, *Uttara-khanda* 72.25, and the *Brihan-naradiya Purana* 38.97)

"Living beings who are entangled in the complicated meshes of birth and death can be freed immediately by even unconsciously chanting the holy name of Krishna, which is feared by fear personified." (*Bhag.*1.1.14)

When instructing King Pariksit, the great sage Sri Shukadeva Gosvami said, "O King, constant chanting of the holy name of the Lord after the ways of the great authorities is the doubtless and fearless way of success for all, including those who are free from all material desires, those who are desirous of all material enjoyment, and also those who are self-satisfied by dint of transcendental knowledge. What is the value of a prolonged life which is wasted, inexperienced by years in this world? Better a moment of full consciousness, because that gives one a start in searching after his supreme interest." (*Bhag.*2.1.11-13)

The reason that chanting the Lord's names is such an effective process is because the Lord and His names are identical: they are the same spiritual energy. By chanting Hare Krishna we are in immediate contact with God. If we chant someone else's name, we cannot enjoy their association because the name and the person are different. For example, by chanting "water, water, water," we do not quench our thirst because water and the name are two different things. But in the spiritual world everything is absolute. Krishna is nondifferent from His names and, therefore, we can feel His presence simply by chanting His names. This is further elaborated in the *Caitanya-caritamrta* (*Madhya-lila*, 17.131-133), which explains that there is no difference between the Lord's name, form, or personality, and they are all transcendently sweet. Krishna's name is the same as Krishna Himself, and is not material in any way. It gives spiritual benedictions and is full of pleasure. But in the material world everything is different. Furthermore, in *Caitanya-caritamrta* (*Adi-lila*, 17.22, and the *Padma Purana*), the Hare Krishna *maha-mantra* is said to be the sound incarnation of Krishna, and anyone who chants this mantra is in direct association with Krishna and is delivered from the clutches of the material energy.

It is explained that because chanting the names of God brings us in direct contact with God in proportion to the chanter's purity, this process of self-realization is the way of success for everyone. The *Bhagavatam* (2.1.11) discloses that the chanting of God's names in the manner of the great authorities is the doubtless way to spiritual success for everyone, no matter whether they are full of material desires or free of all desires or self-satisfied because of their spiritual knowledge.

Simply by relying on the chanting of the holy names of God, one need not depend upon other processes, rituals, paraphernalia or persons. One does not even have to be initiated by a spiritual master to chant the *maha-mantra*. As the *Caitanya-caritamrta* (*Madhya-lila*, 15.108) says, one does not have to take initiation, but only has to chant the holy names. Thus, deliverance is available to even the lowest of people. Furthermore, Rupa Gosvami writes about the potency of the holy name in his *Padyavali*:

"The holy name of Lord Krishna is an attractive feature for many saintly, liberal people. It is the annihilator of all sinful reactions and is so powerful that save for the dumb who cannot chant it, it is readily available to everyone, including the lowest type of man, the *chandala*. The holy name of Krishna is the controller of the opulence of liberation, and it is identical with Krishna. Simply by touching the holy name with one's tongue, immediate effects are produced. Chanting the holy name does not depend on initiation, pious activities or the *purascarya* regulative principles generally observed before initiation. The holy name does not wait for all these activities. It is self-sufficient." (*Padyavali* 29)

Herein is evidence that the Hare Krishna *maha-mantra* is so powerful that one who sincerely takes shelter of it will attain all the desired results of connection with the Supreme. The *Skanda Purana* gives further evidence of how powerful is the *maha-mantra*:

"The name of the Lord need not be chanted with regard to place, time, circumstantial conditions, preliminary self-purification or any other factors. Rather, it is completely independent of all other processes and rewards all the desires of those who eagerly chant it." (*Skanda Purana*)

Therefore, without a doubt, the Hare Krishna mantra is the most potent mantra one can utilize for spiritual upliftment. The *Caitanya-caritamrta (Madhya-lila, 15.107)* also points out that one is freed of all sinful reactions simply by chanting Krishna's names. And all the nine types of devotional service are completed by this process. Thus, in Kali-yuga only the chanting of the holy names is necessary for worshiping the Lord. However, if one is not able to chant purely or follow the regulations for chanting, it is recommended that one get further guidance from a bona fide spiritual master.

In Kali-yuga the chanting of the holy names is certainly the most practical and effective process for the conditioned souls. It is also the easiest process whether one finds himself in Kali-yuga, Satya-yuga, Treta-yuga or Dvapara-yuga. Regardless of what age one may be living in, the process of chanting the holy names is always recommended for everyone. "The names of the Supreme Lord who has the disc as His weapon should be glorified always and everywhere." (*Vaisakha-mahatmya* section of the *Padma Purana*) But since the age of Kali is the most difficult, where men have short durations of life, it is also the most fortunate age. This is explained in *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (11.5.36-37 and 12.3.51) which states that those who are wise know the value of this age of Kali because, in spite of the fallen nature of this age, the spiritual perfection of life can be attained by the easy process of *sankirtana*, the congregational chanting of Krishna's holy names. No better position can be found to attain freedom from material existence and entrance into the spiritual kingdom than joining the Lord's *sankirtana* movement.

Even those living in other ages desire to take birth in Kali-yuga to take advantage of this special concession of a speedy delivery from the cycle of birth and death through the process of *sankirtana*. This is confirmed in *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (11.5.38) where we find it said that those who live during Satya-yuga and other ages wish to be born in Kali-yuga just to take advantage of associating with the devotees of Lord Narayana, who are especially found in South India.

The *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (11.5.32) explains that intelligent persons perform congregational singing of Krishna's names to worship the incarnation of Krishna who sings His own names, and who is accompanied by His associates and confidential companions [which indicates Lord Caitanya]. Therefore, as the *Caitanya-caritamrta (Adi-lila, 7.74)* specifically says, the essence of all scriptural teachings is that the only religious principle in the age of Kali is to chant the Lord's holy names, which are the basis of all Vedic hymns. "In this way the most perfect penance to be executed in this world is the chanting of the name of Lord Sri Hari. Especially in the age of Kali, one can satisfy the Supreme Lord Vishnu by performing *sankirtana*." (*Caturmasya-mahatmya* section of the *Skanda Purana*)

The fact of the matter, as explained in *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (3.33.6-7), is that regardless of what one's present situation is, if a person once speaks about the activities and chants the holy names of the Supreme, or hears about and remembers Him, he becomes eligible to engage in the Vedic rituals. And how much more glorious are those who regularly chant the holy names. Such people are indeed worshipable, for they must have performed all kinds of austerities, achieved the characteristics of the Aryans, studied the *Vedas*, bathed at all the holy places of pilgrimage, and done whatever else is required.

When the great sage Narada Muni was explaining to Srila Vyasadeva the means by which he became enlightened, he said, "It is personally experienced by me that those who are always full of cares and anxieties due to desiring contact of the senses with their objects can cross the ocean of nescience [illusory darkness] on a most suitable boat--the constant chanting of the transcendental activities of the Personality of Godhead. It is true that by practicing restraint of the senses by the yoga system one can get relief from the disturbances of desire and lust, but this is not sufficient to give satisfaction to the soul, for this [satisfaction] is derived from devotional service to the Supreme Personality." (*Bhag.* 1.6.34-35)

Lord Krishna goes on to explain to Uddhava that in the association of saintly devotees, there is always the discussion about Him, and those who partake in such hearing and chanting about the Lord's glories are certainly purified of all sins. In this way, whoever hears, chants and respectfully opens his heart to these topics about the Lord becomes faithfully dedicated to Him. Thus, he achieves devotional service to Lord Krishna. Then, as Lord Krishna Himself asks, "What more remains to be accomplished for the perfect devotee after achieving devotional

service unto Me, the Supreme Absolute Truth, whose qualities are innumerable and who am the embodiment of all ecstatic experience?" (*Bhag.* 11.26.28-30)

As further related by Sukadeva Gosvami, "A person who with faith engages in chanting the glories of these various pastimes and incarnations of Vishnu, the Lord of lords, will gain liberation from all sins. The all-auspicious exploits of the all attractive incarnations of Lord Shri Krishna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and also the pastimes He performed as a child, are described in this *Srimad-Bhagavatam* and in other scriptures. Anyone who clearly chants these descriptions of His pastimes will attain transcendental loving service unto Lord Krishna, who is the goal of all perfected sages." (*Bhag.* 11.31.27-28)

Sri Suta Gosvami relates that in a conversation between Narada Muni and Sanatkumara, Sanatkumara explained the way to attain freedom from this world, even for the most wayward sinners. Even all those mean men who are destitute of all good ways of behavior, who are of a wicked mind, who are outcaste, who deceive the world, who are intent upon religious hypocrisy, pride, drinking liquor, and wickedness, who are sinful and cruel, who are interested in another man's wealth, wife and sons, become pure if they resort to the lotus-like feet of Vishnu. The name of Vishnu, sure to succeed here, protects those sinful men who transgress even Him who causes divinity, who gives salvation to the immobile beings and the mobile beings. A man who has done all kinds of sins is freed if he resorts to Vishnu. If a contemptible, wicked biped would commit sin against Vishnu, and by chance resorts to His name, he is emancipated due to the (power of the) name (of Vishnu). However, a man falls down due to his sin against (Vishnu's) name, which is the friend of all. (*Padma Purana* 4.25.8-13)

The sage Kavi instructed King Nimi that the holy names of the Supreme Lord are all-auspicious because they describe His transcendental birth and pastimes, which He performs for the upliftment and salvation of all conditioned souls. For this reason the Lord's holy names are sung throughout the world. By chanting these holy names of the Supreme, one reaches the level of love of God, in which one becomes fixed as an eternal servant of the Lord. Then such a devotee becomes very attached to a particular name and form of the Lord in his service. As his heart melts in ecstatic love, he may laugh loudly or cry or shout. Sometimes he may even sing or dance like a madman in such ecstasy because he becomes indifferent to the opinion of others. (*Bhag.* 11.2.39-40)

In this way, we can begin to understand how elevated the writer of the Vedic scripture considers those who have adopted the process of chanting Krishna's holy names. However, for those who do not like the chanting of the holy names and blaspheme the process and criticize or try to restrain those who do chant, we can understand that their sentiment is due to their sinful and offensive activities. Such people are said to have no intelligence and work for no useful purpose and simply contribute to the chaos and confusion within society. The *Bhagavatam* (3.9.7) confirms that those who do not engage in the blessed chanting and hearing about the activities of the Supreme are bereft of intelligence and good fortune. They perform sinful activities to enjoy sensual pleasure which lasts only for a short time.

HOW TO CHANT THE MAHA-MANTRA

To begin progressing on the path of chanting the *maha-mantra*, it is prescribed that the practitioner chant on beads called *japa-mala*, similar to a rosary, that consists of 108 beads with one extra head bead, which is larger than the others. This represents the 108 *Upanishads*, or, as described elsewhere, Krishna in the form of the head bead surrounded by 108 of His most advanced devotees.

You may be able to purchase a set of *japa* beads at certain import shops or temples. If you cannot find them anywhere, you can also make them. Simply go to a crafts shop and purchase 108 beads of the same size and one larger bead of your choice for the Krishna bead. Also get a length of durable nylon cord. String the 108 beads with a knot in between each one and bring the two ends of the cord through one hole of the Krishna bead and out the other side where you tie the two ends of the cord together in a firm knot. Then cut the remaining lengths of the cord so you have a small tassel. Now you have got your own set of beads for *japa* meditation.

One chants the Hare Krishna mantra once on each bead from the head bead all the way around the 108 beads. This is one round, or one *mala*. Then without chanting on the Krishna bead, turn the beads around in your hand and go in the opposite direction and chant another round. One should try to set a certain amount of time aside each day, preferably in the morning, to peacefully sit down or walk and chant the particular number of rounds you have set for yourself. A person may even walk while he or she chants. There are no hard rules and as long as one listens to the mantra, the mind and consciousness is focused in such *japa* meditation. One may chant two rounds, four rounds, or whatever one can do.

For those who are serious, it is prescribed that they chant a total of at least sixteen rounds everyday. With a little practice, this normally takes about two hours. Two rounds will take about fifteen minutes. But one

should set a fixed number of rounds to chant everyday. Then one can also spend some time reading *Bhagavad-gita* or *Srimad-Bhagavatam* to enhance his or her spiritual development. A daily program of chanting and reading will produce definite results very quickly.

As with any form of meditation, it is best to do your chanting in the early morning when it is quiet and peaceful, and before your mind starts with the activities of the day. However, you can do it anytime or even at a few different times.

When you are ready to use the mantra, it does not hurt to calm the mind through the basic steps of preparation that have already been described, such as a little *pranayama* breathing techniques and so on. This is, after all, steps for preparing to attain deeper levels of awareness and consciousness, although this is not necessary. Then take your *japa* beads and begin intently chanting the Hare Krishna mantra. When the mind is calm and focused, it will especially be able to concentrate on the vibrations of the mantra. As you chant it with your voice, it is received through the ear and considered by the intelligence. From there it goes deeper into the consciousness. Let no other thoughts enter the mind so that the mantra is all there is. Dive deep into the sound of your chanting and feel the vibration of the holy names and the energy they emit.

As you become regulated at this, doing it everyday, changes will begin to manifest in your consciousness that may be imperceptible at first, while other changes begin that will be noticeable from the start. You will often notice an internal energy within you that was not there before. Amongst other things, you may also feel more sure of your own position and purpose in life, and a closer affinity with God and all beings. Of course, this is just the beginning, so if you do this regularly, deeper insights and realizations will occur as your consciousness acquires more clarity and purification.

This short description does not include that you could also get a real taste for the nectar within the Lord's holy names themselves as you can begin to perceive a reciprocation between yourself and the Lord in His names every time you begin to chant. This takes on a whole different side of spiritual growth which more closely links one to God, which, after all, is the whole purpose of any sort of yoga or religion.

CONCLUSION

So this booklet has provided an essential description of the process of meditation, from the basic purpose to the preparations and techniques. This, along with which processes are most recommended, and which ones work the best, gives the average person a quick understanding on how to begin and what to expect, and how to get the most out of it.

This chapter contains brief descriptions of the glories and effectiveness of chanting the *maha-mantra*. Those who are intelligent will certainly add this spiritual practice to their lives. By taking it seriously, they will soon notice a change in their disposition. They are most likely to feel more peaceful, content, happy, etc. One trait that is always noticeable in a person who seriously takes to *bhakti-yoga* and the chanting of the *maha-mantra* is a decrease in such feelings as anxiety and distress, up to the point of complete fearlessness. Once someone is no longer afraid of death, then what is there to be afraid of in this material world? One loses such fear when he or she is spiritually self-realized and knows he or she is not this body and, therefore, not actually subject to death, but merely undergoes a transformation of giving up the body. Thus, by taking shelter of the protection of the holy names of Krishna, one will remain spiritually safe in any condition of life.

Other books by Stephen Knapp include:

THE SECRET TEACHINGS OF THE VEDAS * THE UNIVERSAL PATH TO ENLIGHTENMENT * THE VEDIC PROPHECIES: A NEW LOOK INTO THE FUTURE * HOW THE UNIVERSE WAS CREATED AND OUR PURPOSE IN IT * TOWARD WORLD PEACE: SEEING THE UNITY BETWEEN US ALL * FACING DEATH: WELCOMING THE AFTERLIFE * PROOF OF VEDIC CULTURE'S GLOBAL EXISTENCE * THE KEY TO REAL HAPPINESS * DESTINED FOR INFINITY

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