



Svaroopa® Vidya Ashram

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Spiritual Upliftment #9

Flow State

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A yogi sits on top of a mountain, with the setting sun painting beautiful colors across the sky. She slowly closes her eyes to meditate. Instantly her mind quiets. She rests in a serene inner state. Cut! Movie scenes and car commercials lead you to believe that meditation should be instantaneous. If this is not your inner experience, you think you are a failure. Let's rewind the footage and slow it down. Meditation is a three-stage process.

The sage Patanjali describes a gradual interiorization, leading to the last three of yoga's eight limbs: dharana (contemplation), dhyana (meditation) and samadhi (inner absorption). Understanding this process will help you to understand your meditation experiences and deepen into them even more.

The first stage of meditation is dharana, directing your mind in the direction you want to go – inward. We do dharana on mantra. You may be very aware of this stage, perhaps having to bring your mind back to mantra 10 times or 100 times in one meditation. Dharana is a very important stage of meditation, where you begin to develop some control over your mind. This is why japa (mantra repetition) is so valuable, especially when you do a japa session without going into meditation.

The second stage of meditation is dhyana, which is translated as "meditation." It's confusing. Meditation is a three-stage process, yet the second stage is called meditation. In the West, we use the term "meditation" much more globally: once you sit and turn your attention inward, everything that happens is called meditation. It is like when you have pancakes for dinner, it is still called dinner. In the same way, whatever stage you are experiencing when you are meditating, the West calls it meditation.

Patanjali is more specific. He defines what the second stage of meditation is:

tatra pratyaya-ekataanataa dhyaanam — Yoga Sutras 3.2

The uninterrupted flow of attention toward one (internal) object is called meditation.

During dharana, you are tugging on the leash, bringing your mind back as often as needed. Each time you bring your mind back to the mantra, you stay a little longer, until you reach a point where your mind stays on-point. This is dhyana, meditation - the uninterrupted flow of your mind toward Consciousness.

You're not merely repeating mantra but you are flowing in the mantra: easily, smoothly, like floating downriver in a steady current. The power of the mantra carries you, yet your mind is still involved in the process. You have not passed in, fallen asleep or gone unconscious in Consciousness. You are watching your mind, even directing your mind toward Consciousness-Itself, which is your own Self.

Vidyadevi says, "Now I cherish the times that I don't just drop in, going unconscious in Consciousness. To be deeper within, yet consciously, is very powerful. I am aware of the mantra streaming forth, a vibration rolling out from the vastness of my Self. Here, my mind is imprinted with experiences that give me a deeper understanding of who I really am. By this, I have come to really understand, beyond theory, that I am not my mind. I have a mind, but I am not my mind. When I open my eyes, that understanding carries into my life. Now when my mind wants to do a number on me, I just say, 'OM Namah Shivaya. I am not going there!' It's easy to redirect my mind to the task at hand. I am not so much a slave to my mind. Thank goodness!"

This means that meditation is a certain type of mental activity that has a quality of fluidity to it. It is like the kids zooming around the store in wheel-heeled sneakers. Dharana is walking, separate individual mantra repetitions. Dhyana is gliding, flowing one mantra into the next.

"Muktananda emphasized that everyone already knows how to meditate," says Swami Nirmalananda. "When you apply your mind to a task, once you groove in on it, that's meditation. Modern researchers call it a 'flow state.' Athletes work hard to attain it but are still focused on externals. Simply apply that same ability to the inner exploration of your own existence, all the way to its source, your own Self."

When you think you're not having a good meditation, it's because what you want is "samadhi." This meditative immersion is the culmination of Patanjali's eight limbs, to settle into being Consciousness-Itself. Swamiji says, "It's amazing to me that people long for this profound inner state, since they've never heard of it and don't know its name. *Svaroopaa*[®] yoga excels at the inner opening that makes this experience possible. Shaktipat gives it to you, and gives you mantra so you can take it home with you."

In dhyana, your mind is flowing toward the Self. While your Shaktipat mantra gives you samadhi, deep and easy inner immersion, you often skip the second stage of meditation (dhyana). This means you don't learn how to apply your mind to Consciousness. Yoga's goal is for you to be conscious in the ever-deepening interior realms of your own being. Your mind is essential to the process.

If you think you're not having a good meditation because your mind is so busy, pay attention to the magical moment when you first open your eyes. This is when you realize that something has changed. Something was going on in there, something that made a difference in how you feel, even a difference in who you feel yourself to be. Evaluate your meditation by this difference, not by what happened along the way. Successive meditations deepen this change and improve your ability to make it happen.

Pouring your mind in a meditative flow toward Consciousness places your mind in service to Consciousness, to your own Self. Thus, your mind becomes a means by which Consciousness shines into the world. The good news is that, even if you have no control over your mind, Shaktipat will give you the experience of Consciousness. The bad news is, if that you don't have any control over your mind, you can't bring Consciousness into your life.

Compare driving to flying. Driving, you have many hours of constant attentiveness before you arrive at your destination. When you fly, you get on the plane and meditate, nap, watch a movie or read; in a short time, you are there. Patanjali says that the destination is samadhi, immersion into the Consciousness that you already are. Shaktipat is like flying. It blasts you right into samadhi. But, you don't see any of the scenery along the way; you never learn how to manage your mind.

I dare you to repeat mantra through your whole meditation. Catch the flow on the way in, so you can bring your Self with you when you open your eyes. In this way you transform your mind and become a force for good in this world. Do more mantra repetition.

THIS IS AN ARTICLE IN A YEAR-LONG SERIES ON "SPIRITUAL UPLIFTMENT," OUR THEME FOR 2018, CO-AUTHORED BY SWAMI NIRMALANANDA SARASWATI, VIDYADEVI STILLMAN & RUKMINI ABBRUZZI.

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