

Meditation Helps Us Become More Aware, Times of India, 23 March 2016



Traditional meditation enables us to reorient our vision and appreciate our essential identity with Ishvara, the cause of the universe. Often people say, 'I cannot meditate. It is too difficult to sit quietly and have no thoughts, I feel agitated after a while. What do we do?' First thing to learn is that meditation is not merely a technique to quieten the mind. It has a number of steps.

1) Relaxing techniques such as watching the body, breathing and thoughts are initial preparatory steps of relaxation.

2) Repeating a mantra: The second step is taking any mantra and repeating it for a length of time. For example, Ishaya Namah, Aum Namah Shivaya are famous mantras. Just repeating one of these mantras has several benefits: By bringing back the mind from any thought to that particular mantra, we make the mind more focused and less distracted.

Since each chant is the same as the other, it reduces our tendency to think by association. At times a small, insignificant action like someone not smiling at us could make us think negatively about that person. When thinking by association is curtailed, our story-building tendency is reduced, and we become more aware in our decision-making.

Moreover, during mantra repetition we observe that mantra is replaced by silence and silence in turn is replaced by mantra. Both silence and thoughts come and go but 'I' am the invariable presence, independent of entire mental life. I am invariable presence, the conscious being, totally independent of thoughts.

3) Meaning of the mantra. Dwell on it. Namah salutation to Isha: Lord of the universe in form of intelligent order that pervades every microcosm and macrocosm of universe and governs

everything starting from every cell of our body, to the earth, stars, planet, and galaxies. Meditation is a useful practice during which we learn to appreciate the presence of all-pervading intelligence that governs our life.

In recognition of this intelligence, we unload all our personal burdens — guilt, hurt, anger, sorrows, envy that we have accumulated over the years. These feelings are based on perception that life is unfair; one is victim of circumstances etc. The minute we begin to understand that that everything in the universe is governed by laws of cause-effect we come to terms with the fact that everything that has happened in our lives no matter how painful, is within infallible order of intelligence, Ishvara.

Let's say a child felt unwanted and grows up feeling rejected and carries this feeling of being 'unwanted' through life. Seeing intelligent order entails first accepting these feelings as legitimate and stop fighting them and blaming oneself for it. One can also bring to mind that people who made them feel 'unwanted' were behaving in that manner because of their own frustrations and predicaments. Understanding the situation differently enables one to learn from these experiences and turn them into opportunity to grow in life through seeking knowledge and wisdom.

4) Nididhyasana is an important step in meditation wherein one brings to mind teachings of the Gita and Upanishads that say there is no essential difference between 'I' and the cause of the universe. The individual jiva -- limited knowledge and power -- and Ishvara, all-knowledge and power, despite apparent differences in form, enjoy one reality which is consciousness, sat-chit-ananda. Bringing to mind this equation is called contemplation. Meditation is an essential practice through which one frees oneself from deep-rooted complexes and prepares oneself for understanding this profound reality.