

Taijasa Awareness Meditation

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There is an approach to meditation that encourages the development of a choiceless awareness rather than the use of any process of thought such as analysis, visualization, repetition of *mantram*-s, etc. This awareness meditation was held in high esteem by J. Kirshnamurti as well as by different spiritual traditions. We find it, with variations, in several schools of Buddhism—like Vipassana in Theravāda, Dzogchen and Mahāmudra in Tibetan Buddhism, and Shikantaza in Zen—and in other traditions like Vedānta, Taoism, etc. This practice is frequently considered to be among the more transcendental.

Why is this meditation so highly regarded by different traditions? What happens in our consciousness when we are in a state of awareness? Using the detailed Theosophical teachings regarding the human constitution and the processes of consciousness, we will explore these questions and the theosophical approach to awareness meditation.

Our Spiritual Nature and Its Evolution

The highest Principle in human beings, *ātman*, is but a ray of the Absolute Reality. This universal Principle is eternal, incorruptible, perfect, and complete. Being absolute and unconditioned, it cannot manifest directly in the conditioned Cosmos. It needs a more differentiated vehicle, *buddhi*, through which the Real is reflected in the worlds of illusion. *Ātma-buddhi* constitutes what in Theosophy is called the Monad, that is, the divine Spark, which immerses in matter and undergoes the process of cosmic evolution. At the beginning of this process, the divine Monad is unconscious on the lower planes. It evolves through the lower kingdoms of nature, from elementals to animals, pushed forward by physical evolution. As a result of this, the Monad gradually awakens to consciousness. The efforts of physical evolution, however, are not enough to develop self-

consciousness.¹ This becomes possible only when the human kingdom is reached and the stage of intellectual evolution starts. At this point, the Monad is connected to the highest product of physical evolution—the animal man—through *manas*, which acts as a bridge between the spiritual and the material.

Manas is described as the Principle of Mind, and is the source of self-consciousness. In its original nature, however, it is beyond what we conceive of as mind. Our mind is only the shadowy reflection of this spiritual Principle, when working through our brain. The same happens with the pure *manasic* self-consciousness, which, according to HPB, is self-consciousness “in the higher spiritual sense”.¹ It is not a consciousness of us being body or mind, this or that, but a pure *sense of being*, of *I-am-ness*, which is not identified with or conditioned by any particular characteristic.

By getting in touch with *manas*, the animal man is endowed with mind and self-consciousness. However, since this Principle is too spiritual to work fully through the physical brain, it can only send down a *ray* of itself. This greatly conditions the original quality and expression of *manas*. Now, the spiritual mind is limited to material perceptions, manifesting as the lower, or concrete, mind. And the pure self-consciousness, acting now in association with the body and its senses, develops the sense of “I am—this particular personality or body, separate from the rest”. This causes the birth of the illusory self, the lower ego.

Due to its association with *manas*, at the end of this cycle of evolution the dual Monad (*ātma-buddhi*) acquires divine self-consciousness, thus becoming triple (*ātma-buddhi-manas*). However, the divine Spark can only assimilate the spiritual essence of *manas*. It is then necessary to purify our mind and self-consciousness in order to realize our spiritual nature.

¹ In Theosophical literature self-consciousness is used in the philosophical sense, whereas self-awareness is the more common term used today.

Raising the Seat of Self-Consciousness

As a result of the process just described, most of us feel we are the personality, and are unable to recognize ourselves as being the spiritual Monad. How can we become aware of our real Self? Annie Besant explains the following:

The one certainty for each of us, needing no proof, beyond all argument, incapable of being strengthened by any act of the reason, is the sure truth: *I am*. This is the ultimate fact of consciousness, the foundation on which everything else is built. . . . If, studying man in his present stage of evolution, we seek to know the seat of this Self-consciousness, we find that in most of us its throne is the lower mind. . . . From this life of the lower mind, in which sensations still play so large a part, man rises to the life of the intellect, and the lower mind becomes his instrument, ceasing to be himself. From the life of the intellect he must rise to the life of the Spirit, and know himself as the One. The seat of Self-consciousness is moved from the lower mind to the higher by strenuous thinking, by the intellectual travail of the student, the philosopher, the man of science—if the latter turn his thoughts from objects to principles, from phenomena to laws. And as strenuous thinking can alone lift the seat of Self-consciousness from the mind to the intellect, so can deep concentration and meditation alone raise that seat from the intellect to the Spirit.²

The lower mind is the concrete mind; the one that is interested in material objects, and lives in and by sensations. Most people are self-conscious mainly at this level. They are not interested in *Ideas*, in an understanding of life and its purpose. They are interested in more “practical things”, that is, in what can bring a palpable physical or psychological result. Dr. Besant says that the first stage in this process of raising the seat of our self-consciousness, is to start experiencing this less concrete dimension of life and of our being; to discover that our body and lower mind are not the only reality. This higher dimension is grasped by what she calls the “intellect”, that is, the abstract mind. She said that a person begins to be conscious of these subtler aspects by studying universal themes that are not directly related to personal existence, by trying to grasp abstract principles and laws of life. In other words, the person has to adopt a philosophical attitude and become a seeker of truth. Through this effort the mind gets refined and becomes able to perceive gradually

the formless world of the Spirit. This is what HPB called *Jñāna Yoga* in connection with the study of *The Secret Doctrine*.³

Then Dr. Besant describes the second stage, which is beyond even “strenuous thinking”. As HPB pointed out, gaining spiritual Self-knowledge and becoming conscious of our divine nature is not possible by reasoning or by any brain process.⁴ Here, non-conceptual meditation is needed. We have to resort to that source of wisdom in us which is beyond the intellect and its processes—*buddhi*. This Principle, besides acting as the vehicle of *ātman*, is a faculty of unitive, spiritual, perception. However, Theosophical teachings state that if there is no *manasic* element united to *buddhi* this wisdom remains as only a potential on our plane. In other words: the original nature of our consciousness is full of wisdom, but we are unconscious of it. When there is a union of wisdom (*buddhi*) and pure self-consciousness (*manas*), this innate wisdom becomes available and there is a transformation in us—we become consciously divine. In HPB’s words:

Manas is Spiritual Self-Consciousness, in itself, and Divine Consciousness when united with *Buddhi*.⁵

Taijasa Meditation

Let us explore now the Theosophical approach to this non-conceptual type of meditation.

Since all virtues are already present in our spiritual consciousness, we do not need to add or acquire anything. What is needed is to disentangle our pure self-consciousness from its association with the personality, thus becoming self-aware at the spiritual level. In other words, we need to transcend the sense of “I am this name, body, and mind”. As we said, this cannot be done through any activity of thought, because thoughts belong to the personality. The problem, however, lies not in the thinking process itself—which is the natural activity of *manas* when working through the brain—but in the identification of our consciousness with the illusory thinker. It is important to realize that, though there is a continuous process of thinking, there is no *thinker* as a real entity at the psychological level. There seems to be one only due to the union of this living thinking process with the pure self-consciousness.² In other

² This thinking process (*kāma-manas*) which expresses itself through the lower Principles has an

words, the illusory sense of “I am the thinker” is created when a succession of thoughts arises in our minds and the *manasic* self-consciousness is reflected on them.

There are several meditative practices to become self-aware at the spiritual level, some of which were explained in a previous article (“Who am I?” *The Theosophist*, Aug. 2009). In awareness meditation we accomplish this by watching our mind and its movements. According to HPB, when the individual consciousness is turned inward, there is a conjunction of *buddhi* and *manas*.⁶ Here, there is “self-consciousness in its purest form”.⁷ This conjunction is permanent in the enlightened one who has realized his divine consciousness, while the aspirant is able to attain it only momentarily. This temporary state of mind in the aspirant is called *taijasa*, “radiant”, since *manas* is “illuminated by the radiance of the divine soul [*buddhi*]”.⁸

J. Krishnamurti explains the steps for this type of meditation as follows:

First of all, sit very quietly; do not force yourself to sit quietly, but sit or lie down quietly without force of any kind. . . . Then watch your thinking. Watch what you are thinking about. . . . And when a thought arises, do not condemn it, do not say it is right, it is wrong, it is good, it is bad. . . . When you look, when you go into thought very, very deeply, your mind becomes extraordinarily subtle, alive. No part of the mind is asleep. The mind is completely awake.

That is merely the foundation. Then your mind is very quiet. Your whole being becomes very still. Then go through that stillness, deeper, further—that whole process is meditation.⁹

In the *taijasic* state of our mind, we are in contact with our innate wisdom (*buddhi*). This is a clear, radiant awareness, beyond all mental grasping. We cannot produce it in a direct way, by means of the activity of thought. It is only reached by the effortless recognition of one’s transcendental identity through discriminating wisdom. “Effortless” here means that we cannot force or produce this perception. All we can do from *below* is to create the right conditions for the *buddhic* perception to appear from *above*. Let us explore these conditions.

intelligence of its own—the elemental consciousness. Even after the transpersonal Ego leaves behind these lower Principles after death, they can still reproduce the same thinking process when attracted to a medium, and be taken as the real person.

The *buddhic* perception is beyond the personal. It can only arise when there is no distortion produced by our personal likes and dislikes. Therefore, we should remain aware of the movements of our mind with equanimity, without engaging in judgments or reactions to what we perceive. We are pure witnesses. This higher consciousness, however, is also described as being associated with a state of love and bliss. It cannot manifest if there is any sense of condemnation or severity in our witnessing. We watch whatever is in the field of consciousness with a sense of love and integration.

Because this spiritual perception is non-dual, we have to let go of the separation between the observer and the observed, between the thinker and the thinking. As we said, thoughts are not a problem in and of themselves. They are like the waves of the ocean, like passing clouds in the immutable sky. We do not try to stop or manipulate them, because in that very act we are assuming the position of the thinker. Without intervening, we relax all effort, inward and outward, and let the continuous process of thinking work in its own self-directed activity. Dropping the identification with the illusory thinker, we simply stay quietly aware.

This *taijasic* state is full of wisdom. Wisdom here means that we see things as they really are, without getting entangled in personal reactions or conditionings. Being beyond the psychological process, this state is beyond time, and in its very atmosphere illusion is dissolved. As we read in *Light on the Path*:

Live neither in the present nor the future, but in the eternal. This giant weed [the lower self] cannot flower there: this blot upon existence is wiped out by the very atmosphere of eternal thought.¹⁰

The state of *taijasa*, in and of itself, gradually purifies our self-consciousness from its personal elements. We become aware of the impersonal sense of *I-am-ness* and then our consciousness can go beyond, rising “to the life of the Spirit.”

The Theosophist

References

- 1- H.P. Blavatsky (HPB), *The Secret Doctrine* II, Stanza III, p. 79
- 2- Annie Besant, *The Reality of the Invisible and the Actuality of the Unseen Worlds*.
- 3- R. Bowen, *Madame Blavatsky on How to Study Theosophy*.
- 4- HPB, *Collected Writings (CW)* VIII, "Self-knowledge", p. 108
- 5- HPB, *CW* XII, "The Philosophical Rationale of the Tenet", p. 630
- 6- HPB, *CW* XII, "ES Instruction No. II", p. 545
- 7- HPB, *CW* VIII, "Modern Idealism, Worse Than Materialism", p. 96-7
- 8- HPB, *Key to Theosophy*, Section 9, "On Post-Mortem and Post-Natal Consciousness", fn. 4
- 9- J. Krishnamurti, *On Education*, p. 58
- 10- M. Collins, *Op.cit.*, Part I, "Rule 4".