# Dhyāna : Meditation & Contemplation

Words of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

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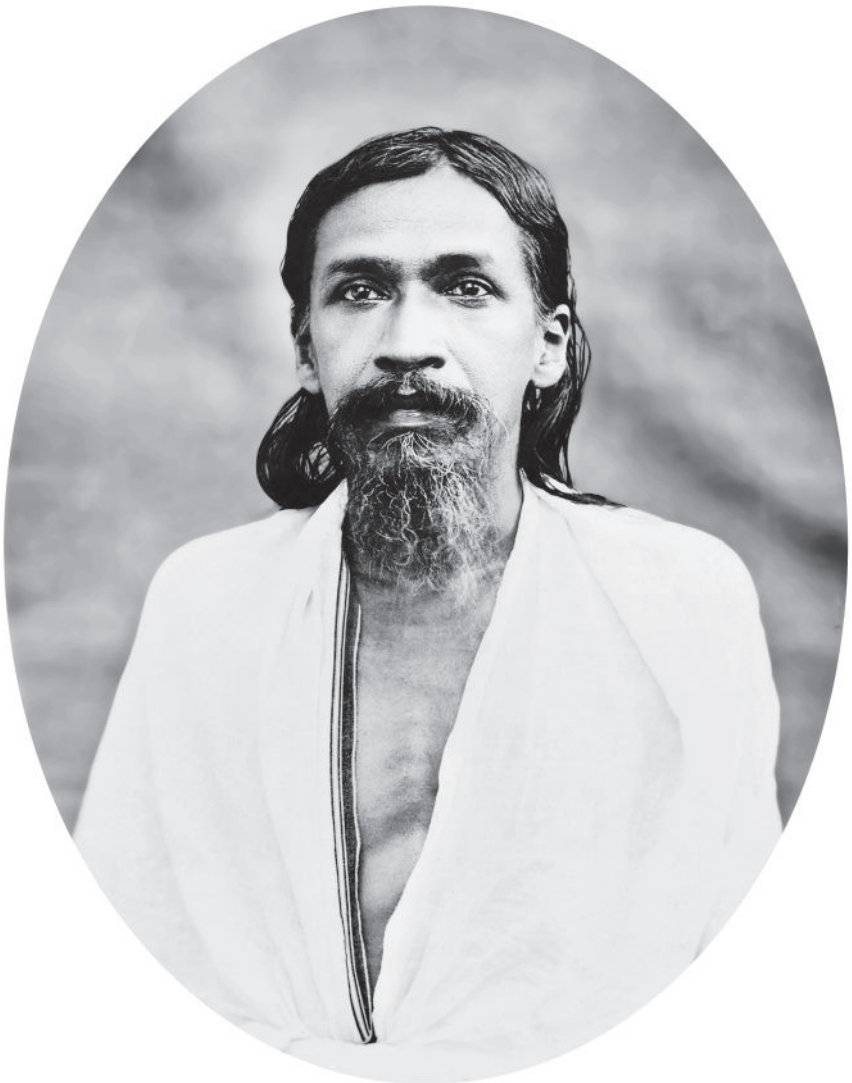

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Sri Aurobindo

## What Meditation Exactly Means

There are two words used in English to express the Indian idea of *dhyāna*, "meditation" and "contemplation". **Meditation means*** properly the concentration of the mind on a single train of ideas which work out a single subject. **Contemplation means** regarding mentally a single object, image, idea so that the knowledge about the object, image or idea may arise naturally in the mind by force of the concentration. Both these things are forms of *dhyāna*, for the principle of *dhyāna* is mental concentration whether in thought, vision or knowledge.

There are other forms of *dhyāna*. There is a passage in which Vivekananda advises you to stand back from your thoughts, let them occur in your mind as they will and simply observe them and see what they are. This may be **called concentration in self-observation.**

This form leads to another, the emptying of all thought out of the mind so as to leave it a sort of pure vigilant blank on which the divine knowledge may come and imprint itself, undisturbed by the inferior thoughts of the ordinary human mind and with the clearness of a writing in white chalk on a blackboard. You will find that the Gita speaks of this rejection of all mental thought as one of the methods of yoga and even the method it seems to prefer. This may be **called the *dhyāna* of liberation,** as it frees the mind from slavery to the mechanical process of thinking and allows it to think or not to think, as it pleases and when it pleases, or to choose its own thoughts or else to go beyond thought to the pure perception of Truth called in our philosophy *Vijñāna*.

Meditation is the easiest process for the human mind,

* Emphasis added by the editor at several places in this compilation by using bold typeface.

but the narrowest in its results; contemplation more difficult, but greater; self-observation and liberation from the chains of Thought the most difficult of all, but the widest and greatest in its fruits. One can choose any of them according to one's bent and capacity. The perfect method is to use them all, each in its own place and for its own object; but this would need a fixed faith and firm patience and a great energy of Will in the self-application to the yoga.

(SABCL 23: 721-22) **Sri Aurobindo**

## What should Be the Object or Ideas for Meditation

Whatever is most consonant with your nature and highest aspirations. But if you ask me for an absolute answer, then I must say that Brahman is always the best object for meditation or contemplation and the idea on which the mind should fix is that of God in all, all in God and all as God. It does not matter essentially whether it is the Impersonal or the Personal God, or subjectively, the One Self. But this is the idea I have found the best, because it is the highest and embraces all other truths, whether truths of this world or of the other worlds or beyond all phenomenal existence,—"All this is the Brahman."

In the third issue of *Arya*, at the end of the second instalment of the Analysis of the Isha Upanishad, you will find a description of this vision of the All* which may be of help to you in understanding the idea.

(SABCL 23: 722) **Sri Aurobindo**

* See SABCL Vol. 12, p. 86 (The Vision of the Brahman)

## Most Essential Conditions for Meditation

There are no *essential* **external conditions**, but solitude and seclusion at the time of meditation as well as stillness of the body are helpful, sometimes almost necessary to the beginner. But one should not be bound by external conditions. Once the habit of meditation is formed, it should be made possible to do it in all circumstances, lying, sitting, walking, alone, in company, in silence or in the midst of noise etc.

The first **internal condition** necessary is concentration of the will against the obstacles to meditation, i.e. wandering of the mind, forgetfulness, sleep, physical and nervous impatience and restlessness etc.

The second is an increasing purity and calm of the inner consciousness (*citta*) out of which thought and emotion arise, i.e. a freedom from all disturbing reactions, such as anger, grief, depression, anxiety about worldly happenings etc. Mental perfection and moral are always closely allied to each other.

*

The sitting motionless posture is the natural posture for concentrated meditation — walking and standing are active conditions. It is only when one has gained the enduring rest and passivity of the consciousness that it is easy to concentrate and receive when walking or doing anything. A fundamental passive condition of the consciousness gathered into itself is the proper poise for concentration and a seated gathered immobility in the body is the best position for that. It can be done also lying down, but that position is too passive, tending to be inert rather than gathered.

**Sri Aurobindo**

(SABCL 23: 722-23, 727)

## Two Common Difficulties in Meditation

The mind is always in activity, but we do not observe fully what it is doing, but allow ourselves to be carried away in the stream of continual thinking. When we try to concentrate, this stream of self-made mechanical thinking becomes prominent to our observation. It is the first normal obstacle (the other is sleep during meditation) to the effort for yoga.

The best thing to do is to realise that the thought-flow is not yourself, it is not you who are thinking, but thought that is going on in the mind. It is Prakriti with its thought-energy that is raising all this whirl of thought in you, imposing it on the Purusha. You as the Purusha must stand back as the witness observing the action, but refusing to identify yourself with it. The next thing is to exercise a control and reject the thoughts — though sometimes by the very act of detachment the thought-habit falls away or diminishes during the meditation and there is a sufficient silence or at any rate a quietude which makes it easy to reject the thoughts that come and fix oneself on the object of meditation. If one becomes aware of the thoughts as coming from outside, from the universal Nature, then one can throw them out before they reach the mind; in that way the mind finally falls silent. If neither of these things happens, a persistent practice of rejection becomes necessary—there should be no struggle or wrestling with the thought, but only a quiet self-separation and refusal. Success does not come at first, but if consent is constantly withheld, the mechanical whirl eventually ceases and begins to die away and one can then have at will an inner quietude or silence.

It should be noted that the result of the yogic processes is not, except in rare cases, immediate and one must apply

the will-patience till they give a result which is sometimes long in coming if there is much resistance in the outer nature.

*

It is not easy to get into the Silence. That is only possible by throwing out all mental-vital activities. It is easier to let the Silence descend into you, i.e., to open yourself and let it descend. The way to do this and the way to call down the higher powers is the same. It is to remain quiet at the time of meditation, not fighting with the mind or making mental efforts to pull down the Power or the Silence but keeping only a silent will and aspiration for them. If the mind is active one has to learn to look at it, drawn back and not giving any sanction from within, until its habitual or mechanical activities begin to fall quiet for want of support from within. If it is too persistent, a steady rejection without strain or struggle is the one thing to be done.

*

When one tries to meditate, there is a pressure to go inside, lose the waking consciousness and wake inside, in a deep inner consciousness. But at first the mind takes it for a pressure to go to sleep, since sleep is the only kind of inner consciousness to which it has been accustomed. In yoga by meditation sleep is therefore often the first difficulty — but if one perseveres, then gradually the sleep changes to an inner conscious state.

**Sri Aurobindo**

(SABCL 23: 731-32, 736, 739)



The Mother

## The First Thing to Know: Why One Meditates

(Meditation is a means and not an end in itself)

Generally, people don't have a dynamic meditation. When they enter into meditation—or at least what they call meditation— they enter into a kind of immobility where nothing stirs, and they come out of it exactly as they went in, without any change either in their being or in their consciousness. And the more motionless it is, the happier they are. They could meditate in this way for eternities, it would never change anything either in the universe or in themselves. ...

I think the most important thing is to know why one meditates; this is what gives the quality of the meditation and makes it of one order or another.

You may meditate to open yourself to the divine Force, you may meditate to reject the ordinary consciousness, you may meditate to enter the depths of your being, you may meditate to learn how to give yourself integrally; you may meditate for all kinds of things. You may meditate to enter into peace and calm and silence — this is what people generally do, but without much success. But you may also meditate to receive the Force of transformation, to discover the points to be transformed, to trace out the line of progress. And then you may also meditate for very practical reasons: when you have a difficulty to clear up, a solution to find, when you want help in some action or other. You may meditate for that too.

*

... a discipline in itself is not what we are seeking.

**The Mother**

(CWM (1st ed.) 8: 88-89; 3: 20)

## The One Need

*Q: Is not an increasing effort of meditation needed and is it not true that the more hours you meditate the greater progress you make?*

The number of hours spent in meditation is no proof of spiritual progress. It is a proof of your progress when you no longer have to make an effort to meditate. Then you have rather to make an effort to stop meditating: it becomes difficult to stop meditation, difficult to stop thinking of the Divine, difficult to come down to the ordinary consciousness. Then you are sure of progress, then you have made real progress when concentration in the Divine is the necessity of your life, when you cannot do without it, when it continues naturally from morning to night whatever you may be engaged in doing. Whether you sit down to meditation or go about and do things and work, what is required of you is consciousness; that is **the one need**, — to be constantly conscious of the Divine.

*Q: But is not sitting down to meditation an indispensable discipline, and does it not give a more intense and concentrated union with the Divine?*

That may be. But a discipline in itself is not what we are seeking. **What we are seeking** is to be concentrated on the Divine in all that we do, at all times, in all our acts and in every movement. There are some here who have been told to meditate; but also there are others who have not been asked to do any meditation at all. But it must not be thought that they are not progressing. They too follow a discipline, but it is of another nature. To work, to act with devotion and an inner consecration is also a spiritual discipline. The

final aim is to be in constant union with the Divine, not only in meditation but in all circumstances and in all the active life.

There are some who, when they are sitting in meditation, get into a state which they think very fine and delightful. They sit self-complacent in it and forget the world; but if they are disturbed, they come out of it angry and restless, because their meditation was interrupted. This is not a sign of spiritual progress or discipline. There are some people who act and seem to feel as if their meditation were a debt they have to pay to the Divine; they are like men who go to church once a week and think they have paid what they owe to God.

*

[The above talk of April 21, 1929 was taken up in the "Mother's Classes" on February 17, 1951 where the Mother explained some passages as under.]

> *"Then you have rather to make an effort to stop meditating: it becomes difficult to stop meditation, difficult to stop thinking of the Divine, difficult to come down to the ordinary consciousness."*

How I wish this would become true for everybody!

You may be engaged in the most active action, for example, in playing basketball, which needs a great deal of movement, and yet not lose the attitude of inner meditation and concentration upon the Divine. And when you get that, you will see that all you do changes its quality; not only will you do it better, but you will do it with an altogether unexpected strength, and at the same time keep your consciousness so high and so pure that nothing will be able to touch you any longer. And note that this can go so far that even if

an accident occurs, it will not hurt you. Naturally, this is a peak, but it is a peak to which one can aspire.

Do not fall into the very common error of believing that you must sit in an absolutely quiet corner where nobody passes by, where you are in a classical position and altogether immobile, in order to be able to meditate—it is not true. What is needed is to succeed in meditating under all circumstances, and **I call "meditating" not emptying your head but concentrating yourself in a contemplation of the Divine;** and if you keep this contemplation within you, all that you do will change its quality — not its appearance, for apparently it will be the same thing, but its quality. And life will change its quality, and you, you will feel a little different from what you were, with a peace, a certitude, an inner calm, an unchanging force, something which never gives way.

**The Mother**

(CWM 3: 19-21; 4: 121-22)

*O Lord, inconceivable Splendour...*

*A deep and solemn chant, smiling and subtle, rises from my heart, and I do not know whether this chant goes from me to Thee or comes from Thee to me or whether Thou and I and the entire universe are this marvellous chant of which I have just become conscious. . . . Surely there is no longer any Thou or I or any separate universe; only an immense harmony is there, sublime and infinite, which is all things and of which all things will one day grow aware. It is the harmony of boundless Love...*

*The Mother*

CWM 1: 25 (July 23, 1913)

## How to Meditate

The method is always the same. Gather together the energies in you that are usually dispersed outside; concentrate your consciousness within, beneath the surface agitation, and establish, as far as possible, a perfect quietness in your heart and head; then formulate your aspiration, if you have one, and open yourself to receive the divine force from above.

*

*Q: What is real meditation?*

It is an active and deliberate concentration on the Divine Presence and a sustained, alert contemplation of that Sublime Reality.

*

When you sit in meditation you must be as candid and simple as a child, not interfering by your external mind, expecting nothing, insisting on nothing. Once this condition is there, all the rest depends upon the aspiration deep within you. And if you call upon Divinity, then too you will have the answer.

*

... instead of being in a state of tension, instead of making a tremendous effort to silence the inner machine and be able to concentrate your thought upon what you want, when you do it quite simply, naturally, without effort, automatically, and you decide to meditate for some reason or other, what you want to see, learn or know remains in your consciousness and all the rest disappears as by a miracle; everything falls quiet in you, all your being becomes silent, your nerves are altogether soothed, your consciousness

is wholly concentrated — naturally, spontaneously — and you enter with an intense delight into a yet more intense contemplation.

This is the sign that you have succeeded; otherwise it is not the thing.

*

It is always better, for meditation — you see, we use the word "meditation", but it does not necessarily mean "moving ideas around in the head", quite the contrary — it is always better to try to concentrate in a centre, the centre of aspiration, one might say, the place where the flame of aspiration burns, to gather in all the energies there, at the solar plexus centre and, if possible, to obtain an attentive silence as though one wanted to listen to something extremely subtle, something that demands a complete attention, a complete concentration and total silence. And then not to move at all. Not to think, not to stir, and make that movement of opening so as to receive all that can be received, but taking good care not to try to know what is happening while it is happening, for if one wants to understand or even to observe actively, it keeps up a sort of cerebral activity which is unfavourable to the fullness of the receptivity — to be silent, as totally silent as possible, in an attentive concentration, and then be still.

If one succeeds in this, then, when everything is over, when one comes out of meditation, some time later — usually not immediately — from within the being something new emerges in the consciousness: a new understanding, a new appreciation of things, a new attitude in life — in short, a new way of being. This may be fugitive, but at that moment, if one observes it, one finds that something has taken one step forward on the path of understanding or transformation. It may be an illumination, an understand-

ing truer or closer to the truth, or a power of transformation which helps you to achieve a psychological progress or a widening of the consciousness or a greater control over your movements, over the activities of the being.

And these results are never immediate. For if one tries to have them at once, one remains in a state of activity which is quite the contrary of true receptivity. One must be as neutral, as immobile, as passive as one can be, with a background of silent aspiration not formulated in words or ideas or even in feelings; something that does this *(gesture like a mounting flame)* in an ardent vibration, but which does not formulate, and above all, does not try to understand.

With a little practice one reaches a state which may be obtained at will, in a few seconds, that is, one doesn't waste any of the meditation time. Naturally, in the beginning, one must slowly quieten the mind, gather up one's consciousness, concentrate; one loses three-quarters of the time in preparing oneself. But when one has practised the thing, in two or three seconds one can get it, and then one benefits from the whole period of receptivity.

Naturally, there are still more advanced and perfected states, but that comes later. But already if one reaches that state, one profits fully by the meditation.

*

**A simple method:**

There is another kind of meditation which consists in being as quiet as one can be but without trying to stop all thoughts, for there are thoughts which are purely mechanical and if you try to stop these you will need years, and moreover you will not be sure of the result; instead of that you gather together all your consciousness and remain as quiet and peaceful as possible, you detach yourself from external things as

though they do not interest you at all, and all of a sudden, you brighten the flame of aspiration and throw into it everything that comes to you so that the flame may rise higher and higher, higher and higher; you identify yourself with it and you go up to the extreme point of your consciousness and aspiration, thinking of nothing else — simply, an aspiration which mounts, mounts, mounts, without thinking a minute of the result, of what may happen and especially of what may not, and above all without desiring that something may come — simply, the joy of an aspiration which mounts and mounts and mounts, intensifying itself more and more in a constant concentration. And there I may assure you that what happens is the best that can happen. That is, it is the maximum of your possibilities which is realised when you do this. These possibilities may be very different according to individuals. But then all these worries about trying to be silent, going behind appearances, calling a force which answers, waiting for an answer to your questions, all that vanishes like an unreal vapour. And if you succeed in living consciously in this flame, in this column of mounting aspiration, you will see that even if you do not have an immediate result, after a time something will happen.

*

... usually one means by contemplation a kind of opening upwards. It is rather a state of passive opening upwards. It is a fairly passive form of aspiration. One makes this movement rather like something opening, opening in an aspiration; but if the contemplation is sufficiently total, it becomes a concentration. Yet it is not necessarily a concentration. ...

A concentration is essentially a limiting. One can't concentrate on several points at once, it is no longer a concentration.

*

*Q: Often after a long meditation (an effort to meditate), I feel very tired and want to rest. Why is this and how can I feel differently?*

So long as you are making an effort, it is not meditation and there is not much use in prolonging this state.

To obtain mental silence, one must learn to relax, to let oneself float on the waves of the universal force as a plank floats on water, *motionless* but *relaxed.*

Effort is never silent.

**The Mother**

(CWM 17: 361, 24; 14: 53; 4: 120-21; 9: 114-15; 4: 104-05; 7: 278; 16: 312)

*

**How to prepare for the meditation:**

Read the Mother's answer on pages 44-45 of this booklet.

—ed.

*The quiet mind one gets through meditation is indeed of short duration, for as soon as you come out from meditation you come out at the same time from the quietness of mind. The true lasting quietness in the vital and the physical as well as in the mind comes from a complete consecration to the Divine; for when you can no more call anything, not even yourself, yours, when everything, including your body, sensations, feelings and thoughts, belongs to the Divine, the Divine takes the entire responsibility of all and you have nothing more to worry about.*

*The Mother*

(CWM 14: 99)

## Inner Contemplation

**Correct contemplation:**

Egoless thought concentrated on the essence of things, on the inmost truth and on the goal to be attained.

How often there is a kind of emptiness in the course of life, an unoccupied moment, a few minutes, sometimes more. And what do you do? Immediately you try to distract yourself, and you invent some foolishness or other to pass your time. That is a common fact. All men, from the youngest to the oldest, spend most of their time in trying not to be bored. Their pet aversion is boredom and the way to escape from boredom is to act foolishly.

Well, there is a better way than that — to remember.

When you have a little time, whether it is one hour or a few minutes, tell yourself, "At last, I have some time to concentrate, to collect myself, to relive the purpose of my life, to offer myself to the True and the Eternal." If you took care to do this each time you are not harassed by outer circumstances, you would find out that you were advancing very quickly on the path. Instead of wasting your time in chattering, in doing useless things, reading things that lower the consciousness — to choose only the best cases, I am not speaking of other imbecilities which are much more serious —instead of trying to make yourself giddy, to make time, that is already so short, still shorter only to realise at the end of your life that you have lost three-quarters of your chance—then you want to put in double time, but that does not work—it is better to be moderate, balanced, patient, quiet, but never to lose an opportunity that is given to you, that is to say, to utilise for the true purpose the unoccupied moment before you.

When you have nothing to do, you become restless, you

run about, you meet friends, you take a walk, to speak only of the best; I am not referring to things that are obviously not to be done. **Instead of that**, sit down quietly before the sky, before the sea or under trees, whatever is possible (here you have all of them) and try to realise one of these things— to understand why you live, to learn how you must live, to ponder over what you want to do and what should be done, what is the best way of escaping from the ignorance and falsehood and pain in which you live.

*

**No need of solitude of the forest:**

... it is quite certain that eating alone, sleeping alone, living in the forest all alone is not enough to give you freedom of spirit.

It has been noticed that most people who live alone in the forest become friendly with all the animals and plants around them; but it is not at all the fact of being all alone that gives you **the power of entering into an inner contemplation and living in communion with the Supreme Truth.** Perhaps it is easier, when by force of circumstance you have nothing else to do, but I am not convinced of it. One can always invent occupations and it seems to me, according to my experience of life, that if one succeeds in subduing one's nature in the midst of difficulties, if one endeavours to be all alone within oneself with the eternal Presence, while keeping the same surroundings which the Grace has given us, the realisation which one obtains then is infinitely more true, more profound, more lasting.

To run away from difficulties in order to conquer them is not a solution. It is very attractive. In those who seek the spiritual life, there is something which says, "Oh! to sit down under a tree, all alone, to remain in meditation, not to have the temptation to speak or act, how fine it must be!" It

is because there is a very strong formation in this direction, but it is very illusory.

The best meditations are those that one has all of a sudden, because they take possession of you as an imperative necessity. You have no choice but to concentrate, to meditate, to look beyond the appearances. And it is not necessarily in the solitude of the forest that it seizes you, it happens when something in you is ready, when the time has come, when the true need is there, when the Grace is with you. ...

You must know how to live alone with the Eternal and Infinite in the midst of all circumstances. You must know how to be free, with the Supreme as your companion, in the midst of all occupations. That is indeed the true victory.

*

**Inner quietude:**

Once you step back from these whirling forces into quiet regions, you see how great is the illusion! Humanity appears to you like a mass of blind creatures rushing about without knowing what they do or why they do it and only knocking and stumbling against each other. And it is this that they call action and life! It is empty agitation, not action, not true life. ...

And the silence I speak of is the inner quietude that those alone have who can act without being identified with their action, merged into it and blinded and deafened by the noise and form of their own movement. Stand back from your action and rise into an outlook above these temporal motions; enter into the consciousness of Eternity. Then only you will know what true action is.

**The Mother**

(CWM 3: 250-51, 275-76, 67-68)

## Pseudo-Meditation and the True Humility

*"There are some who, when they are sitting in meditation, get into a state which they think very fine and delightful."*

*(The Mother, CWM Vol. 3, p. 20)*

*Q: What is this state?*

Whatever it may be, they think their state is delightful and remarkable. They have a very high opinion of themselves. They believe they are remarkable people because they are able to sit quietly without moving; and if they don't think of anything, that is remarkable. But usually it is a kind of kaleidoscope that is going on in their head, they do not even notice it. Still, those who can remain for a moment without moving, without speaking and thinking, have certainly a very high opinion of themselves. Only, as I have said, if they are pulled out of it, if someone comes and knocks at the door and they are told, "There is somebody waiting for you", or "Madam, your child is crying", they immediately get furious and say: "There, my meditation is spoilt! Completely spoilt." I am telling you things I have seen with my own eyes. People who were very serious in their meditation, and could not be interrupted in their meditation without their getting violently angry.... Naturally this is not a sign of great spiritual progress. They stormed against everybody because they had been pulled out of their beatific meditation.

Among people who meditate there are some who know how to meditate, who concentrate not on an idea, but in silence, in an inner contemplation in which they say they reach even a union with the Divine; and that is perfectly all right. There are others, just a few, who can follow an idea closely and try to find exactly what it means; that too is all

right. Most of the time people try to concentrate and enter into a kind of half sleepy and, in any case, very tamasic state. They become some kind of inert thing; the mind is inert, the feeling is inert, the body is immobile. They can remain like that for hours, for there is nothing more durable than inertia! All this that I am telling you now—these are experiences of people I have met. And these people, when they come out of their meditation, sincerely believe they have done something very great. But they have simply gone down into inertia and unconsciousness. People who know how to meditate are very few in number. Besides, admitting that through much discipline and years of effort you have in your meditation succeeded in coming into conscious relation with the divine Presence, evidently this is a result, and this result should necessarily have an effect upon your character and your life. But this effect is very different according to individuals. There are cases in which the person is split into two in so radical a way that while in meditation such people can enter into contact with the Divine and obtain this supreme felicity of identification, but when they come out of this and lead their normal life, begin to live and act, they can be the most ordinary men with the most ordinary and sometimes even the most vulgar reactions. Indeed, I know people who become altogether ordinary men, and then they do, for example, all the things one should not do, like passing their time in gossiping about others, thinking of themselves only, having all selfish reactions and wanting to organise their life for their petty personal well-being; they do not think of others at all and never do anything for anybody, have no large idea. And yet, in their meditation, they have had this contact. And that is why people who have discovered how very difficult it is to change this petty outer nature that one takes up along with the body, how difficult

it is to transcend oneself, to transform one's movements, say: "It is not possible, it is no use trying; in coming to the world, you have taken a body of dust, you have only to let it fall off and prepare to go away, leaving the world as it is; and the only thing to do is to run away as quickly as one can; and if everybody runs away, there will no longer be a world and therefore no more misery." That's logical. If they are told: "But perhaps what you propose to do is very selfish, to go away and leave others floundering?"—"Well, they have only to do what I do. If everybody did what I am doing, they would get out of it, there would be no longer any world, no longer any misery." As though it depended upon the will of individuals who have not even taken any part in the making of the world! How can they hope to stop it? At least if it was they who had made it, they could know how it was made and could try to undo it (although it is not always easy to undo what one has done), but it is not they who have made it, they do not even know how it has been made and they have the presumption to want to undo it, because they imagine that they themselves can run away from it.... I do not think it is possible. One cannot run away, even if one tries. That however is another subject. In any case, for me, my experience (which is sufficiently long, for it is now almost fifty-three years since I have been dealing with people, with their yoga, their inner efforts; I have seen much here and there, a little everywhere in the world); well, I do not believe that it is by meditation that you can transform yourself. I am absolutely convinced of the contrary.

If while doing what you have to do — whatever it may be, whatever work it is — if you do it and while doing it are careful not to forget the Divine, to offer to Him what you do and try so to give yourself to Him that He may change all your reactions — instead of their being selfish, petty, stupid

and ignorant, making them luminous, generous—then in that way you will make progress. Not only will you have made some progress but you will have helped in the general progress. I have never seen people who have left everything in order to go and sit down in a more or less empty contemplation (for it is more or less empty), I have never seen such people making any progress, or in any case their progress is very trifling. I have seen persons who had no pretensions of doing yoga, who were simply filled with enthusiasm by the idea of terrestrial transformation and of the descent of the Divine into the world and who did their little bit of work with that enthusiasm in the heart, giving themselves wholly, without reserve, without any selfish idea of a personal salvation; these I have seen making magnificent progress, truly magnificent. And sometimes they are wonderful. I have seen sannyasis, I have seen people who live in monasteries, I have seen people who professed to be yogis, well, I would not exchange one of the others for a dozen such people (I mean, from the standpoint of terrestrial transformation and world progress, that is to say, from the standpoint of what we want to do, to try that this world may no longer be what it is and may become truly the instrument of the divine Will, with the divine Consciousness). It is not by running away from the world that you will change it. It is by working there, modestly, humbly but with a fire in the heart, something that burns like an offering. *Voilà*.

***Q: So meditation is of no use?***

No, and to the extent it is necessary, it will come spontaneously. All of a sudden, you will be seized by something that makes you still, makes you concentrate in the vision of an idea or of a psychological state. That captures you. You must

not resist. Then you make the needed progress. At such a moment you see, you understand something; and then the next minute you start your work again with that something gained in you, but without any pretension. What I most fear are those who believe themselves very exceptional because they sit down and meditate. Of all things this is the most dangerous, because they become so vain and so full of self-satisfaction that they close up in this way all avenues of progress.... There is one thing that has always been said, but always misunderstood, it is the necessity of humility. It is taken in the wrong way, wrongly understood and wrongly used. Be humble, if you can be so in the right way; above all, do not be so in the wrong way, for that leads you nowhere. But there is one thing: if you can pull out from yourself this weed called vanity, then indeed you will have done something. But if you knew how difficult it is! You cannot do a thing well, cannot have a fine idea, cannot have a right movement, cannot make a little progress without getting puffed up inside (even without being aware of it), with a self-satisfaction full of vanity. And you are obliged then to hammer it hard to break it. And still broken bits remain and these begin to germinate. One must work the whole of one's life and never forget to work in order to uproot this weed that springs up again and again and again so insidiously that you believe it is gone and you feel very modest and say: "It is not I who have done it, I feel it is the Divine, I am nothing if He is not there", and then the next minute, you are so satisfied with yourself simply for having thought that!

***Q: What is the right and the wrong way of being humble?***

It is very simple, when people are told "be humble", they think immediately of "being humble before other men" and

that humility is wrong. True humility is humility before the Divine, that is, a precise, exact, *living* sense that one is nothing, one can do nothing, understand nothing without the Divine, that even if one is exceptionally intelligent and capable, this is nothing in comparison with the divine Consciousness, and this sense one must always keep, because then one always has the true attitude of receptivity — a humble receptivity that does not put personal pretensions in opposition to the Divine.

(CWM 5: 42-46)

**The Mother**

*If one can be like that, open – truly open in a simplicity, well, the simplicity that knows that it is ignorant–like that (gesture upward, of self-abandon), ready to receive whatever comes. Then something can happen.*

*And naturally, the thirst for progress, the thirst for knowledge, the thirst for transformation and, above all, the thirst for Love and Truth–if one keeps that, one goes quicker. Truly a thirst, a need, a need.*

*All the rest has no importance; it is* that *one has need of.*

*To cling to something one believes that one knows, to cling to something that one feels, to cling to something that one loves, to cling to one's habits, to cling to one's so-called needs, to cling to the world as it is, it is that which binds you. You must undo all that, one thing after another. Undo all the ties.*

*The Mother*

(CWM 11: 6)

## The State of Samadhi and Progress

*Q: "Is the state of trance or Samadhi a sign of progress?*

In ancient times it was considered a very high condition. It was even thought to be the sign of a great realisation, and people who wanted to do yoga or sadhana always tried to enter into a state of this kind. All sorts of marvellous things have been said about this state — you may say all you like about it, since, precisely, you don't remember anything! And those who have entered it are unable to say what happened to them. So, one can say anything one likes.

I could incidentally tell you that in all kinds of so-called spiritual literature I had always read marvellous things about this state of trance or Samadhi, and it so happened that I had never experienced it. So I did not know whether this was a sign of inferiority. And when I came here, one of my first questions to Sri Aurobindo was: "What do you think of Samadhi, that state of trance one does not remember? One enters into a condition which seems blissful, but when one comes out of it, one does not know at all what has happened." Then he looked at me, saw what I meant and told me, "It is unconsciousness." I asked him for an explanation, I said, "What?" He told me, "Yes, you enter into what is called Samadhi when you go out of your conscious being and enter a part of your being which is completely unconscious, or rather a domain where you have no corresponding consciousness—you go beyond the field of your consciousness and enter a region where you are no longer conscious. You are in the impersonal state, that is to say, a state in which you are unconscious; and that is why, naturally, you remember nothing, because you were not conscious of anything." So this reassured

me and I said, "Well, this has never happened to me." He replied, "Nor to me!" *(Laughter)**

And since then, when people speak to me about Samadhi, I tell them, "Well, try to develop your inner individuality and you will be able to enter these very regions in full consciousness and have the joy of communion with the highest regions, but without losing all consciousness and returning with a zero instead of an experience."

So that is my reply to the person who has asked if Samadhi or trance is a sign of progress. The sign of progress is when there is no longer any unconsciousness, when one can go up into the same regions without entering into trance.

*

> *Q: I don't understand this: "The disadvantage [of trance or samadhi] is that trance becomes indispensable and the problem of the waking consciousness is not solved; it remains imperfect." (*Sri Aurobindo, *Bases of Yoga)*
>
> *"Waking consciousness is not solved" means what?*

And naturally! Because if in order to have a meditation or a relation with the inner world, you are obliged to enter into samadhi, your waking consciousness always remains what it is, without ever changing. That's what I said in other words, you see, when I said that people have a higher conscious-

* When this talk was first published in 1962, Mother added the following commentary: "There are also some people who enter domains where they are conscious, but between this conscious state and their normal waking consciousness there is a gap: their personality does not exist between the waking state and this deeper state; so, during the passage they forget. They cannot bring the consciousness they had there back into the consciousness here, for there is a gap between the two. There is even an occult discipline for constructing intermediary fields in order to be able to recall things."

ness only in very deep meditation. When they come out of their meditation they are no better than they were before. All their defects are there which come back as soon as they come back into their waking consciousness; and they never make any progress because they do not establish a relation between their deeper consciousness, the truth of their being, and their outer being. You see, they take off their outer being as though they were taking off a cloak, and they put it in a corner: "Come now, don't trouble me, keep quiet. You are a nuisance." And then they enter into contemplation, their meditation, into their deep experience; and then they come back, put on the cloak which of course has not changed—which perhaps is dirtier still than before—and they remain exactly as they were without any meditation.

If you want the outer being to change, it is while remaining conscious of it that you should have the other experiences; and you must not lose contact with your ordinary outer consciousness if you want it to profit by the experience. There are many people... I knew people like that, who used to meditate for hours, almost all the time... they spent their time meditating, and then if by chance... if someone disturbed them in their meditation, if they had to do something, they flew into a rage, a fury, they abused everybody, they became more intolerable than if they had never meditated, than any ordinary person. This happened because they neglected making their outer being participate in their deeper life. They cut themselves into two, so there is a portion inside which progresses and a portion outside which becomes worse and worse, because it is completely neglected.

**The Mother**

(CWM 8: 275-76; 6: 427-28)

## Forces Brought In During Meditation

*Q: What are the forces that are in operation when one is in silent meditation?*

That depends upon the one who meditates.

*Q: But in silent meditation does he not make himself a complete blank? Then how can anything depend upon him?*

Even if you make yourself an absolute blank, that does not change the nature of your aspiration or alter its domain. In some the aspiration moves on the mental level or in the vital field; some have a spiritual aspiration. On the quality of the aspiration depends the force that answers and the work that it comes to do. To make yourself blank in meditation creates an inner silence; it does not mean that you have become nothing or have become a dead and inert mass. Making yourself an empty vessel, you invite that which shall fill it. It means that you release the stress of your inner consciousness towards realisation. The nature of the consciousness and the degree of its stress determine the forces that you bring into play and whether they shall help and fulfil or fail or even harm and hinder.

There are many varying conditions in which you may meditate and all have their effect upon the forces brought in or brought down and on their working. If you sit alone, it is your own inner and outer condition that matters. If you sit with others, the general condition is of primary importance. But in either case the conditions will always vary and the forces that answer will never be twice the same. A united concentration rightly done can be a great force. There is an old saying that if twelve sincere persons unite their will and

their aspiration and call the Divine, the Divine is bound to manifest. But the will must be one-pointed, the aspiration sincere. For those who make the attempt can be united in inertia or even in mistaken or perverse desire, and the result is then likely to be disastrous.

In your meditation the first imperative need is a state of perfect and absolute sincerity in all the consciousness. It is indispensable that you should not deceive yourself or deceive or be deceived by others. Often people have a wish, a mental preference or vital desire; they want the experience to happen in a particular way or to take a turn that satisfies their ideas or desires or preferences; they do not keep themselves blank and unprejudiced and simply and sincerely observe what happens. Then if you do not like what happens, it is easy to deceive yourself; you will see one thing, but give it a little twist and make it something else, or you will distort something simple and straightforward or magnify it into an extraordinary experience. When you sit in meditation you must be as candid and simple as a child, not interfering by your external mind, expecting nothing, insisting on nothing. Once this condition is there, all the rest depends upon the aspiration deep within you. If you ask from within for peace, it will come; if for strength, for power, for knowledge, they too will come, but all in the measure of your capacity to receive it. And if you call upon the Divine, then too — always admitting that the Divine is open to your call, and that means your call is pure enough and strong enough to reach him,—you will have the answer.

*

*[The above talk of June 23, 1929 was later taken up in the "Mother's Classes" on April 5, 1951 where the Mother explained it further:]*

*"Making yourself an empty vessel, you invite that which shall fill it. It means that you release the stress of your inner consciousness towards realisation. The nature of the consciousness and the degree of its stress determine the forces that you bring into play and whether they shall help and fulfil or fail or even harm and hinder."*

*Q: What does "the degree of its stress" mean?*

Aspiration and will produce a stress in the being. But I say "degree", for there is also the point upon which the stress works.

I say "to make yourself blank" is to release the stress of your consciousness towards realisation, towards the goal you want to realise. The "stress" is the pressure upon a point, what is concentrated upon a point and insists that it be done. Consciousness — the consciousness of the being, individual consciousness — puts a pressure upon a point, you see. We may take the example we were just speaking of: you have a chronic illness, a malformation of the body, a physical defect. Then your consciousness, in its aspiration and will puts a more or less constant stress on the thing it wants to realise, what you want to cure.

Well, when you make yourself empty within in meditation (this is one form of meditation if you like), this means that you stop this concentration of will: your consciousness becomes neutral for the moment. Its stress is upon this point (it may be on other points, on things more or less concrete or abstract, but the stress is on one point) and when you make yourself empty you withdraw this pressure, this stress, and you remain like a blank page upon which nothing is written. This is what I call "making yourself empty", not to have any active will concentrated upon one point or another. And so I

say the moment you make yourself empty, the stress indeed stops, and yet in your silent aspiration you put yourself in contact with the forces attracted by this stress you usually have, the special point of stress you have normally. That is why I have emphasised the fact that all depends upon the person, because everything depends upon his habitual aspiration, the thing he usually wants to realise, for he is naturally in touch with the forces which will answer his aspiration. So, if for a certain time one stops the activity of this aspiration and remains silently receptive, passive, well, the effect of the habitual aspiration remains and will draw just those forces which ought to answer it.

*

*Q: Sweet Mother, how can one empty the mind of all thought? When one tries during meditation, the thought that one must not think of anything is always there.*

It is not during meditation that one must learn to be silent, because the very fact of trying makes a noise.

One must learn to concentrate one's energies in the heart — then, when one succeeds in that, silence comes automatically.

(CWM 3: 97-99; 4: 282-83; 16: 311) **The Mother**

*When you sit in meditation you must be as candid and simple as a child, not interfering by your external mind, expecting nothing, insisting on nothing. Once this condition is there, all the rest depends upon the aspiration deep within you.*

(CWM 3: 99) *The Mother*

## Length of the Meditation Period

[Here is a question:] It is from someone who is trying to prepare himself to receive the Supermind, and in this preparation, among other things come prayer and meditation. And then there is this reflection which is very frank and which very few would have the courage to make. Here it is:

> *"I begin to meditate and pray ardently and fervently, my aspiration is intense and my prayer full of devotion; and then, after a certain length of time—sometimes short, sometimes long—the aspiration becomes mechanical and the prayer purely verbal. What should I do?"*

This is not an individual case, it is extremely common. I have already said this a number of times, but still it was in passing — that people who claim to meditate for hours every day and spend their whole day praying, to me it seems that three-fourths of the time it must be absolutely mechanical; that is to say, it loses all its sincerity. For human nature is not made for that and the human mind is not built that way.

In order to concentrate and meditate one must do an exercise which I could call the "mental muscle-building" of concentration. One must really make an effort — as one makes a muscular effort, for instance, to lift a weight — if you want the concentration to be sincere and not artificial.

The same thing for the urge of prayer: suddenly a flame is lit, you feel an enthusiastic *élan*, a great fervour, and express it in words which, to be true, must be spontaneous. This must come from the heart, directly, with ardour, without passing through the head. That is a prayer. If there are just words jostling in your head, it is no longer a prayer.

Well, if you don't throw more fuel into the flame, after a time it dies out. If you do not give your muscles time to relax, if you don't slacken the movement, your muscles lose the capacity of taking strains. So it is quite natural, and even indispensable, for the intensity of the movement to cease after a certain time. Naturally, someone who is accustomed to lifting weights can do it much longer than one who has never done it before. It is the same thing; someone who is accustomed to concentration can concentrate much longer than one who is not in the habit. But for everybody there comes a time when one must let go, relax, in order to begin again. Therefore, whether immediately or after a few minutes or a few hours, if the movement becomes mechanical, it means that you have relaxed and that you need no longer pretend that you are meditating. It is better to do something useful.

If you cannot manage to do a little exercise, for instance, in order to neutralise the effect of the mental tension, you may read or try to note down what happened to you, you may express things. Then that produces a relaxation, the necessary relaxation. But the duration of the meditation is only relatively important; its length simply shows how far you are accustomed to this activity.

Of course, this may increase a great deal, but there is always a limit; and when the limit is reached one must stop, that's all. It is not an insincerity, it is an incapacity. What becomes insincere is if you pretend to meditate when you are no longer meditating or you say prayers like many people who go to the temple or to church, perform ceremonies and repeat their prayers as one repeats a more or less well-learnt lesson. Then it is no longer either prayer or meditation, it is simply a profession. It is not interesting.

(CWM 8: 228-29)

**The Mother**

## Different Kinds of Meditation

There are all kinds of meditations.... You may take an idea and follow it to arrive at a given result — this is an active meditation; people who want to solve a problem or to write, meditate in this way without knowing that they are meditating. Others sit down and try to concentrate on something without following an idea — simply to concentrate on a point in order to intensify one's power of concentration; and this brings about what usually happens when you concentrate upon a point: if you succeed in gathering your capacity for concentration sufficiently upon a point whether mental, vital or physical, at a given moment you pass through and enter into another consciousness. Others still try to drive out from their head all movements, ideas, reflexes, reactions and to arrive at a truly silent tranquillity. This is extremely difficult; there are people who have tried for twenty-five years and not succeeded, for it is somewhat like taking a bull by the horns.

**The Mother**

(CWM 4: 104)

## Meditation on a Sentence

*Q: Mother, in the Friday Classes, you often read a sentence to us and ask us to meditate on it. But how should we meditate on a sentence? ...*

The sentence is already a mental formation; the mental formation is made. The sentence is the expression of the mental formation. So when you meditate on a sentence, there are two methods. There is an active, ordinary external

method of reflecting and trying to understand what these words mean, understand intellectually what the sentence means exactly—that is active meditation. You concentrate on these few words and take the thought they express and try, through reasoning, deduction, analysis, to understand what it means.

There is another method, more direct and deep; it is to take this mental formation, this combination of words with the thought they represent, and to gather all your energy of attention on it, compelling yourself to concentrate all your strength on that formation. For instance, instead of concentrating all your energies on something you see physically, you take that thought and concentrate all your energies on that thought— in the mind, of course.

And then, if you are able to concentrate the thought sufficiently and stop it from vacillating, you pass quite naturally from the thought expressed by the words to the idea which is behind and which could be expressed in other words, other forms. The characteristic of the idea is the power to clothe itself in many different thoughts. And when you have achieved this, you have already gone much deeper than by merely understanding the words. Naturally, if you continue to concentrate and know how to do it, you can pass from the idea to the luminous force that is behind. Then you enter a much vaster and deeper domain. But that asks for some training. But still, that is the very principle of meditation.

If you are able to go deep enough, you find the Principle and the Force behind the idea, and that gives you the power of realisation. This is how those who take meditation as a means of spiritual development are able to unite with the Principle which is behind things and obtain the power to act on these things from above.

But even without going so far — that implies a rather hard discipline, doesn't it, a long-standing habit — you can pass quite easily from the thought to the idea, and that gives you a light and an understanding in the mind which enables you, in your turn, to express the idea in any form. ...

When I give you a thought it is simply to help you to concentrate....

Sometimes one of these sentences expresses a very deep truth. It is one of those happy sentences which are very expressive. So that helps you to find the truth that is behind.

**The Mother**

(CWM 9: 381-83)

## Imagination and Meditation

... Images like that are not necessarily ridiculous. They are not ridiculous, they are mental images. If they bring you some result, they are quite appropriate. If they give you an experience, they are appropriate.

For example, when I ask you to go deep down within yourselves, some of you will concentrate on a sensation, but others may just as well have the impression of going down into a deep well, and they clearly see the picture of steps going down into a dark and deep well, and they go down farther and farther, deeper and deeper, and sometimes reach precisely a door; they sit down before the door with the will to enter, and sometimes the door opens, and then they go in and see a kind of hall or a room or a cave or something, and from there, if they go on they may come to another door and again stop, and with an effort the door opens and they go farther. And if this is done with enough persistence and one can continue the experience, there comes a time when

one finds oneself in front of a door which has... a special kind of solidity or solemnity, and with a great effort of concentration the door opens and one suddenly enters a hall of clarity, of light; and then, one has the experience, you see, of contact with one's soul.... But I don't see what is bad in having images!

*Q: No, but it is only an imagination, isn't it, Mother?*

An imagination? But what is an imagination?... You cannot imagine anything which doesn't exist in the universe! It is impossible to imagine something that doesn't exist somewhere. The only possibility is that one may not put one's image in its place: either one gives it virtues and qualities it doesn't have, or explains it with some other than the right explanation. But whatever one imagines exists somewhere; the main thing is to know where and to put it in its proper place.

Of course, if after having imagined that you are in front of a door which is opening, you thought that it was really a physical door inside your body, that would be a mistake! But if you realise that it is the mental form taken by your effort of concentration, this is quite correct. If you go wandering in the mental world, you will see plenty of forms like that, all kinds of forms, which have no material reality but truly exist in the mental world.

You cannot think powerfully of something without your thought taking a form. But if you were to believe that this form was physical, that would obviously be an error, yet it really does exist in the mental world.

Imagination is a power of formation. In fact, people who have no imagination are not formative from the mental point of view, they cannot give a concrete power to their

thought. Imagination is a very powerful means of action. For instance, if you have a pain somewhere and if you imagine that you are making the pain disappear or are removing it or destroying it — all kinds of images like that— well, you succeed perfectly.

There's a story of a person who was losing her hair at a fantastic rate, enough to become bald within a few weeks, and then someone told her, "When you brush your hair, imagine that it is growing and will grow very fast." And always, while brushing her hair, she said, "Oh, my hair is growing! Oh, it will grow very fast!..."—And it happened! But what people usually do is to tell themselves, "Ah, all my hair is falling again and I shall become bald, that's certain, it's going to happen!"

And of course it happens!

*

*(On an another occasion the Mother said:)*

To sit in meditation before a closed door, as though it were a heavy door of bronze—and one sits in front of it with the will that it may open—and to pass to the other side; and so the whole concentration, the whole aspiration is gathered into a beam and pushes, pushes, pushes against this door, and pushes more and more with an increasing energy until all of a sudden it bursts open and one enters. It makes a very powerful impression. And so one is as though plunged into the light and then one has the full enjoyment of a sudden and radical change of consciousness, with an illumination that captures one entirely, and the feeling that one is becoming another person. And this is a very concrete and very powerful way of entering into contact with one's psychic being.

**The Mother**

(CWM 9: 379-80; 7: 272)

## Collective Meditation

... collective meditations have been practised in all ages for different reasons, in different ways and with different motives. What may be called a collective meditation is a group of people who gather together for a definite purpose; for example, in all ages it has been a practice to gather for prayers. Naturally in the Churches, it is a sort of collective meditation but even outside the Churches, some people have organised collective meditations for group prayer. These prayers are of two different kinds.

From the beginning of human history, it is known that certain groups of people would meet to express a certain common state of soul: some to sing together the praise of God, hymns, thanksgiving, to express adoration, thankfulness, gratitude, and to praise God; others — and there are historical examples of this — a certain number of people gathered together for a common invocation, for instance, to ask God for something, and this was done all together, united, in the hope that this invocation, this prayer, this asking would carry more weight. There have been some very famous instances. A very old one occurred in 1000 A.D. when some prophets had announced that it was the end of the world and everywhere people gathered together to offer common prayers and ask that the world may not come to an end (!) or anyway, for it to be protected. Much more recently, in modern times, when King George of England was dying of pneumonia, people assembled in England, not only in the churches but even in the streets in front of the royal palace, to offer prayers and ask God to cure him. It so happened that he recovered, and they believed that it was their prayers.... That is, of course, the most external form, I

could say the most worldly, of group meditation.

In all initiatory groups, in all the spiritual schools of ancient times, group meditation was always practised and in that case the motive was quite different. They assembled for a collective progress, to open together to a force, a light, an influence, and... this is more or less what we want to try to do.

However, there are two methods, and this is what I am going to explain to you. In both cases, one must practise as one does in individual meditation, that is, sit in a position at once comfortable enough for one to be able to keep it and yet not too comfortable for one to fall asleep in it! And then you do what I had asked you to do ... that is, prepare for the meditation, try to become calm and silent; not only to avoid chattering outwardly, but to try to silence your mind and gather your consciousness which is dispersed in all the thoughts you have and your preoccupations; to gather it, bring it back within yourself as completely as possible and concentrate it here, in the region of the heart, near the solar plexus, so that all the active energies in the head and all that keeps the brain running, may be brought back and concentrated here. This can be done in a few seconds, it can take a few minutes: that depends on each one. Well, this is a preparatory attitude. And then, once this is done — or done as well as you can do it — you may take two attitudes, that is, an active attitude or a passive attitude.

What I call an active attitude is to concentrate on — I shall put it in general terms—on the person who is directing the meditation, with the will to open and receive from him what he intends to give you or the force with which he wants to put you into contact. That is active, for here there is a will at work and an active concentration to open yourself to someone, a concentration on someone.

The other one, the passive one is simply this: to be concentrated as I have told you, then you open yourself as one opens a door; you see, you have a door here *(gesture at the level of the heart)* and once you are concentrated, you open the door and stay like this (*gesture of immobility*). Or else, you may take another image, as if it were a book, and you open your book very wide with its pages completely blank, that is, quite silent, and you stay like that waiting for what is going to happen.

These are the two attitudes. You may take one or the other, according to the day, the occasion, or you may adopt one of them, out of preference, if it helps you more. Both are effective and can have equally good results.

And so, now, for our special case, I shall tell you what I am trying to do.... It will soon be a year since, one Wednesday, we had the manifestation of the supramental force. Since then, it has been working very actively, even while very few people are aware of it! but still I thought the time had come for — how to put it?—for us to help it a little in its work by making an effort of receptivity.

Of course, it does not work only in the Ashram, it is working in the whole world and in all places where there is some receptivity this Force is at work, and I must say the Ashram hasn't an exclusive receptivity in the world, the monopoly of receptivity. But since it so happens that all of us here more or less know what has taken place, well, I hope that individually each person is doing his best to benefit by the occasion; but collectively we can do something, that is, try to unify a ground, to produce a particularly fertile soil to obtain collectively the maximum receptivity and to have as little wastage as possible of time and energies.

**The Mother**

(CWM 9: 37-39)

## Indispensable Complement of Meditation: Work

The outer life, the activity of each day and each instant, is it not the indispensable complement of our hours of meditation and contemplation? And is not the proportion of time given to each the exact image of the proportion which exists between the amount of effort to be made for the preparation and realisation? For meditation, contemplation, Union is the result obtained—the flower that blooms; the daily activity is the anvil on which all the elements must pass and repass in order to be purified, refined, made supple and ripe for the illumination which contemplation gives to them. All these elements must be thus passed one after the other through the crucible before outer activity becomes needless for the integral development. Then is this activity turned into the means to manifest Thee so as to awaken the other centers of consciousness to the same dual work of the forge and the illumination. Therefore are pride and satisfaction with oneself the worst of all obstacles. Very modestly we must take advantage of all the minute opportunities offered to knead and purify some of the innumerable elements, to make them supple, to make them impersonal, to teach them forgetfulness of self and abnegation and devotion and kindness and gentleness; and when all these modes of being have become habitual to them, then are they ready to participate in the Contemplation, and to identify themselves with Thee in the supreme Concentration. That is why it seems to me that the work must be long and slow even for the best and that striking conversions cannot be integral. They change the orientation of the being, they put it definitively on the straight path; but truly to attain the goal none can escape the need of innumerable experiences of every kind and every instant.

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If you don't do anything, you cannot have any experience. The whole life is a field of experience. Each movement you make, each thought you have, each work you do, can be an experience, and *must be* an experience; and naturally work in particular is a field of experience where one must apply all the progress which one endeavours to make inwardly.

If you remain in meditation or contemplation without working, well, you don't know if you have progressed or not. You may live in an illusion, the illusion of your progress; while if you begin to work, all the circumstances of your work, the contact with others, the material occupation, all this is a field of experience in order that you may become aware not only of the progress made but of all the progress that remains to be made. If you live closed up in yourself, without acting, you may live in a completely subjective illusion; the moment you externalise your action and enter into contact with others, with circumstances and the objects of life, you become aware absolutely objectively of whether you have made progress or not, whether you are more calm, more conscious, stronger, more unselfish, whether you no longer have any desire, any preference, any weakness, any unfaithfulness—you can become aware of all this by working. But if you remain enclosed in a meditation that's altogether personal, you may enter into a total illusion and never come out of it, and believe that you have realised extraordinary things, while really you have only the impression, the illusion that you have done so.

(CWM 1: 6-7; 7: 291-92)

**The Mother**

## Meditation, Devotion and Works

Meditation, by the way, is a process leading towards knowledge and through knowledge, it is a thing of the head and not of the heart, so if you want dhyana, you can't have an aversion to knowledge. Concentration in the heart is not meditation, it is a call on the Divine, on the Beloved. This yoga too is not a yoga of knowledge alone, knowledge is one of its means, but its base being self-offering, surrender, bhakti, it is based in the heart and nothing can be eventually done without this base. There are plenty of people here who do or have done Japa and base themselves on bhakti, very few comparatively who have done the "head" meditation; love and bhakti and works are usually the base; how many can proceed by knowledge? Only the few.

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Meditation is one means of approach to the Divine and a great way, but it cannot be called a short cut—for most it is a long and most difficult though a very high ascent. It can by no means be short unless it brings a descent, and even then it is only a foundation that is quickly laid; afterwards meditation has to build laboriously a big superstructure on that foundation. It is very indispensable but there is nothing of the short about it.

Karma is a much simpler road **provided one's mind is not fixed on the Karma to the exclusion of the Divine. The aim must be the Divine and the work can only be a means.** The use of poetry etc. is to keep one in contact with one's inner being and that helps to prepare for the direct contact with the inmost, but one must not stop with that, one must go on to the real thing. If one thinks of being a literary man or a poet or a painter as things worthwhile for their own

sake, then it is no longer the yogic spirit. That is why I have sometimes to say that our business is to be yogis, not merely poets, painters, etc.

Love, bhakti, surrender, the psychic opening are the only short cuts to the Divine — or can be; for if the love and bhakti are too vital, then there is likely to be a seesaw between ecstatic expectation and Viraha, Abhiman, despair, etc., which makes not a short cut but a long one, a zigzag— not a straight flight—a whirling round one's own ego instead of a running towards the Divine.

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What do you call meditation? Shutting the eyes and concentrating? It is only one method for calling down the true consciousness. To join with the true consciousness or feel its descent is the only thing important and if it comes without the orthodox method, as it always did with me, so much the better. Meditation is only a means or device, the true movement is when even walking, working or speaking one is still in sadhana.

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You need not have qualms about the time you give to action and creative work. Those who have an expansive creative vital or a vital made for action are usually at their best when the vital is not held back from its movement and they can develop faster by it than by introspective meditation. All that is needed is that the action should be dedicated, so that they may grow by it more and more prepared to feel and follow the Divine Force when it moves them. It is a mistake to think that to live in introspective meditation all the time is invariably the best or the only way of yoga.

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It is not necessary to be in samadhi to be in contact with the Divine.

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On the contrary, it is in the waking state that this realisation must come and endure in order to be a reality of the life. If experienced in trance it would be a superconscient state true for some part of the inner being, but not real to the whole consciousness. Experiences in trance have their utility for opening the being and preparing it, but it is only when the realisation is constant in the waking state that it is truly possessed. Therefore in this yoga most value is given to the waking realisation and experience.

To work in the calm ever-widening consciousness is at once a sadhana and a siddhi.

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... there are many [here in the Ashram] who can prepare themselves only by work, their consciousness not being yet ready for meditation of the more intense kind. But even for those who can do intense meditation from the beginning, Sadhana by work is also necessary in this Yoga. One cannot arrive at its goal by meditation alone. As for your own capacity, it was evident when for a fairly long period an active Sadhana was proceeding within you. Everybody's capacity however is limited — little can be done by one's own strength alone. It is reliance on the Divine Force, the Mother's Force and Light and openness to it that is the real capacity. This you had for a time, but as with many others it got clouded over by the coming up of the physical nature in its full force. This clouding happens to almost everybody at that stage, but it need not be lasting. If the physical consciousness resolves to open itself, then nothing more is

needed for progress in the Sadhana.

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Half an hour's meditation in the day ought to be possible — if only to bring a concentrated habit into the consciousness which will help it, first to be less outward in work and, secondly, to develop a receptive tendency which can bear its fruits even in the work.

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Concentration is very helpful and necessary — the more one concentrates (of course in the limits of the body's capacity without straining it), the more the force of the yoga grows. But you must be prepared for the meditation being sometimes not successful and not get upset by it — for that variability of the meditations happens to everybody.

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There is no harm in concentrating sometimes in the heart and sometimes above the head. But concentration in either place does not mean keeping the attention fixed on a particular spot; you have to take your station of consciousness in either place and concentrate there not on the place, but on the Divine.

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It is certainly much better to remain silent and collected for a time after the meditation. It is a mistake to take the meditation lightly — by doing that one fails to receive or spills what is received or most of it.

**Sri Aurobindo**

(SABCL 23: 534, 535-36, 539, 743, 743, 743; 25: 252; 24: 1272; 23: 729, 726, 728)

## Three Powers of Concentration — Their Right Use

It is by the thought that we dissipate ourselves in the phenomenal; it is by the gathering back of the thought into itself that we must draw ourselves back into the real. Concentration has three powers by which this aim can be effected. By concentration on anything whatsoever we are able to know that thing, to make it deliver up its concealed secrets; we must use this power to know not things, but the one Thing-in-itself. By concentration again the whole will can be gathered up for the acquisition of that which is still ungrasped, still beyond us; this power, if it is sufficiently trained, sufficiently single-minded, sufficiently sincere, sure of itself, faithful to itself alone, absolute in faith, we can use for the acquisition of any object whatsoever; but we ought to use it not for the acquisition of the many objects which the world offers to us, but to grasp spiritually that one object worthy of pursuit which is also the one subject worthy of knowledge. By concentration of our whole being on one status of itself, we can become whatever we choose; we can become, for instance, even if we were before a mass of weaknesses and fears, a mass instead of strength and courage, or we can become all a great purity, holiness and peace or a single universal soul of Love; but we ought, it is said, to use this power to become not even these things, high as they may be in comparison with what we now are, but rather to become that which is above all things and free from all action and attributes, the pure and absolute Being. All else, all other concentration can only be valuable for preparation, for previous steps, for a gradual training of the dissolute and self-dissipating thought, will and being towards their grand and unique object.

(SABCL 20: 304)

**Sri Aurobindo**

## Utility of Meditation and Contemplation in Yoga

*Q: What exactly is meant by meditation in Yoga? And what should be its objects?*

The difficulty our correspondent finds is in an apparent conflict of authorities, as sometimes meditation is recommended in the form of a concentrated succession of thoughts on a single subject, sometimes in the exclusive concentration of the mind on a single image, word or idea, a fixed contemplation rather than meditation. The choice between these two methods and others, for there are others, depends on the object we have in view in Yoga.

The thinking mind is the one instrument we possess at present by which we can arrive at a conscious self-organisation of our internal existence. But in most men thought is a confused drift of ideas, sensations and impressions which arrange themselves as best they can under the stress of a succession of immediate interests and utilities. In accordance with the general method of Nature much is used as waste material and only a small portion selected for definite and abiding formations. And as in physical Nature, so here the whole process is governed by laws which we rather suffer than use or control.

The concentration of thought is used by the Rajayogins to gain freedom and control over the workings of mind, just as the processes of governed respiration and fixed posture are used by the Hathayogins to gain freedom and control over the workings of the body and the vital functions.

By meditation we correct the restless wandering of the mind and train it like an athlete to economise all its energies and fix them on the attainment of some desirable knowledge or self-discipline. This is done normally by men in ordinary

life, but Yoga takes this higher working of Nature and carries it to its full possibilities. It takes note of the fact that by fixing the mind luminously on a single object of thought, we awaken a response in general Consciousness which proceeds to satisfy the mind by pouring into it knowledge about that object or even reveals to us its central or its essential truth. We awaken also a response of Power which gives us in various ways an increasing mastery over the workings of that on which we meditate or enables us to create it and make it active in ourselves. Thus by fixing the mind on the idea of Divine Love, we can come to the knowledge of that principle and its workings, put ourselves into communion with it, create it in ourselves and impose its law on the heart and the senses.

In Yoga concentration is used also for another object,— to retire from the waking state, which is a limited and superficial condition of our consciousness, into the depths of our being measured by various states of Samadhi. For this process contemplation of the single object, idea or name is more powerful than the succession of concentrated thoughts. The latter, however, is capable, by bringing us into indirect but waking communion with the deeper states of being, of preparing an integral Samadhi. Its characteristic utility, however, is the luminous activity of formative thought brought under the control of the Purusha by which the rest of the consciousness is governed, filled with higher and wider ideas, changed rapidly into the mould of those ideas and so perfected. Other and greater utilities lie beyond, but they belong to a later stage of self-development.

In the Yoga of Devotion, both processes are equally used to concentrate the whole being or to saturate the whole nature with thoughts of the object of devotion, its forms, its essence, its attributes and the joys of adoration and union. Thought is then made the servant of Love, a preparer of Beatitude. In the

Yoga of knowledge meditation is similarly used for discrimination of the True from the apparent, the Self from its forms, and concentrated contemplation for communion and entry of the individual consciousness into the Brahman.

An integral Yoga would harmonise all these aims. It would have also at its disposal other processes for the utilisation of thought and the mastery of the mind.

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To arrive then at this settled divine status must be the object of our concentration. The first step in concentration must be always to accustom the discursive mind to a settled unwavering pursuit of a single course of connected thought on a single subject and this it must do undistracted by all lures and alien calls on its attention. Such concentration is common enough in our ordinary life, but it becomes more difficult when we have to do it inwardly without any outward object or action on which to keep the mind; yet this inward concentration is what the seeker of knowledge must effect.* Nor must it be merely the consecutive thought of the intellectual thinker, whose only object is to conceive and intellectually link together his conceptions. It is not, except perhaps at first, a process of reasoning that is wanted so much as a dwelling so far as possible on the fruitful essence of the idea which by the insistence of the soul's will upon it must yield up all the facets of its truth. Thus if it be the divine Love that is the subject of concentration, it is on the essence of the idea of God as Love that the mind should concentrate in such a way that the various manifestation of the divine Love should arise luminously, not only to the thought, but in the heart and being and vision of the sadhaka. The thought may come first

* In the elementary stages of internal debate and judgment, *vitarka* and *vicāra,* for the correction of false ideas and arrival at the intellectual truth.

and the experience afterwards, but equally the experience may come first and the knowledge arise out of the experience. Afterwards the thing attained has to be dwelt on and more and more held till it becomes a constant experience and finally the dharma or law of the being.

This is the process of concentrated meditation; but a more strenuous method is the fixing of the whole mind in concentration on the essence of the idea only, so as to reach not the thought-knowledge or the psychological experience of the subject, but the very essence of the thing behind the idea. In this process thought ceases and passes into the absorbed or ecstatic contemplation of the object or by a merging into it in an inner Samadhi. If this be the process followed, then subsequently the state into which we rise must still be called down to take possession of the lower being, to shed its light, power and bliss on our ordinary consciousness. For otherwise we may possess it, as many do, in the elevated condition or in the inward Samadhi, but we shall lose our hold of it when we awake or descend into the contacts of the world; and this truncated possession is not the aim of an integral Yoga.

A third process is neither at first to concentrate in a strenuous meditation on the one subject nor in a strenuous contemplation of the one object of thought-vision, but first to still the mind altogether. This may be done by various ways; one is to stand back from the mental action altogether not participating in but simply watching it until, tired of its unsanctioned leaping and running, it falls into an increasing and finally an absolute quiet. Another is to reject the thought-suggestions, to cast them away from the mind whenever they come and firmly hold to the peace of the being which really and always exists behind the trouble and riot of the mind. When this secret peace is unveiled, a great calm settles on the being and there comes usually with it the perception and experience

of the all-pervading silent Brahman, everything else at first seeming to be mere form and eidolon. On the basis of this calm everything else may be built up in the knowledge and experience no longer of the external phenomena of things but of the deeper truth of the divine manifestation.

Ordinarily, once this state is obtained, strenuous concentration will be found no longer necessary. A free concentration of will using thought merely for suggestion and the giving of light to the lower members will take its place. This Will will then insist on the physical being, the vital existence, the heart and the mind remoulding themselves in the forms of the Divine which reveal themselves out of the silent Brahman. By swifter or slower degrees according to the previous preparation and purification of the members, they will be obliged with more or less struggle to obey the law of the will and its thought-suggestion, so that eventually the knowledge of the Divine takes possession of our consciousness on all its planes and the image of the Divine is formed in our human existence even as it was done by the old Vedic Sadhakas. For the integral Yoga this is the most direct and powerful discipline.

**Sri Aurobindo**

(SABCL 16: 399-400; 20: 308-310)

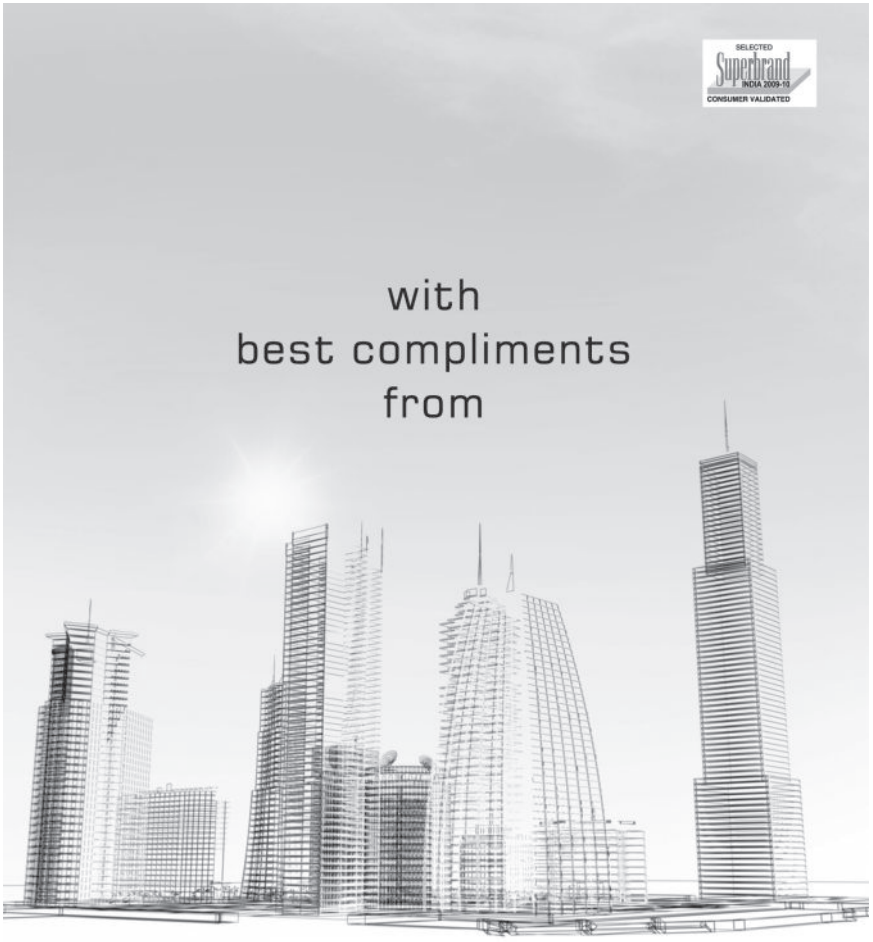
*A sincere consecration of all you are and all you do is for the sadhana much more effective than meditation.*

*

*True love and consecration lead much quicker to the Divine than an arduous Tapasya.*

*The Mother*

(CWM 14: 106)




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