

Aim of meditation and its accomplishment in Patanjali yoga and Vedanta

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ABSTRACT

This article comprehends the actual goal, philosophy and practice of meditation prescribed in the ancient Yoga system of Patanjali and Vedanta. Meditation is very popular in present days, especially in the west becoming increasingly popular and rightly so as it offers lots of benefits, which is already researched and published. Many schools of Meditation have come to west from east, for instance Yogic Meditation (Hatha Yoga) at the beginning followed by Zen Meditation and transcendental meditation and many other forms of meditation. Presently Mindfulness is well acknowledged meditation in the west, which helps in controlling the wondering mind to calm down by anchoring the attention to the breath means paying attention to the rhythm of breathing cycles. Therefore, the focus of the mind can be attained by effort of meditation, it means the distracted mind can be transformed into concentrated mind by a process of meditation. According to Yoga and Vedanta objective of the meditation is 'self-realization', which means true recognition of the self as the 'witness consciousness' which is beyond the mind, it is not to be manufactured and it is not to be attained, it is always there and natural, which is the true nature of individual being, but it cannot be objectified, it is has to be recognised subjectively as the true self by which every objective experience is possible and to get this realization is the actual goal of meditation.

Keywords: Meditation, Mind, Patanjali, Vedanta, Yoga

The meditation has become very popular majorly due to enormous health benefits which includes mental disorders related to stress and some life style disorders. The published literature is indicating how meditation boost the immune system, how it calms down the mind which in turn helps to fight and reduce the mental stress. Another big application of meditation is found recently that it helps even in chronic pain management of patients. Apart from health benefits, meditation has the benefits in other areas like improves creativity and focus of an individual, this is very helpful for the current generation which is seriously suffering from attention deficit disorder. Perhaps the biggest benefit of meditation is that; which allows us to observe our thoughts in whichever process of meditation ultimately it will allow us to objectify and observe thoughts, there by gain a little distance from mind and there by gain a degree of control over mind. So, gaining a little distance from thinking process, and getting control over the mind, gradually lead to transformation of

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individual personality which in turn changes attitude of the individual in reacting to circumstances and people, thereby oneself become calm and serene, wiser and more compassionate (Horowitz S, 2010 & Davis M & Jeffrey AH, 2012).

Primary purpose of the meditation

None of the above benefits deliberated are the primary purpose of meditation; neither better health nor curing a disease nor fighting or reducing stress nor calming down the mind. According to ancient texts, the primary purpose of meditation is 'self-realization'. All the ancient traditions from which these techniques of meditation are drawn whether it is Patanjali Yoga or Zen or transcendental meditation, Mantra Yoga or Tibetan Buddhist Meditation or Mindfulness Meditation etc. all of them are aiming at 'self-realization' or 'enlightenment'. All these eastern traditions consider that, Meditation is a stepping stone for the self-realization. Though all other benefits of meditation are true but they are the kind of side effects on the way to 'self-realization' (Wadhwa A et al., 2013 and Swami Vivekananda 1996).

Patanjali yoga system of meditation

Patanjali Yoga Sutras are one of the most ancient texts originated from India. According to Yoga Sutras; "Self-realization" is the real goal of meditation. How Yoga Meditation does helps in the self-realization; this is deliberated in the 'Yoga Sutras' (aphorisms), one of them says; "*Yogas Chitta Vritti Nirodhah*" means Yoga is the cessation of the modifications in the mind. Here the modifications mean thinking process of mind in the form of thoughts, emotions, desires, memories, intentions, judgements etc. What the Yoga does is, at beginning makes the mind to focus by practicing a Mantra or by breathing technique or a holy image etc. This early technique of meditation brings the wondering mind to focus on to one prescribed thing. By concentrating the mind on one thing again and again, the mind becomes calm there by oneself get a control over mind and its attention, eventually at one point the modifications of the mind cease all together then it becomes one pointed, absolutely concentrated and thinking about things becomes stopped (Swami Prabhavananda & Christopher Isherwood, 1881).

Then third Sutra of Patanjali Yoga says "*Tada Drashtuh Svarupe Avasthanam*" means, seer realizes as its own nature. It is like, when there are waves in a lake one cannot see the bottom of lake and when the water of the lake is muddy then also one cannot see the bottom of the lake but when the water is clean and there are no waves then one can see straight through into bottom of the lake. Exactly like this, when waves of the mind are calm down, and when the mind is clear (*Satvik* mind) but not dull then what is beyond the mind shines forth and it is seen as it is. Then oneself realizes that he or she is not the body, not the mind but as awareness shining through the mind experiencing the body and through mind and body experiencing the world. In this process oneself experientially realizes that world is changing, body is changing, mind is changing but that witness consciousness does not change and it illumines these changes that is "I am" is known as 'self-realization'.

What happens at other times; the fourth Sutra of Patanjali Yoga says; "*Vritti Sarupyam Itaratra*" means at other times whatever waves are in the mind, that witness consciousness is identified with them, it is like anger is expressed as "I am angry" or "I am irritated" "I am happy" "I am bored" but not known as "I am" distinct as consciousness and recognise the movement/wave of anger, irritation, happiness or boredom in the mind. This is the philosophy of Yoga and how the meditation works in the way of "self-realization" (Swami Prabhavananda, Christopher Isherwood, 1881).

Vedanta philosophy of meditation

The Vedanta approach to the Meditation is unique which involves enquiry-based analysis and intellectual understanding. Vedanta suggests to individuals to closely look into his/her routine experiences and then ask most fundamental questions to own self such as; is it that the 'witness consciousness' is there only when the mind is calm? Or is it there when the mind is active also? This investigation has been pursued in the Vedantic Meditation.

Vedanta says that witness consciousness is there all the time. It means, when the mind is thinking, listening and all other times, the essence of individual being is the 'witness consciousness which is evident in a calm and serene mind. Yoga philosophy objection to the Vedantic approach is; how one can recognise 'witness consciousness' while the mind is engaged with activities because during activities the 'pure consciousness' is mixed up with mind. Vedanta response to this objection as follows; it is like asking when an ocean is calm and serene without waves then only water can be seen and other times only waves are present. In fact, at all the time water is only present in the ocean and it is not required to cease the waves for seeing the water. Because usually our attention is drawn to the waves it seems that wave is the reality but actually the reality of the wave is the water. Similarly, 'witness consciousness' is present continuously in all the experiences of human throughout life. It doesn't require to stop the mind to realize the true nature of oneself as the 'witness consciousness'. Vedanta further says that, even the functioning of the mind can be used to recognise the 'witness consciousness' in oneself. This is the insight from Vedanta (*Wadhwa A et al, 2013 and Swami Gambhirananda, 1972*).

HELP OF POINTERS IN INSIGHT PATH (VEDANTA PATH) OF MEDITATION

According to Yoga, by calming the mind one can ultimately realizes that he/she is beyond the mind as unchanging awareness (witness consciousness). The other way is; insight path (Vedanta), in this path self-realization is possible with the help of pointers. For instance; examining the experience of seeing an external object; according to modern science; all that we see in the world is only reflected light because eyes are only meant to receive the light but not object as it is. This light later converted in to electrical impulses by optic nerves and finally this information is transmitted to some centre in the brain and then somehow (mechanism is not explored yet in modern science) the electrical activity in the brain get translated in to an image of the external object in the mind, it is presented as a thought wave (*Chitta Vritti*/modification of the mind) and based on memory the person reports his experience of seeing a particular object. This entire process in the mind is lit up by 'awareness' and makes oneself feels the first-person experience as "I am seeing an object". Here, "I am seeing an object" is in the mind and awareness of this thought is the 'consciousness'. Thus, all experiences of seeing, touching, smelling, tasting and hearing is in mind and all thinking, remembering, loving, hating is one's own mind but awareness of all these activities in the mind make possible by 'witness consciousness which is the true self in essence of all living beings. No school of philosophy disputes this entire process of experience of seeing the objects with the sense organs (eyes), because it is evident that no one can directly experience the external objects of the world, but only reflected light of an objects goes in to the eyes and that light finally transformed in to a thought in the mind. (*Gambhirananda S, 1972*)

Likewise, how experience of seeing an external object is formed as a thought in the mind which is called modification of the mind (*Chitta Vritti* in Sanskrit); all other experiences including; listening, thinking, eating etc. happens exactly in a same fashion. This gives rise to continuous experiences in the mind due to unbroken engagement of sense organs with

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external world in waking state. Therefore, we usually think our minds are disturbed, because world is disturbing us. But, in reality, we are disturbing because our minds are disturbed. Thus, “Samsara” (worldly troubles) appears to us because of a disturbed mind but not that “Samsara” disturbs the mind. In a peaceful and a serene mind, the same external circumstances can be seen in totally different perspective.

Having understood intellectually the science behind seeing an external object based on actual experience and with the modern science wisdom; one proceeds to Vedantic Meditation to make this understanding in to a realization. This realization of seeing the external object with the eyes but at deeper level there is experience of seeing the object in the mind and this is being experienced by something deeper than the mind which is witness consciousness is now evident. But one can never objectify consciousness, it is like no more than one can see with the eyes but he/she cannot use them to see their own eyes. Similarly, consciousness cannot be objectified, it is having to be recognised subjectively as the true self by which every objective experience is possible. (Swami Krishnananda, 1992)

CONCLUSION

What Yoga approach of Meditation does is; it tries to calm down the modifications in the mind (Chitta Vritti) and made consciousness is evident, like when the waves in the lake are calm down then the bottom of the lake is evident. This evidences to oneself that he/she is certainly not the body and not even the mind or the person and he/she will realize as awareness in which the person, mind and body appearing and functioning. This could be achieved in the Yoga meditation.

Vedantic approach suggest that; let the activities of the mind continue, it means experiencing of external objects in the mind need not to be ceased. But one has to question and examine like, what is experiencing these thoughts in the mind, this kind of enquiry should lead to intensive observation within oneself and this is known as Vedantic meditation. With the perseverance and persistence in this approach, finally one can recognise the ever-present consciousness in every conscious experience because without consciousness no experience is possible. This consciousness is sometimes compared to a ‘luminous space. ‘In Buddhist texts this pure consciousness is referred as “clear light of the Void”.

The Vedantic insight path to self-realization seems to be instantaneous and effortless but practically it is demanding the continuous engagement unlike Yogic meditation approach at one particular time. There is another danger in the insight path is; the tendency of the intellect is to philosophise the procedure it means; ‘I’ had a question and now ‘I’ have got the answer so investigation is finished that’s it. In fact, it is not finished the procedure has to repeat again and again and again until it becomes effortless and living experience.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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