

Models for Meditation According to Indian Tradition

by T.K.V. Desikachar

Editor's note: This is the first lecture of a 12 day seminar presented by T.K.V.

Desikachar in Madras, India in December, 1988. These notes were prepared by Elliot Roberts with the assistance of Tey Roberts and Franz and Simone Moors.

This day, *Vaikuntha ekadasi*, is an auspicious one, the eleventh day of the new moon (*ekadasi*), a time when, according to Hindu tradition, the door to heaven (*vaikuntha*) is open. Those who die today, no matter what their sins, will reach heaven; for them, it is the end of *duhkha* or suffering. I remember in my youth how we did not mourn the death of a prince but rejoiced, for we knew he would go directly to heaven because he had died on this day. By accident, this seminar starts on *Vaikuntha ekadasi*; it is a good accident.

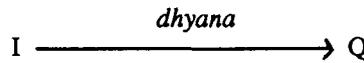
We are offering this two-week seminar on "Models for Meditation According to Indian Tradition," as part of Shri Krishnamacharya's 100th birthday celebration. I often wonder about the value of meditation because I have seen how it has not helped people who practice it. In fact, in some cases it has destroyed their balance of mind and even their body. So the risks of meditation scare me.

To be fair, I have not seen better things in the people who reject meditation. Many are worse than the people who do practice it. Certainly those who do not practice meditation are not any better than those who do.

The Vedas speak highly of *dhyana*, the Sanskrit word for meditation, for the discoveries of the great masters are attributed to *dhyana*. In Vedic tradition, meditation—the need to reflect on something in order to understand it better—is necessary for happiness.

Definition of *Dhyana*

We need to begin with a definition of *dhyana*. *Dhyana* involves an individual and a question or object.



On the simplest level, what happens between the individual and that question (or object) is the beginning of *dhyana*. It can be any question but it must be one question; there must be only one channel between the "I" and the question, not multi-channels. The "I" must temporarily drop the other interests.



And there must be a question; there is no *dhyana* if there is no question or no object.

Perhaps the best explanation of *dhyana* is given by Patanjali in the *Yogasutras*, III. 1 and 2, where he states, respectively, that one must first fix the question (*dharana*) and then link to it (*dhyana*). One who is not able to fix the question is not able to succeed in *dhyana*.

Since *dhyana* cannot occur without an object of concentration, there must be an area (*desa*) where you fix your mind. So you first have to fix or to bind (*bandha*) your mind on a particular place (*desa*), a chosen object. This is known as *desa-bandha*. And second, the mind must establish a relationship with the object which should last, at the least, for a moment.

Thus, the ability to fix the question is a requisite for *dhyana*. One who cannot is not ready for meditation. Again, let me remind you that *dhyana* is:

1. the ability to establish a contact with an object.
2. the ability to prolong this contact, thus creating a link between both ends.

Purvanga

We must recognize the necessity of preparation, the need to work so we

can come to the level where we are able to fix the question. For example, I am still preparing for this seminar—thinking about the content, discussing it with various students, asking questions to the participants, praying for guidance, and so on. Often *dhyana* fails because one is not able to reach the first stage, the *purvanga* (preparation). Often one wants to go to the second stage without going through the first one, and that is not possible. So only after I have prepared properly can I know what to pursue in the course.

Proper preparation can involve eliminating divisive forces and making certain the person is ready for the work. For example, a student of Mohan wished to see me about meditation, but I have put him off for three months to make certain he is ready to do the necessary work. I asked him to be here today, at 7:05 a.m.—an auspicious time according to our Hindu beliefs, even though I wouldn't be ready to see him until later. He arrived at that time and waited for me. When we did meet, I discovered that the meditative techniques given him by his guru were so conflicting that they produced disharmony. But before I would suggest any changes in his practice, I asked him to speak to his guru to find out: first, can some of his techniques be eliminated?; and second, may I teach him? He is to come back later in the week. If he comes back with his guru's permission to change techniques, he has taken the first step, the *purvanga*. If the answer to the question is yes, then the relationship between us can be established, and he is ready for *dhyana*.

If he is to attempt *dhyana*, he must be there, not elsewhere. *Purvanga* is necessary to get rid of the divisive forces so he can pursue the question.

Dhyana, then, the ability to pursue and fix the question, also requires *purvanga*, preparation. Are there any questions?

Question: What is the most important aspect of *purvanga*?

Purvanga is essentially a process of elimination in which we eliminate those thoughts that are not relevant. In fact, yoga is the process of eliminating the undesirable so we can be linked with the desirable. But we must be

careful how we define desirable and undesirable. Sri Aurobindo shocked many of his devotees when they questioned him, "How can you, a Brahmin, smoke when it is expressly forbidden?" He responded, "Yes, I'm attached to cigarettes. But you are attached to non-cigarettes!" Of course, Aurobindo continued to smoke.

Question: How does the "I" influence *dhyana*?

Patanjali's *Yogasutras*, which describes every aspect of mental activity, provides an answer to this question. According to Patanjali, (IV.17), even when you have something in front of you, you may not see it. Even when you don't have something in front of you and you want to see it, you will see it. Everything depends upon *you*. You may think you have a question when in reality you don't. Or you may not have a question but will find it as well as the answer.

According to Patanjali, comprehension is dependent upon two things: one, your interest, and two, the proximity of the object. *Apeksha* is the interest of the *purusha* (what is deep within us that sees correctly and does not change) for the object. The success of *dhyana* depends on the force of the *purusha* that pushes the mind to direct itself toward an object. Without interest, there is no question and no answer.

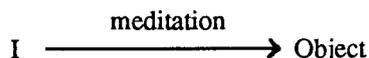
When you have the interest, you will discover the proximity. When an object is invisible, it is not invisible because it is not there, but because something hides it. Something may be next door, but you won't find it, precisely because it is next door.

One need not fix the question first. Instead, one must do the preliminary preparation. If that is done properly, one does not have to decide; the question will come. You must rise to the level where questioning is possible.

Sometimes a question may arise when you are not ready. To reach the question requires preliminaries, for there must be a freshness in your approach. If the approach is habitual, the response will be wrong. When we equip ourselves better, we will know the right question. Only then can we say, "It is *my* question."

I do not reject the concept of meditation without a question for inquiry or

an object for meditation, but how, given the previous definition of meditation, could we explain such absence in this scheme?



Certainly, if the "I" is not there, there can be no meditation. But what about the "object"?

Many heads have rolled on this question of objectless meditation, and I want to save my head. It may be possible to meditate without an object, but personally I am skeptical that one can.

Question: Does the object of meditation affect the "I"?

The characteristics of the object go into the meditator. The *dhyeya*, or object, is very important. It influences the meditator, for whatever one is linked to, is mind.

"The greatest obstacle to meditation is *vikalpa*, the ability of the mind to fabricate in spite of the existence of reality."

Question: What is the greatest obstacle to meditation?

The greatest obstacle to meditation is *vikalpa*, the ability of the mind to fabricate in spite of the existence of reality. Through *vikalpa*, the mind fabricates thoughts of no essence, no substance. And since meditation is, for most of us, the play of the mind, *vikalpa* is the greatest obstacle.

The means to knowledge involves a progression, a movement from *agama*, what we hear or learn from authoritative sources, to *anumana*, the beginning of understanding, to *pratyaksa*, to the fire itself, the truth, the reality. Such means to know is a movement from the gross to the subtle. In *vikalpa*, we don't have this progression. Even if one's guru says a certain thing will happen and it happens, this is still *vikalpa* because it has not gone through the necessary progression.

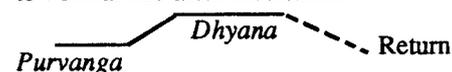
A Model for Meditation: Meditation to the Sun

A popular model in Hindu meditation is the Meditation to the Sun, usually performed three times each day, at sunrise, midday, and sunset. The meditation consists of three parts, each of which uses prayer, *mantra*, *asana*, and *pranayama*.

The first part of the Meditation includes a *mantra* praising the Sun, the embodiment of *Ishvara*, and asking the Sun to give us light. Using *asana*, water and dry grasses, the devotee blesses parts of his body, reminds himself that he received his *mantra* from his teacher, and asks for the help of *Ishvara*.

In the second part, the devotee gives up the "I," becomes the *mantra* itself through the body, and takes on the energy of the Sun. *Ishvara* now resides inside the devotee's heart. Thus, in the second stage of meditation, the devotee is linked to the Sun.

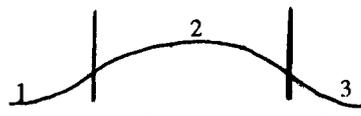
Then, the devotee comes back to this world. He asks leave of *Ishvara* to return so he can go back and do his work. The meditation concludes with praise of the Sun, a friend in the morning. This third state is important in any meditation; we must always come back to normal life after meditation.



This three step process is the idea of *vinivoga* (gradual progression): to start from the gross (the preliminaries), go to the subtle (*puja*, meditation, prayer), and come back to a normal state.

According to the Vedas, if you do something, you should do it well. In meditation, one needs the time for the preliminaries. Then the actual meditation may be short because the mind is ready. The preliminaries are very important, especially in isolating one object for meditation. How ineffective one's meditation will be if one attempts to start at the peak! Any model for meditation presented in this seminar will have:

1. preliminaries
2. peak
3. descent



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Models for Meditation
According to Indian Tradition
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Summary:

This morning we have discussed: elimination of the undesirable; the steps that lead to meditation, the *dhyana*, that is, the intimate link with the question or object of meditation; and the return, so we are sane to other activities. The first two are possible as independent exercises, but I am not certain about the other two. I do not believe it is possible to teach meditation in a group situation, but I hope I am wrong.

For our meeting this afternoon, I want you to reflect on the following two questions:

1. Is belief in God a must for the success of *dhyana*? (My teacher believes that such a belief is necessary, but don't believe an old man!)
2. What happens to the "I" in *dhyana*? Traditionally, there are two opposing views:
 - A. As long as "I" exists, there can be no *dhyana*.
 - B. When one realizes only "I" exists, one has reached the highest level of meditation.

Resume of Morning Lecture:

Dhyana, the Sanskrit word for meditation, means the link between "I" and a particular question, and the absence of links in other directions. It presupposes that the "I" is equipped to be linked and is conscious enough that a link is possible.

All models for meditation have a preliminary step, *purvanga*, in which one does things which lead to the situation where *dhyana* may be possible. From *purvanga*, one goes into the state of *dhyana*, then must come out. One must have the means to come out of that state.

During the next two weeks, we will look at different examples of *purvanga* and the different possibilities of *dhyana*, especially the possibility of *dhyana* on God.

The length of time for each step of the meditation model is variable. However, the preparation is linked to the exact character and evolution of *dhyana*. The person who has reached

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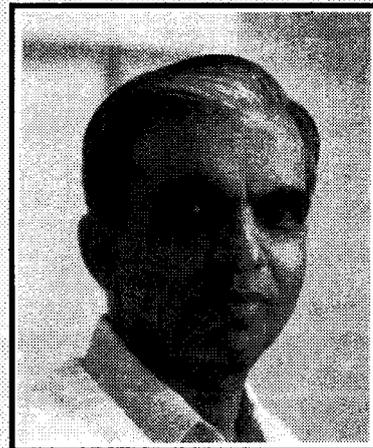
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the highest level doesn't need to prepare for meditation by using the holy dry grasses we saw used in the Meditation to the Sun.

Meditation also depends on the meditator. Many *dhyanas* are possible because of the many variables. I know, for example, of a brother and sister who studied with the same master yet had totally different meditative experience. To meditate, we must have faith in ourselves, God, and our teacher—preferably all, or it won't work. The belief that the individual can be his or her own teacher is one point of view. Certainly, ultimately the God in one's heart is one's teacher.

In meditation, one must make the transition from the gross, that which has form and can be seen by the mind, to the subtle, the formless. Hindus believe that God is not something that can be seen, and that *agama* (truths arrived at by respected sources) is the way to get to God. For Hindus, the temple is needed for the feeling of prayer. The temple is one more step to make certain *vikalpa* (imagination which is devoid of reality) is reduced, that we are close to reality.

Not everyone needs *purvanga*. Some extraordinary people, because of merits in the past, do not need this preparation. (See *Yogasutras* I.19 and IV. 1) Quite a few such examples exist; however, if we try to emulate them, we are in trouble.

The *Yogasutras*, in IV.1, indicate five ways to reach the highest. The fifth, which is gradually changing the mind from a state of distraction to a state of sustained direction, is the most labored because we must start from the bottom.

And we must respect our *dharma*. Here the concept of *sva-dharma* becomes important. (*sva*: my own, what belongs to me; *dharma*: characteristics, that is, religion, family rules, tradition, etc.) These are characteristics which differentiate me from others. We are told again and again to stick to "my character," "my family," "my religion," "my tradition." Any yoga practice must fit a student's background so it will not produce conflicts.

Question: If *sva-dharma* means characteristics that come from one's family, religion and tradition, do you have the same *dharma* as your father and your children?

No. All of those things—concept of family, religious beliefs, traditions—change. But if you have a strong *sva-dharma*, it is best to work within it. If you don't have a *sva-dharma*, then you must look for one. A Brahmin is one who seeks the truth; I am a Brahmin, a seeker of truth, and proud to be one. That is not always the case. I can re-

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Yoga Imagery in Preparation for Chemotherapy

by Mary Louise Skelton

The use of imagery in healing reaches back several thousand years across many cultures. One of the most important cultures, and perhaps the best known to us as yoga students, is India. To mentally focus on the image of a full moon or an effulgent light in the heart center and experience calmness, or to focus on the image of a bright sun and experience arousal, certainly helps us understand that psychological factors can and do significantly affect the physiology of the body.

"Only within the last three decades have researchers and clinicians in Europe, Japan, China, and the United States begun to explore systematically the role of imagery as an important factor in determining an individual's health or illness, and perhaps, life and death."¹ One important area of research (and now medical practice) by Martin L. Rossman, M.D. of Mill Valley, California, concerns the mental aspects of healing—how we can use our imagination and will to cooperate with our body's desire and ability to heal.

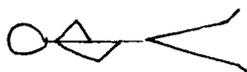
When I first spoke to Sarah she was just leaving for the hospital to have a mastectomy. The previous week she had been informed that she had a malignancy, and as one would expect, her reaction was one of total horror. A Professor in a Graduate School for Nursing—she was very health-conscious and dutifully had her yearly gynecological exams and mammograms. She said, "I feel like I've been hit in the face." She wanted to talk with me about the possibility of using imagery to reduce the oftentimes terrible nausea that accompanies chemotherapy.

I met with Sarah a week after her surgery to discuss what might be her approach to the upcoming chemotherapy. While listening to her concerns and fears, I observed her breathing, and I noticed that her voice was unsteady and a little high pitched. Her biggest fear was that she had lost con-

trol; she desperately needed to feel that she was, partially at least, in control of what happens to her.

Obviously Sarah needed a means for relieving her anxiety. I spoke with her about the interrelationship of the mind and the breath. We talked about how a disturbed mind could affect her breathing, and how disturbed breathing could affect her mind. A vicious cycle of anxiety could ensue, not only making her feel a loss of control but possibly preventing her from having a clear perception of the situation.

Since we were sitting on a low, comfortable couch, I asked her to lean back, close her eyes and mentally observe where she begins her inhalations. It didn't take her long to recognize that her breathing was very shallow and confined to the upper chest. I suggested that she practice the following:



Left palm on upper chest; right palm just below the rib cage.

I told her I always place my little finger over the navel and then spread the fingers. She liked knowing specifically "where" to place the palm. Then I asked her to feel the rise of the abdomen while inhaling and the flattening of the abdomen while exhaling. It took a conscious effort on Sarah's part to begin breathing diaphragmatically, but I could see that she understood what should happen. I suggested she practice an even rate of breathing to help her feel in balance.

Example: Inhale 5, Pause
Exhale 5, Pause

Or if she wanted to attain a deep state of relaxation, she could focus on making her exhalation longer than her inhalation.

Example: Inhale 4, Pause
Exhale 8, Pause
or: Inhale free, Pause
Exhale 8, Pause

I told her to practice this diaphragmatic breathing as often as she could until we met again. I was prepared to leave when she again mentioned imagery. After all, this was why she wanted to see me in the first place. I wasn't trying to avoid discussing imagery, but I felt that her anxiety level was so high, we should reduce that aspect first. I told Sarah the following: In yoga we have the concept that there is a fire in our bodies located in the area where I had her place her right hand.



The seat of the fire is near the navel, and the flame shifts depending on whether we are inhaling or exhaling. On inhalation there is a downward movement of the breath, creating a draft that forces the flame downwards. It is the flame that can burn
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Models for Meditation According to Indian Tradition

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member a gathering where a young woman, a Brahmin, felt very ill at ease when Krishnamurti criticized the caste system and Brahmins in particular.

Comments on Questions for Reflection

Meditation must elevate the mind. That is its basic purpose. This involves an ascent of the individual's mind. The object or question is very important. Since God is the highest, because God is perfect, successful *dhyana* on God will link one to perfection.

Is belief in God a must for the success of *dhyana*? The previous discussion would provide the logic for the answer, "yes," to that question.

What happens to the "I" in *dhyana*? Upon the arrival of his guru, a student said, "I am meditating." The guru answered, "No, you're not."