

The Maharshi



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ADVAITIC SADHANA

BY S. S. COHEN

CHAPTER 3

DHYĀNA (MEDITATION)

WE have seen that *sāadhanā* is necessary for those who keenly feel the impermanence and hardships of the world of sense, and seek redemption from them and from the affliction of *avidyā* (ignorance). We have also discussed the nature and results of the *sāadhanā* in general. Now we shall examine a few practical methods of *dhyāna* which are known to have helped seekers throughout the centuries to tread the same path and arrive.

I wish first to remark that the failure of many people to lead their *dhyāna* to success is due to two principal causes. First is their inability to concentrate at all, let alone for any appreciable length of time, which induces some of them to resort to makeshifts or follow a Guru who does not recommend *dhyāna*. The second, by far the greater cause, is their starting with inadequate knowledge, with hazy, improperly-formed ideas about the aim and object of their meditation, which naturally results in their remaining in the cloud of uncertainty for a long time. The vast majority of beginners are in too great a haste to take to the road of *dhyāna* before seizing themselves of all its facts and principles. Who is therefore to blame if they feel at a loss to know how to meditate, how to begin meditation, or if the meditation always remains thin and jejune? It is not enough to snatch a few slogans, shut the eyes, and start

questioning oneself “Who am I?” or suggesting to oneself “I am not the body nor the senses,” etc. A comprehensive grasp of the Master’s teaching and profound reflections are absolutely necessary to endow the meditator with a prior knowledge of what he is to expect from the *dhyāna* and the direction it should take, or else who is to answer his questions? For the very mind that asks them is itself the Reality it is seeking, and if it has not been understood with full conviction as such, how can the meditation be clear in its objective to succeed? This is the stage when no one can help the meditator: he has to help himself by assiduous application and deep cogitation on the words of the Master to draw practical conclusions from them, which is itself a sort of meditation and which in course of time matures into the meditation proper, whose aim is to annihilate the *vṛtti* (mind transformation or thoughts) which covers the reality of the Self, as has been explained in the last chapter.

Meditation is a self-contained process, which goes on correcting itself to perfection by trials and errors in him who comes prepared for it. It somehow finds its way by the light of its own torch, catching the smallest hints that rise from within or without and automatically acting on them without even the knowledge of the surface consciousness. The presence of the Guru is then of the greatest help, and must be availed of at any cost, if by then the Guru has revealed himself. If not, dwelling in holy places and clean

environments is essential till the Guru is found. In fact, to those who have attained this state of maturity the Guru does not tarry to appear somehow. They are never left in the lurch for long in that respect. He is there waiting, as it were, all the time: the seeking, conscious or unconscious, is definitely mutual.

Residence with the Guru during the whole period of the practice is of inestimable value (occasional absenteeism excepted), for reasons which the *sādhaka* (the practitioner) will not fail to discover by himself after passing the stage of apprenticeship and beginning to know what is what in the true spiritual life. There will be, moreover, no particular inclination on his part to return to the world, if he means business and is truly fervent. The time factor is of the utmost importance to him: he abhors being a minute longer than he can help it in this welter of vanity, superficialities, and wasted efforts. He cannot afford to lead a busy life for pretty nothing, or lead a life of lax indifference. He has by then developed a positive detachment, contemplative habits, love for seclusion and for *sāttvic* (pure) company, particularly that of the Guru. Yet the worldly-mindedness which he brings with him takes a long time to be rubbed off. Its substitution by the *nivṛtti* (return to the being) impressions is made easy by meditative efforts, supplemented by the holiness which ceaselessly emanates from the Guru. Worldly people call this penance (*tapas*), of which they are very scared, indeed, imagining it to call for Herculean efforts and great sacrifices. Nothing is farther from the truth. Apart from the very first steps there exists no suffering worth mentioning for those who are seriously inclined towards it. The suffering seen by others in the *tapasvin* lies only in their own imagination. The *tapasvin* himself enjoys the indescribable bliss of the inner freedom which *tapas* affords — freedom from the terrible load with which the world burdens the ordinary life. The *tapasvin* has thrown down that load and is now free. The strict meaning of *tapas* in this path is adherence to the quest for the Self, and if the Self has already been realised, continued inherence in it, not allowing oneself to slip back again to the world of the senses (*Ramana Gītā*, XI, 19). The true *tapasvin* is he who has, in his heart and mind, turned his back completely to the world. If he has not done that,

domestic life is best for him. He will be freer at home than in an Ashram or a temple to pursue his seeking even in the midst of his worldly affairs. It is no use being in an Ashram in seclusion when the instrument through which he expects to attain peace — the mind — is itself disturbed by longings.

It goes without saying that this has nothing whatever in common with the flesh and soul mortifications of the Hindu and Christian extremists, of the cave and desert hermits. The *Bhagavad Gītā* insists on moderation in everything and on the necessity of maintaining good health and mental ease and comfort.

Once the mind is cleared of the dead past it will be amenable to adjust itself to the new conditions. The Guru, let it be at once stated, merely reveals this truth and its import to the *sādhaka* and points the direction to it, but he cannot take the place of the meditation, which is the preparation of the mind for the supreme experience by the yogi himself, no more than the schoolmaster can himself make the study on behalf of his pupils. Nor can the Guru confer the ability to meditate, or, for the matter of that, *mukti* (Liberation) itself by an act of His will. For then there would be no need for any practice whatever, or for even self-purification: who would then take all this trouble when a simple request to the Guru would do the trick? *Sāadhanā* would then be a mockery and *mukti* valueless. Moreover, the true Guru is not less than a *jīvanmukta*, one who had divested Himself of all personal volition even prior to His attainment, and, when He had become the one Self, the absolute Brahman, not only the personal will but also the vision of multiplicity, of otherness, had ceased to exist for Him. To ascribe to Him, therefore, partiality and discrimination denotes ignorance, if not also disloyalty to Him. Yet miracles, as acts of His Grace, do sometimes appear, but these are not brought about consciously and deliberately by Him as an individual, but the powers latent in His pure mind mysteriously respond in their own gracious ways, if the *prārabdha* (destiny) of the devotee concerned is favourable.

The impulse and desire for meditation have thus to be born inside the *sādhaka's* own heart, and they are invariably so born when the heart by long-sustained aspirations has sufficiently blossomed and developed an appreciable degree of detachment

(*vairagya*) and the mind has cooperated with it in a rational sensitivity to truth and in a power of discrimination (*viveka*). The Guru becomes then extremely valuable, not only as a revealer of the Truth and the way to it, but also as an inspiring, purifying and soothing influence which calms the storm which agitates the hearts not yet turned truly ascetic, hastening the maturing of meditation into *samādhi*.

The true seeker goes on plodding with his meditation day in and day out, year in and year out, supplementing it in his free hours with the study of the subject of his meditation, so that his mind may not lie fallow and fall back in its old ruts, or retrospect on incidents the memory of which does decided harm to his *sādhana*. A careful watch has to be kept on the tricks of the memory which keeps bringing to the present sorrowful and remorseful events and associations, which had better remain buried in the past. Equally distressing is the memory of persons who, in their times, had left profound marks on the heart and mind. All these recollections have to be guarded against and nipped in the bud the moment they make their appearance. The past, in brief, has to be thrown into limbo to preserve the calm which is necessary for the practice.

Once out of the initial darkness the mind becomes eager to receive concrete directions and hints, which throw some light on its journey in this uncharted land of the spirit, which stretches before it to infinity without landmarks or milestones.

We come now to the core of the subject — meditation. What is meditation, and why it is practised?

Meditation is simply the repeated attempt to withdraw one's thoughts from the multitude of objects around and fix them on only one object — the subject chosen for concentration. In chapter two we have dealt with the restlessness and unhappiness of the unrestrained, diffused mind. Although the mind is said to be fleeter than the wind, fleeter than lightning and thus uncontrollable, yet by constant practice it slowly bends and acquires quiescence and depth till it reaches the Heart or Self, which is absolute peace, the mind's own true nature, free from thoughts. This is the true meditation and its aim in this yoga.

(*To be continued*)

PRESENCE

I have seen the Maharshi when he was in a small cave up the hillside, shunning human society and rapt in uncanny and unbroken silence. I have seen him when he came a little down the hillside and dwelt on its lower stretches. A room with a verandah all round took the place of the narrow diminutive cave. Whenever I saw him, during these later days, I used to ply him with questions about the soul and he used to smile and give brief, bright, blessed replies, dispelling doubt. I have seen him since in a spacious room amidst a handsome pile of buildings, which are yet growing in number and in size. A shrine was built in memory of his holy Mother who has passed into the 'beyond' and become one with God. His present abode is at the foot of the Hill. His coming down thus from the hillside to the hill-base is symbolical of the new urge, the urge to commune with God and also to build the Kingdom of God on the earth.

I found him stretched at ease on a couch, during the sweltering heat of the day. A revolving bookshelf was near his hand; at his foot a stand of incense sticks sent wreathed smoke-rings of subtle perfume into the motionless air. A little beyond sat disciples and admirers in a meditative pose, in absolute calm and quietness. Ever and anon the slightest of slight breezes came stealing into the room and made the incense smoke whirl and spread, while the world-intoxicated mind became subdued, calm and purified in the holy atmosphere of the Sage. Not one word was uttered by anyone. But there was an eloquent silence all about us.

“Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter; therefore ye soft pipes, play on;
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone.” (Keats)

Was it the stately presence of the silent Hill seen through the window that spoke to our souls with a solemn, silent stillness? Was it the holy mood of the Master in his introverted introspection? Was it the still small voice of everyone there rapt into a kindred mood by a force subtle and unseen, but powerful and felt within? We sat there, and time rolled on while we were oblivious of its course. Each felt a sense of inner

release and was as happy as a bird “sailing with supreme dominion through the azure deep of air.”

The hush of the evening fell upon us. The Master rose and passed into the open pandal close by and sat on a couch in a place whence we could see the Hill floodlighted by the setting sun. The disciples and admirers also moved thither and sat in a semicircle in front of the Sage. Then began their chant of the daily evensong, glorifying the Master and his message. The hymn swelled forth again and again in ever-new cadences, all the persons present taking up the chorus: “May Sri Ramana’s holy Feet live and flourish, and bless all forever and forever!”

Then the hymn came to a solemn close, and the full

moon rose in the sapphire sky. That deep silence which had preceded the rapturous song fell on us once more. The inner Full moon of Divine ecstasy rose in the sky of our hearts. Then came to my mind the great passage by Oscar Wilde: “Indeed, that is the charm about Christ; when all is said, He is just like a work of art. He does not really teach one anything, but by being brought into His presence one becomes something. And everybody is predestined to His presence.” I felt that I was predestined to the Sage’s presence and went into the stillness of the night, moving away from him physically but feeling drawn nearer to him in spirit like a streamer borne against the wind...

— from the Golden Jubilee Souvenir, by Dewan Bahadur K. S. Ramaswami Sastri

THE VOICE OF THAYUMANAVAR

THE SILENT SAGE

AN 18th Century TAMILIAN saint whose poetry beautifully defined the path to Liberation and the exalted states of the Liberated was Saint Thayumanavar. Bhagavan Ramana so identified with many of Thayumanavar’s poems that he would frequently recite them to illustrate the spiritual truths he wanted to bring home to his devotees. He has been quoted to have said that in the whole Thayumanavar literature he preferred one stanza, which says, “Ego disappearing another ‘I-I’ spontaneously manifests in full glory.”

Saint Thayumanavar’s life was characterized by an all-consuming aspiration for Truth and a spontaneous outpouring of his experiences expressed in inspired Tamil verse.

The following biographical notes and translations were done by Dr. B. Natarajan of Chennai and are copyrighted by the Himalayan Academy. Under the title “A Guiding Light,” Dr. Natarajan’s description of how Thayumanavar came into his life is no less inspiring than the Saint of whom he writes.

A GUIDING LIGHT

The World was my open book and inner quest
my deep study.
Who am I in the vastness of cosmic phenomenon?
The Mystery Car of Time takes me round changeable
seasons;
Destiny leads the play of life, blindfolding me in
self-oblivion.
*“Who am I? What am I? Whence am I?
What is beyond the entry and exit in this
amphitheatre of Existence?
Who feels in the senses and thinks in the
mind and dreams in my fancy?”*

Such were my reflections during my school days. I kept aloof from home, society, and noisy crowds taking delight in inner communion. Home and school resented my dreamy mood and crazy solitude. One day I was treated harshly by my kith and kin. I ran for refuge to the temple and there hugged the feet of God. I surrendered my life into the hands of the Divine Grace. ‘O Grace, I take refuge at Thy feet. Lead me to Light from this dark vale of tears. Reveal to me the mystery of life and its mission. Keep me here to fulfil that mission and call me back to be with Thee’. I sobbed in a frenzy of spontaneous fervour. I felt a warm current traversing my heart and brain and a descent from above which continues to this day. I

was reborn in the Grace and could now understand the meaning of life and the language of the soul.

I sat in a dark corner of the temple forgetting body and world when a song attracted me to the lotus tank nearby. There, in the bright moon light, some monks were singing together a song that touched my soul.

The Silent One possessed me in Silence and poured into me a speechless word that was the seed of wisdom. That word, O friend, had a magic effect on my life. It hushed up the mind and opened my heart to silent embrace of the Divine.

So on went the song which brought me peace and joy. I learnt from the monks the song and for the first time knew about its author, Sage Thayumanavar. I secured a copy of his works and treasured it in my bosom. The Hymns of Sage Thayumanavar became the guiding light of my life. I still believe that the Divine Grace gave a silent friend to my pilgrim soul.

The hymns of Thayumanavar removed my gloom and solved my mental problems. It unravelled the riddle of existence. Each line was a message and each message a vision of Truth. Each truth was a spark of intuition and each intuition had a transforming force. The style of Thayumanavar was limpid, simple, straight, bright, profound and sweet. It flowed from the abundance of soul's delight in rapturous union with the Beloved.

Every hymn is a gem of divinity. It is an enchanting flute-voice of the soul that touches all souls. The poet was song and the song the poet. This is the message of the Seer Poet:

The unique One pervades all beings. All are one in that.

It is the Life of lives, the One that moves in many names and forms.

It is beyond the mental conceptions of caste, creed and religion.

Ascetic or householder, all have a right to live in its consciousness.

Come collectively to enjoy the bliss of life in the Divine Grace.

Call with deep love; the Grace shall pour itself from above.

Now let us see the evolution of his life towards Divinity.

WHO IS THIS BOY ?

The rock temple at Trisirapuram is a marvel of Indian architecture. It enshrines the image of Thayumanavar — the God of Mother love. The temple is busy with crowds of devotees singing devotional songs and dancing in ecstasy. Among them we see a brilliant boy, fair in colour, tall in stature, with rosy cheeks, lotus face and phosphorescent eyes, beaming with grace and rays of knowledge. The boy contemplates upon the Divine for a while and then leaves the crowd. He quickly gets up to the topmost temple of the hill. There Ganesa stands. The boy sits self-immersed, meditates a while, and then sings:

Rare is human birth. While yet I live on this earth, in this body, with heart and soul, I must revel in the ecstasy of Divine Grace.

The boy seeks a spiritual teacher to initiate him in the secret of the Divine art. He stands again before Lord Thayumanavar and pours out his soul's aspirations into songs.

He becomes silent in meditation, tears gushing out of his eyes in pearl drops of ecstasy.

THE PIOUS PARENTS

A tall stately man comes in haste. He looks here and there and catches hold of the boy saying, "Come home; how long are you to be here? Come!" That is his father, Kediliappa. Kediliappa 'literally means immortal Father. Born to this mortal father, the boy sought Father, the immortal. This saintly boy is our *Thayumanavar*. He was named after the Deity of the Rock-Temple.

Kediliappa Pillai, a Chola Vellala, was an administrative officer of the Naik Kingdom. Kediliappa originally lived at Vedaranyam, a famous pilgrim centre. He was the trustee of the local temple. He was a learned man high in intellect and wide in heart. His wife Gajavalli was a pious lady, humming devotional songs while attending to housekeeping. Their home was surrounded by a divine aureole. The liberality of their hearts expressed itself in charity and hospitality. There was a royal dignity in the personality of Kediliappa, and a remarkable sweetness in his words. His elder brother, Vedaranyam, a great scholar well placed in life, had no children. Kediliappa offered his own boy Siva Chidambaram in adoption to the elder brother. The brother's face glowed with joy and there was sunlight again in his life.

THE KING'S FAVOUR

Those were the days of the Naik kings. The Pandyan dynasty had declined. The Naik chiefs of Vijayanagar possessed the Madurai Kingdom (1559-1736). Visvanatha, Tirumalai, and Mangammal were noteworthy rulers of Madurai. They were great patrons of art and poetry. The grandson of Mangammal was Vijaya Ranga Chokkanatha. He set up his residence at Thrisirapuram. He was a pious man, but not a statesman. He ruled for twenty-seven years (1704-1731). His kingdom was often attacked by the Maharattas and the Mussalmans. He wanted strong assistants.

His minister, Govindappa, one day came to Vedaranyam. Kediliappa received the august guest with temple honours and entertained him under his hospitable roof. Both of them spoke on religion and politics. The Minister said, "Kedili, you are a scholar, a devotee, an astute statesman, a clever diplomat and a keen accountant. You are just the man that we are seeking. Come with me and serve the King." Kediliappa shifted his family to Trisirapuram. King Chokkanatha, pleased even at the first sight, took Kedili into his council and gave him a free hand in the management of his household. Kedili was faithful to the king, alert to his duty and timely in advising him against enemies. Chokkanatha treated him like a brother. Kedili's fame and fortune flourished day by day. There was only one gloomy spot in his life: that was the absence of a child to cheer his home.

He and his wife went daily to the rock-temple and prayed to Lord Thayumanavar for a child. They fed saints and made gifts to scholars. Kedili chanted holy songs. He also arranged for Vedic recitals before the sanctum of Thayumanavar. While the atmosphere was thus charged with holy vibrations, his wife Gajavalli became enceinte. Gajavalli spent her days in prayer and listening to holy recitations.

Devotees were chanting the soul-thrilling psalms of Manickavachakar when Gajavalli delivered the gifted child. That child was named Thayumanavar, for it was born by the grace of Thayumanavar Swami.

Kedili was overjoyed at the sight of his luminous son, radiant in beauty. Temple bells rang in blessings.

LEARNING AND YEARNING

Everyone was attracted to this lovely child. King Chokkanatha admired the boy and marked him for his service. The father brought up the son with high hopes.

He taught him Tamil and Sanskrit, spiritual lore and statecraft. The king was satisfied with his progress. He was the cynosure of saints and scholars. He was an adept in Vedanta and Siddhanta. He read with rapture the hymns of Saints

like Manickavachakar, Appar, Sambandhar and Sundarar, He mastered the Maikanda Sastras. These are holy books in Tamil. He studied the Upanishads, side by side with Tiruvachakam. He was a clever logician and none could rival him in discussions. But, he was not satisfied with book-lore. Books did not reveal the Blessed One cradled in his heart; words did not quench his thirst. From sunrise to sunset, he was seeking for something within, for somebody that can lead him to the fount of Self-Conscious Bliss. He had a rich home. He had free access to the King's palace. He was welcomed in royal circles. But the born-sage preferred solitude to company, reflection to reading and introspection to speaking. Words were loads to him, and books burdens. He went often to the rock-temple and spent his time in meditation and prayer. In the bosom of purified calmness, in the silent seclusion of inner peace, he sought Self-reality with all the fervour of his faith. His eyes flowed with tears of yearning. His lips throbbed with songs of spiritual melancholy. He had the sage-mind of Pattinattar, the contemplation of the

Buddha, the inspiration of Vedic seers, the fervour of Manickavachakar, the humility of Appar and the faith of Sambandhar. Nuggets of golden truth, cast in brilliant couplets, came out of the inner mine.

Then longer poems flowed out spontaneously. Showering tear-pearls gushing out of his lotus eyes, the boy saluted and contemplated upon the Supreme. Learning yielded to yearning.

Thayumanavar saw the Hatha-yogins controlling breath and twisting their bodies. He saw religionists in hot discussion; he saw verbomaniacs quarrelling about the God whom they could not even imagine.

He sought solace in the Unique One who is all and all in all. He invoked His grace day and night for a guiding light.

ROYAL SERVICE

Kediliappa did not live to see the brilliant manhood of his son. He joined the majority while yet Thayumanavar was in his teens. His father's death intensified his yearning for spiritual freedom. "*With this body, I must attain liberation.*" This was his resolution.

But the King would not leave him to himself. “*Dear Thayumanavar, serve me in your father’s place,*” said he. Thayumanavar had to obey the King. He became the Chancellor of exchequer of the Naik Kingdom. He fulfilled his state duties to the entire satisfaction of the King who loved him more and more. Also his Rani Meenakshi. She was ready to do anything for him. People liked his gentle manners and benevolent heart. He did his duty for duty’s sake; but his heart was aloof from the distractions of state affairs. He saw what the world was and took lessons from what he saw.

Those were troubled times. Trisirapuram was a field of conflicting forces. The throne was shaken by invasions and revolutions. Political butchery, local treachery, social animosity, royal indolence and religious pretence disrupted the harmony of life everywhere. The marauding Maharatta hordes and the invading Nawab’s forces were lurking in ambush in the vicinity. The clatter of enemy swords enervated the Naik forces. Thayumanavar saw with open eyes the danger of royal courts disrupting by flippant pleasures. The kingdom was a web of spies and a trap of enemies. The friends of today became the foes of tomorrow. None can play with fire without being scorched. Thayumanavar did not like to be caught in this political

turmoil. He witnessed a thousand golden hypocrisies and pitied humanity caught in the coils of temptation.

Thayumanavar despised the mere life of carnal desires and sex indulgence. Yoga was his deep aspiration. A Master sought the Seeker. *(To be continued)*

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