

Title

**Concentration
and
Meditation**

**By
Swami Paramananda**

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About this eBook

“*Concentration and Meditation*” by Swami Paramananda

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Concentration and Meditation

I. Concentration

We all possess the faculty of concentration, but with the majority it is instinctive and automatic, not conscious. Even among the animals we see how a lion or tiger will gather his strength by a moment of absolute stillness before he springs upon his prey; that automatic, instinctive power of concentration is embedded in every living creature. But until we can gain conscious command over our mental and spiritual forces, we can never have complete concentration. When the scattered mind is gathered together it is like a bright searchlight, and by it man is able to investigate the latent powers which he possesses but of which he is not now wholly aware. As he grows more conscious of these hidden forces and learns to use them, he becomes more and more proficient.

We never wish to be defeated and yet how often our strength of mind or our physical capacities prove inadequate. It is because we have not the full and conscious possession of our whole being. Man cannot achieve much unless he has free use of his hands and feet, free use of his eyes and ears, free use of his muscles and above all free use of his mind and intelligence. But how many of us have the free use of all these? When we would make use of them we find them hopelessly scattered and rebellious to our will. The cause of this does not lie in any inherent lack of power, but in our inability to coordinate, and in our lack of definite one-pointed purpose. We miss the mark because we do not set our aim properly.

Once in ancient India there was a tournament held to test marksmanship in archery. A wooden fish was set up on a high pole and the eye of the fish was the target. One by one many valiant princes came and tried their skill but in vain. Before each one shot his arrow the teacher asked him what he saw and invariably all replied that they saw a fish on a pole at a great height, with head, eyes, etc.; but Arjuna as he took his aim said: "I see the eye of the fish," and he was the only one who succeeded in hitting the mark.

A similar incident is given by the Chinese sage, Chuang-Tzu: "The man who forged swords for the Minister of War was eighty years of age. Yet he never made the slightest slip in his work. The Minister of War said to him: 'Is it your skill, sir, or have you any method?' 'It is concentration,' replied the man. 'When twenty years old, I took to forging swords. I cared for nothing else. If a thing was not a sword, I did not notice it. I availed myself of whatever energy I did not use in other directions in order to secure greater efficiency in the direction required.'"

Concentration means wholeness, unity, equilibrium. The hands, feet, mind, all our members and faculties must be unified. They must all work in harmony, in tranquillity and balance. Balance is needed everywhere in life. A man may be over-active or he may be idle; both indicate absence of self-adjustment. Sri Krishna declares in the Gita: "O Arjuna, the practice of Yoga is not for him who eats too much or who does not eat at all, nor for him who sleeps too much or who keeps awake in excess. He who is moderate in eating and recreation, moderate in his efforts in work, moderate in sleep and wakefulness, his practice of Yoga destroys all misery." What does this signify? That he who goes to extremes is a slave of impulse, he is not the master. He lacks balance and lack of balance means lack of strength and without strength no great work can be accomplished. If on the contrary we practise moderation or equilibrium even in our most ordinary daily tasks, we shall see how steady will be our gain in concentration.

The practice of moderation necessitates a certain amount of self-discipline. The Hindus call this *Tapas*, which literally means "fire" or "heat," and they believe that unless this fire of self-discipline is lighted in order to burn to ashes all the impurities and limitations of our system, spiritual illumination will be impossible. But here too extremes must be avoided. Often people through misunderstanding or over-enthusiasm torture and strain themselves in the hope of

advancing more rapidly, but they defeat their own end. Excessive penance or mortification is as harmful as self-indulgence. The purpose of all discipline is to make our constitution more enduring, more adaptable and more responsive. Body and mind must be made wholly obedient to the will and independent of external circumstances.

The person who is a slave to physical comforts should gradually eliminate all that is superfluous and train himself to be content with the bare necessities. Anyone who finds it difficult to overcome physical lethargy and rise early in the morning should drag himself out of bed by sheer force of will. One who is inclined to over-eating should by degrees reduce the quantity of his food. A person who has the habit of talking unnecessarily should practise stillness by persistent control of all useless motions. Such practices not only increase our power of concentration and meditation, but do much to improve our bodily health and make us happier in every way.

The mind falls naturally into three general states: - the dull state; the over-active or scattered state; and the calm, centred state. These correspond to the three *Gunas* or qualities of matter, called in Sanskrit *Tamas*, *Rajas* and *Sattwa*.

They are innate in every living being and manifest in the human mind as the subconscious, the conscious and the super-conscious. The first quality is that of darkness, inertia, heaviness, the brute state. When the mind is overcome by this quality, it lacks in power to differentiate between right and wrong and is easily carried away by lower animal passions. The second quality is that of excessive ambition, egotism, arrogance and discontent. When this quality is in ascendancy, a man is consumed by feverish unrest and an irresistible desire to multiply possessions and to entangle himself more and more in external undertakings. His energies are scattered and often wasted. No matter how much he achieves, he is never satisfied; for the flame of his desire mounts with each new gratification as a fire fed by fresh fuel. With the quality of *Sattwa* the mind grows collected, serene and illumined. This is the fitting state for spiritual attainment. In order to reach it the condition of dullness or inertia must be conquered by stimulating all the physical and mental activities. Then these activities must be regulated and directed until they are focused. The sub-conscious must be brought into complete subjection to the conscious and the conscious must be expanded into the superconscious. This is the natural process in acquiring the power of concentration and meditation.

Meditation is inseparable from concentration. When the mind has gained its full strength through singleness, it naturally becomes meditative. Often the mind is compared to a lake. If the surface is absolutely smooth not a ripple then we can see clearly what lies beneath. Similarly when this mind becomes calm, when the wind of uncontrolled desire does not constantly create ripples over the surface of it, then the image of our true nature is not broken and we obtain a perfect reflection of what we are in reality and what our relation is with the Supreme Intelligence. As long as the mind is agitated, so long our vision can never be unerring. We are constantly hoping that someone else may give us knowledge and happiness, but that is not possible. These can only come from within.

What we need is to be active spiritually. As we go on living our outer life, we must devote some time each day to making our mind introspective, that we may develop our subtler powers of perception. In all investigations certain instruments are necessary, as we see scientists inventing finer and finer instruments for their researches. Also for spiritual observation we need a form of mind which can discern the subtler things imperceptible to our ordinary sense faculties. The concentrated mind is such an instrument and the only one fitted for higher research. It is like a focused light. We know that when light is dissipated we cannot see well, but when the scattered rays are brought together by the help of a shade or reflector, then everything grows distinct. So will the hidden powers of the universe be revealed to us when through determined and steadfast practice we gather up the present forces of our mind, which is now weak only because it is disorganized and divided.

We must not remain content, however, with the lower forms of concentration. These may bring us physical health, prosperity or success, because concentration always gives power; but even though we acquire more wealth, greater honor or increased bodily strength, we shall find that one part of our being still remains unsatisfied in spite of all our worldly acquisitions. Never will it be content until we awaken and begin to work for our higher development. Nor should such work be regarded as selfish, because all human beings are bound together and as we unfold our own spiritual nature we cannot fail to benefit others. The same life runs through and through everywhere; and only he who can seize hold of that subtle spiritual being hidden in every heart, will know how to solve the riddle of this human existence for himself and be able to render lasting help to his fellow-men. That one alone lives happily and fearlessly. Now we are fearful because so many things are hidden from us: we fear the future because we do not know what the future may bring; we fear death because we are not sure what may come after. For this reason we must learn to focus the mind and turn it within, then by its brilliant light we shall understand all things and attain the vision of Truth.

The purpose of meditation is to gain that vision. Nor must we stop until we have seen by direct perception our true Self and our relation with the Supreme. That must be the purpose of all our spiritual practice. When the mind becomes fixed on the Supreme Being, when through meditation we are united with that Power, then we have fullness of vision. This is called the superconscious state or *Samadhi*. As we concentrate on That which is All-Light, the darkness of mind and body will vanish; for what we constantly think upon, that we become. There is only one Power, one Intelligence, one Mind, which is God, and our mind is nothing but a reflex of that Universal Mind. As it works separate from that Mind, it remains unintelligent, ignorant, powerless; but when it becomes united with It, it attains a state of complete illumination: "After having attained which no other gain seems greater; being established wherein man is not overwhelmed even by great sorrow."

II. Meditation

When the mind is poised and well concentrated, the Supreme Self of man becomes visible. At other times we do not see the real man and the apparent man thinks himself all in all. The Seer or higher Self is there, but we are not conscious of it. When, however, the mind becomes poised, the Self appears in its true state and we do not have to make any effort to perceive it. In the Mundaka-Upanishad these two selves of man are compared to two birds on a tree. One sits aloft, calm, serene, immersed in its own glory; the other jumps from limb to limb, eating the sweet and bitter fruits of the tree. Each time it tastes a bitter fruit, it looks towards the other bird and beholding it calm, contented, shining, its grief passes away.

So long as there is any disturbance in our mind, we cannot get the vision of our true Self. All these waves - in the form of selfishness, ambition, desires - must subside. The mind must be made one-pointed. When a man attains this, he sees the Self. At other times he identifies himself with some passing adjunct of mind like anger or jealousy or fear. If we analyze, we shall see that when any one speaks harshly to us, the word is first outside us, then it enters into us and we grow angry. At first anger and we are separate; then we become one, we identify ourselves with it and we suffer. The wise man, however, does not identify himself with these states or modifications of mind and body. He does everything like other people, - eats, sleeps, works - but his actions differ from others because he knows the distinction between the true Self and the ego. He realizes that all these outer things only exist because the Self is behind them and he is only conscious of That, so he goes through the various experiences of life without being affected by them.

As long as we identify ourselves with conditions, we suffer; but when we cease to identify ourselves with these passing conditions, we never really suffer. At present our mind is going in