



ISSN: 2456-4419

Impact Factor: (RJIF): 5.18

Yoga 2018; 3(1): 994-997

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www.theyogicjournal.com

Received: 20-11-2017

Accepted: 22-12-2017

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Understanding Sri Aurobindo's concept of silent mind

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Abstract

Sri Aurobindo who was an Indian Yogi, Philosopher, Guru, gave the concept of a new form of yogic philosophy being not satisfied with the approaches of traditional yogic philosophies. He called his yoga 'Purna Yoga' or 'Integral Yoga'. This yoga aims at the conscious union with the Divine in the super mind and the transformation of the nature. According to Sri Aurobindo, It is not possible to make a foundation in yoga if the mind is restless. The first thing needed is to get quiet in the mind & is to get a settled peace and silence in the mind. Sri Aurobindo gave the concept of 'Silent Mind' under the notion of Integral Yoga. This research paper is an attempt to understand his approach towards the concept of a silent mind, the process to achieve it and the achievements of this state of mind

Keywords: Understanding, Aurobindo's concept, silent mind, philosopher, guru

Introduction

In Integral Yoga, silencing the mind is a preliminary & fundamental step of a self-development programme. The mind has to be silenced to silence that trivial round of daily thoughts that continue to affect us.

The first stage, therefore, in Sri Aurobindo's Integral yoga and the fundamental task which gives the key to many realisations is the 'silence of the mind'. But the question arises, why silence the mind? The answer is, if we want to discover a new world within us, we must first leave the old. If we want the supra mental we shall have to stop the mental. If we want the higher rank we shall have to leave the lower one.

Supra mental: It is the highest level of consciousness of mind, according to Sri Aurobindo. Supra mental mind comes from a plane of manifestation far above the merely mental plane that humans come into contact with. Although the term mind is used, this plane far transcends the logic and intellect that ordinary mind can reach. The supra mental descends when the mental mechanism stops.

The first work of Sri Aurobindo's yoga is to break this mental screen which allows only a single type of vibrations to filter. In such a condition how can we expect to know the complete reality of the world. The world and all beings, as they really are, can be known only when the narrow limited mental screen breaks and the higher and wider supra mental dawns in us. This enormous task of opening into supra mental consciousness is therefore the first aim of Sri Aurobindo's integral yoga.

Need of a Silent Mind

Our mind needs to be silenced to calm that unnecessary outcry of thoughts collected by unnecessary information from newspapers, television and the Internet, information which mostly is of no use and needs to be dealt with as we deal with junk.

The mind needs to be silenced to put a stop to the never-ending conflict between arguments which are equally valid so that arguments go on contradicting each other without constructing any real integrative synthesis.

The mind needs to be silenced to end that volatile indulgence of emotions over logic, of sentiments over reason that leads even sensible people to commit monstrous stupidities as in erratic crowd behaviour during riots and feuds.

The mind needs to be silenced to put at rest those taboos, superstitions, conventions,

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stereotypes and dogmas that constitute the irrationality of human existence which is the hallmark of human limitation.

What happens when the mind is thus silenced?

The mind becomes functionally ready to be the ground where higher, creative thoughts can manifest. The mind becomes capable of intuitive thought and intuitive discrimination that illumines and clarifies where reasoning gets limited.

The mind becomes ready to receive the downpour of peace and joy that alone can bring a settled poise of the being. The mind becomes capable of overcoming stress in a holistic way. The mind gradually acquires the capacity to integrate thought and will so that the thought becomes automatically effective and the will becomes spontaneously luminous.

The consciousness can operate from a supra-cognitive level above the ordinary mentality where supra-rational faculties are spontaneously and naturally active. In short, the mind begins to be capable of operating from higher planes of consciousness.

It may sound easy but silencing the mind is a difficult art that has to be consciously cultivated and practised for the mind is habituated to go on thinking. A guided imagery may be needed to put the mind on track. Once the mind can silence itself, one can proceed to be stationed in a poise above the thinking mind that brings in peace and opens up the possibility of proceeding towards intuitive thinking. Or else, one may be poised behind the external mind in the true Mental Being (*Monomaya Purussa*) and witness the world around from a non-judgmental poise.

When the mind get silent, the seeker can hold the key to the true mastery of the mind. He can reject the same thought when he sees it coming from outside.

In this context the experience of Sri Aurobindo with his friend Vishnu Bhasker Lele is remarkable. He writes,

“It was my great debt to Lele that he showed me this “Sit in meditation” he said, “But do not think, look only at your mind, you will see thoughts coming into it; before they can enter throw these away from your mind till your mind is capable of entire silence. I simply sat down and did it. In a moment my mind became silent as a windless air on a high mountain summit and then I saw one thought and then another coming in a concrete way from outside, I flung them away before they could enter and take hold of the brain and in three days I was free. From that moment, in principle, the mental being in me became a tree intelligence, a universal mind, not limited to the narrow circle of personal thoughts as a labourer in a thought factory, but a receiver of knowledge from all the hundred realms of being and tree to choose what it willed in this vast sight-empire and thought-empire.”

And after reaching this state when the person looks behind, he feels how foolish he was and how could he live in the mental prison so far. The person discovers that he is everywhere, he feels at home everywhere.

Process to achieve a Silent Mind

A simple guided imagery is often useful to initiate the process of silencing the mind for those not habituated to meditative practices. The subject can conceive the mind to be an empty and locked house. Strangers in the form of thoughts come to this house of the mind from many directions but as the house is locked, they cannot enter but encircle the house and gradually fade away. The mind becomes either silent and empty, void or zero. Gradually one can imagine a white column of white light which is also a solid block of peace descending from above, piercing the roof of the house of the

mind, occupying the mind, filling it brim to brim.

Such imageries are helpful initially; they can be dispensed once one has learnt to silence the mind. The silent mind was always valued in the spiritual tradition but the importance of the ‘descent’ of the Light and Peace was never explored till Sri Aurobindo revealed its significance for a transformational yoga.

But the above method of silencing the mind is just the process for the beginners and this is quite necessary to give the push in the beginning. But this meditation is not the solution, because the moment we put our foot outside our room we shall again be in the habitual clamour and again there will be the eternal separation of the within and without. The inner life and the outer life in the world will be different, the inner silence which we have experienced in the meditation will be disturbed in the outer life of the active world. And in fact we need a complete life, a life of truth of our being, every day, every moment and not only at the time of meditation or in solitude.

Therefore, the above mentioned meditation is not the solution and therefore Sri Aurobindo shows the method of Active meditation, where the person under any circumstance and situation should experience the silence and the reality of this world.

Sri Aurobindo distinguishes two modes of meditation, the passive and the active one, and suggests the active meditation as the solution of silencing the mind at all situations. When one sits down to silence the mind, in the beginning the thoughts crop up from everywhere like aggressive monkeys. The only way of stopping- this is to try and try again patiently and persistently. And we should not commit the mistake of struggling mentally with the mind.

At the same time there arises the widening of the consciousness. For this Sri Aurobindo says that each one can have his own method of silencing the mind in the beginning. There is no hard and fast rule of doing it in the integral yoga. As he writes, “One may start a process of one kind or another for the purpose which would normally mean a long labour and be seized, even at the outset, by a rapid intervention or manifestation of Silence with an effect out of all proportion to the means used at the beginning.

Actually we do not notice the real effect in the beginning, because it settles in very gradually by little doses. But after some practice, when we concentrate for a moment it comes like a massive rush. This is the first transmutation of our energies. All comes to a standstill. One feels like a full jar. In the words of Sri Aurobindo we have “A solid cool block of peace.” And simultaneously it is seen that the inner vision too opens and we find that all is bluish. We become vast and vast. Here the person actually plunges into the source, because this descending force is the very force of spirit, The Shakti. After sometimes we do not need to close the Eyes to concentrate and withdraw ourselves from the surface to feel it. It is then permanently established in us and gathers greater and greater intensity as we become used to it.

In Sri Aurobindo’s Integral yoga or Purna Yoga there is not only ascending but there is also descending of the eternal peace in order to transform life and matter with the help of the descending force. This is the basic experience of the integral yoga.

After the above mentioned experience the seeker gets further and higher experiences. His inner being develops, but with it the outer plane also develops. He begins to feel the transparency within himself and the outer world. He receives people’ a thoughts, their wishes, their desires in their true

form and in their nudity as they really are. The seeker now possesses the force and the silent mind for its complete protection. He feels that he is permeable to outside impacts. He receives and receives from everywhere. Distance plays no part as barriers, even at thousand miles away he can receive clearly the thoughts of a friend, someone's anger or the buttering. The result with the silencing of the mind comes as the widening of the consciousness and it can be turned at will towards any point of the universal reality. With the silent transparency we come across a very important discovery that not only others thoughts come to us from outside, but our own thoughts also come to us from outside. They come in the forms of whirls, which enter in us and produce a particular thought. They are in the form of vibrations. And that is why a good thought-reader catches the vibrations coming from another person and then he translates the vibrations to the form they belong to.

The seeker has attained the inner silence and all his actions become meditation. The force passes, and passes in him and he is tuned for everything. In the words of Sri Aurobindo, "A mind that has achieved this calmness can begin to act, even intensely and powerfully, but it will keep its fundamental stillness - originating nothing from itself but receiving from above and giving it a mental form without adding anything of its own, calmly, dispassion ably, though with the joy of the truth and happy power and light of its passage." Such is the experience of the silent mind and the descent of the force.

Barriers in achieving Silent mind

In actual practice this is the transition period which requires a long time. Here the two workings encounter each other. The old mental mechanism constantly interferes to recapture its old rights by wanting to show and convince us that it is not possible to do without it and the person should do as he has been doing so far.

The main suffering in this transition is the inner void. After living for a long time in our old habit of mental feverishness, then the person after some practice of silent mind finds himself in a state of id, he feels a bit lost, with strange humming in the head as if this world is terribly noisy, tiring; he develops acute sensibility and feels as if knocked about everywhere against aggressive men, brutal events and the "world seems to him much absurd. These signs develop due to interiorization. Such a condition is also felt when the person practices the meditation consciously and tries to descend within. This is the condition where the person has to be quite careful where he is neither in full mental nor in the upper mental. An individual should not stop here but should go on and proceed further because once we have stepped in the path of yoga we, must go to the very end, whatever it may cost. There is no midway and therefore it is the trial period. If we want to fill the cup with the divine nectar, we shall have to empty the cup for the new to be filled in. Therefore Sri Aurobindo says, "The cup (has to be) left clean and empty for the divine liquor to be poured into it".

As the practice continues little by little the void is filled and the person starts having new experiences. And from the moment the person leaves the old world of mental smallness, he starts experiencing that everything is possible. And here it should be noted that each person will have his, own experience. When there is some establishment of peace and silence in the mind, we feel the first phenomenon around the head, "There is felt a sort of unusual pressure in the head and we may falsely take it as fuse headache. But after sometime we feel a veritable current which descends, a current of force,

which is not unpleasant; but I like the fluid mass. And then we come to know that the false headache was due to our resistance to the descent of the force. And we should allow the descent of this force into all the strata of our being from top to the bottom.

What is achieved through Silent mind.

In a silent mind the higher power or the force descends and the new vision and knowledge is discovered the consciousness widens. This descending force is the force of the Divine-Sachchidansnda which works through the super mind to transform the person to complete protection, by transforming the mental, vital and physical status of the person. All the activities of the mind, intelligence, memory, reason and imagination, as well as the senses, are transformed in the supra mental stage. But this can be done by bridging the gulf between mind and super mind for which a triple transformation of psychic, spiritual and supra mental is required.

When the silence of mind is established in us for a considerable per-lad of time, we start getting new mode of knowledge. And this new mode of knowledge produces a new mode of action. One comes to know that it is possible to keep the mind silent when walking in the crowd, and doing 30bs like dressing, eating etc. But the question arises how a person can keep the silence of mind in office or when discussing some problem with others?

And in all these matters we use the mental mechanism like memory and logic etc. According to Sri Aurobindo, it is the result of the long evolution in whose course we have grown accustomed to depend on the mind for knowledge and action. But this is only a habit and it can be changed. In Sri Aurobindo's yoga we are to unlearn so many imperative habits, which we have inherited from our animal evolution. The practice of silencing the mind will, in due course of time will become automatic and no deliberate attention towards it will be required. And we shall feel something which lives in our depth in the back-ground of our being like a little muffed vibration, and just a moment will be required to find it at any time the vibration of silence.

Conclusion

All the steps which we find in Sri Aurobindo's integral yoga are aids in finding the self within us. Starting from the silencing of the mind, the emergence of the force, the opening to the universal mind, the knowledge of the psychic being and the ascent towards the supra mental consciousness produce the result in harmonising the spiritual order of the whole being. Then we get the Inflow of all kinds of spiritual experiences. And with it there is the collaboration of the inward opening to the outward opening. This takes place when there is the ascent of the psychic being to the supra mental levels. But with it there is the descent of the supra mental consciousness which alone possesses the power of permanent transformation and permanent ascent of the psychic being. This super mind or the supra mental consciousness transforms the entire being and establishes it on the higher plane.

This work is not a sudden job, but it requires a gradual process as so many intervening difficulties are to be overcome in the way. The psychic change has to call for spiritual change to complete it. So also the spiritual change is not complete without the supra mental transformation.

In the words of Sri Aurobindo, "When the peace is established, this higher or divine force from above can

descend and work in us. It descends usually first into the head and liberates the inner mind centres, then into the heart centre then into the navel and other vital centres, then into the sacral region and below. It works at the same time for perfection as well as liberation. It takes up the whole nature part by part and deals with it rejecting what has to be rejected, Sublimating what has to be sublimated, creating what has to be created. It integrates, harmonises establishes a new rhythm in the nature”.

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