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The ancient spiritual sciences on the fast track

By Shardey Singh Rawat



There is a story I came across recently in which a man wrote about his friend. This friend really wanted to get married, so he went ahead and got married to this very beautiful girl but, with the marriage, he came under his mother-in-law's influence. Slowly his life went from bad to worse; he was very distracted and never focused on anything. He had five children who always did their own thing and never obeyed him.

The writer said, "He came to me and asked, 'What should I do?' So I told him the best solution is to kill your mother-in-law, divorce your wife and capture all the children!" "So what the writer is trying to say is that this is not the story of an individual, it is all of our stories. The writer is trying to explain what happens inside of us.

We all have a friend, which is called the intellect, which is beyond the mind, our ability to reason, to think and it is that ability which makes you grow in life. As you grow, you gain experiences, you gain wisdom, but it is the intellect that is working, that is making you aware, that is making you conscious of everything that is around you. Now for a while you and your intellect will be the best of friends, it will be your guide, it will be your monitoring force, your power of reason, but at some point your intellect wants to leave you and get married. Now who does the intellect marry? The mind.

The mind and intellect go hand-in-hand. Without the mind, there cannot be any thought and without any thought, you cannot reason out, you cannot gain something in your life and without gaining something in your life the intellect itself cannot exist. Now, the mother-in-law is 'ignorance'. The mind is under the influence of its mother-in-law, which is ignorance. When the mind has gone into this world it becomes ignorant of its own nature, the nature of the Self. Sages have tried to explain the Self, that it is not limited to the I or the 'mine', to the individual or names. People may have different names, they may call themselves by different names, but the Self does not change. So the Self they talk about is the Pure Self, which is the image of God in all of us. But what happens is, because the mother-in-law, Ignorance, is sitting there, the mind cannot distinguish what is true and what is not true, what is 'me' and what is 'not me'. This is the root cause of all problems, of all suffering, because the intellect, our ability to rationalise, has been married to a mind which is ignorant. An ignorant mind can never show us our true Self, because everything that the mind will think will be under the influence of ignorance. That is what happens.

So the writer of the story was trying to explain how the mind is trapped and how the individual focuses on everything else. He will focus on spiritual traditions, on spiritual obligations, or spiritual practices, who he talks to, how he behaves; but while having his focus on all these external things he loses focus on what is most important, the Self. What the writer says, which is true, is that scriptures have existed for thousands of years, whether it be the Torah, whether it be the Bible, whether it be the Koran. You know

that there are different New Age scriptures coming out too. People are researching that, talking about that, but what is the point of all these scriptures if our problems still exist? If the scriptures have the power, or the wisdom, to remove our problems, then we shouldn't be suffering right now. Scriptures have existed for hundreds of years, some have existed for thousands of years, but even after the hundreds of years of their existence, the same problems plague the human mind today. I'm still unhappy. I'm still unsatisfied. I'm still restless in my outlook and gradually this restless nature becomes my identity, becomes a part of who I am. I don't want to be like that, but I can't stop myself from being like that.

So he says that, by focusing on all these external things, we miss out on what is the most important force, which is: what you already are. As long as the mind is ignorant, until the mind is trained to see it, through the intellect, we can never realise our true Self. So that is why he says, "Kill the mother in law", which means, kill Ignorance, then "divorce your wife" which means, go beyond the mind, don't be under the influence of the mind.

There are many practices. The sages taught, "Stop all thoughts". The aim of any meditation practice is to still the mind, to stop the mind. But when we look at all these practices we see that we can only still the mind while we are practicing that form of meditation. If I am meditating in a very serene environment, the influence of the environment is such that my mind will be still, but the moment I am taken out of that environment, when I travel in the world and do my worldly activities, then what happens to my mind?



Largest freestanding building in Asia – Trindigar Ashram in Haridwar.



Because the power of Truth should be all-pervading, in all states.

So it is very important to move beyond the mind and realise how we can go beyond the mind. That is where all spiritual practices come in. The objective is to still the mind in such a way that the mind exists but does not exert an influence on you. That is what our sages called 'shunya', or Point Zero. They say that everything came out of something. The basic belief is that. So that point of origin is what we call shunya, because when that point was there, nothing else existed. Just that one point. Even the mind's source is that one point - it is the singularity of the spirit and the body, but to reach that one point you have to go beyond what is called the rational mind. Now the rational mind is such that is very difficult to reach a state where you can say that no thought exists. Because the moment you say, "No thought exists in me," that itself becomes a thought. So it is difficult to be in that state of being completely 'shunya' and the way we live our lives, it is practically impossible to do, because one leg is in

the spiritual world and one leg is in the material world. We have to find a balance in our spiritual development.

Maybe you have seen mahatmas and siddhus doing their religious practices with such rigor that nothing comes in between. There is no family, there is no working life. For them to reach this point is easy, but the whole point that our sages tried to explain is that reaching that state of no-thought is also not liberation.

To understand your spiritual goal, first and foremost to understand what is liberation is very important. In its essence being liberated does not mean being free of who you are, being free of your name or sacrificing your mental processes, because even then the world will exist for you, you will exist and there will still be a relationship between you and the world. You will not be completely free. Being liberated means to truly find yourself. You don't have to give up anything. One of the greatest philosophies of spirituality teaches us that we are complete in ourselves, it is just that

we do not know it. That is the ignorance that has come into our lives. All of us have been given a spiritual force which is present inside us, which is beyond time, which is beyond limitations, which is beyond what we call the 'gunas' (attributes), beyond anything that is restricted. Now what restricts is the mind, because the mind comes in and says 'I am so-and-so', 'my name is so-and-so'; 'I am doing this or that.' The limitation comes, the categorisation comes only when the mind manifests in the way.

But beyond the mind, the Self still exists. For example, if I'm looking through a telescope I can see many things. I can see the mountains, I can see the sky, I can see a tree, I can see a lake. If I remove certain things from my perception, I'm obviously taking something out. If I remove the mountains from my perception I won't be able to see a mountain. If I remove a lake from my perception I won't be able to see a lake. However, even after you have removed everything from your vision, there is still the consciousness which remains. You remain! That Self, that You is your pure identity, because whether you are having a spiritually charged experience or not, your consciousness will remain, as it is the source of your being, it is the source of everything in this world, which we call the True Self.

Now, everything is in the image of the True Self, but, because of the mind, because of the influence of ignorance on the mind, it becomes very difficult to see. But when Knowledge is given to us - and Knowledge is inherent in all of us - through spiritual practice, through the techniques, we make that Knowledge part of us active. When the Knowledge is charged and active, changes happen from within. These changes are true changes because they have manifested from within your being, from within the core of your being, from who you are - not because you saw someone doing it, therefore you are doing it, not because someone has told you to do something you are doing it, because that is again a play of the mind, a creation of your own mind. So to go beyond all experiences is to basically

know who you are and that you can only do by going deeper and deeper within yourself.

Meditation is very important, but also know that meditation is not the goal. The goal is already present inside you. You are complete in yourself. Now to realise that in essence much work is to be done. That is where the battle with your mind will take place. When you sit in sadhana, to say there is no thought is practically impossible. The moment a person tries to meditate, so many thoughts will surface and those thoughts will surface because you have to control the mind, you have to control the nature of the mind. You have to burn these thoughts - not literally by lighting a fire,

but knowing how influenced you are, how trapped in the influence of your mind you are. Because everyone is under the influence of his own mind and how far we are influenced by the mind can only be tested by

meditation, because only when you meditate, when you go deeper into yourself, do the core processes of your thought begin to surface. I want to do good, so why do I do bad? I always want to be honest, but sometimes to save my skin or to take the easy way out, I tell lies. These inherent things are happening within me which I don't want to do. That brings in what we call spiritual discipline, which doesn't mean that we have to constrict ourselves by certain rules or ideologies. The root of the word 'discipline' is 'to learn'. So when we meditate and go deeper into ourselves, we learn from our true selves, which is the cosmic Knowledge which is already within us.

So how is this learning? For instance, light shines on the wall and light also shines on a mirror, but the mirror has the ability to reflect the light back, whereas the wall will absorb the light. You can see your reflection in the mirror but not in the wall. So basically everything that we do in the world is like that wall. All matter is made out of the cosmic Self which we call the omnipresent Spirit. But focusing on a tree will not help you, because the tree, or all matter around me, is like the wall which absorbs the light. But when I look deep into myself, with a pure mind, into the Self, that's the reflecting surface, that's the mirror. When I do that, then

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that knowing and seeing
are two different things.*

what my true Self is, is shown to me. So it's very important how you focus your spiritual energies and on what you focus. You will meet a lot of people in India doing very different practices. You'll see people turning a rosary. You will see people coming very early in the morning to bathe in the Ganges, thinking that they will become pure. But they do this not realising that it is not the river that you have to dive into, it is not the rosary beads that you have to use, all you have to do is focus your energies on the mind and purify the mind. If the mind is purified, everything that needs to be known manifests inside us.

If you are driving at night, you don't need your whole road to be illuminated, what you need is for your car's headlights to work and the moment you switch on the headlights the road immediately ahead of you is illuminated. Then, because the path ahead of you is illuminated, as you travel to the end of the illuminated section, then the next portion of the road gets illuminated. This is what Knowledge does

and what a pure mind does for us. If you live your life with a pure mind, whatever needs to be known is known to us. When you travel the distance, whatever needs to be known after that point in your sadhana, after your spiritual practice, becomes known to you. But to sit and say, "I want everything to be given to me - enlightenment, liberation, spirituality - everything should be given to me at once" - that is not possible. So we are all on our individual paths, but all our individual paths merge in the Source, the origin of all things. Our Source is the same, so we cannot be different; we have originated from the same source. So it becomes very important for us to live our lives with a pure mind. With a pure mind and the path of Knowledge, automatically spiritual progress will happen.

Our inherent nature is such that when we do something we expect something in return. I sit in meditation for one hour every day, so I think in my mind that something should happen. That means I am wanting something in return. Now

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that itself can be a trap of the mind. Whatever has to happen in your life will happen whenever it needs to happen. It's like when you are learning from the world, the moment you have learned that thing, when you are aware of it, nobody can teach you the essence of that thing, because you have learned it yourself. So it becomes very important in spiritual practice to focus on the moment, on the present, on how you are living your life and leave everything else to the Cosmic Force. If your intellect or your mind has developed to certain stages, when spiritual awareness develops in you, then automatically you will understand what is being said. If spiritual ignorance is still in you, it doesn't matter if a hundred masters come and try to teach you something, you will never understand, you will still have doubts. Liberation or peace of mind, being in bliss, is not something that can be given. It is not an object of perception. If it were, I could give it to you or you could find it yourself. But being who you are cannot be an object of the world. Your consciousness is the source of all things, your consciousness cannot be an end in itself. It is the source of all things.

People say we shouldn't listen to any thoughts while we are meditating. So most of the time, instead of meditating, we are merely fighting our thoughts. A thought comes and we think, 'Don't think about this!' Then another thought comes and we think, 'Don't think about that!' or 'Don't think about the time!' Somebody was telling me that you can get meditation timers nowadays. You fix the time then sit for meditation. Some people want to time everything! I was amazed when I heard this and asked, "Why do they do that?" and I was told that by setting the timer you can sit and not think about when your 15 minutes will be up so at least that thought, that one aspect of the mind has gone, it is one less thing to think about!

Now, there is a meditation which you do using techniques,

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but there is a form of meditation which is: living your life. If fifteen minutes of the day was worthwhile because you meditated, what about the rest of the day? The day is not comprised of fifteen minutes. It is comprised of 24 hours and how you live your life in those times, moment to moment, is the biggest influence in your life -who you are, what your nature is, how you react to people, how you respect people shows your spiritual qualities. If I cannot respect my elders, do you think I will be able to respect God? I may fear God, or I fear my elders, but respect is something that is born from within you. Nobody can give you the ability to respect,

nobody can teach you respect. So when we focus and live with a pure mind, everything that needs to be known is given to us automatically.

When the time is right, they say, the Master comes to

you, Knowledge itself is right inside you. When you make a genuine effort to access Knowledge, to access your true Self, all these things are like the spoils of your war against the mind. These things will be automatically given to you. Your nature will automatically change. Your outlook and attitude towards others will automatically change. You will be respectful not only to your elders but to those younger than you too. These changes are the grading points of how spiritual you are. You cannot always judge yourself, but this judgement can be passed by those around you, because the first change is the change that they will see in you.

There are people I have seen all my life and they never change, like Mahatma Fakiranandji. He is always smiling, no matter what is happening. It does not matter whether he is going through suffering or whether he is in extreme bliss - his outlook on life is the same. Now that is something that we can see. For Mahatmaji it is not something exceptional, because that's the way he is. That is how you can experience people spiritually. That level is not something that he reached in one day. It's a lifetime of experiences that a

person accumulates. So we have to also strive with that innocence, with that purity in our life and automatically our inherent nature will be like that.

So next time when you are meditating, when you are getting angry, just think and try to focus on WHO is getting angry. Is it me that is getting angry or is it some force behind me which is making everything happen but which is itself free of values? Once you reach that source you have reached your Self. Meditation and the states that you experience are all very good, but that is not what the Truth talks about. Every meditation experience has a beginning and an end. All these practices are there to point us in the right direction, but once you are pointed in the right direction and you are aware of the Cosmic Truth, that Truth forever stays with you. The aim is to know the True Self. That should be the aim of meditation, not to know anything else and our sages and scriptures say that you are already at a spiritual level which you do not comprehend.

So in life, always learn from your discipline, learn from your life, learn to remove ignorance. That happens slowly and gradually as we pay attention to small things. Now this attention to small things is your bhakti, it is moment-to-moment how you relate the world to your individual self, your spirit which is present within you. That devotion itself can break through all bonds, all limitations. Now if there is no bhakti, if there is no love, there is no starting point to spirituality. There are two kinds of devotion, or bhakti - one is love for God or devotion surrounded by 'gunas' or attributes. This bhakti is also fixed to certain things. I pray to God, I am praying for a job. I'm praying to God but my devotion to Him has a tainted nature. I'm invoking the spirit of God because I want something in return. Every morning I pray to God, "Please let me win the lottery!" Now, I'm praying, I'm a religious person, but that devotion is tainted. This is 'guna bhakti' and many people we see around us are totally engrossed in that type because they haven't realised their spiritual nature; they haven't realised what is beyond the world. They just want this world and the happiness in this world through these means. So there is no spiritual awakening as such. They will continue to pray to God, no matter how much you try to explain it to them, no matter

how much you try to make them aware of their true nature. Their inherent nature will not change because they are limited to that; their time has not come. They have to face a lot of challenges in their spiritual journey for them to realise that what they are asking for is more troubles, not true happiness.

Then there is "para bhakti" which is beyond all attributes. Why are you trying to experience God, or why are you trying to remember God? Only for this experience, nothing else. So it is out of total love. If you love someone you will always try to be in touch with that person. It's like a mother's son goes abroad to study. She will be in constant contact with her son. It's the special bond that they share. Now that bond is not that she is calling him to bring her nice things from abroad. That is not her reason for calling her son. It is only to hear his voice, nothing more. In the same way, when we love our Creator, our Mother-Father, it is easier to get in touch with that Cosmic Spirit, because there is no taint in your bhakti. There are no attributes limiting you. Then it becomes the bhakti of pure consciousness, nothing else but the experiencing of experiencing God. So it is you, the experiencer, and what is to be experienced.

But even these meditative states where you go into deep bliss, into deep sadhana, is not the Truth. The Truth is beyond even that experience. Truth always exists, the Truth is always there and that Truth is your Self, it is the source of all things. Because if you remove your Self from the equation, if you remove your consciousness from the equation, nothing exists. The world does not exist for us - even God and spirit worlds do not exist for us. We ourselves do not exist. But if today I am saying that I exist, first of all I must know the source of my existence. What is the power that is giving me the power to say that I exist? It is not my name, it is not inherent in whether I am a Hindu or a Christian, whether I am a person living in India or a person living in America. All of us have the Energy in us, but realization of that source is very important.

Someone very wisely said that knowing and seeing are two different things. I can know a lot about world religions, or about different kinds of religious ideas, but knowing

does not help me because I can still have a lot of different problems, I can still suffer a lot. But seeing is believing. When you experience something there is no requirement for anything else. So the objective of our spiritual meditation is to see. A lot of people can tell us a lot of things, but even if we know all this it is not going to help us on our spiritual journey. Everyone has his own path with its own set of challenges, his own set of karmic debts that he has to fulfill, his own set of disciplines that he has to learn throughout his life. Essentially we all move towards the same source, but the road that we take may wind through different ways. That is what we eventually have to understand.

So all sorts of happiness is within you, all sorts of compassion is within you. Awaken that! You can only do that through moment-to-moment effort. That is what is called 'living in the present'. But the mind is not living in the present! No matter how hard we try to live in the present, we always think about tomorrow or what we could've done yesterday. We live our life with dreams and aspirations, or we live it with regrets and the present goes to waste. This is maya, this is the illusion of the mind. This illusion is what the sages called 'mahamaya'. It's even greater than the worldly maya that you see. Worldly temptations are nothing compared to the temptations that your own mind creates.

So it is very important to understand the inherent quality of your own mind. That is true liberation. True liberation is finding yourself, your true Self. Now, our true Self is beyond

name, beyond attributes, social or any restriction, beyond ideologies or philosophies, beyond thought. But to get there you have to utilise the mind also. Now, how do we utilise the mind in the correct way? That is why the kriyas, the four techniques have been given to you. These are tools to put the mind into correct focus, but what happens is that we do not utilise these tools. If a sword is not constantly sharpened it becomes dull. If the mind is not constantly made aware of what the Truth is, it reverts back to its inherent nature, which is to create thoughts, which is to always think. When there is thought there will not be singularity of your consciousness and if there is no singularity you can never know your true Self, because the mind and the ignorance will taint your thoughts. Wants, desires, needs - this can happen materialistically and spiritually also. Many people have spiritual desires, they want siddhis (yogic powers) - such as the power to hypnotise others, or to be able to change your physical form. There are documented cases of yogis who can travel even beyond the speed of light. They can manifest in one place, then appear in another and then come back to that same place. There are people who can do that. It is called astral travelling. But is the goal of life just to astral travel, or to hypnotise people? Because if that is the goal, then they are doing the right thing! But the main goal should be to be very focused within ourselves, how we should live our lives and for what objective. This is very important.



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