

Meditation the Yoga way

by Kay Mouradian

"May the outward and inward man be at one."

—Plato

Yoga is a powerful discipline, but we Westerners have diverted it from its ultimate objective of samadhi, that of reaching pure consciousness. Designed to purify the body and mind for readying an individual to unite with that universal energy commonly referred to as God, yoga is a spiritual discipline whose subtle magical energy is being diluted by promoting it as a means of physical fitness or a cure for every illness known to mankind.

Yoga is not about standing on your head or any of the other traditional yoga postures known as asana. Asana is only a part of the eight branches of yoga – yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, and samadhi – which are closely tied together and should not be viewed or practiced as separate units. Otherwise yoga can become harmful. There is an aphorism: "What is good can also be bad. Those who want to become the knower of traditional yoga, with all of its magic, must have a strong desire, a strong will, and a keen and broad intelligence. Yoga demands sound physical condition and an alert and energetic mind, for the higher branches of yoga demand control of the mind. It is not for the lazy or those who are riddled with doubt.

Having spent several months in India researching yoga for my dis-

sertation, I came across little understood facets of this powerful discipline. The higher branches of yoga work with the mind through meditation. Most of us have no idea what is going on inside our minds or understand that it is even possible to find out. Those who have the capacity and interest to investigate how their own mind works will begin to have a deeper understanding of why they are who they are.

Movement is inherent in man, but its impact is as subtle as the earth's movement around the sun. Everything, including the physical body, is dependent upon movement, as our hearts beat and circulate blood without our awareness. Another unnoticed movement, *the movement of thought*, comes into play in silent meditation, but it is so faint it is usually unobserved.

Most of us have never investigated the place where our thoughts come from. Where is that place in and around our minds? We are a composite of all our thoughts, yet we have no idea how they affect our consciousness. The key that opens that door lies in learning how to sit in silent meditation, but for most of us silence is a stranger.

Achieving silence

Silence is the garden of meditation. It is a skill that can be likened to developing skills in sports. Some individuals respond more quickly than others, some have no desire or ability, and others spend hours practicing to become better. Developing the skill of silence needed in meditation demands that same quality of attention, desire, and dedication that is practiced by all outstanding performers, and the skill of silence requires even more.

Silence is probably the highest



Kay Mouradian.

Illustration by Edik Balaian.

refinement of sound. Sounds carry vibrations, and some are very heavy. Our world is not quiet and we tend to associate things with sounds, and those associations often are not accurate. For example, a car just speeded by and I saw ocean waves in my mind, all in a flash. Engine sounds remind me of the ocean. As I'm writing this, I heard another car speeding by and a red car flashed in my mind. How accurate are these pictures? Would I have seen those pictures in my mind if I had not been aware of the impact of sounds on my thought process? Those pictures would have flashed, but I would not have noticed them. How much more am I unaware of? What activity is taking place in my mind when the radio or television is blasting away, but I'm not really listening? I've wondered if these kinds of unnoticed sounds play havoc on our minds and create confusion and stress in our lives. And are those heavy sounds playing a role and undermining our consciousness?

We have passively accepted noise as a way of life. For many, it conve-

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Aparan dam.
Photo: Photolure.

niently drowns out the inner clamor that affects and confuses our thinking. I first became aware of the effects of noise when I started to meditate some 30 years ago. It was an uncomfortable experience. Not seeing what was around me and not being the center of my environment, I no longer could make judgments, even for something as simple as not seeing what in the room needed dusting. I had to learn to move away from the outside world and its effect upon me. It was my first encounter with silence.

I was told to “look within,” but I found the phrase confusing. Looking denotes eyes and if I close my eyes, how can I see? I wondered if there was another dimension of seeing within, or is there another kind of sight and sound? Curiosity and my scientific mind began to investigate, and I sensed the opening of a fascinating new world.

I had been a proponent of the “think positive” approach, but to my surprise I realized I had never really understood *thought*. I began to see a more profound meaning to the “think positive” aphorisms as a deeper part of my mind came into play. I could hear myself think! I had never experienced this, and I found it exhilarating.

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Interesting questions began to surface. Could I really hear my thoughts? Does thought carry a tonal vibration? Does my sense of sight even with my eyes closed affect the depth of this new listening? Does the intensity of quiet affect this inner sight?

I learned to center my attention in the middle of the forehead at that space yoga aficionados call the *mind's eye*. It was there I discovered an interesting facet of my thought process. My thoughts originated in several places and many thoughts were activated simultaneously. I realized how easy it was to be oblivious to all of them, because they tended to be floating around and feeble. They were just there. Then I realized I could strengthen a thought, *one* thought, by focusing it at the mind's eye and giving it alert attention. Then the others lost whatever force they carried. I would sit for hours just watching the activity in my



Syunik.
Photo: Photolure.

mind. It was a captivating experience, and I began to understand the yoga expression “the monkey mind” (the mind that darts hither and thither and doesn’t focus) and the aphorism “The highest yoga is the control of the mind.”

Purification

More questions surfaced. Could I rid myself of what I call “my junk thoughts”, such as anger or its relative, self-pity, by watching them form? I practiced focusing total attention into my mind’s eye, and one day I saw a strong angry thought form surface. I watched it intently, without confrontation or fear, and it *dissipated*! Anger, which had been a bane in my life, has never plagued me since. What a gift.

I now keep my thoughts focused at my mind’s eye and I’m aware of what thought activity is continually playing in my mind. My thoughts rule my consciousness,

and I work very hard to keep junk thoughts from polluting my mind.

Becoming curious about how others perceived this concept, I experimented with my community-college students who were enrolled in my yoga class. I discovered that most of them had a difficult time focusing at the mind’s eye. Those students able to consciously bring thoughts to this space said those thoughts tended to be positive while negative thoughts seemed to be elsewhere. Some complained of the onset of a headache. I wondered if a possible explanation was that these frontal brain cells had never been stimulated with *conscious* use, therefore the intense concentration may have caused tension.

Our educational system has trained us to assimilate knowledge, and if we change that passive pattern to an effort to investigate, the brain cells have to be

reeducated. Then we begin to impose vibrations on the whole of our thinking apparatus, to compel it in a way that is new and unusual. This produces tension, so we need to be careful not to overcharge our mental vehicle. This kind of investigation is not appropriate for everyone, just as attending graduate university classes is not for everyone.

Descartes’ famous maxim, *Cogito ergo sum* (I think therefore I am), carries deep significance, but when we are quiet most of us have no idea what thoughts pass through our consciousness. Those who have the ability to be watchful of their thoughts in meditation may discover a new sense of freedom as their *junk* thoughts dissipate in nothingness.

It can be a promising gift. ☸

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