

**Lectures by Sri Shyam Sundar Goswami
(I.30)**

Pointers to Mental Concentration

Mental concentration* is quite possible, but too often people think it can be achieved while ignoring the body. It is better to know the role of the body in this important exercise, otherwise much disturbance will arise from it. The body should not be ignored; it is too important here. Unless one has already developed a very high level of control, concentration will usually be impossible if there is pain or discomfort in the body.

It is foolish to think that health is unimportant or just an accidental matter. Perfect health does not arise without special preparations for building it up. Many people erroneously regard health as a condition free of disease, but the sole absence of disease is not the right kind of health. This is a negative aspect of health. By contrast, free from any artificial external means of immunization (such as vaccination), real health is a positive factor, which keeps the body free from diseases and increases its immunity. This is the state of being virtuous in the etymological sense of the word (Cf. Latin *virtus*), that is a valorous man who is aware of his force.

It is wise to develop the body's latent, natural resistance to disease. It is not by mere accident that, from our very births, this particular power is growing, developing, becoming conscious of its environment and expressing itself intelligently. We believe that since this inherent power of growth is there, and development and assimilation are inseparable from it, the living mechanism has, in the same way, certain properties of protection by which it lives and expresses consciousness. When disease arises, that inner power should be there to protect us. While artificially-, externally induced immunization is possible, large percentages of a population may still escape succumbing to an outbreak of disease without the "benefit" of vaccination thanks to their natural immunity, while many vaccinated people may still die. The reason for this is to be found in the individual's inner immunization-power, a faculty which all human beings possess and can

actually develop for their protection.

When the physical body is not fully healthy, concentration is difficult if not impossible, insofar as the body negatively affects and diverts one's attention. When one places demands upon an improperly nourished body and expects it to respond adequately, the body may not be able to properly obey. Following an overly long period of neglect, the body is sure to revolt. An intelligent person will then try to analyze the reason for this revolt, and try to take the best advantage of it, rather than feeling disgusted or wanting to kill the body! (It is wise to recall that we cannot in reality kill ourselves by just killing the body, as the remembrances acquired via the physical linger and the mind cannot be eliminated altogether).

It is of no use to feel disgusted about the body with which we have been entrusted; it is far better to give it proper care. The body is truly a wonderful instrument and it is apt to become obedient whenever needed. It is also a synergistic fact that the mind will have more energy when the body is healthy and vigorous. We should therefore realize the importance of not overlooking or neglecting the body.

This very message, with respect to both body and mind, is the contribution of Hatha Yoga. The mind-body relation is inescapable, as the mind cannot function at the sensory level without the help of a body, which is fit for an efficient function of the mind. This way, one may expend less effort in developing the power of concentration. However, that does not mean that one should postpone the practice of concentration until the body is completely fit. In Yoga, efforts in both directions converge for a parallel development. One of the main lessons of Hatha Yoga is reaching the mind and developing the power of concentration by the right use of the body.

Concentration has 2 main aspects:

- 1) the mental effort for concentration, which is often very great; and
- 2) a relaxed, calm attitude of mind in which the thinking process is to completely stop.

Daily life is filled with various problems, both small and serious. Often one may feel the mind as to be out of control, unwillingly invaded by problematic thoughts which continue on and on without any constructive value. This indicates a morbid state

where both mind and body have been used irrationally. Therefore, it is important to learn how to be at ease even while having problems, to think them out clearly when they arise, to plan as far as necessary and then to put these thoughts aside altogether.

We have to learn how to control the extent of our thoughts, and then to let go. Where continuous thinking and caretaking is unavoidable and necessary, we have to learn how to be at ease in the pauses taken between—for instance, when one is eating and resting. Too often the mind does not dwell in a constructive manner on various issues. No strength emerges from such a way of thinking. A restless mind will only exhaust the body in vain thinking with a heavy expenditure of mental energy, a state which the body usually cannot stand.

We simply must make time for a real break, with calm and ease between, so as to think constructively on what is to be done. This is not to say that one should try to elude one's problems, but beneficial pauses will allow the mind to recuperate more quickly and thus better serve our plans for successful realization. In practice, we must learn how to sit and be at ease, without surrendering the source of our troubles.

To that, Krishna says: "*If one has abandoned action physically, but is going on acting mentally, one has not really given up action.*" Clearly, it is of no use to stop acting and yet think of action. Our duties have to be undertaken, lest we feel quite dissatisfied, but at the same time we should make time for leisure in between, to find calmness and comfort and enjoy peace of mind.

Yoga provides the right methods for helping us towards sensible, rational thinking while still fulfilling our daily life obligations. It teaches that we do not necessarily need to drop various issues, but rightly adjust to them with the incorporation of new, enriching values in our life. We are not going to be only spiritual to the exclusion of all matters worldly; not many people can do that. Most of us must tend to many matters, but whatever falls under our responsibility ought to be done rationally and successfully.

This is why we have to know how to adjust ourselves so that all our aspirations can be rightly materialized by our efforts. For this to happen, we need to know the right method by which to manage time for rest, how to sit, how to avoid worries and how

to cultivate a feeling of being at ease. Helping the body by adequate exercises will help bring about control of the mind. Inversely, a well-controlled mind will help the body.

The body must be trained by both dynamic and static exercises and full motionlessness, so as to facilitate mental concentration. Usually we eat, drink and live as we like, and so we do not gain any control. The right type of exercise, nutritive foods and other yogic methods are all very important.

Mental effort may seem as though it uses the body only superficially, yet it requires a vital and strong body. When the body is fully vitalized, the mind-functions will act to exhibit their full power. The toleration-point will be expanded, and a brilliant mind in a vital body will be still more brilliant, though, of course, there may be exceptions to all this.

* *Editor's note:* Rather than adhering to the vague and inadequate English-language term, "meditation" (*to reflect upon, ponder, contemplate*), the Author has adopted this term to cover the yogic, 3-stage, mental control process of *dhârana*, *dhyâna* and *samâdhi*. The etymology of the word concentration (*to direct the mind toward a one-pointed state; bring or draw to a common center or point of union; to focus*) better relates to the actual mechanism involved in this mental exercise.