

American Vedic Association

Presents:

Derailed By Silent Meditation

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Meditate Silently at the Mall?

It's never been very clear to me why people who believe so strongly in the practice of "*Silent Meditation*" need to hold regularly scheduled meetings to practice that discipline. It's not as if silent meditation required a partner like ping-pong, nor is it like golf where one could play alone, but few do because half the game is the socializing that goes on between the greens.

The whole purpose of silent meditation is to withdraw the senses from their objects, clear the mind, focus the life force, and free the soul from the trap of false identification with the mundane. None of these require the presence of another person and therefore having people around when attempting to go deeply within simply doesn't make any sense. Why then do those who claim to be serious about practicing that type of meditation go out their way to meet others at a public place which is not conducive to silence? If you are seeking undisturbed privacy you stay home, not go to the mall!

Could it possibly be that meditation has become so "*Hip*" that the only way to let others know you are a part of the in-crowd is to be sure to show up for the weekly meditation hour with your kapok cushion, natural biodegradable latex mat and happy Buddha tee-shirt? But if silent meditation is such an uplifting experience, why has it taken on the mood of a social club similar to the bridge parties my mother attended when I was young? How could such an environment be conducive to withdrawing the senses? What will be next...? Planters Dry Roasted Peanuts in Chinese candy dishes next to the ceremonial bronze gong?

If an attempt to answer this question I have been told that the Sunday Morning sit-in is justified by the fact that it helps those who want to "*Sit*" keep their commitment to do so. This makes a little sense if we think of it in context with the concept of "*Accountability*", the magic tool used by sponsors who lead substance abuse addicts out of their personal hell via any of several "*12 Step programs*". When managed correctly, being accountable to a mentor can boost one's self-esteem enough to provide the alternative positive reinforcement necessary to displace the lure of the destructive "*Quick High*" attained by substance abuse. But if silent meditation is so rewarding why do those who claim that it brings them so much joy need to be enticed to practice that discipline with the same type of motives used to keep drug addicts from slowly killing themselves?

Become a Superhero... Meditate!

Those who are enamored by silent meditation make so many grandiose claims about its benefits they sound hauntingly similar to late night infomercials. Personal testimonies are often cited to buttress up the validity of keeping one's mouth shut, but intelligent people know that antidotal evidence is subjective and limited to the experiences of the individual. Children are equally enamored by fictional characters like Mickey Mouse and Barney, the singing purple dinosaur. But kids don't understand that the real purpose of these cartoon icons they idolize, is that they are marketing props designed to attract huge corporate revenues for mega corporations! Ironically the very character traits that children are so enamored by often annoy sensitive parents who do not appreciate how these larger than life commercials logos exploit the imagination of their children and the discretionary funds they have in their wallet!

In a similar way there are a lot of so-called "*Silent Mediators*" who are anything but silent. They exploit the innocent by selling them books which claim how silence is the source of creativity and how by that technique alone, they will eventually be capable of telepathically understanding everything like Leonard Nimoy could with his Spock "*Mind-meld*" or like other Masters of The Universe Superhero's!

"But those who always worship Me with exclusive devotion, meditating on My transcendental form -- to them I carry what they lack, and I preserve what they have." - Bhagavad-Gita Gita As It Is, Chapter 9, "The Most Confidential Knowledge", Text 22

Only those who do not understand the Bhagavad-Gita would make these types of childish and misleading statements because Krishna clearly declares that He brings us what we lack based on our devotion to him, not on how long we stare at the tip of our nose.

If silence was such a great benediction then those who are hearing/speech impaired would historically be the source of the most peaceful, creative, and "*Enlightened*" masters on the face of the earth, but that is obviously not true. In fact, an obsession with silence is often a harbinger of mental illness. When someone doesn't want to deal with the issues in their life they recede into their own imaginary worlds and become non-communicative. People who are emotionally constipated and incapable of expressing their feeling are also known to shut out those who they share their lives with by giving them the "*Silent Treatment*." It is also interesting

to note that the worst non-violent punishment our society delves out correcting incorrigible offenders of the law is to toss them into *“Solitary Confinement!”* The reason why that is considered so heinous is because the nature of the soul is active and desires loving exchanges. But if one truly believes otherwise, then there are several ways one could arrange for the State to make the perfect environment to practice silent meditation for a very long time with all expenses paid!

Is Silent Meditation A Valid Process?

So why is silent meditation surrounded by so much glee-club hyperbole? Why have so many apparently *“Realized Souls”* given this process of mystic meditation such stellar endorsements? To find our answer let’s first begin with what Krishna has to say specifically about speech:

“Austerity of speech consists in speaking truthfully and beneficially and in avoiding speech that offends. One should also recite the Vedas regularly” – Bhagavad-Gita Gita As It Is Chapter 17 “The Divisions of Faith” Text 15.

If silent meditation was such a critical part of becoming self realized then why is Krishna recommending that *one should regularly recite the Vedas?* This is a very important point and understanding it is what separates those who are true *“Mahatmas”* from eccentric personalities who promote their own ideas about what it means to be *“Enlightened”* in order to attract followers or make a business out of those seeking to grow spiritually.

Not wanting to communicate is attractive to those who don’t know what to say because they don’t accept any authority regarding the nature of the absolute. They seem to be very willing to accept the opinions of the paparazzi about their favorite Hollywood Star in *“People Magazine”* but they remain reticent about *NOT* accepting what Lord Brahma or other highly respected authorities have to say about the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Once one agrees to consider input from reliable sources like the Vedas, they can take advantage of an endless stream of wonderfully exhilarating information about the soul, time, the material world, and most importantly who God is. One who carries that torchlight of knowledge is immediately inspired to want to speak about it and share with others. Even the Bible recognizes this phenomenon and advocates the active process of verbally praising the Supreme Lord:

“Praise ye the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary: Praise him in the firmament of his power.¹ Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness.² Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with psaltery and harp.³ Praise him with the timbre and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs.⁴ Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals.⁵ Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord!⁶” – Psalms 150 1-6

Trumpets, harps, timbres, organs, and loud cymbals don’t sound like Silent Meditation to me. Where did the proponents of this new age myth come up with the idea that fossilizing one’s spiritual growth in a shell of silence was the ultimate stage of realization?

OK... Being Silent has Its Place

Being silent has its place in spiritual discipline but it is an intermediate state, not a pinnacle as is often implied by the ill informed. This point is more easily comprehended with the analogy of how a student who disrupts the class with nonsense behavior will get exiled to the principal’s office. Those who disrespect their teacher and refuse to participate nicely with the lesson that is planned are better off sitting alone in the principal’s office because it gives them a chance to contemplate their selfish actions. If they do that pensively enough then they may eventually get in touch with what they are missing out on and perhaps even their own obnoxious tendencies. Only then will they be welcome to sit with the other students, rejoin their studies and continue growing.

Hedonistic people are like the brats in the classroom of life. Instead of accepting good instructions, from a bona-fide teacher, properly trained in the Science of Self Realization, they adopt all sorts of rogue ideas about spiritual life from all sorts of suspicious types who often show up in advertisements found in the back of the *“Whole Life Times!”* Those who are a bit savvy might find a guru that comes from India and tells cute stories about oceans, elephants or snakes that they never heard before. But just because they carry a blanket, have matted hair, sat in the same place for long periods of time or only communicating with a chalk board, does not automatically mean they are qualified to teach about the Absolute Truth.

So for those who have not been properly trained in the Vedic Sciences, then it is indeed better for them to sit silently than to disturb the ether by babbling perverting interpretations of Vedic aphorisms like *“I Am That, You Are That, and That’s All There Is”* etc. Those who parrot such mantras out of context, or not even realizing what they are saying is incomplete, are textbook examples of a little knowledge being dangerous.

The Mega-Truth about Meditation

The mega-truth is that meditation is one of the many subtle sciences originally taught with great detail in the Vedas. Dhyana yoga (sustained deep meditative trance) is a very serious practice that goes way beyond sustaining a full lotus position and skipping a few meals. What the microwave generation has come to accept as *'Meditation,'* is actually a greatly diluted portion of the complete process Krishna gave Arjuna for meditating in the Bhagavad-Gita Gita:

"To practice yoga, one should go to a secluded place and should lay kusa grass on the ground and then cover it with a deerskin and a soft cloth. The seat should be neither too high nor too low and should be situated in a sacred place. The yogi should then sit on it very firmly and practice yoga to purify the heart by controlling his mind, senses and activities and fixing the mind on one point. One should hold one's body, neck and head erect in a straight line and stare steadily at the tip of the nose. Thus, with an un-agitated, subdued mind, devoid of fear, completely free from sex life, one should meditate upon Me within the heart and make Me the ultimate goal of life". - Bhagavad-Gita Gita As It Is Chapter 6 "Sankhya-Yoga", Texts 11-14

This is serious stuff and for good reason! The details spelled out here are the mechanical way one can transcend the harsh influences of conditional life and that is no small undertaking. Notice how Krishna says one should go to a secluded place in the forest and sit on a deerskin? Krishna doesn't suggest going to *"Club Med"* and take a towel. The deerskin is important because it implies that the yogi will sit for such long periods of time that the oils in the deer pelt would be necessary to repel the snakes that would eventually come out of the forest and disturb the trance of the yogi.

Arjuna Rejected the Silent Meditation Process!

Ever since the Beatles went to India it has become stylish to burn incense, practice yoga, chant Om, and practice Silent Meditation. But in the age of Kali, nobody is qualified to practice it properly. That is why Arjuna, a very accomplished, powerful and austere warrior referred to as "Sinless", clearly rejected this method immediately after Krishna proposed it:

"O Madhusudana, the system of yoga which You have summarized appears impractical and unendurable to me, for the mind is restless and unsteady. For the mind is restless, turbulent, obstinate and very strong, O Krsna, and to subdue it, I think, is more difficult than controlling the wind." - Bhagavad-Gita Gita As It Is, Chapter 6, "Sankhya-Yoga", Text 34.

The mature spiritualist does not think he/she is more capable than Arjuna was and will concur with his decision to reject Sankhya Yoga. Then, if they are thoroughly honest, they will also follow in Arjuna's footsteps and adopt the Bhakti Yoga path which Krishna later confirms is the highest of all Yoga/Meditation Processes.

"And of all yogis, the one with great faith who always abides in Me, thinks of Me within himself, and renders transcendental loving service to Me -- he is the most intimately united with Me in yoga and is the highest of all. That is My opinion." - Bhagavad-Gita Gita As It Is Chapter 6 "Sankhya-Yoga", Text 47.

Unfortunately, these very important points are not appreciated by profit motivated entrepreneurs who prefer to market their own slick hybrid version of *"Instant Meditation"* with bodacious claims about how it is a panacea for personal conflicts, stress, sexual dysfunction, and even low sales results!

Yup... Now all it takes is a hand full of Ben Franklins and you can get into a weekend seminar to learn Mediation 101. By the time you get back to work on Monday morning you'll be looking real cool and have the best water cooler stories for the rest of the month!

When the belligerent student exiled from the class finally gets tired of sitting by himself, he may actually mature enough to realize the importance of participating in class and respecting the instructions of the teacher. The exaggerated accolades about mindless adherence to not breaking the *"Code of Silence"* seems to be exactly what the singer-song-writer Paul Simon is referring to in the concluding verses of the popular song he penned called the *"Sounds of Silence"*:

"Fools", said I, "You do not know Silence like a cancer grows
Hear my words that I might teach you Take my arms that I might reach you"
But my words, like silent raindrops fell and echoed... In the wells of silence...

... and the people bowed and prayed, to the neon god they made
And the sign flashed out its warning in the words that it was forming
and the sign said, "The words of the prophets are written on the subway walls
and tenement halls" And whispered in the sounds of silence.

—Paul Simon: *Sounds of Silence*.

What's an Aspiring Meditator to Do?

If one is fortunate then their experimentation with silent meditation will quickly lead them to the same conclusion George Harrison arrived at after he explored that path thoroughly in the early 60's:

"One of the main differences between silent meditation and chanting is that silent meditation is rather dependent on concentration, but when you chant, it's more of a direct connection with God.... Chanting Hare Krsna is a type of meditation that can be practiced even if the mind is in turbulence. You can even be doing it and other things at the same time. That's what's so nice. In my life there's been many times the mantra brought things around. It keeps me in tune with reality, and the more you sit in one place and chant, the more incense you offer to Krsna in the same room, the more you purify the vibration, the more you can achieve what you're trying to do, which is just trying to remember God, God, God, God, God, as often as possible. And if you're talking to Him with the mantra, it certainly helps." - George Harrison, Chant and be Happy Chapter One: "The Hare Krishna Mantra, There's Nothing Higher" p. 9. -Bhaktivedanta Book Trust

When all the fanfare about sitting still for 20 minutes a day is seen from this informed perspective, it's easy to understand why Krishna's devotee considers "*Silent Meditation*" as no more significant than "*Sleeping Vertically*." It may help rest the body, but the only spiritual thing about this over promoted technique is that it would keep those who believe it is the highest stage of spiritual evolution from speaking so much misleading opinionated nonsense if they would simply practice what they preach!

But unfortunately, they don't do that and so there is a lot of confusion. Those who claim silent meditation is the highest path, are not honest enough to admit their inability to practice it properly like Arjuna did immediately after he heard how rigorous one must be for that process to be effective. Overcome by their own imaginative ideas about spiritual life, they run the risk of having their devotional train completely derailed and may languor for many lives in a state of spiritual suspension. This is often the outcome of one who attempts to stop the mind through the mechanical means of silent meditation but fails in that effort as Arjuna implies will be the result for everyone in the age of Kail. When all the hoop-la wears off, the unsuccessful monist regresses right back into his disruptive ways, just like the delinquent student who will eventually gets completely suspended from school if he remains defiant.

The Meditation Recommended for This Age Is Not Silent!

The more hopeful alternative is that the defunct silent meditator realizes that his self-imposed solitary confinement is not only an artificial austerity in the mode of ignorance, but a complete waste of time and rooted in atheism: (Faithlessness)

"Any sacrifice performed without regard for the directions of scripture, without distribution of prasadam [spiritual food], without chanting of Vedic hymns and remunerations to the priests, and without faith is considered to be in the mode of ignorance." - Bhagavad-Gita Gita as It Is Chapter 6 "The Divisions of Faith", Text 13.

Such blind adherence to imaginary spiritual practices fail to deliver the real ecstasy of life which is to hear, chant, discuss, glorify and always remember the name, fame and pastimes of the unlimited Supreme Personality of Godhead Lord Sri Krishna. That is not an imaginary state of awareness, nor is it an artificial imposition on the mind or a concocted tidbit of the Snakya Yoga system that Arjuna unequivocally declared was beyond his ability to do.

No. The culmination of the silent meditation process is useless unless it leads one to restoring their lost relationship with the Supreme Personality of Godhead whereupon one is anything but silent. If you happened to run into a high-profile politician, movie star, or athlete at your local market, you wouldn't be able to stop talking about it with your friends, associates, and co-workers etc. When one actually breaks thru the dry speculations put forth by the impersonalists, and awakes to their eternal relationship with the Supreme Lord they are similarly inspired. Krishna Himself confirms that this is what real meditation is all about, and the reservoir of pleasure we all so anxiously seek, and is the origin of the bliss that the soul cries for;

"The thoughts of My pure devotees' dwell in Me, their lives are fully devoted to My service, and they derive great satisfaction and bliss from always enlightening one another and conversing about Me." - Bhagavad-Gita Gita As It Is, Chapter 10 "The Opulence of the Absolute", Text 9.

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