

Does novel Coronavirus teach us about meditation?

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Abstract: *Is Nature teaching us about meditation? The lockdown of people inside their homes forced by the novel Coronavirus gave us a glimpse of what is possible for the restoration of the purity of Nature, if humanity stops their ceaseless activity for a length of time. At the level of the individual, one can get a glimpse of what is possible for the restoration of the purity of one's own inner nature, if one stops all the activities of the mind, speech and the body, which is called meditation. There are instances in our life, when we momentarily experience this involuntarily.*

A lot of money, time, and effort was spent in trying to clean the Ganges, with limited success. Due to the lockdown forced by the novel Coronavirus, in a month's time, most rivers in the world became much cleaner and aquatic life not seen for decades returned to them. Air became pristine and sky became purer so that distant mountain peaks could be seen clearly. In other words, to reset and clean Nature, all we had to do was to stop whatever we are doing and be just within our homes.

In exactly the same manner, when we want to clean our inner self, we do not need to DO anything. In fact, we need to stop whatever we are doing with our brain, speech, and our body, and just be quiet within ourselves (our inner home). Our inner nature resets itself, becomes pristine, the pollution in our thinking reduces, and scientists have even recorded physical benefits in terms of increased gray matter in the hippocampus, the brain region responsible for learning and memory [1].

Just as people found it difficult and restless to be confined within their houses, it is not easy to sit quiet in meditation not doing anything physically, mentally, intellectually and just be an observer of everything inside and outside of us. It comes by a deep understanding and consistent practice. Even though the novel Coronavirus showed us how we can restore the purity of nature, it is doubtful whether humanity will be responsible enough to organize itself totally differently to continue this trend of nature returning to its glory for our own better health.

When one comes upon an exquisite range of snow-clad mountains or a vast, seemingly endless ocean, for a moment, that extraordinary sight takes one's attention off from the mind's normal preoccupations of desire, upset, anger, etc. and one experiences a great peace and happiness, which is one's own true nature, as per the Upanishads. However, once one gets back, it is doubtful whether one will be responsible enough to organize himself totally differently to continue this trend of oneself being with its own blissful nature.

In ancient Tamil Siddha literature, such a meditative state has been termed as 'sleepless sleep' (தூங்காமல் தூங்கும் நிலை). The siddhar Badragiriyaar sang as follows in his poem [2]:

ஆங்காரம் உள்ளடக்கி ஐம்புலனை சுட்டறுத்து

தூங்காமல் தூங்கி சுகம் பெறுவது எக்காலம்

The meaning of this couplet is as follows: “When am I going to win over my five senses, overcome my ego and experience the blissful state of the sleepless sleep?” Chidambaram Ramalinga Adigaal (popularly known as Vallalaar) put it slightly differently [3]: “இன்று வருமோ நாளைக்கே வருமோ ... சும்மா இருக்கும் சுகம்?”, which means, “Will the bliss of doing nothing come today or tomorrow?”.

Patanjali says in his Yoga Sutra, योगः चित्त-वृत्ति निरोधः (yogaś citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ), which refers to quietening the mind in order to move toward self-realization, which he calls as yoga [4]. Lord Krishna, in Bhagawad Gita [5] says, “यदा संहरते चायं कूर्मोऽङ्गानीव सर्वशः | इन्द्रियाणीन्द्रियार्थेभ्यस्तस्य प्रजा प्रतिष्ठिता”, which means, “One experiences divine wisdom when one withdraws one’s senses from their objects of desire, similar to how a tortoise withdraws its limbs into its shell.”

This is also what is indicated by the Zen saying, “Sit quietly, doing nothing; spring comes, and the grass grows by itself.”

So, is Nature teaching us about meditation?

References:

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[2] Badragiriyar's Life History: <http://agathin-kural.blogspot.com/2018/09/pathragiriyar-life-history.html> last accessed on June 1, 2020.

[3] Vallalaar’s Arutpa: <http://www.vallalarspace.org/user/c/V000011876B> last accessed on June 1 2020.

[4] Patanjali’s yoga sutra 1.2: <https://patanjaliyogasutra.in/samadhipada1-2/> last accessed on June 1, 2020.

[5] Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 2, Verse 58: <https://www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/chapter/2/verse/58>, last accessed on June 1, 2020.