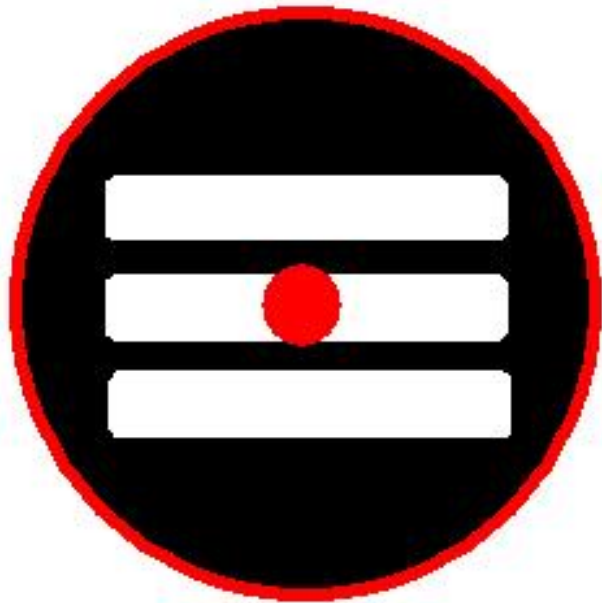


ONCE AGAIN IN THE MEANING OF MEDITATION



Acharya Peter Wilberg

2011

ONCE AGAIN ON THE MEANING OF 'MEDITATION'

Despite the fact that both my books and on-line essays on The New Yoga repeat the same basic 'definition' of awareness – 'giving time to be aware' – many times, not to mention them being replete with descriptions of countless meditational practices (not least in my 'Manual of The New Yoga' and the 'Introductory Essays' on it) I feel called upon to once again address the basic question of the meaning of 'meditation'.

What then is the essential meaning and practical starting point of 'meditation'?

Is it a 'technique', a 'mantra', a yoga posture or 'asana', an act of concentration on a single point or on a single thought ('dhyana') an attempt to free one's mind of thoughts or to detach oneself from one's body, a form of guided relaxation or visualisation, or an arcane practice culled from an ancient text or set of meditational 'techniques'.

It is none of these. It is something far simpler and more basic in principle and yet so often and persistently avoided in practice – not least in everyday life and living.

As so often emphasised and repeated in my writings, the alpha and omega of meditation is nothing more or less than giving ourselves TIME TO BE AWARE –more aware, aware of more and aware of it more sharply and intensely.

To be aware of what however? To start with, nothing but how we are feeling ourselves – bodily – right now and yet also in the middle or midst of our concrete lives and relationship. For we do not meditate in a vacuum but from a place of existential situatedness in our life world as a whole.

The 'word' meditation itself stems the Latin 'medius' - to find ourselves situated 'in the middle'.

In the middle or midst of what? In the midst of our life world as a whole, with all its specific events, encounters and accompanying moods and emotions - the experience and 'sense' of which lingers or dawns in our bodies, whether as 'residual' senses of what 'has been' or as anticipatory senses of what is or may yet be to come.

The first and most important step in meditation therefore is precisely to give more and not less awareness to our inwardly felt bodily sense of each and all the different events and encounters, moods and emotions, reflections and thoughts, recollections and anticipations that make up our lived experiential world – along with whatever sensations or symptoms of ease or dis-ease that accompany them.

Alternatively, we may simply come to be aware of specific bodily senses, feelings or sensations whose meaning or sense is at yet unclear. And yet by giving ourselves time to follow and feel further and deeper into those feelings or senses with awareness – they will reveal their meaning or sense - their connection with specific events or experiences, questions or challenges connected with our life world and relationships.

Only by giving enough time for meditation in this sense - abiding in the midst of a bodily feeling awareness of all the elements of our immediate experiencing and the life events and contexts out of which they arise - will the felt senses we experience in our bodies come, in time, to make sense in new and meaningful ways - giving rise to a new awareness and to new insights into our lives and life world on a personal, inter-personal and trans-personal level.

The starting point, motive and aim of 'meditation' then, is certainly NOT a seeking or striving to in any way distract or distance ourselves - emotionally, mentally or 'spiritually' - from how we currently find and feel ourselves in the midst of our actual lived experience of ourselves, the world and other people. Instead is a granting of greater bodily awareness to them - and thus also to our body, self and life world as a whole.

To begin with, we may or may not wish or need to close our eyes, but if periods of meditation are to lead us to a whole new way of continuous meditative living, then we must learn also to meditate with our eyes open –for we cannot meditatively go about our everyday lives with our eyes closed. This is also the meaning of 'Bhairava Mudra' as a meditative practice and bearing - the capacity to turn the gaze of our feeling awareness inwards and into the depths of our inwardly felt body – yet without having to close our eyes to the world around us.

This in turn is the precondition for the practice and experience of 'Khechari Mudra' as expounded through the teaching of The New Yoga – the practice and experience of attending to the 'empty' spaces of awareness around our thoughts, feelings and sensations - and of the entire space around and surrounding our body as a whole. Experiencing the singularity of empty space, not as mere emptiness but as a spacious field of pure awareness, allows us in turn to bring into play the 'fundamental distinction' at the core of The Awareness Principle. This is the distinction between, on the one hand, all that we experience, inwardly and outwardly and, on the other hand, the pure awareness of experiencing it.

It is through this fundamental distinction that we can realise another basic precept of The Awareness Principle – namely that the pure AWARENESS of a thought or emotion, sensation

or perception, urge or impulse, is NOT ITSELF a thought or emotion, sensation or perception, urge or impulse – but is instead innately FREE of thoughts and emotions, sensations or perceptions, urges or impulses.

The result of this recognition is a capacity to do two most important things simultaneously – firstly to follow and feel ourselves fully into every element of our bodily self-experiencing - doing so much more fully and intensely that we may normally give ourselves time to do - whilst, secondly, and at the same time, avoiding the trap of IDENTIFYING with any given element of our experiencing, whether a particular mood or state of being, thought or emotion, sensation or impulse, life situation or bodily symptom.

Having quite literally re-embodied ourselves through giving awareness to our immediate bodily sense of self in all its aspects - whilst also coming to experience our self and body as safely embraced within the all-surrounding space and silence of pure awareness - we have already taken the first step in the direction of a further stage of meditation.

The essence of this next step lies in passing from simply giving ourselves 'time to be aware' (in particular more bodily aware all that we feel and find ourselves in the midst of) to BEING that very awareness - itself nothing bodily. In other words we come to not only feel but BE that unbounded 'spacious silence' of pure bodiless awareness that surrounds and embraces our bodies, and with it, all elements of our lived experiencing and life world, inner and outer.

It is through this transition – from 'being aware' to 'being awareness' – that the central aim and maxim of The New Yoga is realised, namely to pass 'from a new AWARENESS of all that we experience to a new EXPERIENCE of awareness as such'.

The experience of Being Awareness (sat-chit) has the primary character of Bliss (ananda). Yet this bliss can be experienced in countless ways – not just through the experience of awareness as an infinite, all-embracing and spacious silence, but also as a new and sensuously enriched perception of all that is embraced by and within that spacious silence of awareness.

All the most ordinary sights and sounds, things and people that are around us in this world then cease to have the character of mere 'objects' which we perceive and look out at through 'the peepholes of the senses'. Instead we experience every sensory quality of the bodies around us in space – whether the bodily colour, sound, shape or texture or a thing, or the bodily shape, movements, face and eyes of a person - as the expression of the most blissfully exquisite 'soul qualities'. These are qualities that we not only outwardly perceive

through our sensory awareness of them, but also and at the same time sense inwardly and within our own bodies - experiencing them as blissfully sensuous qualities OF awareness.

BEING pure awareness (Shiva) every body, thing and person in the world around us is now experienced in its true nature as a 'Shakti' – as a divinely sensuous manifestation of pure awareness. Thus it is that we come to know 'Shiva' as that divine awareness whose bliss consists not of transcending the sensual but rather of constantly enjoying - indeed revelling - in its own manifold sensory and bodily manifestations, experiencing them all as the expression of the most unique, exquisite and blissfully sensuous qualities of soul or awareness itself.

The ordinary things and phenomena of this world reveal their extra-ordinary nature. Outer sensory qualities reveal themselves and are felt from within as unique soul qualities. Our ordinary sensory awareness of the world is not in any way dulled, suppressed or 'transcended' but instead intensified, enriched and enlivened to an unimaginable degree.

It then becomes quite impossible for any thing, place or person to be perceived as 'ugly' or 'bad' in any way, since all things now glow, radiate or resound with their own unique beauty of soul. As a result, every thing and person is both perceived from without and felt from within as what it most truly is – a unique portion, expression and embodiment of that divine awareness which is GOD, and therefore also as A GOD in its own right, a uniquely beautiful face of the Goodliness and Godliness of the Divine.

This experience of divine Awareness Bliss as the extra-ordinariness of the ordinary, the divinity of the 'worldly', the soul inwardness of the sensory, the sensuality of the 'spiritual', is what in 'tantric' terms can be named 'samadhi' – for 'tantra' is nothing if not the blissful enjoyment in awareness of the divine nature of all sensual experiencing and phenomena. It is the experience of 'Maya' not as 'ignorance' or 'illusion' but as 'mayashakti' - the capacity or power ('Shakti') of the divine awareness to embody and enjoy its own immanent sensuous qualities or 'tattvas', whilst at the same time, as PURE awareness (and like empty space) both embracing and transcending them all.

Meditation then, is what allows us to stand in the middle or midst of the Divine in both its Immanent and Transcendent nature. We do so NOT by taking leave of our actual life world and its problems, nor by distancing ourselves from our bodies, shutting down our minds, or closing our eyes and ears to our outer sensory experiencing.

We do so by but by first of all coming back to our BODIES, and, from out of a deepened bodily awareness of self and world, literally 'coming to our senses' in every possible sense of

this phrase - both making fresh sense of our lives AND richly intensifying our sensual experience of the world around us. All this is impossible without giving ourselves more TIME to be aware of all that we are currently experiencing in the midst of our lives, and in this way coming to experience the sensuous BLISS and profound life insights that naturally arise from BEING that AWARENESS (sat-chit-ananda) in its unbounded and open spaciousness and silence.