

## OVERVIEW - MEDITATION QUEST - MODULE 4

### MQ-4: "LEAD ME FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT"

This meditation introduces the ancient mantram "lead me from darkness to light", which is a cry from the struggling neophyte, for psychological and spiritual light and freedom.



#### **Skill to Learn - Concentration**

This month's study section continues with the mind, this time we focus on the important need for mind concentration. An essential requirement for successful meditation.

## MEDITATION 4: STUDY PAPER

# CONCENTRATION and MINDFULNESS

### CONCENTRATION



*Wesak*, by Francis Donald

*The **Buddha** came and spoke to the multitude, telling them what was the source of their misery and discontent, and giving them, in the **Four Noble Truths**, a concise statement of the human situation. He outlined to them the **Noble Eightfold Path** governing right conduct, and gave in reality the rules which should control one upon the Path of Discipleship<sup>1</sup>*

### The Noble Eightfold Path<sup>2</sup>

The right use of the mind is important. This has been recognized for a long time in Eastern faiths, and is now being recognized by Western cultures as well. The Buddhists follow the Noble Eightfold Path, a list of eight factors that start with **right belief** and **right intention**; both involve wisdom—a type of

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<sup>1</sup> Alice Bailey, *From Bethlehem to Calvary*, page 258

<sup>2</sup> Information paraphrased from Alice Bailey, *From Bethlehem to Calvary*, page 15; *Light of the Soul*, page 40, and Wikipedia article on the Noble Eightfold Path

discernment that awakens us to the faculty of understanding so we see things as they really are. Right belief fosters aspiration so we consciously become intent on living less selfishly, and that leads us to cultivate ethical conduct in our day-to-day affairs like **right speech**, **right action**, and **right living**, thus restraining our personality flaws. And when that happens, we begin concentrating on **right endeavor**, **right mindfulness**, and **right concentration** in our life. But this is by no means all there is to it; we must continue to practice right mindfulness and right concentration to consistently stay with the right belief and other factors. So in reality, these eight factors of the Noble Path are actually all linked together, and the cultivation of each assists with the cultivation of all the others. Once the earlier factors are achieved, then the ones involving concentration (right endeavor, right mindfulness, and right concentration) are easier to sustain, but they are all still required.

1. **Right Belief** (or right perspective) is the way we look at life, nature, and the world around us. If understood correctly, it explains the underlying reasons for human existence, suffering, sickness, aging and death, greed, hatred, and delusion. It begins with knowledge of ourselves and our immediate surroundings, and as we grow and become more soul-conscious, it becomes a wise understanding of the universe in which we live.
2. **Right Intention** (or right thought, right aspiration) is the exertion of our own will upon the personality, forcing it to change for the better. We refine our lower vehicles and purify them to make them fit for the conscious expression of our soul. In other words, we take ourselves under control and eliminate such bad characteristics as ill will, violence, harmfulness, greed, selfishness, and other negative qualities. Instead, we pursue a spiritual path of goodwill and harmlessness toward other people.
3. **Right Speech** involves the elimination of words that can be hurtful -- like lies, criticism, derisive or abusive speech, even gossip. One speaks at the right time, factually, and with words that are reasonable, circumscribed, and connected with a positive outcome in mind. If this is not possible, then one says nothing and does his best not to even think negative thoughts that should not be voiced.
4. **Right Action** (or right conduct) involves practicing moral activities that will not bring harm to anyone else. One lives life scrupulously, mercifully and with compassion for the welfare of all living things. One avoids any misconduct.
5. **Right Living** (or right livelihood) calls for living and working honestly, and avoiding involvement in business that can be harmful to others.
6. **Right Endeavor** (or right effort) is persistently making the effort to abandon all wrong and harmful thoughts, words, and deeds. Instead, live selflessly, be helpful to others, and use kind words and thoughts about other people.
7. **Right Mindfulness** (or right mindedness) is constantly keeping the mind alert to things that might affect the body, emotions and mind. It is the cultivating of an awareness of and attention to things around you accompanied by a deliberate intention to focus, to remember and to avoid inattention and forgetfulness.
8. **Right Concentration** calls for full attention to the object under consideration as one meditates. It is developed through mindfulness in meditation and is used to suppress any distractions during the meditation process. Through right concentration you can cultivate



hardly concentrate on any subject or object even for a second. His mind will be jumping all over the place like a monkey. The initial stages of mental cultivation are especially delicate. When getting started in meditation, one of the first things you will notice is how incredibly active the mind really is.

Those who have learned to abstract (to withdraw the senses from the objects of attention) will have good concentration.

## **Something to Rest the Mind Upon**

There is no concentration without something to rest the mind upon. In the beginning, the mind can be fixed on any object which is pleasant. As one begins the practice of meditation, it is very difficult to fix the mind on an object which the mind dislikes. Therefore in the meditations offered, a soul quality or phrase is emphasized.

Really deep concentration can only take place under certain specific conditions. First, one needs to create a physical environment free of distractions in which to learn this skill. No noise, no interruptions. Just as important, however, is the creation of a distraction-free emotional environment. The development of concentration will be blocked by the presence of certain mental states which we call the "Five Hindrances". They are greed for sensual pleasure, hatred, mental lethargy, restlessness, and mental vacillation.

## **Enemies of Concentration**

Some of the enemies of concentration skills are constant sensory input, multi-tasking, trying to do many things at the same time, loud noises, and flashing light patterns. The human nervous system is a marvellous instrument, but it is not built to function constantly in the presence of such disturbances. Attention-deficit patterns arise, at least to some extent, from the activities or situations which make concentration difficult to impossible. Then a habit of non-attention or the inability to concentrate deeply is established and proves difficult to overcome.

Deep concentration results from increasing or directing your consciousness or attention. The more of this kind of energy you have, the better. Scattered energy doesn't help. It must be calm, focused energy. One needs to learn to be calmly concentrated and concentratedly calm.



## Mindfulness and Concentration Go Hand in Hand

*Concentration and mindfulness are different functions, but they work closely together in meditation.*<sup>4</sup>

Concentration is an activity that can be developed by force and willpower. Mindfulness, on the other hand, is more delicate and refined. Mindfulness is a form of sensitive perception while concentration provides the power.

Concentration is exclusive. It focuses on one item and ignores everything else. Mindfulness is inclusive; it stands back from the focus of attention and watches with a broad focus, quick to notice any change that occurs. If you have focused the mind on a stone, concentration will see only the stone. Mindfulness stands back from this process, aware of the stone, aware of the concentration focusing on the stone, aware of the intensity of that focus and instantly aware of the shift of attention when concentration is distracted. It is mindfulness which notices the distraction which has occurred, and it is mindfulness which redirects the attention to the stone. Mindfulness is more difficult to cultivate than concentration because it is a deeper function. Concentration is merely focusing of the mind, rather like a laser beam. It has the power to burn its way deep into the mind and illuminate what is there. But it does not understand what it sees. Mindfulness, for instance, can examine the mechanics of selfishness and understand what it sees.

Concentration leads to meditation. Mindfulness guides your development in meditation, because mindfulness has the ability to be aware of itself. It is mindfulness which will give you a perspective on your meditation. Mindfulness will reveal your process and progress.



### Resource Material

The word "concentration" comes from the Latin words "con" ("together") and "centrare" ("to centre"). It means the "bringing together or the drawing to a common centre or focal point"; it

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<sup>4</sup> Ven. Henepola Gunaratana, *Mindfulness in Plain English*, Chapter 14, Mindfulness Versus Concentration

connotes the gathering together of our wandering thoughts and ideas, and holding the mind firmly and steadily focussed or centred on the object of our immediate attention, without wavering or distraction. It involves the elimination of all that is foreign or extraneous to the matter under observation.

Students would do well at the very beginning of their meditation work to learn to make these basic differentiations, and to cultivate the habit every day of making these distinctions. They must distinguish always between:

1. The Thinker, the true Self, or the Soul.
2. The mind, or the apparatus which the Thinker seeks to use.
3. The process of thought, or the work of the Thinker as he impresses upon the mind (when in a state of equilibrium) that which he thinks.
4. The brain, which is in its turn impressed by the mind, acting as the agent for the Thinker, in order to convey impressions and information.

Concentration is, therefore, the power to focus the consciousness on a given subject and to hold it there as long as desired; it is the method of accurate perception, and the power to visualize correctly, being the quality which enables the Thinker to perceive and know the field of perception. Another word for concentration is attention, that is, one-pointed attention.

The objective, therefore, of all our endeavor is to train the mind so as to make it our servant and not our master, and to cultivate the power of concentration preparatory to true meditation work. The earnest student, therefore, will carry this close attention into the affairs of everyday life and will thereby learn to regulate his mind as an apparatus for his thought.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Alice Bailey, *Intellect to Intuition*, pages 105 -107

## MEDITATION 4

# LEAD ME FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

### SKILL TO LEARN -

### CONCENTRATION VIA SEQUENTIAL-THINKING

The average mind flits from topic to topic rapidly, and concentration (especially if the subject is considered "boring") is difficult. Concentration is the power to focus the consciousness on a given subject and to hold it there as long as desired; it is the method of accurate perception. Another word for concentration is attention, that is, one-pointed attention. The best way to harness the mind's attention is to become really interested and focused on whatever it is we are doing in the moment. This will automatically make the mind one-pointed. This month you given instruction in a mind-concentration technique called "The Sequential Thinking Method".

#### **Sequential-Thinking**

Start by concentrating on the seed-thought. Then move your mind to the next thought that has arisen from the seed, and concentrate on that. Then move your mind to the next thought, and concentrate on that. Move your mind forward in a sequential manner, linking the next thought with the previous thought. You are laying a pathway of thoughts, neatly strung together. Be alert as you come to the end of a thought and before you connect with the next thought. This is when the mind is most likely to try to resume its restless ramblings. Being able to move through that gap, from thought to thought, without mind-flitting, is Sequential Thinking.

The following example of sequential thinking comes from Alice A. Bailey's 'From Intellect to Intuition' page 330. It starts with the seed-thought "Thou God seest me."

Thou God seest me.  
This God is the divine in me, the indwelling Christ, the soul.  
For long ages, this soul has perceived and observed me.  
Now for the first time I am in a position to see God.  
Until now, I have been negative to this divine Reality.  
The positive relation is becoming possible.  
But — this seems to involve the idea of duality.  
But I and God are one.  
I am God, and have been all the time.  
Therefore I have been seen by my Self.  
I am that Self, That Self am I.

Can you read through the whole thought-stream with full 100% attention and awareness? If so, that is sequential thinking.



Using any topic that you find interesting, practise the technique. In the beginning, it may help to write your thoughts down. If you take the time now to train your mind to follow this sequential thinking process, it will greatly benefit your meditation work and personal development. There is nothing esoteric about this work, it is simply mind-training.

In the accompanying study material, you will learn more about concentration and the Practise of Mindfulness.

## Glossary

### Five Hindrances

The five hindrances to right concentration are greed for sensual pleasure, hatred, mental lethargy, restlessness, and mental vacillation.

### Noble Eightfold Path (The)

The Noble Eightfold Path is a list of eight factors that start with right belief and right intentions; both involve wisdom—a type of discernment that awakens us to the faculty of understanding so we see things as they really are. Right belief fosters aspiration so we consciously become intent on living less selfishly, and that leads us to cultivate ethical conduct in our day-to-day affairs like right speech, right actions, and right living, thus restraining our personality flaws. And when that happens, we begin concentrating on right endeavour, right mindfulness, and right concentration in our life.

### Right Concentration

Right concentration calls for full attention on the object being considered in meditation. It is developed through mindfulness in meditation and is used to suppress any distractions during meditation, so you can cultivate wisdom and insight and be able to fully investigate your ability to have right views and see the reality around events and life's happenings. The development of concentration will be blocked by the presence of certain mental states which we call the five hindrances.

### Right Mindfulness

Right mindfulness (or right mindedness) is constantly keeping the mind alert to things that might affect the body and mind. It is cultivating an awareness and attention of things around you with deliberate intent and focus to remember and avoid inattention and forgetfulness.

### Vedas and Upanishads

The Vedas originated in ancient India and are the fundamentals of Hinduism. Composed in Vedic Sanskrit, the texts constitute the oldest layer of Sanskrit literature and scriptures of Hinduism. The Upanishads deal more with the philosophical side of Hinduism, they are a collection of texts which form the theoretical basis for the Hindu religion. *Advaita Vedanta* is the school of Vedic philosophy.

## MEDITATION THEME –

### "LEAD ME FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT"

This is a prayer from the Vedas - *Asatoma Ma Sadgamaya* (Brhadaranyaka Upanishad — I.iii.28); in which the supplicant asks the Almighty for assistance. It is an entreaty for spiritual enlightenment and illumination. Enlightenment - the spiritual illumination of the mind so that the love and light of the soul has free expression through the nature, is the goal for all spiritual seekers. Enlightenment is the doorway into reality, continuity of consciousness, and true spiritual beauty. This is the goal of this mantram.