

Some Thoughts on Meditation, Spirituality and the Way of the Heart by Gordon Broussard

For some time now, we in the West have shown more and more interest in Meditation and Spirituality. We can—perhaps—speculate that this interest dates back at least as far as 1893 when Vivekananda, a disciple of Ramakrishna, introduced Hinduism to the Western World at the Parliament of World Religions, 1893, Chicago¹. Soyen Shaku, a Rishi of the *Rinzai* school, introduced Zen to the same parliament². Also playing an important part was Paramahansa Yogananda, another teacher from India. He founded Self Realization Fellowship—an organization still helping seekers long after his death in 1920—not long after he came to the United States to attend the International Conference of Liberals in Boston³. Another mystic tradition, Sufism, was brought here in the early 1900s⁴.

One must not—however—forget 1955, the beginning of when Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and Transcendental Meditation had a great deal of influence on the United States. TM, promoted by celebrities and supported by research, encouraged—along with other techniques—to be part of everyday life pointed the way to where we are today. And where are we? Well, the physical and psychological effects of meditation and energy-related styles of healing such as Reiki, Qigong and martial arts are being explored and (for those open minded enough to listen) it is being shown that there is something to these “weird” techniques those of other cultures have been doing for centuries. Skeptic that I am—although I’ve seen nothing to support this thought—I sometimes consider that initial research might have been done to disprove the value of meditation. If so, it apparently didn’t take too long to prove that it *was* beneficial. Even today, one sees frequent headlines on the research-demonstrated benefits of meditation. Just to name a few: how Mindfulness Meditation affects the brain⁵, how meditation affects heart health⁶, and how using Transcendental Meditation helps with PTSD⁷.

There is meditation for relaxation and for self-improvement—physical and mental—as well as meditation for spiritual growth and Realization/ Enlightenment. However, it isn’t that simple (few things ever are). There are many styles of meditation and many teachers/gurus for each of those styles. Complicated? Should you want to research teachers who present from a mystical “here is how to become enlightened” approach, an interesting resource that rates the many teachers is Sarlo’s Guru Ratings⁸. A few teachings, those associated with men or paths mentioned in this article are, Maharishi Yogi’s Transcendental Meditation, Paramahansa Yogananda’s Kriya Yoga, Mindfulness

as taught in the Buddhist tradition, and Swami Vivekananda's Raja Yoga. Inasmuch as there *are* many styles of meditation—with the same goal—what is the right way to meditate? Is there a “best” type of meditation?

According to Timothy Conway (mystic, teacher, author), there are five styles of meditation. The **first** of these is “One-pointed concentration on a specific object of meditation”⁹ and the focus could be an image, sound, prayer or something similar. The **second** style is “witnessing” or “mindfulness” or “insight meditation”¹⁰ in which one notes the passing thoughts, emotions and sensations. Notice is made not only of how fleeting they are, of the fact that there is not a steady flow and that there are intervals between them but also of the fact that you are standing apart from them “witnessing” them and therefore are not them. The **third** style is that in which one “immerses oneself in love for and surrender to God”¹¹. It can be God with or without form. However, eventually there is “no more lover, only the Beloved. No more “me,” only the all-pervasive “I” of God”¹². The **fourth** style of meditation (essentially the style I do) is the “transpersonal, intuitive self-inquiry (or *atma vichara*) into the nature of Absolute Awareness ItSelf”¹³. In this style one can use the koan “What/Who am I.” Ultimately as one does this, there is a process of “disidentifying from the body-mind personality, floating unattached in the perfect freedom of Awareness. One realizes that one is not a body, not a mind, not a ‘me,’ not any ‘thing’ at all”¹⁴. In the **Final** style, “one simply abides in an open, empty/full, relaxed, alert stillness”¹⁵. Essentially, you flow as what you already are.

So you have a style or method. One might ask “Must I sit in formal a formal meditation posture to be accomplishing one of these styles of meditation?” That is, must I sit with their legs crossed in the lotus position, eyes shut, etc.? While it may be true that certain postures may be more conducive to meditation—may allow the currents (Qi/Kundalini) to flow more easily—ultimately one can learn to meditate in any position. Look at the styles of meditation in the previous paragraph. Nothing is said about posture. Can one meditate—for instance—while walking. Yes, there is walking meditation¹⁶. So when sitting or walking, or watching TV, or exercising, or reading, etc. one can be in a peaceful, altered state. Will they stay in this state all the time? Not necessarily. One must admit that life has its ups and downs and it is sometimes easy to lose focus. However, eventually a person may reach the point where he or she is in such a state most or all of the time¹⁷. If one is in such a state—in bliss?—all the time, does this mean that they are “realized” or “enlightened;” whatever that is? Who can say? Ramana Maharshi, whom most felt was enlightened, said that only someone who is enlightened can determine if someone else is enlightened¹⁸. Papaji (highly rated on Sarlo's Guru Ratings) reportedly recognized a varying (never more than seven with an additional fifty or so he sort of said had

temporary rather than permanent enlightenment experiences) number of individuals he considered Self-Realized¹⁹. Ramana Maharshi also recognized only a few.

As I've mentioned, there are many paths. However, since 1969 the path I've followed has involved Atma Vichara and the Heart (Hridaya) as taught by Ramana Maharshi. The rest of this paper will be related in some way to one or the other from Ramana's and other paths mentioning a spiritual Heart (as opposed to a Heart Chakra).

According to the literature on Ramana, he was not seeking "Realization" when, without any effort, all things changed. One day he became aware of the fact that not only was he aware—flowing in silence as a current of awareness whether sleep, dreaming or awake—but this was the natural state for him and everyone else. *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi* state that his realization occurred spontaneously: "When the Maharshi, Bhagavan Ramana, realized the Self, he was a lad of seventeen (again some web sites say 16) in a middle-class Brahman family of South India. He was still going to high school and had undergone no spiritual training and learnt nothing of spiritual philosophy²⁰". Of course, as this was so, he had never heard of the Heart (*Hridaya*). Instead his awareness of Heart began naturally as a part of his realization²¹. Later he spoke of *Atma Vichara* or Self Enquiry as the way to come to know the Self or Atman and silently "radiated" from the Heart to enable others to become aware of it.

A teacher who speaks of a spiritual Heart is Llewellyn Vaugahan-Lee, of the Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya Sufis. Llewellyn reports that his first meeting with Mrs. Tweedie, his teacher, came in 1973 when he met her at a lecture to which he had been invited²². On his way to becoming a Sheikh of his order (successor to Mrs. Tweedie), he studied with his Sheikh for more than eleven years. As he followed the path, learning to dwell in silence, know the meaning of dreams and practicing his dhikr or mantra, he reached the point wherein he was "introduced" to the heart of hearts and experienced "spiritual conception."

What is spiritual conception? According to Llewellyn, this conception occurs when "the heart of hearts"²³ which is "the heart of the Self"²⁴ is "spun" in a particular way. Llewellyn goes on to say:

The divine energy of the Self vibrates at a higher frequency to our ordinary human self. Through the spinning of the heart, the higher consciousness of the Self is able to be integrated into the lower vehicles, into the denser dimensions of the human being. All the

wayfarers spiritual work has been a preparation for this moment and from now on the work will be to give birth to this seed of consciousness, to attune one's waking consciousness to the higher vibrations of the Self that are now spinning within the heart. This is the gradual process of awakening to the consciousness of the heart, opening the eye of the heart through which the Beloved is able to experience His creation²⁵.

Kashmiri Saivism is another path which speaks of the Heart and also of *sphurana*, the divine pulsation. Like the follower of the Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya Sufi path, one who follows this path meets a guru when the time is right. He is given a mantra and is then "led through the vibratory spectrum of awareness to the ever subtler domains within. As this occurs, the surface word-form of the mantra falls away and only the original lively pulsation of enlightenment is left. At a certain definite point, the individual awareness is permanently caught up in this subtle pulsation of the ultimate"²⁶. This "pulsing radiance (*spurana*) or Self-luminous consciousness that shines in all things"²⁷ has a variety of names in this path: Heart (*Hridaya*), *Spanda* (vibration, throb, pulsation), *sphuratta* [probably a variation of *sphurana*] (radiance), *urmi* (wave), *sara* (essence)]²⁸.

Consider, we have three paths—Ramana's, the Sufi, and that of Kashmiri Saivism. All speak of similar steps on a path. However, although there are similarities in their approaches there are also differences. For instance—as has already been pointed out—both Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya Sufis and practitioners of Kashmiri Shaivism are given mantras. Ramana does not consider *Atma Vichara* a mantra. Then there is the fact that—as quoted above—the teachings of Kashmiri Shaivism speak of the pulsing radiance of *sphurana* and that Ramana spoke of *sphurana* which "scintillates with consciousness"²⁹ in *Samadhi* (so far as I know the Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya do not speak of pulsing of the Heart. Yet, although Ramana acknowledge feeling the Heart (*Hridaya*) throughout his life *Atma Vichara* rather than Heart was the primary emphasis of his teaching:

Of course there is also the practice of meditation on the heart-centre. It is only a practice and not investigation. Only the one who meditates on the heart can remain aware when the mind ceases to be active and remains still; whereas those who meditate on other centres cannot be so aware but infer that the mind was still only after it becomes active again³⁰.

For the Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya Sufi, however, Heart—the interface with God—seemingly becomes a way that God "looks out" at the world as

the Sufi becomes more and more an instrument of God with inner attention dwelling “with the Beloved and his outer attention”³¹ in the world.

Essentially, the Sufi becomes more and more an instrument of God, a lover of God—in the world but not of it—moving hidden through it, acting to carry out God’s will. When working in their spiritual capacity, the Sufi works in silence much of the time for “silence is the gateway to the Beloved”³². He speaks the first thing that comes to mind “because the first thought comes from God”³³. This growing egoless action can only occur as he surrenders his ego. Moreover, “it is in this sense that His lovers are points of light; places where He can unfold the hidden purpose of His creation”³⁴.

It seems quite clear that although he was unique unto himself, Ramana too was a lover of God, a point of light leading many people—some of whom undoubtedly led others—to an awareness of Self and Self Enquiry;³⁵ just as over many generations many Sufi Sheikhs illuminating followers who illuminated others. In effect, the Beloved looked into the world through them and touched many through them.

Again, we have three Ways of the Heart and although there are “apparent” differences, each leads to the Beloved in one way or another. As a comment on this I turn again to something once said by Ramana Maharshi. As indicated earlier in a note, once when he was asked by a disciple what Kundalini is, he responded:

Kundalini is one name given by the *yogic* people for what may be called the *atmic sakti* inside the body. The *Vichara School* calls the same power *jnana*. The *bhakta* calls it love or *bhakti*. The yogic school says that this power is dormant in *muladhara* at the base of the spinal cord and that it must be roused and taken through the various *chakras* on to *sahasrara* at the top, in the brain, to attain *moksha*. The *Jnanis* think this power is centered in the heart, and so on³⁶.

Ultimately, no matter what road you take the destination is the same. Perhaps only those who consciously dwell in that Oneness can really see the essential Oneness of the “different” ways and the futility of engaging in word play rather than dwelling in Silence.

How many are actually arriving at the Knowing of the Divine? Although it doesn’t logically follow, there may be more than in the past inasmuch as there are more people than in the past. After all, there are more teachers/gurus. In the West, teachers such as Lewellyn Vaugahan-Lee and Timothy Conway—to name a few among many—are out there showing the

way. And there are the silent Knowers—those who are aware and go through life quietly enabling transformation without calling attention to themselves. But I haven't met any, just read about them.

Finally, I was once told by someone that since this is the “New Age” it is (or should be?) easier to attain enlightenment. Yes, and there should be no winners or losers in some sports for all young people *are*—everyone *is*—equal. Think how painful it is to lose, how much it hurts them. Everyone *should* be a winner (enlightened).

Footnotes

1. Wikipedia, "Swami Vivekananda", https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swami_Vivekananda
2. Wikipedia, "Soyen Shaku", https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soyen_Shaku.
3. Wikipedia "Paramahansa Yogananda", https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paramahansa_Yogananda#Move_to_America.
4. Bagasra, Anisah, MA, www.israinternational.com/latest-news/110-a-short-history-of-sufism-and-sufi-communities-in-america.html.
5. Wolken, Jennifer "How the Brain Changes When You Meditate," September 20, 2015, www.mindful.org/how-the-brain-changes-when-you-meditate.
6. Chopra, Deepak, MD, "How Meditation Affects Heart Health", www.chopra.com/articles/how-meditation-affects-heart-health.
7. Kaplan, Gary, "PTSD & The Brain: How TM Can Help", August 16, 2011, www.tm.org/blog/video/ptsd-brain.
8. "Sarlos' Guru Ratings", <http://www.gururatings.org/?p=3>. I've seen past critiques of Sarlo's because the person who put it together follows a particular teacher and this might bias what he has to say.
9. Conway, Timothy, "Meditation Trends Styles and Stages," Enlightened-Spirituality.org, 2006 11 Dec. 2010, http://www.enlightened-spirituality.org/meditation_trends_and_styles.html.
10. Conway
11. Conway
12. Conway
13. Conway
14. Conway
15. Conway

16. "What is Walking Meditation," Wildmind Buddhist Meditation, 11 Dec 2010, <http://www.wildmind.org/walking/overview>.

17. I 've been meditating since 1969 and have reached the point where I can do some of what I've always read about is possible even though I'm not "there" yet.

18. Unfortunately there are individuals out there who proclaim themselves "Masters" and who are quite willing to charge you "whatever" supposedly to get you where they are spiritually speaking. Some of these individuals also often say they are "In the Lineage" of some famous master as that makes them sound more capable (?). One such teacher who is claimed in this way (who has supposedly trained many of these pseudo Masters) is Ramana Maharshi who named *no* successors. Web sites which address aspects of this are <http://www.enlightened-spirituality.org/neo-advaita.html> and www.naturalnews.com/041497_fake_gurus_donation_scams_fraud.html.

19. "An Interview with David Godman",
<https://www.davidgodman.org/interviews/rs3.shtml>.

20. Like Ramana, the Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya Sufis speak of a particular location for the spiritual Heart. However, on a number of occasions Ramana had more to say on the idea of location on one such occasion, he said "God is said to reside in the Heart in the same way you are said to reside in the body. Yet Heart is not a place. Some place must be named as the dwelling of God for those who take their bodies for themselves and who comprehend only relative knowledge. The fact is neither God nor we occupy any space." S.S. Cohen, *Guru Ramana: Memories and Notes*, p. 97.

21. He experienced it and then understood its significance and began using the word Heart (*Hridaya*) after "seeing literature on the subject". *Talks With Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p119.

22. "Neither of the East nor of the West: The Journey of the Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya from India to America",
http://www.goldensufi.org/article_eastwest.html.

23. Vaughan-Lee, Llewellyn, *The Bond With the Beloved: The Mystical Relationship of the Lover and the Beloved* (Inverness, Ca., 1993), p. 36

24. Vaughan-Lee, p. 36

25. Vaughan-Lee, p. 36

26. Jaideva Singh, *The Yoga of Vibration and Divine Pulsation*, (Albany, NY, 1991, back cover.)
27. Quoted by Mark S. G. Dyczkowski, *The Stanzas on Vibration*, p 15.
28. Dyczkowski, p. 15.
29. Cohen, S. S., *Guru Ramana: Memories and Notes*, p. 82.
30. *Talks With Sri Ramana Maharshi*, (Tiruvannamailai, 1968), p. 116.
31. Vaughan Lee, p. 99.
32. Vaughan-Lee, p. 40.
33. Vaughan-Lee, p. 90.
34. Vaughan-Lee, p. 99.
35. As he observed himself, he who renounced everything—including family—had a very big family.
36. Mudaliar, A. Devaraja, *Day by Day With Bhagavan*, 2002, p. 38.