

Chapter 5

The Neurophilosophy of Meditation

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ABSTRACT

Meditation is the art and science of optimal self-integration. We are naturally nested in Nature. Meditation is being at-peace with oneself and at-home in the world. It is the art of self-observation, learning, and developing presence of mind and selfless love. It is a unique mode of being present in the moment. It is a natural state of health and happiness. We should let go of the vicious cycle of negative feelings and discover the virtuous cycle of positive feelings like joy, cheerfulness, equanimity, friendliness, compassion, and love. This is possible through meditative practices like yoga, mindfulness, flow-state, and nature-experience. With advancement in neurobiology, we can understand how these meditative skills are learned, developed, evolved, and mastered. These meditative skills and lifestyle are the key to positive psychology and mental health. These secular meditative practices are being recommended in our education and health care systems.

EXISTENTIAL UNITY, NONDUALISM AND MENTAL EQUANIMITY

“When, to one who knows (oneness), all beings have, verily, become one with his own self, then what delusion and what sorrow can be to him, who has seen the Oneness”, translated by Radhakrishnan (1953; Isha Upanishad (800 B.C.). “What delusion, what sorrow is there for the wise person who sees the Unity of Existence and perceives all beings as his own self”, translated by Sharvananda (1958). “To the illumined soul, who sees everything as a manifestation of his own self, how can there be delusion or grief since he sees only oneness?”, translated by Krishnamurthy (2019).

Nondualism means *not two* or *one whole reality*, undivided without a second. Nondualism primarily refers to a mature state of consciousness, in which the dichotomy of *I-Other* dissipates, disappears, or it is transcended, and the spontaneous nondual awareness is described as the *selfless* or *centerless presence* without dichotomy.

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“Being steadfast in yoga, O Dhanajaya, perform actions, abandoning attachment, remaining unconcerned as regards to success or failure. This *evenness of mind* is known as yoga, translated by Swarupananda (1909; Bhagavad-Gita 2:48). “Focused in Yoga, do thy work, O Winner of wealth (Arjun), abandoning attachment, with an even mind in the success or failure, for the *evenness of mind* is called Yoga, translated by Radhakrishnan (1948; Bhagavad-Gita 2:48). These three terms point to the same truth of the unitive state of *essential nondual awareness* and the *existential holistic being*.

VEDIC-UPANISHADIC MEDITATION

The non-REM wake state of *Turiya* or *Chaitanyam*, is the fourth state of consciousness-as-such which is non-narrative, non-cognitive, non-conative awareness. It is nondual, non-plural, spontaneous, effortless, selfless, egoless, primal, timeless, eternal, sentient arousal-aware-being. It is the sacred, divine perfection. There is nothing beyond it. It is the *Ground* of all, the *Source* of all. *WE are THAT!* Let all REM dreams, wandering thoughts, mental travel, mind-agitations, ruminations of the past, and simulations of the future, dissipate freely, completely, and naturally into the immeasurable ocean or the sky-like space of *Life's self-experience and existence*. It is the *Consciousness-as-such, Life-as-such*. It is the spontaneous, still, silent, serene, supreme *energy-awareness-being*. It is the ultimate *existential feeling* or *qualia of existential presence*” (Deshmukh, 2020).

Meditation according to the yoga tradition has an exceedingly long history. In fact, the original lineage goes back to the Vedic-Upanishadic period. Most of the *Vedic-Upanishadic* literature is devoted to spiritual growth, *Atmonnati*, and actualization of one's essential being with clear self-understanding. This leads to complete calmness, natural peace of mind and a well-composed being in reality. Vedanta described such a state as *sat-chit-anand* or blissful conscious being. What one personally experiences from moment to moment depends on one's self-perspective or the mindset. One can look at oneself as an isolated living being, a living organism in the environmental niche, a passionate human being, a cognitive intellectual individual, or a holistic human being embedded in its natural surroundings. The extraordinary self-perspective of this existential being is possible only after a profound self-understanding and self-realization. This wise stage in human life has been described in the Upanishads and Bhagavad-Gita as the supreme self-integration, unity and equanimity called *Turiya*, *Sthita-prajña*, *Atma-prasād*, and *Brahmi-sthiti* (Deshmukh, 2011).

Turiya, the fourth state of consciousness as described in *Mandukya Upanishad*, is an extraordinarily inspired state of calm, alert, and intuitive consciousness with self-integration. It can be understood within the framework of modern neuroscience. The author proposed that *Turiya* is a unique conscious state of non-rapid eye movement wakefulness (NREM-W) characterized by a) an optimal attentiveness with freedom from day dreaming and intrusive thoughts, b) behavioral quiescence with no internal speech or restless eye movements, c) heightened perceptual clarity from moment to moment with perceptual-conceptual excellence and d) an enhanced sense of well-being, curiosity, serenity, compassion, and creativity. Many exceptionally gifted people throughout human history seem to have verified the truth of such a unique state. Just as we stand on the shoulders of past intellectual giants to understand and discover what is new in science, so also, we may be guided by the genius and experiences of the ancient seers and philosophers to understand and discover the neuroscience of self-consciousness (Deshmukh, 2004).

The most ancient description of meditation to achieve such self-realization and self-freedom is in the *Mandukya Upanishad*. It has only 12 *mantras* to explain this complex subject and the self-integrative

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