



## Obstacles to Meditation

One dire enemy of meditation is sleep. The moment you try to stop all the activity of the mind and the mind becomes inactive, sleep will come. Knowing this difficulty, Patanjali Maharishi has very wisely prescribed that in the beginning stages of your sadhana practice, you should have some object as your focal point of concentration. And gradually, make the area of concentration smaller and smaller till the mind is left with only a single *vritti* to the exclusion of all other *vrittis*. When you reach the stage of *nirvikalapa* Samadhi, even this *vritti* will subside. Until then, that single *vritti* becomes your greatest help, your greatest *avalamban* (support) for your mind. But for it, you will lapse into sleep.

Another great obstacle is memory, because it is not under your control. When you do not want to remember past things, all of them will come up; they will keep disturbing you when you do not want them. In that state of empty mind, all *vrittis* and memories start coming and imagination starts working havoc.

Another subtle disturbance is the onslaught of hidden desires – desires which you never thought were there. Worst still is the unconscious ambition within the mind. Your ambition can take endless shape. You may think that you are meditating, but you might have gone to a different realm where you begin to imagine this and that – building castles in the air, *manorajya*. The most mysterious portion of it is that you do not know that you are doing it! The thing at the back of castle-building is hidden desires, which you do not know. Certain enjoyments are against spiritual life. When the help of consciousness is withdrawn, they try to come in. In the realm of meditation, they work havoc in the aspirant who does not take extra care to keep them at bay.

They have to be overcome by a number of methods. The salient ones are prayer of God, an earnest surrender to the Guru, practice of the Divine Name, *abhyasa* (unremitting effort) and *vairagya* (dispassion). Divine Name is powerful spiritual force, which can destroy all obstacles and forces that oppose the aspirant in the inward path of meditation and Yoga. The power of the Name cannot be easily realised unless one keeps faith in it and goes on practising it through proper *bhava*. If your *abhyasa* is always supported by *vairagya*, you will be able to overcome the obstacles of sleep, memory, imagination and ambition.

God Bless You!

■ Swami Chidananda