

# Practice of Antar Mouna - Inner Silence

*'If your mind is empty, it is always ready for anything; it is open to everything.'* - Shunayu Suzuki

Recently a couple of people have asked how to bring their monkey mind into silence and perhaps even stillness; giving some respite from the continual chatter that is going on. Yoga helps us with this every time step on the mat...reminding ourselves to be here and now...in the moment...every class I remind you of this right at the beginning as we connect to the natural rhythm of the breath.

The practice of Antar Mouna is a meditation from the tantras and a wonderful practice to befriend. It is not easy, but once mastered you can use anywhere, anytime.

There are 5 stages, but please, do not even think of moving onto the later stages until you have mastered stage one! This is not a quick fix, it takes dedication and a lot of practice, especially if you have a busy head! With a daily practice you will spend at least a couple of months on Stages 1 and 2 before attempting Stage 3.

Antar means inner, mouna means silence. Antar mouna leads us towards attaining pratyahara (withdrawal of the mind from the sense objects), the fifth stage of raja (royal) yoga, and in its fullest form can lead to dharana (concentration) and dhyana (meditation). Antar mouna is also a fundamental part of the Buddhist practice known as vipassana, used in a modified way.

## Stage 1: Awareness of external senses

You can do this stage sitting in an easy pose, whilst driving, cooking...going about your daily things. You are watching anything from the outside that stimulates your senses. Here are some examples:

Consciously aware of the tastes in the mouth whilst eating...the different sensations on the tongue...how the flavours change as the mouth goes from full to empty. Notice the lingering effects of the previous meal if it was a while ago.

Witness the different smells wherever you are...witness the reaction to them.

Feel the bare skin; covered skin; pressure points from sitting or leaning against a chair

Feel how you are moving...whether walking or buttering the toast...connecting with the different sensations of movement...however small witness each movement. The breath moving the clothes against the body; how you put a trowel into the soil to dig a hole.

Aware of all the colours and textures around you...even if you are in the car...or in the garden.

And the sounds...be very aware of sounds...not making decisions about them...but witnessing the different intensities and tones and densities.

What is the purpose of this? Well, if we try to internalise our awareness directly, instantly the monkey mind jumps outside and becomes distracted by the outside sounds, or smells and the sense of touch etc. So the first stage helps us to witness, or become more aware to all the

sensory inputs around us. We have to know what they are and how they affect us, or how we react to them. Three factors are involved in us doing this:

- 1 the external object of perception (smell, taste, sound, sight and touch);
- 2 the external organs of perception (the jnanendriyas: skin, nose, ears, eyes and tongue)
- 3 the internal perceiver – the witness – which knows it is observing; “I know I am listening to the outside sounds and I know that I know” is the form this awareness can take.

Stage 1 raises our awareness of all the sensory perceptions, allowing the sense of hearing to become like a radar for example, picking up the most subtle sounds as well the obvious gross ones, enabling us to become more aware in daily life of our surroundings. However, the actual purpose of this stage is to reduce the influence of the outside impressions on our perception. It is a case of familiarity breeding contempt. The conscious and intentional perception of the outside world automatically leads to disinterest. The mind becomes bored having checked out all the possible distractions and thus ceases to be either interested or disturbed by its environment. We develop the capacity to remain centred, detached, completely undisturbed and unaffected by anything going on around us. Therefore, stage 1 induces the first level of pratyahara, i.e. dissociation of the senses from the outside world, which prepares us to go inside for the second stage.

## **Stage 2: Awareness of the Spontaneous Thought Process**

In stage 2 we leave the outside world and turn inside to work with the mind. We sit so we can watch the mind screen...the space in front of the closed eyes. The aim with stage 2 is to view and exhaust the samskaras - the unhelpful thoughts, experiences, phobias, old memories, emotions or fears...all the things that are holding us back. We are clearing out the rubbish! As we sit and observe we allow spontaneous thoughts, emotions and sensations to come and go. They will appear and dissolve without assistance...like the scent of a flower finds the nostrils and then is gone.

As we sit with Antar Mouna we observe different tendencies of the mind. We may witness how we hold onto thoughts and get lost within them; how we get lost in repetitive patterns. That may lead to us then losing the purpose of the practice. These are tricks of the mind...but when we notice we can come back to it. By observing the play of the mind with the attitude of the witness, eventually the thoughts lose their emotional force...eventually even the most painful of thoughts may be let go of.

So in Stage 2 we:

Allow the mind total freedom to think anything it wants, let thoughts bubble up spontaneously, whilst at the same time being aware of emotions, feelings associated with the thoughts. But, we are not judging or criticising.

There may be many thoughts all at once...there may only be a trickle or hardly any. Just be vigilant in being aware of watching the process of them coming up. Watch as if watching a TV... an uninvolved spectator watching a stream of things across the screen - with detachment.

Over time and lots of practice, the number of thoughts begins to thin out. The mind begins to become a little quieter - this is not necessarily silence though and do check that you haven't just fallen asleep! The tendency to sleep - especially as a beginner - is the mind suppressing something it does not want to confront. It is as if the mind knows there is a change coming, that you are taking control, possibly as you ask the question 'What am I thinking now?' And the mind decides to shut down and let you sleep because it doesn't want you to take back control. If this happens take a moment, sit quietly, imagine watching an empty road and sure enough another thought will come, the chatter will slowly restart.

As you practice stage 2 be open, honest, have courage...much may become revealed. Some things may be beautiful reminders, other things may be challenging perhaps even things you had completely forgotten about and sometimes even ugly things. But through this process we learn to befriend the mind and how it works. This process helps us to accept ourselves fully - as we really are.

### **Stage 3: Creation and disposal of thoughts at will**

In this stage we consciously create and dispose of thoughts at will. It's the complete opposite of Stage 2 as spontaneous thoughts are not allowed!

You may choose a particular theme or thoughts and look at it fully from all angles; if someone else is involved look at it from their point of view too. After a few minutes...throw it out of the mind...cut it off. Then chose another theme. Repeat this for as long as you have time for. You are choosing to confront the themes or issues.

In stage 2 we are releasing mental tension by allowing thoughts to come up without any inhibition. But in Stage 3, by choosing the themes we also allow the associated thoughts and memories to surface. Using the analogy of fishing, the mind is baited with a thought. The bait is put into the water (subconscious mind) and attracts other fish (deeply rooted sub and unconscious thoughts or impressions) which are caught and brought to the surface and then released. As these are released they lose their force and emotional power, allowing us to have better undressing and clarity about ourselves.

### **Stage 4 Awareness and Disposal of Spontaneous thoughts**

In this stage spontaneous thoughts are to be awakened, but they are to be allowed spontaneity. This is a refinement of the above stages but there is no point doing this stage until you have really mastered Stages 2 and 3.

In stage 4 the disposal of the thought, when that point comes to dispose of it, you dispose of the thought at will. The thought doesn't just go...its departure depends upon your will to let it go.

All thoughts from your subconscious mind are allowed to come up spontaneously - although by this stage the mind will be much calmer. The thoughts will be a different quality, arriving from a deeper more subtle space.

Remain detached so as not to become distracted. The internal witness is really strong in this stage.

## **Stage 5: Awareness of the Inner Space**

This stage takes brings us to the awareness of inner space.

Sitting you will be aware of the mind screen - space in front of the closed eyes...the chidakasha.

Aware of this space but no thoughts...the mind blank, but awareness and alertness still maintained. It is not sleep it is shoonya. But you are so alert that if any thought comes into your mind you immediately dispose of it. You do not think about it or recognise it...you immediately release it out.

If images come you will need to dissolve them into formlessness. For example if an image of a tree comes up, spill water on it like a water colour so it dissolves .

In this stage the only thought to be allowed is 'I shall have no thoughts.'

### **To recap:**

Stage 1 - inner silence is to remain aware of sense experiences with absolute indifference and with an attitude of being a witness.

Stage 2 - is the spontaneous incoming and outgoing of thought processes

Stage 3 - is thinking at will, pondering at will and disposing at will all the thoughts

Stage 4 - incoming of spontaneous thoughts, disposal of thoughts at your will

Stage 5 - thoughtlessness! Any thought that rises is immediately disposed of, but by this stage there will be fewer of them.

## **Benefits of Antar Mouna**

We learn to understand and befriend the mind

We learn to train the monkey mind and learn the ability to witness and observe all that happens

We learn to clear the mind of things that are no longer helpful or beneficial to us

Helps us to eradicate mental noise; bringing a state of peace and calm into the mind

Develops one pointedness

It helps us to transform negativity into positivity

Leads us to a meditative state, steadiness and calmness of mind.

## **Practice in Daily Life**

Stages 1 and 2 are active practices and can be done in normal daily life...you don't have to be just sat still. Antar Mouna is a really helpful tool to learn about yourself and your hidden treasures and sides and your mind...and to see how you react to life's situations in a clear and honest way.

Stage 1 - try practicing when next on a train, in a crowd, as you eat or are in the shower

Stage 2 - reflect on the question 'What am I thinking now?', 'What is happening in my mental or emotional sphere?'

But remind yourself....

**'I am not these thoughts and I am not these emotions , I am the observer.'**

In this way the witness process begins and becomes an automatic response to show you who you really are; what you are doing here; where you are going; and how to fulfil your true potential and develop true peace of mind.

Reference:

'Meditations from the Tantras' - Swami Satyananda Saraswati, Bihar 2004