

Toward the One, the Perfection of Love, Harmony, and Beauty,
the Only Being, United with All the Illuminated Souls
Who Form the Embodiment of the Master, the Spirit of Guidance.

Githa

Series I Number 1

Concentration Practices

GITHA: First Week: Take an object from the mantelpiece or from the furniture in the room, a fruit, or a flower. Place it before you, and focus your eyes upon it.

TASAWWUF: As concentration is a practice of the Sufis which can be performed in everyday life, it is not necessary to go far to find some object upon which to focus one's attention and whereon to center one's mind. Although concentration has for its highest purpose the union with Allah, yet God is to be found in all things and it is through concentration that this can be accomplished, especially in the outer world.

It is well to begin with a simple object. If a fruit or flower is selected, let it not be in the stage of decay. By "simple" is meant one of geometric or elementary design, not having too much detail so that even a little child would be able to grasp it. Symbols and pictures are not so desirable at the commencement, at least for class work.

The mureeds should not sit too close together, so that the breath of each may move freely. It is also necessary that each sit so that the object can be easily observed. Therefore it is not required that the object be placed upon an altar. It may be put upon a table in the center of the room, although if the class can remain seated in crescent fashion it is better. The less things can come under observance the easier the concentration.

GITHA: Inhale and exhale rhythmically without letting your glance waver.

TASAWWUF: Practice of Fikr is of great assistance to concentration. Also to keep the heart and mind on "Toward the One" with each inhalation and exhalation (Darood). This should be continued until all inhalations are equal and all exhalations are equal and there is a balance between inhalation and exhalation. Although this seems very simple it is one of the most important factors in the process of concentration and its very simplicity often causes it to be overlooked.

GITHA: Keep all other thoughts away from the mind.

TASAWWUF: The general condition of a person may cause the rhythm to be slow or rapid, deep or shallow, but it is rhythm and not tempo or quality that is important. Of course during concentration rhythm may change, but the first requisite is to establish some rhythm. The secret is, if the rhythm is maintained this will of itself automatically hold the glance. The glance wavers when one is not in rhythm, because then one is not in tune with one's own being.

Fikr is assigned to talibs for this purpose. One most important object in concentration is to attain mastery on the mental plane. The first three years of discipleship are largely devoted to attaining some degree of mastery on the physical plane, so to speak, and then the next period, when the

Githas are studied, to attaining mental mastery. The spiritual practices are also assigned to assist in this growth and development.

The real secret of mastery comes in rhythm and attunement. If the breath is controlled by the will, it is not so difficult to keep other thoughts away. The will-power, used to regulate the breath, can be more easily co-ordinated to the glance, until this process becomes automatic, and so keeps away foreign thoughts from the mind.

GITHA: And impress the mind strongly with the object before you.

TASAWWUF: This is the real problem. If the talib constantly watches the breath, using Fikr when there are intruding thoughts, it will not be so hard to carve an impression in the mental atmosphere of the object viewed.

GITHA: Look at it for fifteen minutes and hold it in the mind for fifteen minutes, and continue to do so until the object is visualized concretely before your mind's eye.

TASAWWUF: There are often obstacles in one's path. If the mind is not strongly attracted to the object, it will not retain impression. Therefore Fikr is enjoined. After looking at an object with the eye, it is still necessary to keep the heart and mind protected against extraneous thoughts and impressions.

While doing this work it is sometimes wise to keep a diary, making more or less detailed reports of one's progress. When symbols are assigned to talibs, especially at this stage or later, they often serve a double purpose of accomplishing the principles conveyed by concentration and also reaching the heart through attunement.

GITHA: Watch the progress each day and continue this for a week.

TASAWWUF: This time is arbitrary but serves as a norm for assignments. Even if the talib finds it easy to hold the object in the mind, it is often well to continue to full period as it brings greater light in the mind and so greater scope for development. However, along with spiritual growth comes increase in insight, and when spiritual experiences occur in concentration it is always important to note them. This will be especially true of clairvoyants of all classes.

GITHA: Second Week: Change the object; observe for twenty minutes, and hold the thought for twenty minutes.

TASAWWUF: It is almost impossible to select flowers which can be used for over one week. Objects as vases, geometric forms, wax flowers and some fruits, as apples, retain their form. Symbols, such as the six-pointed star, which are not usually used in the Sufic spiritual work, may also be used. Also books of some kinds.

At first the object is just to impress the form and so the inner meaning of things will not affect the exercises very much. If talibs are given short concentrations in the earlier stages they may not find this work so difficult and with some progress will be rapid. Beginning with three minute concentrations in the first year and increasing it to at least ten minutes in the third year, it becomes a preparation for longer concentrations.

GITHA: Third Week: Change the object; observe for twenty-five minutes, hold the thought for twenty-five minutes.

TASAWWUF: Arrangement of time can be by a monitor, or a teacher. The gong may be struck at the appointed time, or somebody may say, "Amen." Sometimes an electric bell can be rung in another room, or some other signal which will not cause too great a shock. Should a mureed continue in the concentration over time, especially, in class work, it is not advisable to approach him unless it is evident he has fallen asleep. In that case it is sometimes well to ascertain the cause for sleepiness which is primarily due to lack of attention to the breath, maintaining its proper rhythm and equilibrium.

GITHA: Fourth Week. Change the object; observe for half-an-hour, hold the thought for half-an-hour.

TASAWWUF: This last practice can be continued indefinitely. The later lessons assign other methods for concentration, and for these the time may be altered, beginning with shorter periods and lengthening them. Also the ideal held in concentration is raised. One begins first with simple material objects, and seeks a definite effect on the mental plane from material objects. It is only later that one gradually adopts concentration for more spiritual purposes; yet this method, studied stage by stage and step by step becomes a ladder which brings one even to God-hood.

Of course this does not mean that the exercises stop at the end of four weeks. But what follows is determined first by the progress shown, and then by the need for higher development as well as the comprehension of the teachings of the Githas as they are studied.

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Githa

Series I Number 10

Developing Mind by Concentration

GITHA: Real concentration is the forming of the concrete picture of the object of concentration in the mind.

TASAWWUF: Steadiness of gaze is not enough nor even retention in memory. It is the definite effect upon the mental atoms, engraving forms and ideas in the light of that plane which proves the concentration.

GITHA: Lack of concentration comes from the wavering nature of the mind, and the mind wavers by lack of proper exercise.

TASAWWUF: The mind has been symbolized as water and as mercury, the waves of which are not so steady and have to be stilled in spiritual evolution. Use of the mind is not the same as exercise of the mind, any more than use of the muscle is the same as exercise of the muscle. Exercise is control under law for the purpose of strengthening and development. Sufis practice *Safa*, purification, which is the inner ablution of the mind and together with concentration bring that power to the mind which benefits it most.

GITHA: As the body develops with physical exercise so the mind develops by concentration.

TASAWWUF: And there is more in this also, that even as the body benefits more from proper breath-control than by mere lifting of weights, so in exercising the mind the breath can be of great assistance. As more work can be accomplished by the mind by the maintenance of rhythm of breath, so from the very beginning one is trained to maintain rhythm also in developing the mind and psychic power.

GITHA: The great hindrance that stands against concentration is the thought of one's own being.

TASAWWUF: It is the thought of one's own being which becomes the *nufs* and it is the greatest obstacle in one's path in every experience of life if one only knew it. The *nufs* is not the thought of self alone so much as the thought of self which has been given power and life by continual concentration upon it, vitalizing it to such a degree that it seems to become of greatest importance.

Atoms on the mental plane are given life by continual thought, for what brings light to them brings life also. This particular thought, by receiving so much attention actually obscures other thoughts. It is not the self, and should not be confused with the self; *nufs* is the thought of self made apparently real and living through continual concentration and movement of breath until it produces a fog and a veil over the true being and usurps its place in life.

GITHA: When one thinks of one's own presence and at the same time thinks, "I am concentrating on a certain object," at that time it is impossible to have full concentration.

TASAWWUF: Because there are two thoughts upon the mind and where there are two thoughts there is not concentration. Besides that, every thought has—the tendency to cast a shadow over every other thought and thus interfere with the light of intelligence on the mental plane. The thought of self, more than anything else, interferes with all other thoughts and so stands as an obstacle to spiritual practices and all forms of concentration, spiritual or intellectual. It colors and shades all mental phenomena and thereby produces shadows. These shadows set up the condition of dualism in Ajsam and so befog the soul on the physical plane.

GITHA: The more one loses the thought of his own being from his consciousness, the more he becomes capable of concentration.

TASAWWUF: The thought of one's being being a thought and not an essence, it naturally prevents concentration. The same is true if other interests or persons attract one more than the object or subject of concentration. Generally they are easy to discern for love takes on forms, which, whether desirable or undesirable, have effects on the mind of a definite nature, but the thought of self is often a life concentration and so much more powerful. It not only sets a mark upon the mind, but touches the consciousness also and keeps it covered by the denseness of the earth.

The basic purpose of spiritual training is to free the individual from this self-created "self," so to speak, and let him live as a God-created "self," which was the intention of creation.

GITHA: As self-consciousness is the enemy of a speaker, singer, doctor or a lawyer, so it is the greatest enemy of the one who concentrates. Concentration is to avoid self-consciousness, and at the same time self-consciousness is the only thing that keeps one from progress.

TASAWWUF: The Hindus have the method of repeating "neti, neti," not this, not this. Sufis believe that the thought of negation of self has the same or a similar effect to the thought of the emphasis of self positively. In either case the nufs throws a shadow over the soul in manifestation, preventing it from perceiving its path.

On the higher planes the soul gives no attention to differences and so destroys their importance, but in Malakut it perceives as an individual, it sees itself as separate and pays so much attention to its distinct condition that this feeling of i-ness or **Ahankara** blinds it to the light which is its true self. Then the shadow continues before one as a veil over the purpose of existence.

Even self-consciousness may be called a thought. Consciousness is; the earth has no existence apart from the solar system and a person has no existence apart from the stream of consciousness. The reality is in the consciousness and the allusion in the separation, which is for convenience only. Therefore in Buddhism it is taught that there is no ego, there is no individual soul, the reality being the stream of cosmic consciousness.

GITHA: The Sufi, while concentrating, uses abstinence against the constant and uncontrollable activity of the mind.

TASAWWUF: Just as the earth is in constant motion, so the atoms of the mental sphere are in constant motion, being of a finer nature, their motion is much more rapid, fluidic and harder to fix. The Sufi, by use of Fikr and Darood gains a control over these atoms by first getting into the proper rhythm of being. That is, he attunes his inner being to the rate of vibration of these atoms and so can

overtake them in their movements, as a man catching a wild horse has to get into a sort of attunement with his motions and then it is not so difficult to capture that horse. And this has been made the basis of much in symbol and in myth portraying this inner condition and struggle.

Whenever there is loss of attention, whenever it appears difficult to hold atoms together on the mental plane, whenever one feels a lack in concentration, Fikr of some form is practiced. Continuous Fikr with determination actually becomes a most powerful concentration, where feeling and will are united. This develops the rhythm of consciousness so it is much more rapid than mental activity, for the atoms of feeling are finer than those of thought and can easily control them when the consciousness is placed in feeling. Then, just as a more rapid object can overtake a slower one, the soul raised to this pitch by feeling and devotion controls all thought.

In the path of mastery there is one task—to seek God, and thereby all other tasks are accomplished and what for the average man is considered a concentration becomes for him a need and a delight.

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