

Meditation and its effect upon conduct

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The human being is a creature who is ordinarily governed by impulses which rise within him comparatively unwatched and unguarded. If he feels happy or melancholy, angry or patient, his action reflects the conditions of his being, and if one reproach him for faults which might disappear with a little self-control he is apt to reply-"Well, I am made that way, and I can't help it."

He is only conscious of the physical impulse which prompts a certain nervous expression and he has not yet learned that there are two of him and that if he would become acquainted with his greater self, the soul or reality, life might be very different, and the disagreeable elements of his temperamental man could easily disappear.

There is a wave of psychological study passing over the world which has many excellent results and which is causing many persons who never gave much thought previously to the existence of the "inner man" to perceive something of this interesting individual, who presently becomes vastly more important as an element of personality than is indicated by that mysterious and baffling term, "the subconscious". The subconscious is in fact the true self, the soul, or as 'Abdu'l-Bahá often calls it, the reality.

There is no part of his wonderful teaching which is more clear and convincing than that relating to the soul in its contact with life, the body, and God. As we follow it we realize that the soul is the avenue through which we know God and receive the Holy Spirit, that it is always a distinct entity becoming more luminous and powerful as we turn to God and control the animal man in us. It often surrounds us like an aureole in our earlier stages of development, but as we progress, and reflect its light, it leaves us free even in our waking hours and carries on its own activity. The subconscious, in other words, is the true thinker and revealer in us, through whom words become real prayer, and impulse becomes intuition and veritable guidance.

But how is this possible? We ask anxiously, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's reply is, through prayer, meditation and deeds, because without the deeds which express the results of meditation and prayer these remain only delightful experiences of the soul, and do not transform life. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says in the great address on meditation in the Paris Talks-the one who cannot meditate is still in the animal kingdom!

Many persons are not aware of the difference between concentration and meditation, which is very positive. Through concentration we enter the psychic or mental world, we hypnotize, we develop the personal will. But in meditation we enter the Abhá kingdom by temporarily eliminating the personal will. In this state we penetrate the consciousness of the reality, and can receive the divine commands through the Holy Spirit, and if we are strong enough to obey the commands we receive our impulses are overcome, we obtain eternal life and become rational beings instead of merely animals who walk erect.

Many believers are only mental believers. They have never taken time to abstract themselves from the turmoil of the outer life and hear the "still, small voice" which is only audible to the inner ear. Bahá'u'lláh says: "We speak one word and by it we intend one and seventy meanings-each one of them we can explain."

These one and seventy meanings are not simply shades of mental and spiritual interpretation but often facts of life which we can only understand through prayer and self-control. The individual who is no longer capable of anger, envy, ambition or revenge, who does not feel such impulses, who is made ill by indulgence in gossip and scandal, and therefore no longer tolerates them has entered the spiritual path and is beginning to know eternal life.

These are some of the results of real meditation, when it is sought as a means of purifying the outer man, not merely as a spiritual pleasure and intoxication. The latter is delightful but not educating, and people who form the habit of meditation without deeds sometimes fall into serious nervous trouble. Meditation lights a fire within us which demands fuel, the fuel of growth and thoughtful activity, and if we refuse to feed it with these, it is liable to burn up its own oven! And this, of course, is not particularly agreeable or advantageous for the oven.

However, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says: "The test of existence is motion. An object which has in itself the power of motion lives; if motion is withheld growth ceases. That is mortality. ... If the reality of man is not confirmed by the divine power there is no doubt whatsoever but that it will stop along the path of human progress, and after its stop there will be a fall."

The confirmation of this divine power comes to us through meditation and its resultant deeds. And one sees the great advance daily among those who are seeking spiritual truth. Sight comes into the eyes, happiness to the heart, and though outward circumstances may not be what one desires, the light and happiness are not diminished. Such light and such happiness are from within and are not dependent upon exterior happenings.