

Observations & Views:

### *Two Consonant Views of Meditation*

#### *Popular View:*

All those who practice meditation are aware of its beneficial effects. Some informative excerpts presenting the popular view of meditation are given below:<sup>1</sup>

Anchor Bob Abernethy observed, “Scientists have long found an association between relaxation and health. Now, there is new evidence that meditation and other spiritual practices have a beneficial and measurable effect on the brain. In a new book, *How God Changes Your Brain*, Andrew Newberg reports that meditation improves memory and reduces stress, and that the kind of God you worship can affect the structure of your brain.”

Coach Vincent Fedor, who practices meditation, remarked, “I think I’ve become a calmer, more tolerant person. If the situation comes up I don’t go to the angry side. I go take the calmer road. And you know, I think the kids see this. I think I’ve become a better coach because of it.”

Dr. Andrew Newberg of University of Pennsylvania said, “Religion and spirituality do help to lower a person’s feelings of depression, anxiety, gives them some meaning in life, helps them to cope with things and that’s going to have a potentially very beneficial effect.”

Correspondent Lucky Severson added, “But Newberg has made another discovery, a controversial one. That our belief system, how we view God can make a huge difference in how it affects our well being. If we believe in a loving God it can have a positive effect, even prolong our lives. But believing in a judgmental authoritarian God can produce fear, anger and stress, and that’s not healthy.”

In Jainism, a soul that purifies itself becomes God. Such supreme soul is beyond attachment and aversion (VEETARAAG). So the question of a loving God or a judgmental authoritarian God does not arise. Jains are self-reliant. All worldly beings depend on self-endeavor and mutual cooperation.

#### *Jain Scriptural View:*

Jain scriptures teach that our thoughts and feelings play a significant role in bondage as well as fruition of karma. Accordingly, meditation plays

---

<sup>1</sup> Presented on the PBS Program ‘Religion and Ethics’ of July 17, 2009

an important role in the spiritual progress of an individual. Further, it brings about contentment and peace of mind in present life.

The Jain scriptures present a comprehensive view of meditation. A few verses from SAMAN SUTTAM's chapter on meditation are presented below:<sup>2</sup>

SEESAM JAHA SAREERASSA, JAHA MOOLAM DUMMASSA YA:  
SAVVASSA SAADHUDHAMMASSA, TAHA JHAANAM VIDHEEYATE:1:

Of all the religious practices followed by a mendicant,  
meditation is esteemed to possess an utmost import,  
just like the head – the faculty of thought, to a body  
and like roots that obtain nourishment for a tree.

JASSA NA VIJJADI RAAGO, DOSO MOHO VA JOGAPARIKAMMO:  
TASSA SUHAASUH DAHANO, JHAANAMA O JAAYAE AGGI:4:

An individual who is free from attachment and aversion,  
has no delusion, no activities of body, speech or mind,  
lights up the fire of a veritable meditation  
that consumes the auspicious and inauspicious karmas.

GARAHYANIYADUCHCHARIO, KHAMIYASATTO NIYATTIAPAMAAO:  
NICHCHALACHITTO TA JHAHI, JAAV PURAOVVA PADIHAAIE:7:

One makes a determination of not repeating  
one's past wrongdoings, begs forgiveness of all,  
renounces negligence and steadies one's mind;  
and, causes the object of meditation to sparkle.

JE INDIYANAM VISAYA MANUNNA, NA TESU BHAAVAM NISIRE KAYAAIE:  
NA YAAMANUNNESU MANM PI KUJJA, SAMAAHIKAAME SAMANE TAVASSI:9:

A person devoted to penance and performing meditation  
avoids pleasant thoughts of means of sensual pleasures;  
further, he/she does not indulge in unhappy thoughts  
of sorrowful and painful objects and occasions.

SUVUDIYAJAGASSABHAVO, NISSANGO NIBBHAO NIRAAISO YA:  
VERAGGABHAAVIYAMANO, JHAANAMMI SUNICHCHALO HOI:10:

Realizing the nature of worldly existence,  
one gives up attachment, anxiety and desires;  
one embraces feelings of renunciation and  
with determination becomes immersed in meditation.

---

<sup>2</sup> Reproduced from Jain Study Circular, July-October 1996.

SAMAN SUTTAM is a compilation of excerpts from various ancient Jain scriptures,

## Observations & Views

DEHAVIVITTAM PECHCHHAI, APPAANAM TAH YA SAVVASANJOGE:  
DEHOVAHIVOSAGGAM, NISSANGO SAVVAHA KUNAI:12:

An aspirant realizes that soul is distinct from the body  
and from all external living and non-living objects,  
renounces all attachment from the external world,  
from all physical afflictions that plague the body.

NAATEETAMATTHAM NA YA AAGAMISSAM, ATTHAM NIYACHCHHANTI TAHAAGAYA HU:  
VIDHOOTAKAPPE EYAANUPASSI, NIJJHOSAITTA KHAVAGE MAHESI:17:

Those who have achieved spiritual progress  
do not look back and are not concerned about the future;  
devoid of all illusions, they deal with the present;  
they transform and ultimately shed their karmas.

NA KASAAYASAMUTTHEHI YA, VAHIJJAEI MAANASEHIN DUKKHEHIN:  
ISA-VISAAYA-SOGA-EIEHIN, JHAANOVAGAYACHITTO:19:

An individual absorbed in deep meditation,  
one who is engaged in contemplation of self,  
has no mental afflictions arising from passions  
such as jealousy, sorrow and lamentation.

CHAALIJJAEI BEEBHEIE YA, DHEERO NA PAREESAHOVASAGGEHIN:  
SUHUMESU NA SAMMUCHCHHAEI, BHAVESU NA DEVAMAAYAASU:20:

A valiant person in meditation is not disturbed by  
natural and man-made calamities and afflictions,  
unconcerned about illusions and apparitions,  
he/she does not entertain unwelcome thoughts.

\* \* \* \* \*

### *An Ideal Hospital*

Based on the PBS Program 'Religion and Ethics' broadcast on Saturday, July 4, 2009

This is the story of the world's largest eye care center, the Aravind Eye Hospital at Madurai, India. Dr. Govindappa Venkatswamy founded Aravind Hospital after retiring from a government hospital in 1976. Dr. Venkatswamy never took a salary. In fact, he mortgaged his home to start Aravind. He also inspired 34 members of his extended family to work at the hospital. His sister Natchiar and her husband, both left surgical careers in America to work with him for about \$20 a month.

Dr. Venkatswamy started with a small 11-bed hospital with four doctors, three from his own family. The hospital would serve patients who could pay and the profits would afford free care to the many more

people who couldn't even afford bus fare. The hospital works on this principle. Today it is an institution that provides one stop care for its patients. It even manufactures many of the lenses and instruments needed. Describing the hospital system, Correspondent Fred De Sam Lazaro stated, "It looks like any of India's high tech centers where rich Indians and medical tourists can get first-world care at third-world prices. The surgical error rate is as low here as any place in America." The big difference is that there is no profit motive, no commercials, no highly paid administrators, no insurance companies and no lawyers. It is founded on dedication to constructive service involving no pomp and show, glitz and glitter, or charades and pretensions. Aravind Eye Hospital reaches patients through screening camps in surrounding rural areas.

Dr. Venkatswamy developed his hospital system along the business model of the American chain stores. Dr. Venkatswamy died in 2005 but his legacy continues. At present his nephew, ophthalmologist Aravind Srinivasan, manages a system that has grown to five regional hospitals and 25 satellite clinics. The original hospital is a 32-year-old institution, geared to see about 700 patients a day. But at present it is handling about 1500 to 2000 patients a day. Each patient pays about one dollar for a doctor's appointment, which funds an equal number of patients who go next door to a free eye hospital.

The hospital is run like an assembly-line operation. Patients are promised a completed appointment in two hours. Registration takes about 5 minutes, vision test about 10 minutes, refraction check about 10 minutes.

At Aravind, the doctors perform about 300 surgeries per day, about half of them free of charge. Describing some details, De Sam Lazaro observed, "Increasingly, however, patients are seen outside the hospital. Telemedicine connects doctors to satellite clinics, and today's eye camps offer much more on site—from grinding eye glass lenses to digital scans. Near the camp a satellite truck beamed high resolution images to specialists at the hospital. Technology has improved care, and it has also brought down costs—notably for the intraocular lenses, which are implanted during cataract surgery. They used to be imported.

"Aravind began making its own intraocular lenses back in the early 1990s. They used to cost between \$50 and \$100 each. Today they are made in this factory for as little as two dollars a piece. Aravind lenses are exported to 120 countries, and they own eight percent of the global market in intraocular lenses. This factory is an example of how Aravind turned a supply problem into an opportunity.

“It’s not just business acumen that drives the mission, but also a firm spiritual basis, inspired by the teachings of Sri Aurobindo, a mid-20th century spiritual leader. He believed that good work and good ideas are a manifestation of the divine.”

R. D. Thulasiraj, Aravind’s Executive, reinforced similar ideas in the following words, “Part of that is to recognize that whatever ideas you get, it’s not really your ideas. They are divine ideas. So ... you kind of act on it but are not taking the egoistic ownership to those ideas, like ‘I have done it?’ So ... you train yourself to open up?”

Aravind has shared its ideas by training about 250 hospitals in 40 nations by helping them adopt its efficient methods. Aravind voluntarily and resolutely shares its intellectual property with other institutions.

De Sam Lazaro remarked, “She (Dr. Venkatswamy’s sister, Dr. G. Natchiar) says the satisfaction of seeing patients ... restored to full lives makes up for any material privation, although over the years salaries at Aravind have greatly improved for the 220 doctors and some 2500 other staff.”

It is interesting to compare Aravind Eye Hospital system with the health care system in America. On the Religion and Ethics Program of July 24, 2009, correspondent Lucky Severson observed, “If Medicare costs are any measure, Miami-Dade County should have the best senior care in the country. The federal health program spends over \$16,000 a year per patient. ... Brian Keeley ... the CEO of Baptist Health South Florida, ... says huge Medicare costs do not translate to better health care.”

Commenting on the reasons for high cost of health care, Severson added, “The threat of lawsuits forces many doctors to practice defensive medicine, ordering more tests and procedures to protect themselves from being sued. Health care professionals here cited malpractice suits as another factor behind spiraling costs, and Medicare fraud in South Florida, particularly in the home health care industry, has been described as rampant.”

Similar concerns about the health care system in USA, which is driven by profit motive, have been expressed by Marcia Angell, a physician and Senior Lecturer in the Department of Social Medicine at Harvard University Medical School, and the first woman Editor-in-Chief of the New England Journal of Medicine. Commenting on the proposal for health care reform, she remarked,<sup>3</sup> “What he [President Obama] has essentially advocated is throwing more money into the current system. He’s treating

---

<sup>3</sup> On the PBS Program ‘Bill Moyers’ Journal of July 27, 2009.

the symptom and he's not treating the underlying cause of our problem. Our problem is that we spend two and a half times as much per person on health care as other advanced countries, the average of other advanced countries. And we don't get our money's worth. So, now he says, okay, this is a terribly inefficient, wasteful system. Let's throw some money into it.”

During the discussion, Dr. Angell observed, “We are the only advanced country in the world that has chosen to leave health care to the tender mercies of a panoply of for-profit businesses, whose purpose is to maximize income and not to provide health.”

In contrast, the Aravind Eye Hospital exemplifies Mahatma Gandhi's vision of independent India. Great things can be achieved if greed and its euphemisms and excuses, such as competition and freedom of choice, are precluded.

\* \* \* \* \*

*We must be the change we wish to see in the world.*

- Mahatma Gandhi

*A foolish faith in authority is the worst enemy of truth.*

- Albert Einstein (From Reader's Digest, May 2007)

*Nonviolence is not inaction. It is not discussion.  
It is not for the timid or weak... Non-violence is hard work.  
It is the willingness to sacrifice. It is the patience to win.*

- Cesar Chavez