Reviews

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The Heartfulness Way: Heart-Based Meditations for Spiritual Transformation
Kamlesh D Patel and Joshua Pollock


Meditation means to think, contemplate, ponder, or devise. Generally, the word ‘meditation’ is used in the sense of contemplation. The goal of meditation can be anything from the material to the spiritual. One could meditate on an object, person, form, sequence of events, or idea. One may meditate to have a better physical and mental health. One might meditate to get rid of the bondage that is the body and the mind, and get liberated from the transmigratory cycle of repeated births and deaths. This liberation is called mukti. Meditation has been there probably since the advent of humanity on this earth. And one cannot say with certainty that the other living beings do not meditate! Of course, they cannot communicate their ideas about different kinds of meditations in a language comprehensible by us humans. The hustle-bustle of the modern life of aspirations and achievements has brought psychological well-being and emotional satisfaction to a grave peril. Nothing contents us anymore. More and finer degrees of any kind of enjoyment is available to all just for demand.

It is in this background of one of the most volatile ages of human civilisation, at least as far as rootedness in one’s mental poise is concerned, that meditation has acquired a never-before felt importance. Though often it is touted as a magic pill to cure all malaise, meditation of any kind requires some kind of discipline of the body and the mind. The availability of varied meditative practices, both religious and otherwise, befuddle the unlearned about which kind of practice to choose. Tomes on meditation available to buy or read online, do not help either.

This book is one of the few in a great corpus of literature on meditation, that makes understanding meditation effortless. Not posing as a one-cure-for-all instant solution, this book attunes and trains a person’s mind, and makes one ready to get immersed in meditation, which according to Kamlesh D Patel and Joshua Pollock can be done only through practice.

Pollock assures us that ‘no book can ever transform us. A book may give us wisdom, but it cannot make us wise. A book can give us knowledge, but it cannot make us experience the truth of that knowledge. What this book offers is an experiential method that has helped many individuals discover that truth for themselves’ (xv).

This book is written as a dialogue between Pollock and Patel, who is endearingly called Daaji by his followers. He is the fourth guide in the lineage of gurus of the Heartfulness Way or Sahaj Marg method of meditation of the Sri Ram Chandra Mission. Written in a lucid style, this book gives a good grounding on the necessity and importance of meditation in our lives. Pollock emphasises the need for practice in meditation: ‘In any experiment, there is an experimenter, there is a subject to be experimented upon, and there is a result. In the spiritual experiment, all three roles belong to you. You are the experimenter, you are the subject of the experiment, and you are its result. With such an experiment, there is never any finality, but only an ongoing process of discovery. That is the joy and wonder of Heartfulness’ (xvi).

Daaji says: ‘Initially, people tend to approach meditative practice with a wide spectrum of aims. For example, many people suffer from a stressful lifestyle. They want a way to relax. Someone else
wants to reduce blood pressure. Another person seeks mental clarity. Others want emotional balance. But when they start meditation, they soon begin to harvest benefits that far exceed these aims. Often, people are surprised to report a profound sense of spiritual well-being—a state reflected by the presence of inner joy and even bliss. It is as if a hungry person asks for a small scrap of food, but then, someone surprises them with a banquet (4).

Daaji tells us that meditation ‘creates naturalness’ and as one proceeds ‘toward naturalness, that which is unnatural in you starts to disappear’ (5). Practical experience of spirituality is the only way to transcend differences. Daaji says that when ‘we lack practical experience, the various religions appear to speak different languages’ (8). A mere theoretical knowledge of various religions does not help us in affirming their validity or understanding the fact that all religions are proceeding towards truth. Meditation makes both ‘knowledge and experience ... extremely useful’ (11). Inner change depends, says Daaji, on ‘whether there is more of me or less of me’ or ‘whether there is more of God or less of God’ (12). He compares the stubborn ego to a stubborn donkey. While everyone meditates in one way or the other doing one’s day-to-day activities, the ‘object of meditation makes all the difference. A profound object gives us a profound consciousness. A mundane object gives us a mundane consciousness. A temporary object makes our meditative state of mind temporary. A profound, changeless object makes our meditation permanent’ (17).

About the mind being restless or disturbed, Daaji says: ‘Many say that the mind’s nature is to be restless ... I would like to dispel that notion. ... When something draws your attention and holds it there, you become unmindful of unwanted thoughts. You only need to give your mind something to sink its teeth into—something really absorbing. Then you will observe just how naturally it stabilizes, how effortlessly it focuses’ (18). Daaji calls meditation an ‘effortless focus’ (21). He poignantly defines desire: ‘Desire is the soul’s misdirected urge for completion’ (ibid.). Echoing the words of the Upanishads, he says that the mind seeks ‘a fulfillment to end all fulfillments’ (24).

Getting stuck to one particular stage of meditation or expecting the next stage are great pitfalls in the practice. Daaji assures us that ‘whatever you may experience, there is always something beyond it’ (37). Love is defined as ‘something that never really arrives. We approach it, and before we arrive, we have already transcended it. But we never pass through it! It gets closer and closer, and when it can get no closer, the whole business is already behind us. It is a mysterious thing!’ (43). Daaji tells us that meditation ‘is really a form of waiting—relaxed, patient waiting, without any expectation’ (90).

Daaji says that raja yoga ‘incorporates’ karma, bhakti, and jnana yogas and hence it is called the ‘king of yogas’. (44). He says that only meditation can fulfil any of these yogas. This is quite contrary to what Swami Vivekananda says when he propounds that the same truth can be attained by each of the four yogas. Swamiji says: ‘Karma-Yoga ... is a system of ethics and religion intended to attain freedom through unselfishness ... The Karma-Yogi need not believe in any doctrine whatever. He may not believe even in God, may not ask what his soul is, nor think of any metaphysical speculation’ (The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 1.111). It is clear that Swamiji’s karma yoga does not need meditation.

Daaji says that the Heartfulness Way ‘is a streamlined version of raja yoga—streamlined in the sense that it has been made effective for modern seekers who don’t have the luxury of dropping everything and devoting every waking moment to meditation’ (50).

An unbelievably simple exposition of the discipline of meditation in a crystal-clear language is what the entire book is all about. In an anecdotal storytelling style, we are brought intricate discussions on the practice of meditation. The important aspects of Patanjali’s Yoga Sutra are also discussed and made accessible. This book is a step-by-step guide to the theory and practice of meditation told in an easy to understand manner. Meditation, cleaning, prayer, and the need for a guru are all explained in different chapters. For anyone interested in meditation in general, and the Heartfulness Way in particular, this is the go-to guide, a manual for practice.

Editor
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