

Distinctions Between Prayer, Meditation, and Contemplation

by Sri Gary Olsen
Current Living Master of MasterPath

The benefits of prayer and meditation throughout spiritual history cannot be denied. These familiar methods of enhancing spiritual communion have been and are practiced daily by millions. Furthermore, anyone utilizing these methods or techniques in order to experience a greater aspect of their divine nature must be respected, for desiring the Divine amidst a predominantly material universe is indeed noble. But despite the widespread practice of both prayer and meditation, one may wonder if they actually manifest the desired spiritual ideals, for so many sincere spiritual seekers appear to remain unfulfilled. Ironically, most seekers question themselves rather than the effectiveness or limitation of their practice, for their innermost spiritual nature can remain elusive and inaccessible to them.

Aspirants of the higher consciousness generally agree that the human entity is comprised of body, emotions, mind, and soul. The Western seeker is generally predisposed to the mind and, through the lead of the mental senses, falsely assumes that the soul can be accessed through either prayer or meditation. While prayer seems to be the most common method for communing with our Creator, it offers only partial success, providing merely comfort and the soothing of emotions. The illusion that our Creator is outside the body remains intact through prayer, and one can easily misperceive the Absolute to be a god in time and space, or a mere personality.

Meditation, though more evolved than prayer, predominantly assists only in stilling and centering the mind. In order to understand the true nature of the spiritual ideal, an insight into the inherent cosmology of our spiritual constitution is required. This reveals a multistoried mansion, consisting in part of three distinct minds from which the soul is completely separate: the material mind; the astral or subconscious mind; and the super-conscious mind located in the mental plane, which is often called the Christ mind, the divine mind, the cosmic mind, or in the Eastern tradition, the *nij manas*, or the innermost mind. Meditation serves these three minds, and creates the impenetrable illusion that when the next greater mind manifests, the soul has certainly been discovered and realized. Contrary to religious and metaphysical doctrine, however, the divine mind is not the divine soul. Once the course of meditation is complete the divine mind is realized, but the soul remains unrealized within the confines of duality. The aspirant's mind inadvertently becomes the disciple in meditation, and the mind alone is inevitably unable to disentangle itself from the clutches of duality.

The mind can only function and generate activity through various manifestations and degrees of universal mind power, such as the masculine and feminine energies, and the energies commonly known as the motor currents within the body. As elevating and noteworthy as such powers can be, the pure truth that the soul is left untouched and asleep remains the insurmountable dilemma of meditation's practice. Though meditation assists in centering the earthly mind and somewhat controls its incessant oscillations, it also creates undue passivity, frustration in attaining the goal, and remains far too rigorous a discipline for the aspiring seeker. It should be remembered that concentrating and focusing the mental forces is one achievement, but to discover and realize the soul is quite another. The attainment of Self Realization requires the devotee to transcend all mental practices, as these pursuits can only adorn the mind with knowledge. The student must travel through and beyond the mind to arrive at soul's doorstep, but the means of ascension is far different from what is commonly understood. Meditation is not the end, but is rather one of the movements or steps to the end.

The secrets of attaining Self and God Realization have been offered to us by all of the true Masters and Saints who have walked this Earth world, whether in the past or in the present. Pythagoras, Jesus, Nanak, Kabir, Swami Ji, Sawan Singh, and many others have all emphasized that initiation into the Sound Current delivers to the seeker all that may ever be needed. Once initiation from a Living Master has been secured, prayer and meditation are naturally replaced with contemplation. Contemplation embraces the widest angle of view possible, allowing the mental senses to muse over the various parts that comprise the whole. To use the analogy of the blind man describing an elephant, the contemplator strives to perceive and comprehend the whole elephant versus realizing a mere tail or ear. Thus, the purpose of contemplation under the tutelage of a Living Master is to begin the process of separation between the mind and soul. It is easy and natural and open to all, whether young or old, rich or poor, educated or unschooled, male or female, while simultaneously transcending race, doctrine, and geographical location.

MasterPath offers an Inner Master who awaits the seeker at the third eye, just above the human consciousness. Once the aspirant successfully gathers the scattered energies from the body and consolidates them within the third eye chakra, a wonderful event takes place – the Inner Master appears to the disciple to guide, escort, and instruct the maturing soul into its own realization. The Inner Master is another form of the Outer Master, and is the direct personification of the Sound Current. Without the assistance of the Inner Master, overcoming the comprehensive effects of our karma, on both the physical and psychic planes, can be virtually impossible.

The consummation of all spirituality is for soul to merge with God within the individual's own microcosm, as compared to communing with God or striving to become God. Meditation concerns itself with the mind alone, and while the mind is a useful servant, it remains a poor master. Our truest essence is the soul, created in the image and likeness of God. Unless the soul is aroused from its slumber to take its rightful position of rulership over the mind, little hope remains for the sincere seeker, save for the possession of an overly-developed mind and its inherent complexities.

The individual evolvment of each soul ultimately determines which spiritual technique is chosen, whether it be prayer, meditation, contemplation, or a combination thereof. All souls must be given the freedom and space to recognize and worship God in the way they perceive God, whether this means having a chosen Master or not. Those yearning for a greater means of accomplishment, and a more complete roadmap to soul's door, need only pursue a Living Master and the accompanying Sound Current received through initiation. Consuming oneself with long years of meditation and ascetic practices is not necessary, for the goal is both easier and yet more difficult to attain than is commonly believed.

To pursue the lofty goals of Self and God Realization, a Guide who can assist the seeker in both the inner and outer worlds is recommended, for the dangers of traversing the psychic worlds are far greater than any seeker initially perceives or comprehends.