

BOOK REVIEW

*Annavajhula J.C. Bose**

**TITLE: LOOKING INWARD: MEDITATING TO
SURVIVE IN A CHANGING WORLD**

Author: Swami Purnachaitanya

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There is a variety of confusing views on different types and techniques of meditation. Instead of shopping around, I choose here the Art of Living Foundation way, a reliable path treaded by millions of people in the world.

On its website (www.artofliving.org), there is a succinct briefing thus: “Meditation is the delicate art of doing nothing and letting go of all efforts to relax in your true nature, which is love, joy, and peace. The practice of meditation gives you deep rest. It is essential to reduce stress levels and maintain mental hygiene. The benefits of meditation are manifold - a calm mind, focussed attention, good concentration power, clarity of thoughts and feelings, balanced emotions in stressful situations, improved communication skills, the birth of new skills and talents, unshakeable inner strength, healing powers, ability to connect to an inner source of energy, relaxation, rejuvenation, and even the ability to attract good luck! These are all the natural effects of regular meditation practice. Today, meditating daily is not a luxury but necessity. To be unconditionally happy and to have peace of mind, we need to tap into the power of meditation.

The purpose of meditation is to make one calm, stress-free, free from pain, healthy and happy. Meditation helps in maintaining good physical health, mental health & emotional health. Practicing meditation is as easy as inhaling and exhaling. It does not require you to go to the mountains and shut yourself up. It is a dynamic practice that can be easily incorporated into your daily life. You can choose any form of meditation from many different types of meditations - all of them help you get to the present moment effortlessly. In fact, in the very first sitting, many people’s experience has been so wonderful that they find it hard to express it in words. As you practice meditation exercise on a regular basis, perhaps once, or ideally twice a day, you feel a transformation - inside out - so much so that people around you also start recognizing the beautiful energy you carry along with you. So, everyone should meditate for a few minutes every - day to make life stress-free and happy.”

The book under review is an experience based reassuring clarification on the above briefing by a most competent Art of Living teacher of Dutch and Indian origins. The gist of the book is

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conveyed by the “wisdom sutras” as follows.

“The only constant of life is change. Acknowledge that change is inevitable and embrace it willingly. You experience the changes in the world around you because there is a part of you that does not change. Acknowledge the part of you that is unchanging and know that that is what you truly are. The law of the mind is effortlessness. The more peaceful and relaxed your mind is, the more powerful it becomes. On the level of the mind, less is more. The emptier you mind, the happier, more peaceful and freer you are. The more importance you give to events, the stronger the impressions become. Wake up to the transitory nature of things—this will free your mind. When your mind is fully in the present moment, it is naturally happy. True and lasting happiness can only be found within you, it is never outside of you. Know that whenever you think that something or someone will make you happy in the future, you have yourself postponed your happiness. The lesser you need, the lesser you have conditioned your happiness. You need a reason to be miserable. You don’t need a reason to be happy. Happiness is your nature. True freedom lies in shifting from living life as a pursuit of happiness to living life as an expression of happiness. Meditation is not concentration or focus—it is the art of de-concentration or letting go. Effort can steady and focus the mind, but to transcend it you need effortlessness. Meditation is a skill that comes by practice, not by knowing something intellectually. Reverence greatly enhances your meditation practice. It is a state of mind where the mind is fully focussed, in the present moment, with a sense of joy and gratitude, effortlessly. Wisdom is understanding why the practice is important and acting on it. For the practice to bear fruit, it needs to be done regularly with honour and commitment.”

This is the best way of summarising the book. We need to ruminate on the above golden words summarising the six chapters of the book titled as “Yes, the World is Changing”; “Understanding How Our Minds React to Change”; “What are You Seeking?”; “Finding Inner Peace”; “Meditation: Mindfulness...or Emptiness?”; “Starting Your Meditation Practice”.

The author has indeed endearingly given us a practical guide to help us on our personal journey towards finding the source of our anxiety, stress and restlessness, as well as give us the tools to address and overcome them, using meditation to soothe distracted thoughts and refocus our energy to being present in the moment while also building resilience.

The book is a valuable friend to three categories of people, viz. those who are new to meditation and feel that they could use a little extra help to really get into it and settle the mind a little faster and more easily; those who had already dabbled with mindfulness or meditation, but who never really got serious with their practice, or who were still looking for an effective and authentic meditation technique; and, finally, those that have been practising some kind of meditation at home with some value addition to their life but they are keen to practising it in a group in a special location that is even more conducive to the practice to go much deeper and probe the subtler layers of their consciousness and being.

The book is a precious gift to be given to near and dear as also strangers on this new year eve. Written as simply and sincerely as possible with unconditional love, it is undoubtedly the rejuvenating balm for people on the planet, struggling to get out of the ravages of the corona-age as a blue funk.