

*Toward the One, the Perfection of Love, Harmony, and Beauty,
the Only Being, United with All the Illuminated Souls
Who Form the Embodiment of the Master, the Spirit of Guidance.*

Githa

Series I Number 1

Concentration Practices

GITHA: First Week:

Take an object from the mantelpiece or from the furniture in the room, a fruit, or a flower. Place it before you, and focus your eyes upon it.

TASAWWUF: As concentration is a practice of the Sufis which can be performed in everyday life, it is not necessary to go far to find some object upon which to focus one's attention and whereon to center one's mind. Although concentration has for its highest purpose the union with Allah, yet God is to be found in all things and it is through concentration that this can be accomplished, especially in the outer world.

It is well to begin with a simple object. If a fruit or flower is selected, let it not be in the stage of decay. By "simple" is meant one of geometric or elementary design, not having too much detail so that even a little child would be able to grasp it. Symbols and pictures are not so desirable at the commencement, at least for class work.

The mureeds should not sit too close together, so that the breath of each may move freely. It is also necessary that each sit so that the object can be easily observed. Therefore, it is not required that the object be placed upon an altar. It may be put upon a table in the center of the room, although if the class can remain seated in crescent fashion it is better. The less things can come under observance the easier the concentration.

GITHA: Inhale and exhale rhythmically without letting your glance waver.

TASAWWUF: Practice of Fikr is of great assistance to concentration. Also, to keep the heart and mind on "Toward the One" with each inhalation and exhalation (Darood). This should be continued until all inhalations are equal and all exhalations are equal and there is a balance between inhalation and exhalation. Although this seems very simple it is one of the most important factors in the process of concentration and its very simplicity often causes it to be overlooked.

GITHA: Keep all other thoughts away from the mind.

TASAWWUF: The general condition of a person may cause the rhythm to be slow or rapid, deep or shallow, but it is rhythm and not tempo or quality that is important. Of course, during concentration rhythm may change, but the first requisite is to establish some rhythm. The secret is, if the rhythm is maintained this will of itself automatically hold the glance. The glance wavers when one is not in rhythm, because then one is not in tune with one's own being.

Fikr is assigned to talibs (seekers, students) for this purpose. One most important object in concentration is to attain mastery on the mental plane. The first three years of discipleship are largely devoted to attaining some degree of mastery on the physical plane, so to speak, and then the next period, when the Githas are studied, to attaining mental mastery. The spiritual practices are also assigned to assist in this growth and development.

The real secret of mastery comes in rhythm and attunement. If the breath is controlled by the will, it is not so difficult to keep other thoughts away. The will-power, used to regulate the breath, can be more easily coordinated to the glance, until this process becomes automatic, and so keeps away foreign thoughts from the mind.

[MUIZ COMMENT: A common misunderstanding of "will" and "will power" is that it is some sort of extra mental effort and exertion, and can even have straining connected with the attempt to engage with it. But in truth, will power is an aspect and faculty of our deep Being that arises from the depth of Heart, not from the Mind. Mind can direct will, but it arises ultimately from the Heart of God, through our Soul and into our individual Hearts. As Hazrat Inayat Khan says "Mind is the surface of the Heart, Heart is the depth of Mind."

In our Toward the One Breathing practice, where we link our magnetized breath with the Love element in our Heart, we are in truth engaging with our Will. And as we've learned in this course there is no efforting, no mental exertion involved in engaging with the Love element and our Will.

When Murshid says "coordinated to the glance", he means linking our will power with our eyes, with what we're looking at, in the same gentle and non-efforting manner that we link our magnetized Breath with our Love. Doing this will help to keep our glance steady (so our eyes aren't darting all around, and we aren't blinking excessively) along with keeping our mind and thoughts steady and focused on the object of our concentration.]

GITHA: And impress the mind strongly with the object before you.

TASAWWUF: This is the real problem. If the talib constantly watches the breath, using Fikr when there are intruding thoughts, it will not be so hard to carve an impression in the mental atmosphere of the object viewed.

GITHA: Look at it for fifteen minutes and hold it in the mind for fifteen minutes, and continue to do so until the object is visualized concretely before your mind's eye.

TASAWWUF: There are often obstacles in one's path. If the mind is not strongly attracted to the object, it will not retain the impression. Therefore Fikr is enjoined. After looking at an object with the eye, it is still necessary to keep the heart and mind protected against extraneous thoughts and impressions.

While doing this work it is sometimes wise to keep a diary, making more or less detailed reports of one's progress. When symbols are assigned to talibs, especially at this stage or later, they often serve a double purpose of accomplishing the principles conveyed by concentration and also reaching the heart through attunement.

[MUIZ COMMENTARY: Hazarat Inayat Khan's program begins with looking steadily at the object of concentration for 15 minutes, eyes open, and then visualizing the object in the mind for 15 minutes, with eyes closed. Then moving to 20 minutes eyes open, 20 minutes eyes closed. Then 25 minutes, and finally 30 minutes.

If 15 minutes is too long to begin with, start with 10, or 5, or even 3 minutes, and gradually increase the time. (See also Murshid's Tasawwuf on the next page beneath the "Githa: Second Week".)

Whatever length the time period, the time with eyes open and eyes closed are always equal. The purpose here is to build our capacity to hold a mental and heart focus, clearly and steadily, for a consciously decided period of time, without getting distracted by other thoughts, feelings, other objects in the room, or noises from outside. We want to build our capacity to notice any potential distractions, in equanimity, without engaging with them, without following them, without turning away from the object of our concentration and

beginning to think about them. Ultimately, we develop the ability to notice, and then go right back to our chosen focus.

Remember the principle about spiritual practice in general, that we've been working with — more is usually better, but definitely some is better than none. And above all, please avoid going down the path of self-criticism and self-judgment, in terms of how poorly we believe we are doing. Rather engage the ar-Raqib space of loving awareness and protective watching over, refined, delicate and gentle engaged interest and curiosity, without effort.]

GITHA: Watch the progress each day and continue this for a week.

TASAWWUF: This time is arbitrary but serves as a norm for assignments. Even if the talib finds it easy to hold the object in the mind, it is often well to continue to full period as it brings greater light in the mind and so greater scope for development. However, along with spiritual growth comes increase in insight, and when spiritual experiences occur in concentration it is always important to note them. This will be especially true of clairvoyants of all classes.

GITHA: Second Week:

Change the object; observe for twenty minutes, and hold the thought for twenty minutes.

TASAWWUF: It is almost impossible to select flowers which can be used for over one week. Objects as vases, geometric forms, wax flowers and some fruits, as apples, retain their form. Symbols, such as the six-pointed star, which are not usually used in the Sufic spiritual work, may also be used. Also books of some kinds.

At first the object is just to impress the form and so the inner meaning of things will not affect the exercises very much. If talibs are given short concentrations in the earlier stages they may not find this work so difficult and with some progress will be rapid. Beginning with three-minute concentrations in the first year and increasing it to at least ten minutes in the third year, it becomes a preparation for longer concentrations.

GITHA: Third Week:

Change the object; observe for twenty-five minutes, hold the thought for twenty-five minutes.

TASAWWUF: Arrangement of time can be by a monitor, or a teacher. The gong may be struck at the appointed time, or somebody may say, "Amen." Sometimes an electric bell can be rung in another room, or some other signal which will not cause too great a shock. Should a mureed continue in the concentration over time [ie beyond the agreed on time for the concentration], especially, in class work, it is not advisable to approach them unless it is evident they have fallen asleep. In that case it is sometimes well to ascertain the cause for sleepiness which is primarily due to lack of attention to the breath, maintaining its proper rhythm and equilibrium.

GITHA: Fourth Week:

Change the object; observe for half an hour, hold the thought for half an hour.

TASAWWUF: This last practice can be continued indefinitely. The later lessons assign other methods for concentration, and for these the time may be altered, beginning with shorter periods and lengthening them. Also the ideal held in concentration is raised. One begins first with simple material objects, and seeks a definite effect on the mental plane from material objects. It is only later that one gradually adopts concentration for more spiritual purposes; yet this method, studied stage by stage and step by step becomes a ladder which brings one even to God-hood.

Of course this does not mean that the exercises stop at the end of four weeks. But what follows is determined first by the progress shown, and then by the need for higher development as well as the comprehension of the teachings of the Githas as they are studied.