A Better World Through Yoga; "Witnessing" Brings Clarity, Solves Problems
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Garud, Nandini

Mr Vinayak Vishwanath Gokhale, age 71, is a simple, humble man endowed with wise discernment and keen intelligence. His lean form clad inconspicuously in crisp white shirt and dark pants appropriately depicts his unassuming character. In a social gathering he characteristically sits back, soaking in the conversation, letting other shine with brilliance. Those who meet him, however, come to realize his significance as an important and dynamic moving force in the renaissance of Hindu thought. It is hard to believe that this gentle and sensitive person worked for eight years as an engineer in the Indian Government weapons factories after receiving his degree in Chemical Engineering from Brooklyn Polytechnic in New York on a Government of India scholarship in 1948.

He did not want to make "a lifetime career in weapons" and soon found greater joy in "social engineering." After retiring at the age of 75, Gokhale became active in diverse fields. Today, he teaches mediation, yoga, holistic health and has organized several meditation camps. He has taught meditation to about 1,500 people in India from all walks of life. His meditation instruction in America and Canada is on a much smaller scale due to the logistical problems of limited publicity and transportation.

He presents meditation "cafeteria style," allowing aspirants to choose from a variety of methods including breath control, mantram chanting and a special technique he refers to as "witnessing." In this latter practice, his students practice concentrated relaxation, deep abdominal breathing and the gradual, conscious cessation of thoughts in search of detached awareness. In this approach Gokhale asserts that a peaceful integration of body and mind is achieved.

Gokhale became interested in yoga for health reasons. At the age of 17, he became very weak after a 50-day bout with typhoid. He benefitted greatly from a month of Yoga and pranayama instruction at Kaivalyadhama in Lonavala, Maharashtra. After practicing yoga for seven years, he started to meditate by concentrating on the area between the two eyebrows. These meditation sessions culminated in a spiritual awakening. "Ever since then I became more devout, and easily moved, especially by Lord Krishna," he reflects.

He later received "shaktipat lessons from Gulavani Maharaj and met such important spiritual leaders as J. Krishnamurti, Nityananda and Vimlabai Thakar. Gokhale considers himself "just a student yet" and feels that reference to kundalini awakenings should "be reserved for more realized soul." He has been deeply influenced by the teachings of Saint Vimalaji Thakar, and has written her biography, translated her lectures and edited two of her books.

In addition to teaching meditation, Gokhale gives talks, and writes articles and books on meditation and yoga. In his book Dhyanavidya he gives a comprehensive summary of 40 different methods of meditation. He is currently working on a book featuring 84 spiritual stories from Zen and Taoist traditions and from the Upanishads. He has become involved with social service projects directed by the Jnana Prabodhini organization. It is an educational organization, found in 1962 and established for the betterment of India through the physical, mental and spiritual training of select Indian individuals.

Gokhale is a strict vegetarian who avoids tea, coffee and white sugar. Ordinarily a soft-spoken man, he speaks strongly and frankly about the mistreatment of animals in the USA, especially the cow.

"Don't broadcast the Bill Cosby show one day and instead show the slaughter houses." He asserts. "Then nobody will eat veal or chicken. Everyone likes to eat hot dogs, but if you talk about how animals are slaughtered, that's considered bad manners."

He strongly encourages Hindus who have settled abroad "to not just go to the temple once in a while but be strong vegetarians and meditators in daily life. "Vividly aware of the many perils facing modern society, Gokhale feels that "we

should all do our bit to help get rid of these problems" which he feels are escalating at such a rate that certain popular predictions of earthquakes, wars, floods are becoming viable notions. He recommends for Hindus the practice of Sanatana Dharma.

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