

THE SWAN PRINCIPLE AND MEDITATION FOR SELF-TRANSFORMATION

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Abstract

In today's fast-paced world, where the pursuit of material success often leads to adverse effects on our character and well-being, it is crucial to recognize the limitations of wealth and external validation. While these may momentarily boost our self-image, they often result in vices and a departure from inner confidence, leading to stress, anxiety, and an ongoing quest for true fulfillment.

The cornerstone of a content and thriving society lies in relationships and family, serving as pillars of stability, care, and solace. However, maintaining harmony within these relationships can be complex due to diverse perceptions, communication styles, and lifestyles. The SWAN sadhana provides a transformative approach to foster understanding and respect among family members, promoting honest communication, balance, unity, and affection. By embracing the SWAN sadhana, individuals embark on a journey of self-discovery and improvement, cultivating empathy and understanding for their loved ones.

Recognizing that everyone possesses a SWAN with varying degrees of shared qualities, the sadhana becomes a tool for clearing misunderstandings, resolving conflicts, and collectively finding solutions. Patience and open-mindedness are essential when listening to each other's experiences, allowing for honest expression without blame. The concept of Sanyam, emphasizing self-restraint and controlled responses, extends beyond conflict resolution to encompass a jointly agreed-upon daily routine, providing structure and promoting responsible contributions from each family member. Swadhyaya encourages self-analysis and correction, tailoring individual roles and responsibilities within the family context. Satsang, involving positive associations and shared activities, reinforces unity, creating a positive familial atmosphere.

In essence, the SWAN sadhana becomes a transformative tool to strengthen connections and nurture relationships within the family, leveraging individual strengths for collective well-being.

Meditation for Introspection and Improvement:

To counter the negative impacts of external pressures and enhance one's character, meditation offers a powerful tool. Engaging in regular meditation allows for introspection and improvement in various facets of life, promoting self-awareness and positive changes in personality, attitude, behavior, and thought processes.

Addressing Mental Distress:

When facing mental distress, the initial step is engaging in meditation and reflection. Symptoms like insomnia, memory loss, or emotional issues are often surface manifestations. Meditation helps delve into the root causes, offering a holistic understanding of mental and emotional imbalances.

THE SWAN PRINCIPLE IN YOGA

Introduced by Swami Niranjanananda, the SWAN Principle focuses on four key aspects: Strength, Weakness, Ambition, and Need.

Strengths encompass physical, mental, emotional, and social well-being, emphasizing qualities like faith, respect, love, and happiness. Mental strengths include equilibrium, mindfulness, focus, clarity, concentration, intelligence, knowledge, discernment, empathy, and determination.

Weaknesses involve identifying and acknowledging obstacles to personal growth. Through meditation, one observes weaknesses without judgment and works towards transforming them.

Ambitions require clear definition, aligning strengths to support goals and identifying weaknesses that might obstruct progress. Visualization and reinforcement of ambitions through meditation are recommended.

Needs involve identifying essential requirements related to physical, emotional, mental, and social aspects, maintaining a balance between excess and deficiency.

Integrated into yoga philosophy, the SWAN Principle guides individuals on a systematic journey of personal development, aiming to enhance positivity and reduce negativity in thoughts, words, and actions for holistic well-being on the spiritual journey.

The SWAN symbolizes spiritual qualities, representing versatility by walking on earth, swimming in water, and flying in the sky. Its ability to filter milk from water in Vedic texts signifies discrimination—the understanding of differences between qualities, permanence and impermanence, and what helps or hinders. In SWAN practices, S is for Strength, W for Weakness, A for Ambition, and N for Needs. Empowerment comes from understanding and discriminating among these aspects, avoiding a state akin to animals. Discrimination, understanding the quality of our lives, defines what makes us truly special as humans.

Our personalities are shaped by our strengths, weaknesses, ambitions, and needs. Despite education, many remain unfamiliar with themselves. In yoga, practicing asana and pranayama is not just about knowing our bodies but understanding our personalities. Without this understanding, we may behave oddly or say inappropriate things. SWAN practices—examining strengths, weaknesses, ambitions, and needs—are crucial for self-discovery. These qualities influence our behavior, habits, actions, and interactions, offering a key to improving our lives. Self-acceptance is emphasized in yoga; however, knowing ourselves precedes acceptance. SWAN practice helps us see ourselves as we truly are, forming the basis of yoga's emphasis on understanding, accepting, and improving ourselves.

Sit in a comfortable meditation posture, close your eyes, and relax your body. Focus on your physical body, feeling it's quiet and still nature. Identify positive strengths; let go of any negative thoughts. Count at least five physical strengths and choose five more to develop. Shift your awareness to emotions, counting five positive feelings and emotional strengths. Move to the mental level, recognizing five current mental strengths and selecting additional ones to develop. Explore the psyche, reflecting on dreams, meditation, and creativity. Sit quietly, observing any specific strength that comes to mind. If none, wait for it to surface. Eventually, let go of that thought, visualize a steady candle flame, and chant the mantra Om three times.

Understand that weaknesses limit and block progress, hindering well-being and development. Physical weaknesses may include poor health, lack of adaptability, or high blood pressure. Emotional weaknesses involve imbalances, sensitivity, attachment, and stress management issues. Mental weaknesses encompass negativity, neurosis, dullness, a restless mind, and lack of awareness. Psychic weaknesses may involve confusion about inner and outer reality, paranoia, poor insight, lack of foresight, poor imagination, and creativity. Recognizing strengths and weaknesses is essential, as often, weaknesses overshadow strengths. Identifying and supporting weaknesses with strengths is crucial for personal development and overcoming limitations.

This SWAN meditation on weaknesses helps you identify and name physical, emotional, mental, and psychic weaknesses. The practice involves acknowledging and naming these weaknesses while being aware of the breath. After recognizing weaknesses in each category, you transition to gazing into the space in front of closed eyes, letting go of thoughts, and focusing on a small, steady candle flame while chanting the mantra Om three times. Returning to the room, become aware of your physical body and the effects of the practice, reflecting on the insights gained about your strengths and weaknesses.

Understanding and applying our strengths and weaknesses involves setting clear aims in life. A purpose or goal is essential for success and personal development. Aims give direction to our lives, motivating and guiding our actions. Aims should align with our strengths and weaknesses. Practicality is crucial; setting realistic goals based on our abilities and deficits ensures attainability. Ambition is necessary for achievement, but it should be directed towards positive and achievable objectives. External aims pertain to physical, professional, financial, and family-related aspects, while internal aims focus on mental and spiritual growth.

To identify Aims: Write down your aims: Consider external and internal aspects, keeping in mind your strengths, weaknesses, and practicality. Prioritize achievable goals. Prioritize your aims: Focus on the top three priorities. Trying to accomplish too much can lead to achieving nothing substantial. Choose aims that align with your strengths and have positive outcomes. In summary, the process involves self-reflection, understanding one's capacities and limitations, and setting realistic, positive aims. By visualizing and reinforcing these aims through meditation, individuals enhance their focus, motivation, and commitment to achieve them. In the SWAN meditation on ambitions, you identify and name external and internal aims. Focusing on realistic, achievable goals, you use meditation to visualize and reinforce these aims, enhancing commitment and motivation. The practice involves naming aims, recognizing and prioritizing them, visualizing and reinforcing, and shifting awareness to the breath, closing with the mantra Om three times.

In the SWAN principle, needs refer to essential requirements for physical, emotional, mental, and social well-being. Recognizing and fulfilling these needs is crucial for overall health and happiness. Needs can be categorized as basic and aspirational. Basic needs relate to survival and include food, water, shelter, and safety. Aspirational needs involve personal growth, fulfillment, and self-actualization. In the SWAN meditation on needs, you identify and name essential physical, emotional, mental, and social needs. Acknowledging these needs, you use meditation to visualize and reinforce them, fostering a sense of fulfillment and balance. The practice involves naming needs, recognizing and prioritizing them, visualizing and reinforcing, and shifting awareness to the breath, concluding with the mantra Om three times.

In the context of the SWAN principle, meditation on needs involves recognizing and fulfilling essential requirements for physical, emotional, mental, and social well-being. By acknowledging these needs and using meditation to visualize and reinforce them, individuals can cultivate a sense of fulfillment and balance in their lives.

Sanyam, often translated as self-restraint or self-discipline, is a vital aspect of the SWAN principle. It involves controlling one's reactions and responses, fostering a balanced and measured approach to situations. Sanyam extends beyond conflict resolution to encompass daily life, encouraging individuals to cultivate discipline in their thoughts, actions, and behaviors. By practicing Sanyam, one develops the ability to respond to challenges with equanimity, avoiding impulsive reactions and maintaining a calm and composed demeanor.

The SWAN meditation on Sanyam involves reflecting on situations that trigger emotional responses and practicing self-restraint in those moments. By observing the breath and maintaining awareness, individuals can develop the capacity for Sanyam, fostering a more measured and balanced approach to various aspects of life. The practice includes recognizing triggers, practicing self-restraint, focusing on the breath, and concluding with the mantra Om three times.

Swadhyaya, or self-analysis, is a crucial element of the SWAN principle. It involves introspection and reflection on one's thoughts, behaviors, and actions. Through Swadhyaya, individuals gain insight into their strengths and weaknesses, enabling them to make conscious efforts toward personal growth and improvement. Regular self-analysis allows for a deeper understanding of one's inner dynamics and paves the way for positive transformation.

The SWAN meditation on Swadhyaya involves dedicated time for self-reflection and analysis. By focusing on specific aspects of one's personality and identifying areas for improvement, individuals can actively engage in the process of self-discovery and growth. The practice includes introspection, recognizing areas for improvement, visualizing positive changes, and concluding with the mantra Om three times.

Satsang, or positive association, is a significant component of the SWAN principle. It emphasizes surrounding oneself with positive influences, supportive relationships, and uplifting environments. Satsang plays a crucial role in fostering a sense of unity, belonging, and shared purpose within a community or family. By cultivating positive associations, individuals can contribute to creating a harmonious and uplifting atmosphere in their personal and social lives.

The SWAN meditation on Satsang involves reflecting on the quality of associations and relationships in one's life. By identifying positive influences and nurturing supportive connections, individuals can enhance the overall well-being of themselves and those around them. The practice includes recognizing positive associations, visualizing harmonious relationships, fostering a sense of unity, and concluding with the mantra Om three times.

In the SWAN principle, meditation on Satsang involves consciously cultivating positive associations and nurturing supportive relationships. By reflecting on the quality of connections in one's life, individuals can contribute to creating a harmonious and uplifting atmosphere. The practice includes recognizing positive influences, visualizing harmonious relationships, fostering a sense of unity, and concluding with the mantra Om three times.

The concept of keeping a Spiritual Diary is a valuable tool in the journey of self-improvement and self-correction, particularly within the framework of SWAN sadhana. This diary serves as a reflective guide, allowing individuals to track their progress, achievements, setbacks, and daily practices. By answering specific questions related to SWAN principles, one can gain insights into their strengths, weaknesses, ambitions, and needs. The diary also encourages regular self-analysis and self-examination, fostering a deeper understanding of one's actions and behaviors.

Here are some key questions suggested for the Spiritual Diary:

1. **Positivity and Expression:**

- To what extent did I express myself and act in a positive manner during the day? Rate your positivity on a scale of 1 to 10; 10 being positive throughout the day.

2. **Yamas and Niyamas:**

- How many times during the day did I remember and practice the yamas and niyamas that I am currently practicing?
- How did the yamas and niyamas influence my thoughts and behavior?

3. **Strength:**

- What was my predominant strength expressed today?
- Did I try to expand it and extend it to different situations?
- Was I successful? Rate on a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being completely successful.

4. **Weakness:**

- What was my predominant weakness expressed during the day?
- Did I try to overcome it with my strength or with the practice of pratipaksha bhavana?
- Was I successful? Rate on a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being completely successful.

5. **Ambition:**

- How was my thinking and behavior influenced by my ambition?
- Did my ambition guide me to act and behave in a positive and constructive manner?

6. **Needs:**

- How was my thinking and behavior influenced by my needs?
 - Did my needs guide me to act and behave in a selfish or in a caring manner?
- Swami Sivananda Saraswati's advice to keep a daily spiritual diary and engage in self-analysis at night underscores the importance of reflecting on one's actions, acknowledging mistakes, and setting positive intentions for the next day. This practice aligns with the SWAN principle, emphasizing self-awareness and self-correction.
- Swami Satyananda Saraswati's quote, "Self-awareness, self-observation is the end of the way," highlights the transformative power of being conscious of one's thoughts and actions. It reinforces the idea that true spiritual progress comes through self-awareness and mindful observation.
- Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati's insight on SWAN meditation, hamsa dhyana, emphasizes developing awareness of the ego's deeper aspects. The purpose of this meditation is to realize the positive aspects of the ego through absolute awareness of actions and reactions. It aligns with the SWAN principle, guiding individuals toward a heightened state of self-awareness and conscious living.
- In conclusion, the Spiritual Diary, combined with the wisdom of these spiritual teachings, serves as a practical guide for individuals on their journey of self-discovery and self-improvement through the SWAN sadhana.
- The SWAN meditation is a guided practice aimed at self-awareness and transformation. Here is a breakdown of the steps involved:
1. **Preparation:**
 - Sit comfortably, ensuring your spine, head, neck, and shoulders are in a straight line.
 - Remove glasses if you're wearing them.
 - Place your hands in a meditation mudra.
 - Close your eyes and bring awareness inside.
 2. **Body Awareness and Relaxation:**
 - Focus on your entire physical body, from head to toe.
 - Allow the body to relax into the posture.
 - Feel every muscle and part of the body relaxing.
 - Gradually feel the whole body becoming calm and still.
 - Feel comfortable and at ease in the body.
 3. **Breath Awareness:**
 - Be aware of the natural breath.
 - Feel that the body is breathing, and observe each breath.
 - Fix your attention on the flow of breath.
 - Feel the breath and awareness flowing together.
 - Know each breath from beginning to middle to end.
 4. **Gazing into Space:**
 - Gaze into the space in front of your closed eyes.
 - Be aware of the breath, space, and aim without expecting anything.
 - Allow an aim to come naturally and place it in the center of the space.
 - Support the aim with breath awareness.
 5. **Strengths and Weaknesses:**
 - Place one, two, or three strengths to the right of the aim.
 - Name and place weaknesses to the left of the aim.
 - Breathe with awareness, letting the strengths and weaknesses come naturally.
 - Find a strength to support each weakness and place it to the side.
 - Support the entire process with breath awareness.
 6. **Visualization of SWAN:**
 - See the aim, strengths, weaknesses, and supporting strengths.
 - See the needs below the aim and write them.
 - Gaze at the whole concept easily, letting it transform into a beautiful white swan.
 - Allow the vision of the swan to fade.
 7. **Final Visualization:**
 - Gaze into space and visualize a small, steady, brightly burning candle flame.
 - Chant the mantra Om three times.
 - Sit quietly for a few moments, feeling the effect of the meditation and the power of the swan within.
 - Become aware of your physical body and slowly open your eyes.
 8. **Conclusion:**
 - Remember the power within you.
 - Hari Om Tat Sat.

In summary, the SWAN principle provides a comprehensive framework for self-transformation, encompassing Strengths, Weaknesses, Ambitions, and Needs. Through dedicated meditation practices focusing on these aspects, individuals can embark on a transformative journey toward holistic well-being. The SWAN sadhana, when integrated into daily life, fosters self-awareness, positive change, and harmonious relationships, contributing to a fulfilling and purposeful existence.

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