

# IMPROVING OUR SELF-AWARENESS THROUGH SWAN MEDITATION

Just as we use SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats) within our businesses, we can use SWAN analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Aspirations & Needs) to gain a better understanding and acceptance of ourselves. To understand and to discriminate between our strengths, weaknesses, aspirations and needs, gives us empowerment.

We may not think about these qualities, yet at every moment they are active in our lives and dictate who we are. If we don't understand ourselves at a deeper level, then what is the quality of our existence? If we wish to direct, control and guide the subtle expressions of our personality, awareness has to be extended into these areas.

## STRENGTHS

We all possess attributes that make us stronger. Our strengths include our virtues, talents and abilities. They are qualities that give us confidence and help us believe in ourselves. They motivate us in a positive and constructive way throughout our life. By applying the SWAN technique, we identify not only our current strengths, but also our dormant strengths, which are just waiting to sprout. Every one of our strengths must be spotted, with honesty and humility. Below are some examples of various types of strengths:

- **Physical strengths:** Good health, flexibility, adaptability, muscular strength, energy, endurance, balance and coordination, optimum function of all body systems.
- **Emotional strengths:** Optimism, kindness, compassion, faith, respect, love, confidence, happiness, contentment, emotional balance, simplicity and gratitude.
- **Mental strengths:** Mental balance, awareness, attention, mental clarity, knowledge, determination, persistence and willpower.
- **Psychic strengths:** Intuition, creativity, inner vision and dreams.

## AIMS

Our goals and desires are what motivate us to work hard every day. Our aims are the forces which drive us on the path to accomplishment, and keep us on said path despite of all fears and doubts. After all, life is usually shaped around our ambitions. We use our strengths to conquer our aims. It is important to analyse the quality of our ambitions, not just those we are conscious of, but even our hidden desires. These are dreams we don't even know we have, which lie in the deeper layers of the mind. Hidden desires are usually irrational; objectives which are most probably unattainable. These must still be identified and observed objectively. Once we are aware of all of our ambitions, we must ensure we prioritize our needs over our ambitions. Aims can be external or internal. Up until now, we have been aware mostly of external aims which can be physical or relate to our family, profession or finances. Internal aims on the other hand can be more difficult to attain because they are not physical or material attainments. For example, one may want to be happy, kind, helpful or creative.

## WEAKNESSES

Weaknesses are limitations. Anything which limits us from achieving our full potential is considered a weakness. These usually appear in the form of subtle self-created obstacles, which are hard to identify by the unaware mind. Examples of such weaknesses are procrastination, anger, being non-assertive, etc. Society trains us to hide our weaknesses and reinforce our strengths. But ignoring our weaknesses only potentiates them. We must turn weakness into strengths by focusing on them and by locating their origin. Below are some examples of various types of weaknesses:

- **Physical weaknesses:** Poor health, lack of strength, lack of endurance, allergies, lack of physical adaptability, headaches and chemical sensitivity.
- **Emotional weaknesses:** Sensitivity, attachment and dependence, insecurity, impatience, jealousy, aggression, anger, pessimism and panic.
- **Mental weaknesses:** Negativity, neurosis, dullness, restless mind, scepticism, inhibition, lack of awareness, misunderstanding, confusion and dissipation.
- **Psychic weaknesses:** Paranoia, poor insight, lack of foresight and poor creativity.

## NEEDS

Our needs are the essentials. On a basic level, they are needs for survival – food, water, clothing and shelter. Once our survival is guaranteed, our needs become geared towards life satisfaction, which are different for each of us. Some are more inclined towards their career, others towards building a family and personal relationships, some need inner development and harmony. Below are some examples of the different types of needs:

- **Physical needs:** Food, shelter, clothing, security, exercise and medicine.
- **Emotional needs:** Relationships, love, support, ideals and faith.
- **Mental needs:** Satisfaction, purpose, stimulation and peace.
- **Psychic needs:** Inner experience and inner purification.



## SWAN MEDITATION TECHNIQUE

Sit quietly in a comfortable meditation posture. Now close your eyes, allow the body to relax. Become aware of your whole physical body. Become aware of the position of the body. Begin to feel the body from head to toe. Feel the body becoming quiet and still. Maintain total awareness of the body, which is physical in nature, and feel your energy, your mind, your soul in the body. Become aware of the quality of your body, whatever it may be.

Look for the positive strengths of your body. You don't have to think about weaknesses or negative points, just the positive ones. If negative thoughts about the body come into your mind, let them go, then bring up positive ones. Try to search out and identify all the positive qualities of your body.

Count on your fingers at least three physical strengths that you have and think about any physical strengths that you wish to develop.

Repeat this process in the same way for your Emotional, Mental and Psychic strengths.

Now leave the four levels of strengths. Just sit quietly. Look into the space in front of the closed eyes without thinking about any particular strength. What is the one strength that comes to mind? If nothing comes, let it be, but see if one quality comes into your mind. It is your best strength. If it doesn't come to you now, it will come to you later. When it comes, you will know.

Now leave aside that thought also. Look into the space in front of closed eyes. See a small, steady, brightly burning candle flame. Keeping this vision, chant the mantra Om (or a mantra of your choice) three times. Now slowly come back into the room, into the physical body. Move your fingers, stretch the body, release the posture and open your eyes.

Repeat this process in the same way for your Weaknesses, Aims and Needs.

## SWAN JOURNALING

Any type of writing is a freeing experience which releases our inhibitions and allows us to be more honest with ourselves. The results of the SWAN meditation should be written down for future reference. Questions we may wish to answer could include:

### Strengths

- Which strengths do I want to develop?
- Which strengths have I inherited? Are they valuable to me?
- Which strengths will help me overpower my weaknesses?

### Weaknesses

- Which weaknesses can I turn into strengths?
- How can I look at my weaknesses in a positive light and accept them as such?



### Aims

- Which aims are realistic and viable? Eliminate the unrealistic ones.
- Which are my most passionate aims?

### Needs

- Which are actually needs and not desires?
- Are they my needs or are they expectations from other people?
- How can I provide for my needs?



## DAILY PRACTICE OF SWAN

The first few times that we practice the SWAN meditation we start with a thorough self-analysis which may take a few hours. You can do this at your own pace, in as many sessions as you want. After that, a weekly 10 - 20 minute practice should suffice.

Once every week, just before going to bed think about your strengths and weaknesses. Analyse your actions and ask yourself: Did I follow through with my ambitions? Did I fulfil my needs? Did I use my strengths to benefit myself or others? Did my weaknesses hold me back from achieving my goals? Write down your answers.

The practice should be repeated weekly for three to six months. Previous answers should not be looked at until the end of each month. The focus should remain on the happenings and feelings of the week, whatever they may be. At the end of each month, take a look at all the notes for the month and analyse your progress. Where did you excel? Which aspects must still be worked on?

Your goals and priorities may change, as a result of a new found level of focus. SWAN meditation and journaling are a journey of self-discovery, which will help us achieve our goals and live a happier life.

*Article adapted from Bihar School of Yoga*