

42. Pranava the praana

In the atmosphere of faction and hatred that is now prevalent in the world, the attainment of Prashaanthi or undisturbed inner peace is eminently desirable. Whenever man suffers from any illness, like headache or stomachache, the physician investigates the causes, for only then can he prescribe the correct remedy. He cannot send the patient away, with some quantity of salt or ointment. If he does so, he does not deserve the faith that people repose in him. Getting involved in this *samsaara*--the process of worldly living, which changes and turns with time and space -- that is the true cause. It is the ups and downs *that samsaara* involves, that cause joy and grief. The decline in grief is welcomed as joy; the decline in joy is bewailed as grief. They are but the obverse and reverse of the same coin *samsaara*.

Samsaara has only some *saara*, that is to say, a little reality, a microscopic quantity of truth. It is called in the Bhagavad Geetha a tree named *Aswattha*, a name which means 'that which will not exist another day'. This appellation brings out the fact of illusion, which is mistaken as lasting and real. But being a huge big tree, it can be destroyed only by the axe of *jnaana* or, as the Geetha says, *by jnaana-agni* (fire of spiritual wisdom).

Spiritual discipline essential to destroy illusions

To generate that fire in awareness, spiritual discipline is essential; it is the only means. The steps are very difficult, for each one insists on your overcoming the handicaps of the ego, which is rooted in the consciousness. The steps are:

(1) Every act has to be dedicated to the Lord; that is to say, it has to be true, just, virtuous and saturated with love, and it has to be done as an adoration of the Source of Truth, Justice, virtue and Love which is the Inner Motive in man, the Lord.

(2) No factious fight should mar the discipline. The Source or the Lord may be given any Name or pictured in any Form. Now, Vaishnavas and Shaivites boycott each others' water and fire; they will not borrow either from the other sect. Crossing swords with each other, they lose the gem of Truth.

When protagonists of the two sects started fisticuffs in his *durbaar*, the King asked each of them whether he has seen the Lord in that Form; not one of them had seen: they had only read books which taught them arguments. Faith transforms lead into gold by its sublime alchemy. Sakkubai transmuted by her faith, stone into heavenly essence; the idol into the embodiment of the divine Ideal. Foster your faith; do not disturb another's Faith; why argue with another that Sai is supreme, when the fact is that worship of the Lord in any form, in any name, is worship of Sai?

(3) Avoid cleverness and pompous scholarship in the process of spiritual discipline. Verbal jugglery is an unprofitable pastime. A stork was elated that it is superior to the Moon, for, as it argued in its scholastic pride, The Moon is white only in one *paksha*; I am white in both *pakshas* (*paksha* means both a fortnight and a wing); the Moon is the enemy of *Neeraja*, only at a specified time; I am the enemy of *Neerajas* all the time (*Neeraja* means the Lotus, which closes at moon rise; it also means fish, which the stork gobbles up all the time, whenever it is able to catch them). But his is merely clever punning on words; it does not guarantee innate superiority.

Understand the four qualities of God

(4) *Prema* is enough to realise the Supreme. *Prema* is the absence of hate, absence of dislike and prejudice; it also means the positive virtues of sympathy and affection, so that you grieve when

others grieve and exult when they are happy. God has four qualities and it is only when you cultivate them that you can understand Him. They are-Divine love (*prema*), Beauty (*soundarya*), Sweetness (*maadhurya*), and Splendour (*shobha*). The development of *prema* is enough to add unto you the other three. When you are so full of love for the divine in all creation, that stage is beauty; when you are immersed in the sea of Universal Love you reach the acme of sweetness; when your mind loses its identity and merges in the Universal Mind, then there is splendour indescribable.

Those who are too weak or unsteady to go through this discipline bring up all kinds of lame excuses when charged with malingering. A farmer's dog was a fierce animal; it leapt towards a visitor with bared teeth and would have bitten him but for his timely discovery of a thorny stick on the ground, with which he hit the dog on the head. The dog retreated howling in pain; the master heard it and got wild at the visitor for inflicting wounds on the dog's head; he dragged him to the Royal Court.

The King asked him why he had beaten the dog, which according to the farmer was quite a harmless pet. The visitor said that it had actually leapt at him and bared its teeth. The farmer said that this did not justify his using a thorny stick; he could have used a smooth stick, instead. The visitor retorted that when one is anxious about saving one's life which is in jeopardy, one has no time to discriminate and pick and choose; one has to use what one can find. Besides, he asked, Why, the dog could have threatened to bite me with its tail; when it bites with the teeth, I have to reply with something equally sharp." The Raaja appreciated this point and he was acquitted. Because it was his pet, the farmer resorted to all these tactics; the visitor had to use counter-tactics. Straight dealing could have avoided the bother.

***OM* is the symbol of unchanging, eternal God**

Whatever you do in the spiritual field, you should do it as a spiritual exercise, with full knowledge of its significance for progress. Many people do not know that *Om* or *Pranava* is the merging together of three sounds, A, U, and M. When you write GOD, you do not pronounce it 'jeeohdee', you voice it as GOD. So too, *AUM* is pronounced *Om*. *Om* has a sequel, of a fading M sound which finally tapers into silence, a silence that is felt and experienced. The *pranava* was taught to every child as the very first sound, when it was initiated into) the alphabet. We call letters *akshara*---the unchanging. *Om* is the symbol of the unchanging, eternal, universal, supreme God. So that was the very first letter taught to the children of India. Now *Om* has given place to A, B and C..

Om is the sound of the movement of the stars in the firmament; it is the sound that manifested when the dawn of creative Will stirred the *Niraakaara* (the Attributeless) into activity. As a matter of fact, every little disturbance of equilibrium produces sound, however minute. The meeting of the eyelids when the eye winks results in sound, however faint. There are infinitesimally faint sounds which no ear can hear. So, you can understand that when the Elements originated and Creation started, the sound *Om* was produced. That sound is the primal, the primeval One. When you are in the dual world-Ting to overcome the duality, you identify 'Him' with 'yourself' by the *japam* of *soham*; when the 'I'-consciousness and the 'He'-consciousness disappear, you repeat only *Om*, that is to say, *Soham* minus *Sah* (He) and *aham* (*I*).

Pray to God for illumination and guidance

That is the experience you need and you claim you crave for; but your activities and behaviour, your routine and road indicate that you are not sincere. You say you are going to Bangalore, but you have boarded the train that goes in the opposite direction towards Guntakal. Ascertain clearly whether the train is the right one and then board it. There are quacks and cranks and even crooks who claim to know the road; but the best course is to pray to the God within for illumination and guidance. Then you will get the guidance without fail.

You will have read that when God appears to the ascetics who undergo *thapas* in the forests for years, He asks them, Ask Me what you want from Me, as He were not aware of the purpose for which the *thapas* was gone through: especially when He has appreciated it and has come on purpose to the very place to reward him for it. Yet, God asks the reason why. For, the tongue is the spokesman of the mind and it may at the last moment ask for something that lies dormant, in spite of the concentration of his consciousness on his main wish.

Dhruva who entered the forest for *thapas* in order to bring God before him, so that he could win from Him a status for his mother and himself equal to that of the Chief Queen and her son, realised that it was too unworthy a boon to demand from the Almighty; he therefore asked for Liberation from Birth and Death, and eternal company of the Lord. Others erred and asked at the crucial moment, for things quite out of keeping with the main wish with which they plunged into the venture.

Vaak, or Voice, has to be rigorously trained to avoid chatter and wandering prattle. Keep the tongue under control; do not express what all you are prompted to say; cut that inclination to the minimum. Silence will charge the battery and you can win through a longer period of meditation. Be full of *prema* and then your words will spread *prema*. They will be sweet and soothing like balm to those who suffer.

OM is the root of all sounds in all the worlds

The most effective method of cultivating *prema* is to practise *Naamasmarana* (remembrance of Lord). Or, better still, spread your time in *Pranavopaasana* (the repetition of *Om*). *Om* is the origin of Creation; it is the source, the sustenance and the strength. It is the *praana* (life) of every being. Just as air forced through the reeds of a harmonium produces the *sapthaswaras*, (the seven musical notes), *Sa-ri-ga-ma-pa-dha-ni*, so the one *Om* is at the root of all the sounds in all the worlds. Know its significance and practise its recitation.

In the Geetha, the Lord has assured that the person who dies with the *Pranava* filling his last breath is sure to be liberated. Of course, mere calling to memory is of no benefit. The sound '*OM*' will not help when the mind is flitting from one desire to another; and weeping over the imminent departure from the world and shivering at the world to come, how can the sound help? The glory of *OM* has to be apprehended throughout life, if it is to stand out before the mind at the moment of departure.

Women can perform *Pranava-upaasana*

There are some who deny women the right to repeat the *Pranava*. This is sheer prejudice; it is not laid down in the *Shaastras*. When women are entitled to *Brahmavidya* (*Yaajnavalkya* taught it to *Maitreyi*, his wife), as the great scholar-disputant in Janaka's court, *Gaargi* proves, how can any one keep the *Pranava* away from them? The *Pranava* is *Brahmam*. *Om ithi Ekaaksharam Brahma*: the one word *OM* is *Brahman*. The *Shaastras* are composed by persons who have

known and experienced that the One *Brahman*, symbolised by *Pranava (Om)*, is inherent in this multiplicity of creation; they have outgrown all distinctions of caste and sex; they seek the progress and liberation of men, women and all animate and inanimate creation. How can such saints exclude women from this great instrument of *jnaana* and *yoga*?

Krishna too does not say that whoever among men who pronounce the *Pranava* at the moment of death, etc. The word He uses is, whoever without any qualification of sex. He does not say, whoever who is authorised" or whoever among the deserving. The clear intention of the Lord is to encourage women as well as men to take up *Pranava-upaasana* (contemplation on OM). You will have seen that I do not discourage any one from the *upaasana*. It is the royal road to spiritual victory, which all are entitled to use.

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