

11. Developing the inner vision

WHETHER we are actively working in the world or have withdrawn from it, the most important consideration is not the work that we do or not do, but how effectively we have been able to uproot and destroy the Vasanas (deep-seated tendencies) which lie hidden in our heart. The removal of these impurities, which have encased themselves so deeply, is the principal objective of all *Sadhana* or spiritual practice. This is also the goal of all *Yoga*, namely to cleanse ourselves of all trace of *Raga* and *Dvesha*, the twin evils of attachment and hatred, which have harboured themselves within us.

The Gita has shown that if we can root out the entrenched tendencies that cling to our heart, we are free to perform any action without concern for the results. From that point on we will not be bound by *any Karma* we become engaged in; in other words, we will be completely freed from the effects of our actions. People who do not understand this truth and end up renouncing all outside activities, become mired in sloth and idleness. But the Gita has repeatedly warned us that there is no room at all for idleness in the world of the Spirit. What the Gita teaches is *Anaasakti Yoga*, the *Yoga* of disinterestedness or impersonal action, in which we remain totally indifferent to any personal interest in the work that we do and in the results that accrue from it. It means working with full concentration to the limits of our capacity for excellence, but dedicating all our actions to the service of God and remaining established in God-consciousness.

Nishkama Karma and Anaasakti Yoga

Anaasakti Yoga goes even beyond the practice of *Nishkama Karma* which has been emphasised in the second chapter of the Gita. *Nishkama Karma* is the stage in which all our actions are performed without desiring or expecting any fruits from our labours. No person will be able to reach the stage of *Nishkama Karma* as long as his Vasanas (impressions), which have arisen from past actions, are impediments to spiritual progress. A person must first remove the bad qualities which are associated with bad actions, by replacing them with good qualities which are associated with good actions. Then when he is firmly established in the stage of selfless service, wherein he performs only good actions, he can go to the stage of *Nishkama Karma* (desire-free actions), where he renounces the fruits of all his actions. From there he will rise to the stage of *Anaasakti Yoga*.

The Gita proclaims that only through good deeds, through *Sat Karma*, can the bad tendencies be removed and our hearts purified. But it goes further. It asserts that the true purity of the heart can be achieved only by dedicating all our actions to the Lord. For example, when food is eaten after having been cooked and prepared in a number of different ways, it is still just ordinary food, and we are subject to the good or the bad effects of eating that food. However, if this food before being consumed is offered to God, then it becomes *Prasadam* (blessed food), which becomes the sacred gift of the Lord. By the same token, all the activities performed by us during the day fall into the category of ordinary *Karma*. But when we perform these same actions, even if they are simple acts, with the intention of making them an offering to God, devoting their results not to our own pleasure but the pleasure of the Lord, then they become *Karma Yoga* (communion through selfless action) as well as a *Yajna*, a holy sacrifice. It is only through such *Karma Yoga* that we will be able to rid ourselves of all evil tendencies and make our hearts pure.

Offerings to God should be pure and sacred

What should be the qualities of the actions we offer at the Lotus Feet of the Lord? Before we offer anything to the Lord we must make sure that it is pure, befitting and sacred. Then it will be a worthy offering to the Lord. For example, if we want to offer a rose to the Lord, we first select a beautiful, fragrant bloom. Then we remove the insects from the flower. Next we remove the thorns or any imperfect leaves from the stem and in a number of other ways we make our offering as beautiful and pure as possible. Every action we perform should be like this. Our actions must be saturated with the fragrance of love and sacredness and must be good and pure. This is the true: *Yoga of Action* as laid down in the Gita.

It is in the field of action, or *Karma*, that a man most patently reveals his character and the type of man he is. If we want to ascertain if a person is predominantly *Satwic*, *Rajasic* or *Tamasic* in nature, we need only to observe his actions; they will unmistakably reveal his nature.

Satwic* action is *Nishkama Karma

The Gita has pointed out the type of actions that should be performed in daily life. The Gita proclaims that the secret of human life is to recognize and follow the path of *Dharma*, which means engaging ourselves in selfless and sacred actions that promote the welfare of our fellow men. Only then can our actions be considered *Satwic* in nature. Once they become *Satwic* then they can be classified as *Nishkama Karma*. No ordinary person will be able to perform actions completely without desire. We will have to orient our actions and our desires towards the purpose of seeking and experiencing God. When that sacred orientation becomes the basis of all our activities, then such Karma belongs to the *Yoga of Anaasakti* (communion through equanimity). That is the highest level of action and leads us straight on the path of our goal. But involved herein will be the spell of *Maya*.

There are two powerful *Shaktis* that make up *Maya*: one is *Avarana* (veiling power) and the other is *Vikshepa* (projecting power). There is no particular form and shape for these two.

Avarana refers to that which veils or covers. How does it cover? If it does not have form itself, by what means does it cover? How can it be removed? These questions cannot be easily answered. *Maya* is mysterious and inexplicable.

In what circumstances does this delusion exert its influence on us? It is during twilight or in the dark that we imagine that we see a snake when there is only a rope there. It is through darkness that the delusion comes and envelops us. In truth, no snake has covered the rope, but the delusion beclouds the mind of man and covers his clear perception. This delusion is *Maya*. When you turn your torch on the area you find no snake there; there is only a rope lying there. Thus, in the light, delusion disappears and the real object is seen. That which exists will always exist; it will never cease to exist. It remains forever unchanged. There cannot be even the slightest variation in its existence. It is only the delusion covering it which comes and goes. The form that this delusion takes in the mind is *Vikshepa* the second powerful *Shakti of Maya*. *Vikshepa* is the projection that is super imposed on the unchanging basis. In this case the projection was the snake. Another time it will be something else.

Moods, pains, pleasures all come and go. They are something like relatives that come to visit us, but they do not stay permanently. In the same way, this *Maya* comes and goes as a delusion for human beings. The delusion in our mind which covers the rope and hides from view is *Avarana*, the veiling power. The illusion which has been projected by our mind on to the rope is *Vikshepa*,

the projecting power. With the help of the light we see the rope as a rope, and the snake vanishes. So these two aspects of *Maya* have come in the darkness and disappeared in the light. *Maya* has no beginning. But it can permanently come to an end. When the light of wisdom shines on it, *Maya* will finally disappear; then the One Unchanging Reality will stand revealed. By teaching this great wisdom to Arjuna, Krishna was able to free him from delusion and make him shine with self-effulgence.

Then as now, we are developing only superficial understanding and outer vision. But it is the inner vision that is important; it alone is true and sacred. We lose sight of the One Reality, of our own Truth, because we pay attention only to the impermanent outer vision and forget completely the permanent inner vision. God comes as *Avatar* (incarnation) in order to bestow this sacred inner vision.

From Karma and Bhakti Yoga to Jnana Yoga

Krishna urged Arjuna to free himself from attachments and illusions that were confounding him. Krishna said, "Arjuna, you yourself must purify your heart and remove the veil of ignorance that is beclouding you. Take to the path of righteous action, work for the welfare of the world and dedicate your every act to Me, who am your very Self, residing in your heart." There is no royal road for human life other than through *Karma Yoga*, through the path of dedicated action. We will be able to enter into *Bhakti Yoga*, the path of devotion only after we have laid a firm foundation through good actions. And only after we have purified our feelings and developed our devotion will we be able to enter into the area of Wisdom and proceed on the highest path of *Jnana Yoga*.

Using our intellect to plan out an action whose fruits would benefit someone else, as is the case in the action of an old man who plants a tree whose fruits will be enjoyed by the future generations, can be called *Buddhi Yoga* (communion through intellect). In *Buddhi Yoga* we enquire into the consequences of our actions, and thereby base our actions on the reasoning power of our intellect. Intellect goes far above the narrow selfish considerations of the lower mind and senses. But even here there is still a tinge of selfishness. When we are completely free from all selfishness, totally indifferent to the results, acting effectively with full concentration, but without any attachment or desire, and offering all our actions to God, then we are practising *Anaasakti Yoga*. This is far superior to *Buddhi Yoga*.

The best way to develop inner vision

Anaasakti Yoga is not easily accessible to ordinary people. But that does not mean that we should give up trying to attain it. With whole-hearted effort and God's Grace, seemingly impossible things can be achieved. If we persist in our efforts then with practice we will be able to reach this high level of *Anaasakti Yoga* in all our activities.

To succeed in this, the inner vision must be developed. Constantly reflecting on the Divinity that is everywhere is the best way to develop the inner vision that will establish us in *Anaasakti Yoga*. But the inner vision is very rare among men; even the greatest *Pandits* and scholars are steeped only in the outer vision. Here is a story that illustrates this.

The story of Ashtavakra and the *Pandits*

Once upon a time, King Janaka called an assembly of great scholars. Famous *Pandits* and logicians came from all over the realm. The assembly was composed of such giants that there was no room at all for ordinary people to enter in. The daily meetings were presided over by

King Janaka himself, and of the highly select group in attendance, only the most outstanding and accomplished were given the opportunity to speak and present their views. It was to this magnificent and august assembly that Ashtavakra, young in age, devoid of formal scholarship and twisted in physical form, sought to gain admission. But who would permit Ashtavakra to enter? He did not have any credentials or any recommendation whatsoever. The only help he had was his deep faith in God

Whoever has an abiding faith in God will not be put to any great difficulties. Temporarily there may be some obstacles but in the end he is sure to meet with success. For three days Ashtavakra waited at the gate of King Janaka's palace. While waiting Ashtavakra observed all the world-famous scholars who were coming to attend the meeting. Ashtavakra was not prepared to give up his resolution to join the assembly and participate in its deliberations. He waited at the gate patiently day after day. There was one observant and sympathetic old scholar who noticed Ashtavakra standing by that gate, whenever he entered and exited through it, morning and evening. The kindly old scholar informed King Janaka that there was a young boy outside, waiting for some days to enter the assembly, although he did not have any of the usual qualifications necessary for being inside.

King Janaka directed his assistants to find the boy and bring him to the assembly hall. Shortly after King Janaka had taken his seat, and the meeting began in the solemn and sacred atmosphere befitting such an august assembly, Ashtavakra entered the hall. The moment they saw the young boy with such crooked form come to take part in the assembly, most of the great scholars who had gathered there began to laugh.

Ashtavarka calls *Pandits* as cobblers

King Janaka who was keenly observing Ashtavakra as he entered, did not laugh. Ashtavakra looked carefully around the hall, and then quite inexplicably started laughing even louder than the scholars seated there. This loud burst of laughter from Ashtavakra was quite inadmissible and greatly surprised the scholars; it became a real problem for them. "Why should this uncouth stripling be laughing at us?" they thought. "There certainly is reason enough for our laughter, considering how funny he looks, but there is nothing at all strange about us, so what conceivable reason does he have for all this laughter?" They were very much puzzled and irritated by what they considered the boy's impertinence.

The assembled scholars were eagerly waiting to find out why this strange looking young person who had just come in, was laughing so loudly. One of the scholars was bold enough to speak to Ashtavakra. He asked, "Oh stranger, who are you? We do not know you. When we looked at you as you came in, your form made us laugh. In response to our laughter you are laughing even more loudly. What is the reason for this? What strikes you so funny about all the renowned scholars seated here that you have not even for a moment stopped laughing."

Ashtavakra replied, "Well, Sir, I entered this gathering thinking it to be sacred assembly convened by the famous Emperor Janaka to discuss the holy scriptures. If only I had known what kind of people were attending this assembly, I would not have bothered to come. I waited patiently for many days and then entered this hall thinking that the greatest living scholars would be assembled here. I looked forward to being in the company of such sacred souls. But, alas, I find nothing but cobblers here, only *Charmakarars* (shoemakers), who stitch chappals and work with leather." When they heard this all the scholars became furious, feeling greatly insulted by Ashtavarka for using such an abusive word.

Pandits should have capacity to look inward

But Ashtavakra continued in the same vein, "*Charmakara* is the proper word to describe you. Only cobblers, only people who work with hides and skins will think about the worth of a particular skin; others will not be bothered about it. All of you are laughing at my skin and have obviously decided it is not worth much, but not even one of you has made an effort to know about my scholarship. Pandits should have a capacity to look inward, but you only seem to care about the outer covering. If you have not developed your inner vision but are only concerned, with the superficial outer vision, then you cannot be considered scholars at all. Then you are only *Charmakaras*, shoemakers, cobblers, specialists in hides." Thus spoke Ashtavakra. The scholars hung their heads in shame. King Janaka who understood very well what Ashtavakra was saying, invited him to take a seat in the assembly, and subsequently bestowed numerous honours upon him.

As was the case then, so is the case now throughout the world. However great we may be, we have developed only the external vision. We do not bother to cultivate the inner vision. When we examine a person we pay attention only to his physical features, his wealth, his status, his education, his degrees and so on. On the other hand when God examines a person, He looks at the purity of his heart. He pays attention to the peace that is within him. It is such inner vision that we must develop.

Whatever be the circumstances we confront with, we should' not get excited or agitated. We should allow time for the nobler feelings to well up. from inside us and manifest themselves. By practising patience and forbearance we will be able to acquire all the other important spiritual qualities, such as mind control, renunciation, endurance and concentration. This will bring a state of inner purity and abiding peace. Inner purity is even more important than outer purity. The Lord is ever present both inside and out. Therefore, both inner and the outer, the entire place where the Lord is to be found, must be purified and sanctified. Then the indwelling God will protect you wherever you go.

Discourse on the Gita, delivered at the Prashaanthi Mandir.