

12. Be Master of the senses

DEAR STUDENTS! The body wields influence over the senses. The senses have even greater influence over the body. The body cannot exist without the senses and vice versa. They are inextricably interdependent. Each is useless without the other, like the positive and negative ends of an electric current.

Proper protection of the body is an essential duty of the individual. In this connection the role of the senses is remarkable. The wonders performed by the Divine defy description. Equally the part played by the senses is marvellous. The senses are subtler than the body. Although the potencies of sound, touch, sight, hearing and taste exist within the body, the senses exercise extraordinary power over all of them. Joy and sorrow, heat and cold are experienced when the sense organs come into contact with external objects. Without sensory objects the senses cannot function. It is not easy for anyone to comprehend or describe the myriad facets of the sense organs.

The *indriyas* (senses) have another name called *Maatrah* (*Maatra* is that which measures). The sense organs have the capacity to measure. How is this done? Take, for instance, a fruit. Which of the senses has the power to determine whether it is sweet or sour? Which sense organ decides the taste of an object? It is the tongue. The tongue determines whether an eatable is tasty or not and makes it known to the person concerned.

Which organ has the capacity to declare, in the case of a picture, whether it is attractive or otherwise? The determining organ is the eye. In the same way, the power to determine whether an object is fragrant or foul-smelling is given to the nose. The ear determines whether a certain note is harmonious or discordant. It is because the sense organs have this power of measuring and determining the particular characteristic of sense objects that they are called *Maatrah* (Measuring instruments).

The senses are like horses

In the *Kathopanishad*, the senses are described as horses yoked to the chariot of the body. In regarding the senses as *Aswa* (horses) what is the inner significance? *Aswa* means that which is continually restless. It is common knowledge that a horse, whether it is running or standing or sleeping, moves some part of its body or the other all the time. The tail, or the leg, or the back or the nose, some part or other is kept moving. It is because of its restless nature that the horse is called *Aswam*. Take the example of a peepal tree: Whether there is any breeze or not its leaves are always rustling. Hence it is called *Aswattha* tree.

In ancient times, the rulers used to perform a *Yaga* (sacrifice) called the *Aswa-Medha Yaga*. *Aswa* means that which is fickle and restless. *Medha* means *Buddhi* (intelligence). *Aswa-Medha* means "fickle-minded." The horse that is used in the *yaga* symbolises a fickle mind. Whoever is capable of capturing and controlling that horse is described as a *Dheemantha*, a man of heroic intelligence, worthy of meeting in combat. Here we see the esoteric and exoteric meanings of the term *Aswa-Medha*. It is only when both the meanings are synthesised that we get at the whole truth. It is the duty of every person to control the horse-like senses. Only then can he become a hero. Whatever *yagas* or *yajnas* one may perform, whatever scripture he may have mastered, if he has no control over his senses, all these accomplishments are worthless.

Use and misuse of senses

The *term Maatra* as applied to senses has yet another meaning. It indicates that there is divinely prescribed limit to what each *indriya* (sense organ) can experience. For instance, the eye can only see, but cannot hear. The mouth can only speak but cannot see. Thus each organ has been endowed by God with a specific talent. Only those who use these organs according to the divinely prescribed functions will be acting up to the will of the Divine. Those who violate the prescribed limits will be going against the Divine Will.

Hence everyone should try to use the sense organs with due regard to their prescribed functions. The nose, for instance, has been allotted a specific assignment. It should inhale and exhale air for the purpose of preserving an individual's health. The nose should distinguish between good and bad smells and take in only what is good and fragrant. This is the specific role ordained for the nose. Unfortunately the nose is used for taking snuff and inhaling foul air. By these practices, one violates the injunctions pertaining to the use of the nose. Thereby he commits a double offence: one, violating a Divine injunction and the other causing damage to his health,. As a result, man becomes a prey to disease.

Likewise, in the case of tongue, it has been given to man so that it may decide what is wholesome and what is bad in the food that is consumed so as to promote one's health, to speak sweetly and give joy to others, and to communicate one's innermost thoughts to others. The tongue, which has been given for these edifying purposes, is being grossly misused today. It is used for consuming narcotics, eating animal food, smoking, indulging in abuse of others, carrying tales, using harsh words (language) and causing pain to others. In these ways the injunctions of the Divine are violated by setting at naught the prescribed limits. As a consequence, man experiences numerous troubles.

Control the senses to attain Divinity

It is only by using the divinely given senses for the purposes for which they are intended that man can rise to the level of the Divine. You should not use the sense organs as you please just because you have them. They are like horses yoked to a chariot. You must know how to handle them properly so that the chariot can be used well. The horses must be in front of the chariot. Today, on the contrary, the horses are behind the chariot. This leads to dangerous consequences. If, on the ground that you should respect the senses and give them a place of honour, you place the horses (senses) in the chariot, what will be the result? The chariot cannot move at all. While fostering the senses, no effort is being made to bring them under control internally. This is like feeding a horse excessively, but not giving it adequate work. This also is likely to have untoward results. We are failing today to engage the senses adequately. They are being allowed to run amuck. As a consequence, the senses are threatening to dictate to the master.

The ten wives of the Mind

This situation may be likened to that of a man with many wives. Uttannapada had two wives and because of the differences between them, the child Druva had to go to the forest to perform penance. Dasaratha had three wives. To comply with the demands of his youngest wife, Dasaratha had to endure the departure of his dearest son, Rama, to the forest. If such difficulties can arise for those having two or three wives, imagine the plight of one who has to manage ten wives. The mind has ten wives--the five sense organs and the five organs of action. Each organ seeks to enjoy objects of its own choice.

The nose smells some good edible and wants to have it. The ear hears some sweet music and wants to enjoy it. The eye hankers after a new film. When all of them are keen about their own particular desires, how can the master (the mind) satisfy them all at the same time? Unable to satisfy them the mind gets frustrated. How can one wedded to ten wives get peace? It is only when the senses are kept under proper control that man would be happy himself and share that happiness with others.

Cultivate equanimity to control the senses

There is a method by which the demands of the senses can be reconciled and harmonised. This is by treating both good and bad with equal-mindedness. There are people who display such equanimity. Tukaram is an illustrious example. He was a saintly person. His wife was a termagant. By his calmness and forbearance, Tukaram managed to get on with her. Once, Tukaram was bringing home in his cart the sugarcane crop harvested from his small farm. As he was going home, the children of the village gathered round him and pleaded for a piece of sugarcane. In his boundless goodness, Tukaram allowed the children to help themselves to the cane on the cart. By the time he reached home there was only one stalk of cane left. Seeing this his wife got enraged, abused Tukaram, and taking out the cane, struck Tukaram with it. The cane broke into three pieces. Tukaram calmly remarked, "*I was wondering how to distribute the single remaining cane to the members of the family. You have solved the problem. You can keep one piece and give the other two to the children.*"

Such forbearance and equanimity can be found only in a few high-souled persons. These qualities can be acquired only through devotion and faith.

You need not feel disheartened at the prospect of being unable to control the senses. By developing one-pointed devotion, the senses can be brought under control.

Kabir is an example of a godly man in a different situation. His wife was highly devoted and faithful, totally dedicated to serving the husband. One day, Kabir was plying his loom, chanting the name of "Ram" all the time. Suddenly, he called his wife and said that one thread had snapped and asked her to bring a lamp. It was noon and when she brought the lighted lamp, Kabir told her to take it away as it was not necessary. She silently took it back without any argument. With such a dutiful wife, Kabir was able to develop his devotion and expressed his gratitude to God for His grace.

A lesson to be learnt in sense control

Here you have two examples of saintly men, who, despite their different family situations, pursued their godly ways equally well. It is not the environment that matters. It is the purity of our impulses which count. Don't worry about the external environment.

The ancient sages regarded sense-control as a form of penance. Disciplining of senses calls for an understanding of how the senses function. A Christian priest learnt a lesson in sense control from the driver of a horse carriage in which he was travelling. The priest noticed that the driver was beating the horse severely as it was approaching a railway crossing. Taking pity on the animal, the priest asked the driver why he was beating the horse unnecessarily. The driver explained that at the level crossing there were some white painted stones which caused a fright in the horse. He was beating the animal as the horse was more afraid of the whip than the white

stones. The priest learnt that diverting the mind away from one undesirable thought was the way to turn it in the desirable direction.

The senses have been compared to *pasu* (animals) whose vision is externally oriented. Man should strive to be a master of the senses and not their slave. For this purpose, first of all, man should not pamper the senses. Man should realise that the pleasure derived from the senses is momentary and ends only in grief. If the senses are kept busy the right way, there will be no trouble from them.

***Atma* is not affected by abuse or praise**

In the Mahabharata when Sisupala abused Sri Krishna in Yudhishtira's audience hall and after Sisupala was slain by Sri Krishna, a flame emerged from Sisupala's body and merged in Sri Krishna. Yudhishtira was surprised at this phenomenon. He questioned Narada how a vile enemy of Krishna like Sisupala could have such a glorious end as the merger of his spirit in Sri Krishna. Narada explained as follows: "Abuse or praise relates only to the body and not to the *Atma*. The one Supreme *Paramatma* dwells in all beings. That being the case, who is the cavalier and who is it that is cavilled? Who is a friend and who is an enemy? All are the same. The blood that constantly remembers God becomes an offering to God., (This is a reference to the blood flowing from Sisupala's body to the feet of Sri Krishna). Whether out of hatred or jealousy or attachment, if the Lord's name is remembered that is sufficient. Sisupala remembered Sri Krishna's name more often than many devotees. Devotees remember the Lord at the time of worship alone. Sisupala in his intense hatred of Krishna, had Krishna in his mind all the time, whether waking or sleeping. It was because of this constant remembrance of Krishna's name that Sisupala's soul could merge in Krishna."

Laymen look only at the superficial aspects of things. The Lord does not see things that way. He is free from hatred or envy, likes and dislikes. When these are attributed to the Lord they are only a reflection of one's own feelings. God is like a mirror. What you see is only a reflection of your own action and posture. God neither punishes nor rewards any one. Punishment or reward is the outcome of your own actions.

Hence, no one is entitled to question the actions of God, accusing God of favouritism or indifference to someone or the other. Who has the authority to prescribe to God how He should conduct Himself?

The divinity that is present in everyone will find expression in varying types of behaviour. The actions of the Divine are totally free from self-interest. Because God is the embodiment of Love, no taint can adhere to God's actions. As God is the embodiment of all that is pure and untainted, any defect that is attributed to God is only a projection of the defect in the individual concerned. Your defective vision makes you see defects which do not exist in creation.

If the senses are properly used, they will offer the right impressions. Everyone should embark on the *Sadhana* for disciplining the senses.

Discourse at the Summer Course in Brindavan on 22-5-1990.