

18. Aham Brahmaasmi

Students! You are neither sinners nor meritorious. You are not pleasure-seekers, nor are you *yogis*. You are neither *Manthra* nor *Yantra* nor *Thantra*. You are not committed to action or to enjoyment. Who, then, are you? "*Satchindananda swarupam Shivoham, Shivoham.*" You are ever the embodiments of auspiciousness. Sai Leela (who had spoken earlier) had reminded you of *Sarvadevathaa swarupam* (all deities appearing in one form). There are no such deities. The combined form of all human beings represents the unified form of all deities. The Vedas declare "*Sahasra Seershaa Purushah Sahasraaksha Sahasrapaadh*" (the Lord has a myriad heads, a myriad eyes and myriad feet).

You are what you are, not somebody else. Whether it be a pauper or a millionaire, a pandit or an ignoramus, a child or an old man, a man or a woman, when they introduce themselves everyone uses the word, "I," "I," "I," (*Nenu* in Telugu). If birds and animals could speak, they would describe themselves as "I am a cat, I am a monkey, I am a dog," and so on. Thus "I" is found everywhere. The cosmos is based on the consciousness of "I." "I" is not only the basis, it is the very form of the cosmos. Wherefrom has this "I" originated? In fact, it has no origin. It is a principle which exists in all beings at all times.

"I" is the embodiment of the *Aatma*

If we examine the phenomenal world, we can see that terms like "you" and "he" and "we" came into existence only after the term "I." What is this "I"? Who is this "I"? It is the embodiment of the *Aatma*. Where does the *Aatma* dwell? It is all-pervading. The *Shrutis* have described this all-pervading *Aatma* as *hridaya*. *Hrid* + *dhaya* is *hridaya*. *Dhaya* means compassion. That which is the embodiment of compassion is *hridaya*. Therefore, the term "I" refers to that which is filled with compassion.

If a student is asked "Who are you?" he may reply "I am Rangayya or Ramayya." If you ask him "When did you come?" he will reply, "I came on May 20 for the Summer course." What is it that has come? It is the body. It is in relation to the body that the student says that he came on the 20th. Here the reply is based on identification of himself with the body. The next day the same student says, "My stomach is upset." When he says "My stomach," there is an obvious distinction between him and the stomach. When one refers to "my hand," "my head," "my belly," "my leg" and so on, obviously he is different from these organs. When one says "This is my towel," the towel is separate from the owner.

The question naturally arises, "who are you?" This question has to be fully explored. One makes himself separate from all physical objects. The entire cosmos is thus made up of two elements, "This" and "I." "This" refers to what is seen (*Drishyam*). "I" is the seer. We use the terms, "This is a table." "This is an auditorium." We cannot refer to any object without first using the word "this." By the use of the term "this," the particular object that is referred to is made clear.

There is no Seen without the Seer

That which is seen is perceived only because there is a Seer. When there is no Seer, there is no Seen. People say that the eyes see. But on what basis do the eyes see? It is not the eyes that see. There is something more basic. For instance, when a bulb sheds light, it is not the bulb that illumines. It is the current that makes the bulb shed light. Likewise all the objects in the world that are present are perceptible and made manifest by the perceiver.

Thus the principle of "I" is all-pervasive. People may call themselves by different names. But the one thing that is common to all of them is the concept of "I." The very first word in the universe was "I." *Aham* ("I") is the first name of the Lord "*Aham Brahmaasmi.*" *Aham* comes first and Brahma comes afterwards. This means that *Aham* is the name of the Lord. For everyone, therefore, the term "I" is always present.

Creation proclaims the will of the Divine. All beings in creation are images of the divine. The advent of man is for the purpose of proclaiming to the world the glory of the Creator. Man is the image of the Creator. The "I" indicates the oneness of man and the Creator. Hence, the nature of the "I" has to be explored. Physical desires become barriers to the discovery of the true nature of "I." Clouds which have been caused by the sun hide the sun from view. How, then, are we to see the sun? We know that the sun is there, but is not visible because it is covered by clouds. When the wind blows, the clouds are scattered and the sun is visible again. The fire in a burning piece of charcoal is not visible when it is covered by ashes. The reason is that the ashes, which, came out of the fire, have covered the fire. To see the fire, we have to remove the ashes.

Shed *Anaatma* to enable the *Aatma* to shine

Man today performs various spiritual exercises. These are of nine kinds: listening to the praise of God, singing the glories of God, remembering the name of the Lord, adoring the Lord's feet, service to the Lord, prostration, worshipping the idol of the Lord, cultivating friendship towards the Lord and complete surrender of the self to the Lord. People think that these nine forms of devotion are for the purpose of realising the *Aatma*. This is a mistake. These forms of worship are intended to shed the *Anaatma* (that which is not the *Aatma*). When the *Anaatma* is cast off, the *Aatma* shines of its own accord, just as the burning charcoal is perceived when the ashes are removed and the sun is perceived when the clouds move away. The *Aatma* is omnipresent. Only if it is confined to one place, will you have to search for it. But *Aatma* is present everywhere. When you want to experience it you have to get rid of the *Anaatma* that envelops it.

What are *Aatma* and *Anaatma*? In reality there is no such thing as *Anaatma*. *Anaatma* is merely the inability to perceive the *Aatma*. For instance, here is a light that is burning. As long as the light is burning, you cannot have darkness. When you switch off the light, there is darkness. Wherefrom did this darkness come? It did not come from anywhere. The mere absence of light produced the darkness. When there is light darkness goes. So, darkness is simply the absence of light. As long as one does not experience the *Aatma Bhaava*, he will be immersed in the *Anaatma*. When the *Aatma* is experienced the *Anaatma* feeling disappears.

The mind turns men away from the *Aatma*

It is because one has lost the vision of the *Aatma* that he is caught up in the *Anaatma Bhaava* (vagaries of the mind). This is like depending on the light of the moon when the sun is not shining. Forgetting the effulgence of the Sun (the *Aatma*), man relies on the mind, which is like the moon that sheds the reflected light from the sun. All spiritual practices in which people are engaged today are related to the mind only. This is totally wrong. By blindly adhering to certain transitional practices people have fallen a prey to peacelessness.

Spiritual exercises should not be performed mentally. The mind is like the thief who cannot be expected to catch a thief. The mind, instead of seeking the *Aatma*, interests itself in other things. It turns man away from the *Aatma* and involves him in illusory pleasures of the world. Hence,

spiritual exercises based on the mind cannot lead man out of the darkness of ignorance. When the *Aatma* is experienced, the mind will cease to exist.

When the mind is absent, there is no need for control of the mind, Once the *Aatma* is experienced, the mind control becomes superfluous. It is like the light of the moon fading in the presence of the sunlight.

Hence, what men have to seek and acquire is *Aatmaanandam* (the bliss of the *Aatma*), not the pleasure of the mind, the body or the senses. All the latter forms of happiness are transient.

The way to experience the *Aatma*

If man enquires earnestly into the nature of "I," his enquiry will lead him to the experience of the *Aatma*. This may be illustrated by an episode from the *Bhagavatha*. It was one of the sports of Krishna to go stealthily into the houses of the *Gopikas* and upset pots containing milk and curds. The *Gopikas*, who were worded about Krishna's pranks, were keen to catch him red-handed. Krishna was an elusive thief. So, one *Gopika* suggested that the only way to catch Him was to pray to him. The *Gopikas* started praying to Krishna. "O Krishna, is it possible for us to get at you? You are subtler than the atom and vaster than the vastest thing in the world. You pervade every being in creation. How can we comprehend you?" As a result of the prayer, the *Gopikas* were shown the means of catching Him. Krishna poured out the milk from the pot, washed His feet in the milk and ran out of the house. The *Gopikas* followed Krishna's footprints and caught hold of Him. The symbolic significance of this episode is that the Divine can be experienced only when the devotee clings to the feet of the Lord. This is the teaching of the *Bhagavatha*.

When the enquiry into the nature of "I" is pursued, it will be found that the "I" is the omnipresent entity present in every living being. This is the truth of the Vedic declaration: "*Aham Brahmaasmi*" (I am the Supreme Self). Some people may ask whether it is enough to meditate on the declaration "*Aham Brahmaasmi*." This may be done, but when one meditates on the declaration "*Aham Brahmaasmi*," one has to start with the understanding of the "I"; then you will understand Brahman.

Pray to God: "I am you and you are me"

There is a prayer addressed to God in which God is described as mother, father, brother, friend and everything else. This is not the right way to worship God. This kind of prayer binds man to worldly relationships. Instead of these multiple relationships, a simpler way of describing the relationship between man and God is to say: "I am you and you are me."

The divinity inherent in man should be considered as one only, and not many. All the variety of names and forms one perceives are creations of the mind and are bound to pass away. When you and the Divine are one, where is the need for seeking the Divine? Only a fool goes in search of himself. Instead of resorting to all forms of meditation, it is simpler and easier to proceed on the single idea that you and the Divine are one. But this process of identification should not be an artificial exercise. It should come from the heart. In declaring "I am the Divine," you should express a genuine and deep experience. You should feel that the Divine is not separate from you. Instead of that if you merely repeat, "I am God, I am God," on the basis that Swami has told you so, you will be indulging in a foolish exercise.

The Divine should be comprehended by earnest enquiry and a profound inner experience. It should, however be realised that as long as you live in this phenomenal world and have to

perform worldly duties, it is not easy to express this oneness in the Divine. It has to be a gradual process by which the divinisation of life is achieved.

Get rid of the identification with the body

You have to realise that there are two elements in a human being. One is the *Aatma* and the other is *Anaatma* (one is the body and the other is the indweller in the body). One is the *Kshetra* (the field), the other is *Kshetrajna* (the Knower of the field). As in a grinder, one stone is firm and unmoving while the other is movable, it is only when both combine that you can achieve fulfilment.

The body should be considered as an instrument. Only then gradually the identification with the body can be got rid of. Man is perpetually enhancing the attachments relating to the body. Because-of these attachments and infatuation, the ego principle gets inflated. As the ego sense grows, the spiritual aspiration becomes weaker. But there can be no decay of the Spirit. What happens is the fading out of the Spirit (the *Aatma*) from one's vision. This implies that a constant effort must be made to control the impulses of the body.

The Divine is only one. The names given to God like Rama and Krishna are incidental. Birth is an incident, like giving a name to one that is born, Life itself is an interlude. But in this artificial interlude of life there is an eternal *Aatmic* principle. That should be made the basis of life. Only then the Reality can be understood.

Whatever books you may read, whatever discourses you may listen to, all these are merely mental lumber without application in practice. What sweetness will you experience if you merely read the description of various sweet preparations? But when you eat them, you experience their sweetness immediately. There is a vast difference between the bliss that is directly experienced and the bliss which is intellectually comprehended by the study of books. Therefore, the first step is to begin practising what you learn. Your faith must be translated into action.

Live the life of a human being

Students! You may pass examinations by studying books. After that you may get a job in which there is no use for all that you have studied. You must see that there is a close link between what you have studied and the life which you lead. There must be harmony between the knowledge you acquire and your speech and actions. It is only when there is this threefold unity that you can live the life of a human being.

Today this unity in thought, word and deed is rarely to be found among men. Students! You have to realise the supreme sacredness of human life. It is better to lead a brief but glorious life of a swan than live for long like a crow. Do not give way to the ever-changing promptings of the mind. Use your discrimination in deciding what you should do. You must examine whether what one wants to do is right or wrong and you should be guided by your intellect. Never act on the impulses of the moment.

You must recognise the divine that is present in all beings. The Upanishad declares; "*Ishaavaasyam Idham Sarvam*" (All this is pervaded by the divine). The divine is one, although described by different names. There is some basis for the differences in names. The same person may be described in different terms according to the functions he discharges.

The idea of total surrender to God

People tend to blame God for their troubles and say that even though they have surrendered to God their troubles have not ceased. This is misuse of the idea of surrender. If one has really surrendered to God, one should not be worried about what happens to him. The sense of separation between oneself and God should go. As long as the sense of separation exists, the divine cannot be realised. Brahman means that which is infinite. The divine, therefore, has to be experienced in all forms.

In whatever form the divine is worshipped, the offering goes to the divine. In the deep sleep state one is not aware of the names or forms or position or anything else. It is also described as the state of *Samadhi*. In that state names and forms do not exist. There is no consciousness of differences. There is no feeling of love or hatred. No likes and dislikes. *Samadhi* is not a state of unconsciousness. It is a transcendental state, in which all differences have ceased. This state is attained when the mind merges with the *Atma*.

Do not forget your inherent divinity

Students! In the different forms and names, you are like different actors on the stage. As long as you have to play your part, you have to act according to the role assigned to you. But you should not forget your true *Atmic* self. Whatever role you play, your *Atmic* self remains unchanged. You should never forget your inherent divinity.

Many parents today are responsible for allowing their children to go astray. Students should remember that even if the parents advise them against their pursuing the spiritual path, they are entitled to act against their parents' advice. When a father comes between a son and his devotion to God, the son is free to disobey the father. In worldly matters the son may follow the father's advice. But with regard to relationship with the divine you must follow your own way. At the time of marriage, the bride and the bridegroom are enjoined to act together in matters relating to righteous conduct, material interests, and worldly *desires*---*Dharmecha*, *Arthecha* and *Kaamecha*. But with regard to *Moksha*, attainment of salvation, each must follow his or her path. This means that in the spiritual field you need not have to be afraid of anyone.

When Meera was locked out of the Krishna Mandir by the Rana she was advised by Tulasidas that in the quest for God she was not bound to obey her husband's orders. In the case of Vibhishana, he chose to renounce his elder brother Ravana when Ravana was opposed to Vibhishana's devotion to Rama. Bharatha did not allow his mother's wishes to come in the way of his devotion and loyalty to Rama. The Emperor Bali disregarded the advice of his preceptor Sukracharya, when he came in the way of Bali carrying out his promise to the Lord.

The lesson to be drawn from all these episodes is that God is above all others. Father, mother, brother, teacher and all others rank far below God. All such relations are temporary and transient. Only the relationship between man and God is permanent and unchanging. The faith in God must be firm and unwavering.

You must acquire steadiness of mind. When a person has a vacillating mind, he is worse than a monkey.

Brindavan, 27 May 1992

*Greed arises from attachment to the senses and catering to them.
Put them in their proper place, they are windows for knowledge,
not channels of contamination.*

Sathya Sai Baba