

28. Discovering the *Aathma*

There is no penance equal to peace;

There is no happiness greater than contentment;

There is no worse disease than desire;

There is no righteousness equal to compassion.

EMBODIMENTS of Love! No penance can be equal to peace. Real penance consists in not leading the life of an ascetic in a forest but in worshipping God in thought, word and deed. Where is the need for any penance to acquire peace if that peace is already present in the heart? Peace can be got when one's vision is turned inward.

"Na santhoshaathparam sukham" (There is no happiness greater than contentment). How many miserable people are there in the world who have all the comforts they need! Dhritaraashtra had all regal comforts and had a hundred sons but could find no peace. Creature comforts cannot be equated with peace. Contentment, it is said, confers the greatest happiness. It follows that true happiness resides in the heart and everyone should, seek it there.

Excessive desires are the source of all ills. There is momentary satisfaction from the fulfilment of some desires. But when desires are not realised, man becomes sick in many ways. There is no more dreadful disease in the world than insatiable desire.

"Na cha Dharmo Dhayaa samah" There is no right conduct equal to compassion--for the simple reason that a compassionate heart is the abode of the Divine. Where there is compassion there is no need for other acts of charity.

Awareness is pure and unsullied consciousness

The Indian sages from ancient times have given the highest place of honour and esteem to the word *Aathma*. This is also known as *Eruka* (Awareness or Consciousness). This awareness finds expression in the term *Aham* ("I"). When this *Aham* identifies itself with a bodily form, it becomes *Ahamkaara*. (the ego). This ego is not the natural state of *Aham*. It is by relating itself to a particular form that it becomes *Ahamkaara*. It is pure and unsullied consciousness.

It is the mind that comes in the way of the proper understanding of *Aham*. Just as the clouds that arise out of the vapours produced by the sun may hide the sun for a time, the mind veils the *Aham* by its thoughts and desires, though the mind arises from the *Aathma*. The role of the mind in relation to the *Aathmik* principle has to be properly understood. It operates as an obstacle to the awareness of the *Aathma*.

The term "I" (*nenu* in Telugu) originated in *the Aathma*. The "I" is the form of *Aham*. Terms like *Aham*, God, Awareness and *Aathma* are all synonymous. When the *Aham* ("I") is rightly understood one becomes *anAathma-jnaani* (knower of the Self).

There is a fundamental principle to which the 'I' is related. The "I" has no basis in the body It has to recognise its 'link with its primary source.

The *Aathmik* principle is one and one only

Every object in the world has its origin in a primary source. This cannot be created by anyone. There is a primordial source, which is responsible for all creation. Very few care to enquire into the nature of this source.

From the worldly point of view, we have a *Kartha* (doer), *the Karma* (duty) and the *Kriya* (deed). But from the spiritual point of view all three are one and the same--the doer, the duty and the deed. This *Aathmik* principle is one and one only

It is said that *Sath-Chith-Aanandha* (Being-Awareness-Bliss) are the attributes of the *Aathma* (Self). In my view these three are not three distinct entities. They are not three different states. *Chith* (Awareness) and *Aanandha* (Bliss) are present in *Sath* like sugar which is dissolved in water and becomes one with it as syrup.

There is an illustration, which explains why it is difficult to recognise the *Aathmik* Principle. There is a cup containing fruit juice. The cup is not aware of the nature of the juice. A man uses a straw to suck the juice. The straw does not know anything about the juice. The *Buddhi* recognises the taste of the juice. It does not enjoy it. The juice is sent down to the stomach, where it gets converted to three parts--the gross, which is excreted, the subtle which becomes blood and helps to sustain life and the subtler goes to the *Prajna-Shakthi* (Constant Integrated awareness), which is synonymous with the Self. In this analogy, the cup is the body; the straw represents the senses. *Prajnaana* is the *Aathma*.

Prajnaana, Awareness, the "I", *Aathma*, *Aanandha*, - *Brahman* are all synonymous terms. Worldly persons may see differences in these words, but in spiritual parlance they mean the same thing.

Two kinds of "I" : attached and detached

The *Aham* ('I') is of two kinds. One that is associated with attachment to the body and the other that dissociates it from the body. Both are "I" (*nenu* in Telugu). But the 'I' that is identified with the body becomes *Ahamkaara* (the ego). The ego carries a form wherever it goes. But the formless "I" not identified with the body is the *Aathma*. The formless *Aathma* has no attributes. But when it is associated with a form it has all attributes. Today people experience only the *Aham*. ("I") that is identified with the body. They cannot conceive of an "I" without a body. But, by treating the body as the basis, if the vision is turned inward, the *Aathma* can be experienced in due course. This is called *Aathma-saakshaatkaara* (Direct Perception of the Self). This means tracking the 'I' to its source. A man walking with his back to the sun will be treading his own shadow. Only when he reverses his direction will he be able to leave his shadow behind. The same process applies to the realisation of the Self. The journey must be directed towards the Self within and away from the external world.

What is needed today in the world is the diverting of the mind from preoccupation with the external world of Nature to the Divinity within. This is the *saadhana* you have to do. In this way you see the Divine in everything instead of seeing Nature as a physical phenomenon. When you see the external world as a manifestation of God, you will not notice the phenomenal aspect of *Prakrithi* (Nature). View Nature as a manifestation of God.

How is this to be experienced in real life with its joys and sorrows? This can be understood from an example. When you sleep, you have dreams in which you experience joys and sorrows. They seem real as long as you are asleep. On awaking, you realise that they were all unreal and mere dreams. In the waking state you have other experiences. What is the relationship between these

two categories of experiences? What you experience in the waiting state is also a dream. The reality is that in both the states--the sleeping and the waking---you are present as the dreamer.

The concept of *Aathmik* principle

The difference between a dream in sleep and what happens in the waking state relates mainly to the time factor. In a dream in a sleep, a person may go through the entire experiences of his life from childhood to old age in a few minutes. The dream compresses the experiences of many years within so many minutes. Likewise what happens over many years in the waiting state may appear as a few moments in spiritual experience.

Our conception of reality is related to the time factor. Time causes great difference between what is *Prathyaksham* (directly perceived) and what is *paroksham* (indirectly experienced). The *Aathma* is the unchanging entity that is able to recognise the changes brought about by time.

The awareness of the unchanging reality underlying the phenomenal world of change is the *Aathmik* principle called *Eruka*. It is present in every one as the *Aham*. But each one views the world from one's particular circumstance, background and experience. The *Aathmik* Principle is explained or described in different ways. There is no connection between its reality and the way it is experienced. The analogies used for explaining the *Aathmik* Principle have their inherent limitations. God is declared to be omnipresent. How do you decide this omnipresence? There is a practical means of deciding this. We are aware of the basic elements--earth, water, fire, air and space--with five qualities--smell, fluidity, illumination, touch and sound. The earth has all the five qualities, including *primarily gandha* (smell). Water has *rasa* (fluidity). It is lighter than earth and is mobile. It has four qualities. Fire has three qualities of which *ruupa* (form) is most prominent. It is lighter than water. Then you have air, which is lighter than fire and has two qualities: *sparsha* (touch) and *shabdha* (vibrant movement). Last comes *aakaasha* (ether or space) which is the subtlest of the five elements and is all-pervading. Transcending space is God, who is omnipresent.

Spiritual progress is related to reduction of desires

When you pursue your enquiry in this manner you find that the different qualities account for feelings and reactions. These qualities have to be brought under control. Simultaneously one has to reduce the burdens of mundane existence and the desires that fill the mind. Man today is weighed down by the overwhelming burden of desires. Spiritual progress is directly related to the reduction of desires. God's grace goes with human effort.

Earlier two teachers spoke about their experiences and extolled *Dhaiva-shakthi* (power of the Divine). But this Divine power does not operate independent of human effort. In fact, every individual has this Divine power. They are invoking Divine power as an auxiliary to their own power, which comes from the Divine. Failing to recognise their inherent divine power, they attribute it to someone other than themselves.

Some devotees tend to blame Baba if their desires are not fulfilled. When devotees pray with pure hearts, their purity itself helps to bring them relief. But they are thankful to Baba for saving them. Baba is not involved in either of these results. They are the fruits of the devotees efforts and attitudes. In our college, there is a placard that carries the saying; "*Dharma* protects its protector. It destroys its destroyer." Likewise, when your faith in the Divine is total, that faith will help you. Develop that confidence in the Self. The Self is not visible even as the foundations of a big mansion are not visible. But without the foundations the edifice cannot stand. Likewise

self-confidence is the base for self-satisfaction. The roof of mansion is self-sacrifice. Then you have self-realisation.

The Self alone is eternal and changeless

Men must develop strong faith. That will confer all spiritual experiences. The *Upanishaths* declare: Arise from the slumber of ignorance and go forward towards awareness of the Self."

Embodiments of Love! Whatever other beliefs you may cherish or not, have firm faith in God. All things in the world are liable to perish. The Self alone is eternal and changeless.

It is unfortunate that the vast majority of mankind lead mundane lives forgetting God. Make God the foundation of your life. Carry on your normal duties. Duty is God. Work is worship. Spiritualise all your actions and treat whatever happens as actions for your good. Learn to experience perennial bliss by seeking union with God. Never forget God. Do not go after the things of the world. Have no fear of death. When your life is tooted in these three maxims, you will realise the *Aathman*.

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