

7. Turn Your Mind Inward To Atma

Listening to a spiritual discourse, recapitulating and digesting that discourse, moving in good company and so on are the many different ways of serving the body. These may be called the outer practices. As against these, there are only two which may be called the inner practices. One is pranayama and the other is prathyahara. Sankara gave the following verse in the Bhaja Govindam series, in regard to these two practices.

శ్రావణం యామం ప్రత్యక్షణం
 నిత్యం నిత్యం వేదం నిత్యం
 బాహ్యేన కైతవే సమాధి నిత్యం
 సంకల్ప నిత్యం సుహృద సంకల్పం

శ్రాంతిగా యాసమును, పుష్కలమును
 నిత్య నిత్య వివేక విజ్ఞానమును
 మంత్రములను సమగ్ర విజ్ఞానమును
 బ్రాహ్మణ్య విశ్లేషణమును చేయుము.

Pranayama is the *sadhana* or practice by which you hold the *prana* or the breath. The significance of *pranayama* may be understood when we recognise that there are five different vital airs namely, *prana*, *apana*, *vyana*, *udana* and *samana*. The process by which these vital airs are controlled is called *pranayama* and this gives us an amount of inner vision. In this *pranayama* there are three different kinds which are referred to by the names *rechaka* (exhaling), *puraka* (inhaling) and *kumbhaka* (holding breath). *Rechaka* and *puraka* relate to methods by which one is able to get control over the various vital airs and take them in. To be able to hold them in the process is described as *kumbhaka*.

The second practice, namely *prathyahara*, consists in controlling the mind through the organs. The organs and the mind always wish to look at and concern themselves with the external objects. The mind develops sensuous desires by looking at such external objects. As a result of these desires, the mind becomes impure. The process of *prathyahara* consists in turning the mind inwards and away from the external objects.

Today several *sadhakas*, not knowing what to do, are approaching ignorant *gurus* for guidance and they are practising either *pranayama* only or *prathyahara* only. This is not correct. *Pranayama* and *prathyahara* go together. In fact, they are reflections of one another. You will not get the benefit if you practise only *pranayama* or only *prathyahara*. Both have to be done together and each one depends on the other. It is only when you control the mind that you can control the *prana* or the vital airs. It is only when you control the vital airs that you can control the mind. It is not possible to do one without doing the other. By doing both these things simultaneously, you can turn the mind inwards and control your *prana*. That is how you can control the body which has life in it and you can experience a state of mind called *samadhi*.

In the second line of the verse, we see that an enquiry directed to finding out what is permanent and what is not permanent is essential. When you make this enquiry you will come to the conclusion that *Atma* is permanent and true whereas the human body is not permanent and is false. If you go further and enquire into the nature of the *Atma*, you will find that it is being referred to by sacred names such as *Sathyam* (truth), *Sivam* (auspiciousness) and *Sundaram* (beauty). It is not possible to have prosperity without adhering to truth. Prosperity goes with truth. Similarly, it is not possible to have bliss and happiness without prosperity.

Happiness goes with prosperity. Truth is like a shining light. It is with the help of this shining light that we are able to see nature around us. The ability to use the shining light of truth to see and understand the nature around us stands for the bliss and happiness conveyed by the word *Sundaram*. Therefore, the mixture or the conglomeration of *Sathyam*, *Sivam* and *Sundaram* is the *Atma*.

After you have been able to understand the special aspects of these three things, there is nothing else for you to find out, just as after the cooking is over, you have no more need for either the firewood or the hearth.

What is contained in the third line of the verse refers to the state of *Samadhi*. This line explains how we get to that state of *Samadhi*. This is attained by using both *pranayama* and *prathyahara*. You will thus be able to give up all your desires and turn your mind towards the *Atma*. When you do this, you will find that the entire body takes a very different turn. The different kinds of energies will all come under your control. This *Samadhi* should not be foolishly understood as blankness or darkness of the mind. The state of mind which goes with *japa* has been described as the state of *Samadhi*. Here the word *japa* does not mean holding a chain of beads and merely turning the beads on your fingers. *Japa* means continual repetition of the name of the Lord. This repetition may or may not be loudly done. It should at least be done in your mind. This repetition of the name of the Lord in one's own mind is called *japa*. If you

pronounce the word *japa* from the reverse side, it becomes *bhaja*. Whether it is *japa*, that is uttering the name of the Lord within your mind or it is *bhaja*, that is uttering the name of the Lord externally in a loud voice, both of them can be called *japa*.

Young students!

Samadhi is being interpreted in many ways. If one falls down unconscious or if one utters the name of the Lord in a semiconscious condition or if one behaves in a confused and inconsistent manner, we seem to think that he is in a state of *Samadhi*. To be unconscious or to be in a subconscious state or to be in a superconscious state is not being in *Samadhi*. You should understand that only when one is in his natural condition and yet can enjoy the bliss of *Samadhi*, then alone is he said to be in a state of real *Samadhi*.

Anything else will be referred to by different names such as hysteria, fits, weakness, being tipsy and so on. These are never to be equated with *Samadhi*.

Unfortunately, Indians today are not able to recognise and distinguish true *Samadhi* from these various diseases. Therefore, they are not able to hand over to others the sacred meaning of *Samadhi*. Words like *pranayama*, *prathyahara*, *japa* and *thapa* have all to be interpreted properly. In that context, one should understand what this sacred *Samadhi* means. The words as referring to various things have their meaning. In fact

the meaning attached to the word comes from the word itself. So *Samadhi* must itself indicate its true meaning. “*Sama*” means equal and “*dhi*” means *buddhi* or mind. When you have developed equal-mindedness, you are in a true state of *Samadhi*.

It is quite possible for you to develop this state even in ordinary life, provided you understand what is meant by *pranayama* and *prathyahara*. When the mind is turned inwards, it looks only at the *Atma* and does not look at the external surroundings. Therefore, when your mind is turned inwards, you will not notice the difference between pleasure and pain, sorrow and happiness or heat and cold. In fact, the mind will not take note of any differences and disparities whatsoever. It is the oneness of everything that you will be able to realise.

When an individual is in a state of *Samadhi*, he has nothing to do with the world although he is moving about in the world. Although the individual appears to be a part of the society, he is not affected by the society. The mind of such a person is always engrossed with what may be called the *Atma Drishti* (Sight).

To illustrate such a situation, one can mention several examples. A worm which lives in mud is not affected by the mud at all. Women who paint their eyelashes black will not have the black paint touch the eye balls. The eyes are completely free, although the eyelashes have the black paint on them. We eat so many greasy things. This greasiness may get on to the hand,

but it never remains on the tongue. The tongue is untouched by the greasiness.

Let us take the case of a lotus. The lotus lives in water and depends on water for its existence, but the water does not affect the lotus. Like the lotus, like the tongue, like the worm in the mud, like the eyeballs of women, the person in *Samadhi* is not touched by the world around him. In order that you may understand this state of *Samadhi*, the last line of the verse says that you must develop what is known as *Maha* (great) *Avadhanam* (concentration). Do not be in haste. Do not lose your patience. Do not have a wavering mind. Remember that you should have an unwavering mind if you want to attain the state of *Samadhi*. You should be able to concentrate.

If you plant a sapling now, how can you get the fruit immediately. The plant must become a tree and then, you can get fruits. Take the case of seedlings which are planted. You cannot get the harvest immediately after planting the seed. The necessary time must be given. Today, all the *sadhakas* want to have the fruit as soon as they plant the seed. They do not allow any time. Sankara wanted to tell us in the fourth line of this verse that we should not be in a hurry and that we should remain peaceful and calm. If you fill your heart in this manner, you will attain the state of *Samadhi*.

Many seekers of truth and many people who are

studying this aspect of *Brahman* often get doubts. They ask how *Brahman* and the created world which are two separate things can be treated as one. This is the question which they often ask. They doubt the identity of *Brahman* with nature. There is a small example for this. It is true that apparently *Brahman* and the world look separate. Take the case of a seed. When you put the seed in the earth, a plant comes out of it. This plant grows into a big tree and this tree gives out flowers, leaves, branches, fruit and so on. You see all these as different manifestations coming from a seed. It is only the illusory appearance of nature that makes us believe that they are diverse. But if you look at these branches, flowers, leaves, fruit and the seed from a spiritual angle, you will see that all these things are different manifestations of the same seed. They have all arisen because the mind pictures them to be so. In the same manner, *prakruthi* or nature which is born out of *Brahman* and which you see around must only be a manifestation of *Brahman* and nothing else. If one regards *prakruthi* as different from *Brahman*, it is only an illusion. In order to be able to recognise this, one must have the clarity of mind and the ability to perceive truth.

In order to get an idea of this clarity of mind, we will consider what happened when Dronacharya called the Pandavas one by one, and asked them to shoot at a bird which he tied up as the object. When each of the Pandavas was about to take aim and hit the bird,

Dronacharya used to ask some questions. Bheema was first asked what he saw. He said that he saw the bird, the rope which was used to tie the bird and the sky behind it. In this manner, all the Pandavas were called and all except Arjuna replied that they were able to see many things. Arjuna, however, replied that he saw nothing except the bird. This was the concentration with which he approached his object. If you have a desire to learn a particular thing, you must develop intense concentration towards that thing only. Unfortunately, today when we want to learn something, we concentrate on something else. This is the reason why we are not able to reach our destination and learn what we want to learn.

For the second aspect also, namely the ability to perceive good qualities, there is a good example in *Mahabharatha*. Krishna called Duryodhana with the intention of testing him. This took place not after the war but before the war. Krishna told him that he wanted to do something important and that he was on the lookout for a good man with good attributes. He asked Duryodhana to look for such a man. Duryodhana searched the world over for a few days and said that there was no person with really good attributes and if there was anyone with good qualities, the best was himself (Duryodhana) and that he came nearest to the desired ideal.

Then, Krishna sent Duryodhana away and asked Dharmaraja to come. He told Dharmaraja to look for a

man who is very bad and whose qualities are such that there can be no one else worse than him. Dharmaraja searched the world over and came back and told Krishna that he could not find anyone with bad qualities and if there was anyone with such bad qualities, it was he himself (Dharmaraja). He said that he fits best the description which Krishna gave.

For Duryodhana, to say that he was the best man and for Dharmaraja, to say that he was the worst man, the world is not responsible. The qualities in them and the way they look at themselves and others are responsible. That is why we give so much importance to the ability to perceive the good and distinguish it from the bad. No one can really determine what is good and what is bad. The only alternative is for one to have faith in God and improve his own qualities.