

## **CHAPTER XIV**

### **THAPAS**

- Q. Can one realise the Atma and merge, as You say, in the Pranava with this material body composed of the five elements? Can the Atma be isolated from the body? How is that done?
- A. Man can, by Dhyaana and other disciplines, by the recital of the Pranava manthra, discover the Atma and isolate it from the body. It is something like getting butter from curds, oil from sesame, water from the subsoil, fire from wood. Churning, squeezing, crushing, boring, turning—these processes are needed, that is all. What happens is the separation of the Atma from the body, the disappearance of the belief that the body is the Atma or the Self.
- Q. Swami! Many elders and sages say that we should visualise the Jivatma as Paramatma; that we should

cultivate that feeling, that conviction. How is that possible?

- A. Why do you think it is difficult? Is it not easier to speak the truth, than to speak falsehood? You are now declaring a falsehood as true and so all kinds of difficulties arise. Accept the truth that the Jivatma and Paramatma are the same, then things become easy. First, recognise the Atma, the “Jivatma” unrelated to the body; you can do this by Dhyaana, etc. As scent is separated from flowers, sugar from cane, gold from rock, thus separate the Atma from the physical body. Then by means of *Nidhidhyasana*, etc., single-pointed reflection and meditation, you can visualise the Jivatma as one with Paramatma. That is the consummation of Thapas, the final Nirvana.
- Q. What exactly is Thapas, Swami?
- A. It means the end of the activities of the senses; one must be the master of all of them. There should be no trace of craving or appetite. It involves effort to attain Brahman, incessant yearning for the end. It must be expressed through moderate food and sleep. It means agony to realise the Principle. Such Thapas is called *Sathwic*.
- Q. What then is *Rajasic* Thapas?
- A. Those who simply starve the body and make it weak without curbing the senses and controlling the emotions

are doing only *Rajasic* Thapas. They do not study or meditate upon the Atma Thathwa; they lay emphasis on physical asceticism.

- Q. There must be *Thamasic* Thapas also.
- A. There is. To propitiate the Gods for favours and then, with the favours as instruments, to desire the exploitation of the world—that is *Thamasic* Thapas. Only that Thapas is proper which has as its aim the attainment of God, the realisation of Brahman, the achievement of the highest Wisdom. That type of Thapas alone is approved by the Sastras. All the rest will lead you astray, away from the Goal. Only the Thapas approved by the Sastras deserve that name. The others are *Thamas*, not Thapas. Thapas means “heat”; the heat burns out sin and reduces all Karma to ashes.
- Q. The Sastras say that the Rishis had in their Ashrams things like the *Chinthamani* (wish-fulfilling) jewel, the *Kalpavriksha* (wish-fulfilling tree) and also the *Kamadhenu* (wish-fulfilling cow), which gave them whatever they wished for. I cannot understand why they should do Thapas at all. Please make this clear to me.
- A. Think about it well. Then you will know that *Chinthamani* is not a jewel, nor *Kalpavriksha* a tree, nor *Kamadhenu* a cow. They are all names for the fruits of Thapas. They are powers that automatically

accrue to a person as a result of Thapas. He realises all that he wishes for. It is called Kalpavriksha Siddhi. When he subdues all desire, it is called Kamadhenu Siddhi. What is the Chinthamani Siddhi? It is the stage when you have no *Chintha* or worry or mental agitation, a stage when all sorrow is kept afar. When *Chintha* ends and the supreme Ananda is won, it is Chinthamani Siddhi. *Chintha* must disappear from thought, word and deed.

Q. They also speak of mental Thapas. What does that mean?

A. Observe control of speech; cultivate purity of feeling; practise humility; let your thoughts be always on the Brahma Thathwam. Then you can be said to be in mental Thapas.

Q. And physical Thapas?

A. That too is good, in its own way. Revering elders, spiritual teachers, saints and sages and God make for purity. Non-violence, sympathy with all beings, straightforwardness, all contribute to physical well-being, health and wholesomeness. Mental Thapas leads to the purity of the mind. Verbal control or Thapas leads to purity of speech. By these three, the precious possessions of Kamadhenu, Kalpavriksha and Chinthamani are attained. They are attainments, not just cows, trees or jewels.

Q. Are there any who have attained Brahma Thathwa and Dharma Thathwa with the help of their success in Thapas? Who are they? Please tell me.

A. Kapilamahamuni attained Brahma Thathwam, Jaiminimahamuni attained Dharma Thathwam, Narada became a Brahmarishi, Bhagiratha brought the Ganga down, Gouthama persuaded the Godavari to flow on the earth, Valmiki realised the force of Rama manthram and was enabled to compose the Ramayana, Gargi was established in Brahmacharya and Sulabha in spiritual wisdom—all through Thapas alone. Why go on quoting examples one after the other? Through Thapas, even Brahma and Rudra become one's collaborators.

Q. Swami! In order to reach this high stage, do you say that birth in a high caste is necessary? Or is Sadhana of a high order enough?

A. Caste without character is meaningless; it is just an empty label. Sadhana, without the base of character, is like the journey of a blind man. Morality, virtue, character—these are vital. On the basis of these, if Sadhana is done according to the scheme laid down for the path one has selected, then there is no doubt of success. But you must take note of a caution that is essential. You must not give place to sloth, simply because Jaathi or birth is not important. *Neethi* or moral standards accrue according to Jaathi also; and

so, to foster them, the consciousness of Jaathi is helpful, and important. But if through the accumulated merit of past births, one has the treasure of goodness and virtue, then one need not attach much importance to Jaathi. Only those who practised Yoga in previous births and who could not complete the process will have that type of excellence. The main thing is to acquire the Neethi that is prescribed for the Jaathi, foster the Jaathi with Neethi, and make yourself fit and full, with a high status in life. For some distance on the path of Sadhana and spirituality, both Jaathi and Neethi will help. The Gunas will be sublimated through these two.

- Q. Therefore, there must be some who, through the merit of previous lives, have attained Godhead. Give some instances, please.
- A. My dear man, you should not seek to discover the source of a river or the ancestry of a Rishi. They may be quite unimpressive. You should be satisfied with their services. Their experience is what is most valuable. Be inspired by them, be led by them to similar efforts. If you go in search of the beginnings, you lose the vital core. Still, since you raised the question, I shall tell you. Vyasa was born of the fisherman caste, Sounaka was of the Sunaka clan. Agasthya was born in a pot. Viswamithra was a Kshathriya. Sootha was born in the fourth caste. In addition, we have among those who were virtuous

and good, who had their eyes always on the moral standards of their Jaathi and Neethi, who renounced all and stuck to the ideal of liberating themselves from the bondage of birth and death and the illusion of physical values: Sanjaya, Sathyakama and many more. My dear man, self-effort, Viveka, Thapas—these qualify man to the highest status. Without purity of the inner instruments, no man, however high his caste, can reach the Highest. If inferior copper is added to gold, the alloy loses in value. Just as pure gold becomes an alloy through contact with copper, the Universal, the *Viraat-rupa*, gets the inferior ego added to it in this Samsaara. The *Viraat-rupa* becomes transformed into the *Jivi*. Now, what has to be done to get back the real gold Thathwa? Through Thapas and *Vratha* (vow), through polishing and cleansing the *Buddhi*, the original stage has to be regained. You wash the feet after walking through the mire; the mind too has to be washed of the mire of attachment to objects. Jnana alone can burn the seeds of attachment so that they may not sprout again. So, if a person has the treasure of Jnana, he gets liberated easily.