

Excerpts from Chapter 7: Worship of Isvara

The nature of one's aspiration for the ultimate realisation through Yoga is perhaps the most important conditioning factor in the practice. This is clearly stressed by Patanjali in one of his Sutras. If the aspiration is lukewarm and not intense enough, there would be a corresponding dampening of the speed with which one progresses towards the realisation of the goal. The greatest Sadhana or practice is the longing of the soul for God, the pressure which one feels from within one's self in the direction of the supreme attainment. To cite an analogy: In the case of a river, the greater the force of the waters of the river, the quicker does the river reach its destination. But, if the same river mellows and moves stagnantly and reluctantly, as it were, it will reach its end only after a long period. In the same way; quick success in the practice of Yoga can be had only if the aspiration is intense and burning inside.

"Tivra-samveganam asannah": Quick is the result of Yoga, immediate is the realisation, if the 'Samvega', or the aspiration of the soul, is very strong and burningly intense. The word used in the Sutra is 'Samvega', a term which has its own peculiar significance. The words we normally use such as desire, longing, aspiration and devotion are inadequate to express what is implied in the term 'Samvega'. We have to stretch our imagination a little bit to understand the significance of the meaning hidden in the word 'Samvega.' It is a shaking up of the whole personality of ours from top to bottom, by the very roots, as it were, where our personality gets devastated by the urge of the spirit for ultimate perfection. Samvega is truly devastating. 'Devastating' is the only word which brings out the meaning of the term 'Samvega'. When Samvega arises in us for the great perfection, it breaks our personality to pieces, shatters us to shreds. It is difficult to translate this word Sarmvega, but its implied meaning should by now be reasonably clear. It is not the little devotion that we try to show to God in our daily routines of practice. It is not the so-called religiosity of approach. It is something unthinkable, an anguish of

the spirit, a surge of the soul, raining of the entire personality out of its essence. We are never in this position at any time of our life. Such Samvega never takes possession of us. We may be devoted people, but even then, our devotion is mostly half-hearted, reluctant and lukewarm. Such lukewarm devotion cannot bring in success, and certainly not quick success.

Even in Samvega, Patanjali mentions three degrees – *Mridu*, *Madhya* and *Adhimatra*. Soft aspiration is Mridu, middling; a little more intense than that is Madhya; but, flaming like a conflagration of fire and unquenchable in its intensity is the aspiration called Adhimatra Vairagya and Adhimatra Samvega. People in our present-day world cannot imagine what this sort of Samvega could be. A person who does not feel the need for God cannot ask for Him, and a need is felt only when the world cracks under one's feet, and not before that. A time comes in everyone's life when such an experience is encountered. No one can escape this situation. It may be today; it may be tomorrow. And until that eventuality occurs, our soul will actually cry from its bottom for that which it actually longs for.

MIND CONTROL – A GRADUATED PROCESS THROUGH KARMA, UPASANA AND JNANA

The mind is difficult to control. Therefore, a very discreet and tactful technique has to be adopted in its restraint. One cannot hit the mind and control it, just as one cannot strike a wild bull and control it, or even ride a horse when it is unwilling to accept one as its rider. On the other hand, just as the animal tamer controls a lion or an elephant, a tiger or a wild bull, by means which are identical with a graduated process, the mind has to be restrained gradually. In doing this, the student must take note of the fact that the mind has got its own desires, and that no desire of the mind can be turned a deaf ear to. True, the mind has to be controlled, has to be sublimated, has to be destroyed. This is the ideal and the goal, no doubt, but it cannot be done at one stroke, even as we cannot control the body ignoring the fact that it has hunger and thirst and a desire to sleep. The body cries clamorously and affirms its existence violently when it is hungry, thirsty or sleepy. When it does that, we cannot say, "You devil, you body! I do not care for you. You are an obstacle in my Yoga practice. I cannot feed you. I cannot quench your thirst and I will not allow you

to sleep". This kind of attitude towards the body will be a ruin of the spiritual aspiration itself. Because, the body is so intimately connected with the mind, and the mind with the spirit, that none of these can be regarded as an absolutely non-essential item. The need for each phase of experience has to be attended to with great wisdom, under the guidance of the preceptor. As is the case with hunger, thirst and sleep, so is the case with every other desire, which has its object either internally or externally. We have social requirements. We have psychological longings. Which of these can be regarded as unimportant, notwithstanding the fact that we are asking for God-realisation? Therefore, we have to disentangle ourselves slowly from these tentacles, which connect us with the external things and internal limitations of our finitude. It is for this purpose that Sadhanas known as Karma, Upasana and Jnana are prescribed.

Karma is the attitude of servicefulness, the practice of Seva, the surrender of one's ego in the interests of a larger area of action known as human society. Upasana is a higher state than Karma. When the mind is sufficiently purified by service, the seeker is ushered into an arena of divine worship. The Guru requires to be served, attended to, and followed implicitly for a protracted period, as a necessary training, indispensable in the case of every student. In ancient days, the service of the Guru was carried on for years together, and sometimes even for a lifetime. The blessing of the Guru was regarded as divine grace itself. When the Guru is satisfied that the mind of the student has been purified sufficiently, he introduces the latter to the methods of concentration. Concentration in Yoga means the adaptation of the mental atmosphere to the atmosphere of reality, again by gradual stages. Meditation or concentration is the attempt of the mind to unite itself with its concept of reality at any given moment of time. As the concept of reality changes and goes on expanding and improving itself as one progresses higher and higher in the practice, so does Upasana also get intensified gradually.

What is our concept of reality at present? Each one may have his own answer to this question. Anything that is unavoidable in our life is a reality for us. We cannot say that the Creator who is beyond the seven heavens is the only Reality and everything else is unreal. As a theoretical assertion this may

sound all right, but Yoga is not a theory. It is intense practice. So, anything without which we cannot get on is our reality, even if it be the silliest thing that one can think of in one's mind. A reality is that which, to us, is an indispensable necessity under a given circumstance at a given moment of time. It cannot be ignored. It has to be taken into account and paid its due, even if that reality is a devil. One cannot get out of the situation merely by calling the reality a devil. When the devil ceases to be a reality, when it becomes an unreality, that is a different matter altogether. But it does not become that. All the little agonies and anxieties and pin-pricks of our life are all our realities. They are not unrealities and we should not try to get away with the illusory notion that they can be ignored completely. That is why it is only gradually that the mind is led in Upasana from the lowest concept of God to the higher concepts.

In the Bhagavad Gita, reference is made to various types of worships and sacrifices, where the great Master tells us that, in the earlier stages of Tamas, we have a very poor conception of perfection and God. And when Rajas begins to preponderate, we have a better perception; and in Sattva alone we have a perfect conception of God. There are people who worship stones, trees, snakes and totems, imaginary hobgoblins and all sorts of spirits, which are supposed to be pervading the atmosphere. We may be tempted to laugh at these animistic notions of religion and deity as inadequate, but they cannot be laughed at so easily. Because, when the mind is capable of accepting only that idea of deity, it can unite itself only with that and with nothing else. The education of the mind is a gradual process. It is carried on, it is conducted, gradually. And, as we go deeper and deeper in this educational career, we have broader and broader conceptions of our involvements in life, and our concepts of reality also get enlarged slowly. At a very early stage itself, we will not be able to meditate on the Father in Heaven as the creator, preserver and destroyer. This is not possible. Who can think of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva while yet a spiritual neophyte? This is not possible. It is hard for the mind to entertain such thoughts. In the early stages, we have only such poor titbits of notions of a deity that is somewhere in front of us, like a human being, almost like us, in height and girth and capacity. This is our idea of God. Let it be.

Even then it is an acceptable concept, provided we regard this deity as something superior to us. In Patanjali's system, he gives suggestions for different types of concentration. These include concentration even on human beings of a superior nature, contemplation on whom will purify the mind in some way.

LOVE OF GOD AND THE ROLE OF RITUALS IN ITS DEVELOPMENT

Worship of God is carried on through various methods, which are elaborated in the Bhakti Yoga system of practice. How to express our love towards any person? This does not require a large commentary. Everyone knows it so well. When we love a person immensely, we would do a thousand things to manifest that love. If an emperor comes to visit our cottage, how do we greet him? We begin to think of his arrival and make preparations even one month before his actual arrival. We are stimulated inside in an anxiety of joy, and we put forth our best efforts to satisfy the august visitor. Such should be our love for God, where, in each and every detail, we try to satisfy God. Love does not require an object finally. It is self-satisfying and self-complete. Finally, in the long run, love has no object in front of it. It itself is its object. When we do worship of sun with a candle-light or the waving of a camphor flame, we are not going to illumine the sun in any way and make it happy on that account. Nor is the ocean going to be satisfied by our doing Abhisheka to it with water. Our devotion is primarily a subjective requirement for self-transformation. We can cite an analogy. A very rich man comes to us with millions of dollars in his pocket. When comes to us, we give him a cup of tea. It does not mean that he is need of it. The need of the person is a different matter. Our offer tea to him is an expression of our respect, regard and affection for him though that little cup of tea, by itself, may mean nothing to him, the rich man that he is. Likewise, we show our regard, love and respect to people even by a mere folding of the hand, which means nothing in essence finally. But it means everything. Everyone knows the value of a 'Namaste'.

So, the love that we cherish for God and the worship that we conduct in respect of Him are to be carried on through rituals in the beginning. One may say that ritual is nonsense. It is not. It is a very essential pillar or leg of the

huge edifice of religion. It cannot be said that the leg is unimportant in the human body. The legs are very important, because it is on our legs that we stand. The pillars are important. It cannot be said that pillars are not the building. When the pillars go, the building falls. The ritualistic part of religion is the pillar of the structure of religious practice. It is as important as the feet on which we stand. True, the feet are not the only important limbs of our body; but, their importance cannot be ignored.

In the beginning, religion begins with ritual. It is the case with every religion in the world, and with every form of religion, from the lowest form of religion to the highest form. A ritual or a performance represents an attitude, a conduct, expressed outside in action. We may offer a leaf or pour a drop of water on a piece of stone considering that piece of stone as our God. There begins religion. The stone is not God, but our feeling of the presence of a higher power in it is our God. These are psychological aspects of religion – these rituals in all the various forms that we see in temples and in churches, for instance. The devotee kneels down; he looks up; he folds his hands; he bows his head down and he offers a deeply felt prayer through words of utter affection and agonised feeling of devotion. This he does by ritualistic worships, offerings and sacraments. While religion starts with ritual, and ritual is an indispensable, unavoidable part of religious devotion, religion rises higher, where the external materials used in ritual lose their importance gradually, and the devotee begins to manifest his devotion to God with lesser accompaniments of material apparatus. In the beginning it looks as if we require a cart-load of material to worship God, and even that stage is an essential stage. When people perform Yajnas or sacrifices, or large temple worships, considerable material is gathered and much money is spent also. That is important enough. But gradually, one rises higher, and one feels that the spending of so much ritualistic material is not, after all, necessary in religion, and one can get on with a few items of worship. It may be just one joss-stick or a piece of camphor or a little Bael leaf, or a leaf of Tulasi or the holy basil. Why, even one spoon of the holy Ganga water offered on the Linga of Siva may be as satisfying to Him as an ocean of milk that may be poured over the same Linga as part of a larger ritualistic worship.

Even higher than this worship with a token offering, like a leaf or a flower representing the heart's love, is the worship through the Name of God. Taking on the Name of God does not require even the little drop of water or milk or honey. It does not require even a leaf or a flower. No, it does not require any material for its fulfilment. Nothing is required from the outside world for the purpose of this kind of worship of God. Here, the mind itself is the apparatus or the instrument of worship, and the thing that is offered at the lotus feet of the Lord is also the mind. The greatest devotion is revealed in acts of mental worship.

In this way, there is a gradual movement in the history of religious practice in India, beginning from the Vedic ceremonialism proceeding to the ignorant contemplations in the Aranyakas, and ending with the pure metaphysical meditations of the Upanishads. In the beginning, external material is necessary for worship. Later on one's own self is sufficient for worship. One's own mind is adequate. In the final stage of worship, the soul of the devotee itself performs the worship by offering itself, by surrendering itself, in an intimate union of itself with its Beloved. A chanting of the Name of God known as Japa, is often considered as one of the best forms of divine worship, and it is also accompanied by studies of holy scriptures, and musical recitations of songs in praise of God and His glory, the type of Satsanga that is usually conducted in many of the Ashrams in India.