

**Satsanga with Sri Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati**  
**Arsha Vidya Gurukulam**  
**UPĀSANĀ, MEDITATION**

उपासनानि - सगुणब्रह्मविषयमानसव्यापाररूपाणि शाण्डिल्यविद्यादीनि॥

*upāsanāni - saguṇabrahmaviṣayamānasavyāpārārūpāṇi śāṇḍilyavidyādīni.*  
Mental activities relating to the *saguṇa brahman* – such as are described in the Śāṇḍilyavidyā are *upāsanās* or devotions [Vedāntasāra, 12].

***The purpose of meditation is to elevate the mind***

What is the purpose of meditation? It is to elevate the mind from the mundane to the profound and fill it with devotion for the profound, which is the Lord. This is the spirit of *upāsana*, which is of the nature of harmony. Just as there is harmony in the diversity of the different limbs of the body, there is harmony in the universe. There is but one principle underlying the diversity. The beautiful meditations given in the Upaniṣads draw our attention to the harmony existing in our own bodies and in the universe.

***The Upaniṣads ask us to meditate upon the self***

The Śāṇḍilya Vidya, for example, says

मनोमयः प्राणशरीरो भारूपः सत्यसंकल्प आकाशात्मा सर्वकर्मा सर्वकामः सर्वगन्धः सर्वरसः

सर्वमिदमभ्यत्तोऽवाक्यनादरः ॥

*manomayaḥ prāṇaśarīro bhārūpaḥ satyasankalpa ākāśātma sarvakarmā sarvakāmaḥ sarvagandhaḥ sarvarasaḥ sarvamidamabhyatto'vākyaṇādarah.*  
(He) appears like the mind, has Prāṇa as the body, has the form of consciousness is of true resolves, is of the nature of space, is the performer of all actions, is possessed of all good desires, is possessed of all good smells, is possessed of all good essences, pervades all this, is devoid of speech, is free from hankering [Chāndogyopaniṣad, 3-14-2].

We are told to meditate upon the Self as being *ātmāpahatapāpmā vijaro vimṛtyurviśoko vijighatso'pipāsaḥ satyakāmaḥ satyasankalpaḥ*, the Self that has no *pāpa*, no decrepitude, no death, no sorrow, no hunger, no thirst, has unfailing desires, and unfailing will [Chāndogyopaniṣad, 8-1-5]. These kinds of meditations are given so that we may look upon our own selves as pure, sinless, with true resolve, free from birth and death, etc. Therefore, in meditation, we impose this perception upon our own selves.

***Meditation is different from knowledge***

It is one thing to know the Self to be pure; it is quite another to meditate or to feel the purity of the self. We should understand that *upāsana* is different from knowledge. In knowledge, we see the Self that is free from birth and death and all modifications. In meditation, we imagine or visualize

the self to be free from birth, death, modifications and impurities. *Upāsanā* always involves visualization or mental activity. It involves individual effort whereas knowledge does not involve any effort. For example, to see fire as fire is knowledge. It does not involve any activity or deliberation on our part. When fire is in front of us and our eyes are open, we see the fire. However, if we want to look upon a bush with red berries as being fire, it is meditation. In this case, we see fire where there is no fire. Again, looking upon my mother as mother is knowledge whereas looking upon any other woman as mother is meditation. Thus, meditation involves a mental activity, a deliberation, a superimposition, and a certain attitude of devotion, etc.

***God with attributes is the object of meditation whereas God without attributes is the object of knowledge***

One can only meditate upon God as having attributes; God without attributes is the object of knowledge. There is a superimposition of certain attributes upon *brahman*, which is then called *saguṇa-brahma*. *Guṇa* is qualities or attributes and *saguṇa* is that which obtains with attributes. *Saguṇa-brahma* means God upon whom various attributes like omniscience, omnipotence, benevolence, fatherhood, motherhood, and all-pervasiveness are superimposed. For example when we look upon God as father or mother, we are superimposing an attribute on God. Thus, we impose these attributes upon the Lord and meditate upon Him because these attributes invoke devotion and reverence in our hearts. It is meditation upon God that ultimately establishes the grounds for knowing God. I don't know my true nature and, therefore, I meditate upon myself. I superimpose the idea of purity and other attributes upon myself.

***Upāsanā is mental worship***

The Upaniṣads, Vedas, Puranas, and other literature provide many kinds of meditations. The prayers and worship performed in a temple are part of meditation. Some meditations involve physical activity, some involve oral activity, and some others are purely mental activity. The word 'meditation' is generally used for purely mental activity while activity involving the physical limbs and speech is generally called *pūja* or worship. Meditation takes place even in *pūja* because there is a certain attitude and visualization in the mind along with the physical and oral worship. *Upāsanā* is an important aspect in the life of an aspirant. While physical and oral worship are included in the *nitya* and *naimittika-karma*, mental worship is considered to be *upāsanā*<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on Vedāntasāra lectures. Transcribed and edited by Malini, KK Davey and Jayshree Ramakrishnan.