

Satsang with Sri Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam
Meditation, *Japa* and Prayer

Question

Given our hectic schedules, what is the best way to pray in about 15-20 minutes everyday?

Answer

It may be difficult to give a common prescription for everybody. I would think that if you have just 15-20 minutes, then you can spend it sitting quietly and doing some *japa* or meditation. You can use the guided meditation tapes, which have some view of the realities of life; they can create a perspective for the day. You could also meditate upon a Vedantic sentence or two that has inspired you. Meditating upon a chant is a very good way of starting the day; it will calm the mind. Or you can repeat the name of the Lord spending the time quietly by yourself. For the people here, with an intellectual orientation, meditation would definitely help.

Question

Why not recite *stotras* during this time, Swamiji?

Answer

Yes, you can. We should spend the prayer-time in a manner that invokes the devotee in us. So, depending on the person, it might be effective to recite *stotras*, do *japa*, or do meditation. Anything that inspires you is good.

Question

How does *japa* heal and purify the mind?

Answer

The Lord has the purifying effect as He is said to be '*pavitrāṇaṃ pavitraṃ yahī*', the

Purifier of all the purifiers. Therefore, the very act of taking the Lord's name has that effect. Also, because of our association, our *saṁskāras*, that name does bring up a certain attitude or devotion in us. Hence, the moment we say "Rāma", something happens to us -- we gain the attitude of reverence and worship. That is why they ask us to repeat the name of that deity, for whom we have this devotion and worshipful attitude, our *īṣṭa devatā*. That *bakthi bhāva* or spirit of devotion, to whatever extent it may be, is very important. So taking the Lord's name itself also has an effect.

Another important thing is the spirit that arises in us while chanting. If you say, "Swamiji, nothing happens when I say Rāma, Rāma, Rāma", my answer is, "It doesn't matter". Just by the effect of that name, slowly something will happen. For example, when you are suffering from *pitta* (bile), then your mouth also becomes very bitter if that *pitta* is too much. To such an extent, that even if you place sugar crystals on your tongue it will taste bitter. But the remedy is to keep on consuming sugar crystals, so that the sweetness of the sugar crystal will in due course neutralize that bile. Eventually, it will remove the bitterness and you will be able to taste the sweetness. Similarly, the repeating of the name Rāma may not touch us spiritually because there is too much of *pitta* (too much of hardness). But the goal is to keep repeating with the belief that the effect of the Lord's name will slowly soften us. As we deal with the world all the time and with the objects of pleasure, our heart has become very hard. It needs to be softened up a little bit with worship. Over time, the Rāma-*nāma* is bound to have an effect on us.

Question

Basically, how many kinds of meditation are there?

Answer

Meditation can be of many different kinds. For example, *mānasa japa* (repeating the Lord's name in your mind) can be a type of meditation in itself. Broadly categorizing, meditation can be of two types: either the nature of worship, or that of contemplation.

Question

Will performing prayer before executing an action help?

Answer

It will help. Prayer is also an action. By performing prayer, we are invoking the grace of the Lord. So it would definitely help.¹

¹ Summer 2003 satsang, transcribed and edited by Subbalakshmi Chandrasekaran, Chaya Raj and Jaya Kannan..