

## Satsanga with Sri Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati Arsha Vidya Gurukulam

### ŚAMA, THE MASTERY OF THE MIND

शमस्तावत् - श्रवणादिव्यतिरिक्तविषयेभ्यो मनसो निग्रहः ॥

*śamastāvāt - śravaṇādīvyatiriktaviṣayebhyo manaso nigrahaḥ* [Vedāntasāra, 19].

*Śama* is the curbing of the mind from all objects except hearing etc.

*Śama* is *śāntiḥ* or the quiet disposition of mind. The word *śama* is derived from the root *śam* in the sense of quietude or silence. *Śama* means quietude of the mind. This passage describes how to make the mind quiet. *Nigrahaḥ* is curbing or restraint, and *manasaḥ nigrahaḥ* is the restraint of the mind. Since the word 'restraint' has negative connotations of force and suppression, we will use the word 'mastery' instead. Therefore, *śama* means mastery of the mind or bringing the mind back from the sense objects, *viṣayebhyaḥ*.

What we really want is a simple, silent, learning, and abiding mind that is available for study and contemplation. Sometimes, we are inspired by a Vedanta class and wish to dwell upon what we have heard; however, as soon as we walk out of the class, other things take hold of the mind. And, despite our efforts to drag the mind back, various emotions such as desires, passions, anger, greed etc., pull our minds away from ourselves.

#### *The mind naturally dwells upon sense objects*

The natural tendency of the mind is to dwell upon sense objects for which it has an attraction or fascination. The peculiarity of the mind is that it also dwells upon those beings, situations, and objects to which it has an aversion. In fact, we find that the mind dwells more often upon things that it hates than on things it likes. If we always thought only of things that we love, we would be happy. Thus, *rāga* and *dveṣa* keep our minds away from the Self; the mind is dragged away from its purpose into the objects of its likes and dislikes.

इन्द्रियस्येन्द्रियस्यार्थे रागद्वेषौ व्यवस्थितौ। तयोर्न वशमागच्छेत्तौ ह्यस्य परिपन्थिनौ ॥

*indriyasyendriyasyārthe rāgadveṣau vyavasthitau,  
tayorna vaśamāgacchetau hyasya paripanthinau.*

There is attachment and aversion with reference to every sense object. May one not come under the spell of these two because they are one's enemies [Bhagavad Gita, 3-34].

Lord Krishna says that every sense organ has both an attraction and an aversion to its corresponding objects. These attractions and aversions are built into our personality. We carry them forward from our past births and, along the way, many more of them become ingrained in us in the course of our upbringing. Everyone, including our parents, elders, society, and

teachers, plants ideas of likes and dislikes such as this is good, this is not good; this is proper, this is not proper; this should be done, this should not be done, or this is right, this is not right. As a result, the mind is full of likes and dislikes, which distract our minds. Validating our experiences, Lord Krishna says in the Gita [2-60]:

यततो ह्यपि कौन्तेय पुरुषस्य विपश्चितः। इन्द्रियाणि प्रमाथीनि हरन्ति प्रसभं मनः ॥

*yatato hyapi kaunteya puruṣasya vipaścītaḥ,  
indriyāṇi pramāthīni haranti prasabhaṁ manaḥ.*

Because the powerful senses of even the person who makes an effort, who sees clearly, forcefully take the mind away, O Arjuna.

Even as we make an effort to concentrate the mind, we find that the strong forces of likes and dislikes pull the mind away. Despite our alertness, we are helpless as our minds are dragged away from the Self into the sense objects. We should understand the mechanism of how the mind gets distracted.

### ***The mind is under the control of the six-fold inner enemies***

At present, the mind is under the control of the six-fold enemies within: *kāma* or desire, *krodha* or anger, *lobha* or greed, *moha* or lack of discrimination, *mada* or pride, and *mātsarya* or jealousy. *Kāma* means passion, lust, or desire. Whenever there is desire, there is the potential of anger, *krodha*. It is said that whenever you make an appointment, there is the possibility of disappointment. Similarly, whenever there is a desire, there is always the chance that it may not be fulfilled. Anger arises whenever there is an obstruction to the fulfillment of a desire. The stronger my desire, the stronger is the likelihood of anger. When my desire gets fulfilled, however, it creates a different problem: my mind always wants more. It is analogous to pouring butter into fire; the fire grows bigger. There is always inner dissatisfaction. This is called *lobha* or greed. Thus, desire gives rise to either anger or greed. Whenever the mind is under the spell of anger or greed, it cannot think clearly and that is *moha*, a lack of discrimination or the loss of proper thinking. Out of greed, people think incorrectly and invest their money in many things, only to lose it all. Greed ruins a person because there is no end to greed; it is compared to an ocean. Just as an ocean has no other bank, so also, greed is that which has no end at all. Many people get ruined out of greed. Anger ruins other people. Since anger and greed rob my mind of a sense of discrimination, both are powerful enemies. Next is *mada*, pride or arrogance. When I find myself successful, there is pride or arrogance. Whenever there is pride, there is immediately going to be *mātsarya* or jealousy. A proud person seeks security in his or her own achievements. When that person finds a more successful person, his or her own inadequacy becomes manifest and gives rise to jealousy. Thus, these six propensities of mind are considered to be our inner enemies, the *śadripuḥ*. At the moment, the mind is under their control. All we want is a mind that is under our control.

### **Mastering the mind requires effort**

The Kāthopaniṣad says [1-2-20]:

तमक्रतुः पश्यति वीतशोको धातुप्रसादान्महिमानमात्मनः ॥

*tamakratuḥ paśyati vītaśoko dhātuprasādānmahimānamātmanaḥ.*

The desireless one sees that glory of the Atman through the serenity of the organs (and becomes) free from grief.

We want the favor of our own minds. Having *śama* means having a mind that is favorable, available, and a friend. The Gita [6-5] says that while the mind is our friend, the same mind is also our enemy.

आत्मैव ह्यात्मनो बन्धुरात्मैव रिपुरात्मनः ॥

*ātmaiva hyātmano bandhurātmaiva ripurātmanaḥ.*

The self alone is one's benefactor and the self alone is one's enemy.

A mind that is pleased becomes a friend; a mind that is under the control of desire, anger, greed, delusion, pride, or jealousy is an enemy. We want the mind to be our friend. We go around cultivating friendships with the whole world, but make no effort to cultivate a friendship with ourselves, meaning our minds. When the mind becomes a friend, it becomes available to us and we enjoy its grace and favor. This requires an effort; it does not just happen. This is also known as emotional maturity.

*Śama* confers an emotionally mature mind, a mind that accepts the facts of life and, therefore, does not react. We have to understand the facts of life and learn to accept them. More often than not, we are battling with the realities of life. Let us call a truce with that reality. To do so requires that we understand the reality of life and understand the reality of our own selves. We are happy only if we make peace with reality and not otherwise.

### **Only a favorable mind is available for Vedantic study**

An aspirant devoted to the pursuit of knowledge wants the mind to be available for *śravaṇam*, listening to the scriptures. He wants to do *mananam*, reflect upon what he has heard, and then achieve *nidhidhyāsanam*, the assimilation of what he has understood to be the truth. *Śravaṇam* leads to an understanding of the truth, *mananam* is the subsequent contemplation to make one's understanding free from doubts, and *nidhidhyāsanam* is the assimilation of that truth. However, the mind of the aspirant strays repeatedly on account of past impressions and innate patterns of thinking and concluding. It requires a particular kind of effort to control or restrain the mind so that it is available to do what we want. This quietude, restraint, cheerfulness, or abidance of mind is *śama*. *Śravaṇam*, *mananam*, and *nidhidhyāsanam*, are the means to gain knowledge and we want the mind to be focused on this pursuit all the time. As the Vivekacūḍāmaṇi [22] says, *svalakṣye-niyatāvasthā*, the mind should be constantly focused on one's *lakṣya* or goal.

*Śama* or quietude of mind enables the mind to turn away from its other preoccupations and remain focused. The mind cannot be brought under control or made agreeable to us unless we make a specific effort. What is it that makes the mind disagreeable to us? It is our likes and dislikes, which arise primarily from *rāga*, attachment. The mind has a false fascination for things. It sees that which is not there; for example, it sees happiness and security in objects, situations, and people, which do not have them. This is the reason why it is necessary to free the mind from its fascinations.

The Bhagavad Gita [2-59] says that we can create a distance between ourselves and the things that we like and, in doing so, refrain from indulging. However, the very *rasa* or fascination does not go easily. I can turn my face away from a given thing, but the fascination remains and it is that which I have to deal with. If it is a proper fascination, it would not be a problem. Unfortunately, the fascination of the mind for objects and achievements is a misplaced fascination because those things do not have the essence of happiness or security. Therefore, the mind first superimposes security and happiness where it is not, and then desires to possess it. When the mind gets an object that it desires, it feels happy. *Rāga* is considered to be an enemy because it is that which deprives one of true happiness.

### ***Repeatedly seeing the limitations of worldly objects helps master the mind***

*Virajya viṣayaṅvrātād doṣadrṣṭyā muhurmuḥuḥ* is the dispassion felt towards a host of objects by seeing their limitations again and again [Vivekacūḍāmaṇi, 22]. The method suggested to restrain the mind or bring it back to its focus is to see its limitation. *Doṣadrṣṭi* means seeing the faults present wherever the mind wants to go or in that to which the mind is attached. What are these faults? Any attachment or aversion can be there only when we have a partial view; there will be neither likes nor dislikes when we have a total view. Fascination is created because the mind sees only one aspect of a thing. We should make the mind see the other aspects as well to free it from its false fascination. A mind free of attachment or aversion is an objective mind. This is a process that is to be practiced constantly. We have to deal with the mind and its likes and dislikes, attractions and aversions.

### ***A mastered mind is free of likes and dislikes***

Whatever is, is *brahman* or God, *sarvaṁ khalvidaṁ brahma* [Chāndogyopaniṣad, 3-14-1]. Therefore, there should not be attachment or aversion to anything because everything is my very Self. In order to appreciate this Truth, the mind must be relatively free from *rāga* and *dveṣa*. Therefore, it is necessary to deliberately make the mind free from *rāga* and *dveṣa*, not by forcing or suppressing it, but by accepting the truth of things. If a thing really deserves my fascination, so be it; if a thing really deserves my hatred or aversion, again, so be it. We do not want to deny the mind what is genuine. When we analyze the nature of things, however, we find that

neither attractions nor aversions can be genuine because a thing does not inherently deserve either. That is why it is said [Bhagavad Gita, 6-26]:

यतो यतो निश्चरति मनश्चञ्चलमस्थिरम्। ततस्ततो नियम्यैतदात्मन्येव वशं नयेत्॥

*yato yato niścarati manaścañcalamasthiram,  
tatastato niyamyaitadātmanyeva vaśam nayet.*

For whatever reason the unsteady mind, always in a state of flux, goes away, bringing it back from that, with reference to the Self alone, may one bring (the mind) into one's own hands.

Whenever the mind gets distracted, let the mind see the true nature of things. In short, we have to learn to appreciate things for what they are; neither as more nor as less. When there is fascination, we see more than is there and, when there is aversion, we see less. Only a mind that sees neither more nor less is objective, free of *rāga* and *dveṣa*, and in the state of *śama*. *Śama* is the mastery of the mind, which enables the student to focus on his goal<sup>1</sup>.

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