

Satsang with Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam
Essential Spiritual Practices

nāvirato duṣcaritānnāśānto nāsamāhiṭaḥ |

nāśāntamānaso vā'pi prajñānenainamāpnuyāt

Neither one who has not withdrawn from bad conduct, nor one who lacks sense-control, nor one whose mind has no concentration, nor one who is not integrated can attain this Self through knowledge [Kāṭhōpaniṣad 1-2-24].

This verse talks of the prerequisites to gaining knowledge of the Self. One has to attain successive degrees of devotion that will lead to discovering this knowledge. Here, we are told of how it is possible to acquire this devotion and thus gain the Self.

Duṣcaritād na avirataḥ, this self cannot be attained by one who has not refrained from wickedness. *Duṣcarita* is evil conduct, the violation of the basic values of life. *Sat-carita* is good conduct based on the values that I expect of others. I expect others to be kind to me, and loving to me, to be forgiving, compassionate, understanding, and accepting of me. I do not want other people to hurt me, cheat me, or lie to me. Others also have similar expectations of me and do not want me to hurt them, cheat them, or lie to them. They expect me to like them, love them, accept them, and be kind and compassionate to them. I know that what I expect of other people is what they expect of me as well.

Positive values such as kindness and compassion, or non-violence and truthfulness are the universal expectation of all living beings. Everyone has love for these values because they are the very nature of the self, and there is a natural love for the self. Therefore, whenever I conduct myself in accordance with these values, I am conducting myself in harmony with my

own self. On the other hand, whenever I violate these values, I am in effect violating my own self. This results in the squandering of my energy. I may not recognize it, but whenever I go against the values, I am hurting myself. There is a slight trauma every time I tell a lie. A little hurt, a little damage, so slight that I may not even notice it. Yet, years of accumulated trauma add up to depression and other kinds of problems.

It is easy and tempting to violate the values, but it is a self-hurting way of life. It is very convenient to take the easy way out, getting away with less effort. There is a tendency to get as much as I can with as little as I can put in. If I fall prey to that tendency, it will become stronger and stronger. It will take over and soon I will become a habitual liar or violator.

Na aśāntaḥ. Another impulse that we have is seeking sense gratification. We have a natural fascination for sense objects. Self-knowledge is not available to one who has not restrained the sense organs from indulging in the sense pleasures. Vedānta does not say that we should not enjoy the sense objects at all. It only cautions that there should be moderation in all activities involving the sense objects. In the Bhagavadgītā [6-17], Lord Krishna refers to one who has moderation and a sense of proportion in whatever he does: *yuktāhāravihārasya yuktaceṣṭasya karmasu*. He is described as one who is moderate in *āhāra*, *vihāra* and *karma*, eating and other activities, and alert with reference to one's duties.

The one who wishes to gain self-knowledge must have the ability to refrain from the temptation to indulge in sense pleasures. The one who cannot do that will not gain the knowledge because his senses are outwardly directed. He is too extroverted and gross. There are those who are given to sensuous impulses, who indulge in the sensory pleasures not recognizing

that they are on the path to self-ruin. The Upaniṣad says that neither the one who has not refrained from evil conduct, nor the one who has not restrained the sense organs from the temptation of the sense pleasures can attain the self.

Na asamāhitaḥ: Another necessity is *samādhānam*, steadiness of the mind. One whose mind is agitated or distracted cannot gain the knowledge of the self. It is necessary to have a mind that has focus or steadiness. The Upaniṣad talks of the need for *śamadamādi-ṣaṭka sampatti*, the qualities of *śama*, *dama*, *uparati*, *titikṣā*, *śraddhā* and *samādhānam*¹. We require the mind to focus upon the self. This happens only through deliberate practice and we have to make the effort. Just as a deliberate effort is required to see that we follow the values and restrain our senses from indulging in sense gratification, training the mind to retain focus also requires effort.

Japa or repeating the name of the lord is an excellent means of cultivating focus of the mind. The steps of *aṣṭāṅga yoga* viz., *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, *dhāraṇā*, and *dhyānam*, are also very helpful in developing concentration. In our daily activities, we have to set aside a certain time to practice the concentration of the mind. This should not become a mechanical exercise, but be a purposeful activity that is centered upon the Lord. Therefore, practice repeating the name of the Lord, as opposed to looking at a flame or something like that. A general level of alertness also helps because when we habitually do certain things for years, we begin to do them mechanically and without paying attention. We should watch for this and guard against becoming mechanical, or impulsive, and restrain the mind

¹ Control or mastery over the mind is *śama*. Control of the external senses of perception and action is *dama*. Strict observance of one's own duty is *uparati*. The endurance of heat and cold, pleasure and pain, etc. is *titikṣā*. Faith in the words of the guru and the scriptures is *śraddhā*. Single-pointedness of the mind is *samādhānam*.

from meandering or wandering. The mind is susceptible to all this and we have to learn to deal with it and train it to develop focus. The sixth chapter of the Bhagavadgītā deals with the practice of developing concentration of the mind.

When the mind acquires concentration or single-pointedness, one likes to enjoy the experience of peace or silence within oneself. Enjoying the pleasure of the concentration of the mind is *rasa-āsvāda*. However, this is seen as being an obstacle to gaining self-knowledge because one may stop at that point, or use concentration of mind; to develop other powers. This verse says that one should become free from the desire to gain any other benefit of the concentration of the mind; one should only want knowledge and nothing else. This is called devotion, *yamevaiṣa vṛṇute* [Kāthopaniṣad 1-2-24], the one who chooses the Lord.

The first level of devotion is the deliberate choice of making Lord our priority in life. What is meant by choosing God in our life? Choosing God means living in accordance with the nature of god. It is *sat-carita*, good conduct, or refraining from violating the values. The second level of devotion lies in restraining the sense organs from sense indulgence. God is within, and therefore, to the extent that the sense organs and the mind are abiding, I am worshipful. The third degree of devotion is developing concentration of mind, making it free from its habitual wandering or habitual distractions. When one reaches the fourth level of devotion to the Lord, one is able to refrain even from that pleasure which comes from concentration, and contain the temptation to use that concentration for acquiring some mundane powers. All these are distractions that come in the way of devotion, to the Lord.

A person who has overcome all manner of distractions, who enjoys the purity and concentration of the mind and is totally dedicated only to the knowledge of the Self and nothing else, will definitely gain the knowledge, *prajñānenainamāpnuyāt*. He is qualified to discover this knowledge, *prajñānena*, and the proper means of knowledge, *śravaṇam*, *mananam*, and *nididhyāsanam*, will thus become effective. *Yamevaiṣa vṛṇute*, he who chooses the Lord or *ātmā* or the Self and lives a way of life reflecting that choice gains the knowledge of *ātmā*².

² Transcribed and edited by KK Davey and Jayshree Ramakrishnan.