

This is the eighteenth part of the serial article, continuation from Nov 2022 newsletter.

## Contemplation upon the self

The essence of the Upaniṣad has already been taught in the *mantras* up to this point. However, the truth being so subtle, there still remains in a student's mind a question about how one can gain abidance in this knowledge or even gain the knowledge. Indeed, gaining this extraordinary knowledge requires that one should constantly contemplate upon the self. The Upaniṣad unfolds the nature of the self upon which one must constantly deliberate. Some preparations are required for that deliberation, which is called meditation. That is described in the next *mantra*.

विविक्तदेशे च सुखासनस्थः

शुचिः समग्रीवशिरःशरीरः ।

अत्याश्रमस्थः सकलेन्द्रियाणि

निरुध्य भक्त्या स्वगुरुं प्रणम्य ॥ ५ ॥

*viviktadeśe ca sukhāsanasthaḥ*

*śuciḥ samagrīvaśiraḥśarīraḥ*

*atyāśramasthaḥ sakalendriyāṇi*

*nirudhya bhaktyā svagurum praṇamya*

विविक्तदेशे - in a secluded place च - and सुखासनस्थः - sitting in a comfortable posture शुचिः - clean समग्रीवशिरःशरीरः - with neck, head and body in alignment अत्याश्रमस्थः - with a mental attitude of renunciation सकलेन्द्रियाणि - all the senses निरुध्य - having withdrawn भक्त्या - with devotion स्वगुरुम् - to one's own teacher प्रणम्य - having bowed

(One should be) sitting in a secluded place, in a comfortable posture, with the neck, head and body in alignment, with a clean mind, in the attitude of renunciation, having withdrawn all the senses, and having bowed with devotion to one's teacher. (5)

This verse tells us that for meditation one should choose a place that is secluded and free from external disturbances. There are two kinds of disturbances, external and internal. To become free from external disturbances, choose a secluded place if you can find one. This is available in many homes in the United States. I don't know in how many homes in India you can find it. "Swamiji, in my house there is no seclusion at all; there is so much noise. Once people wake up in the morning, children start running around and..." Well, in that case, choose a time before other people wake up. At least then, you can enjoy some seclusion. There is nothing else you can do about all the noise around you. Simply choose a time before the noises start or choose a time after the noises have subsided. But it is necessary that there should be a place and a time where there is freedom from such external disturbances, because you do get disturbed by them. A time will come when you are not disturbed by what is happening around, but until then, you may have to manage. You certainly cannot expect to go to Times Square or the New Delhi Railway station and meditate, because the environment is going to impact you. So you have to seek out Saylorsburg or Rishikesh<sup>1</sup> or some place like that where you can enjoy the seclusion.

Meditation should be performed preferably while in a sitting posture. Sitting with legs folded is most preferable. Otherwise, you could be seated on a chair, but not walking or standing. Incidentally, this is discussed in the Brahmasūtra<sup>2</sup>. There is a discussion on whether meditation should be performed only while sitting or in other postures as well. The conclusion is that meditation should be done only while sitting down. When one is standing, a part of the mind is preoccupied with keeping the body upright, lest one lose balance; while standing, there is a risk of falling. While lying down, it is possible that one may fall asleep, and, while walking or running, meditation is not possible because the movements of the body disturb the mind.

*Sukhāsanasthaḥ* means seated in a comfortable posture. What is required is a posture where the center of gravity is such that one does not have to make any effort

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<sup>1</sup> Swamiji is referring to locations of ashrams and retreat centers where the atmosphere is calm.

<sup>2</sup> आसीनः सम्भवात् । *āsīnaḥ sambhavāt*. One should meditate while having a sitting posture since it is possible that way alone. (BS 4.1.7)

to remain in that posture, whether it is in the *padmāsana*, the lotus posture, while sitting with legs simply folded or while in the *vajrāsana* or any another posture that is comfortable. It is said that, if it becomes possible to remain seated in a particular posture for 48 minutes without movement, one has mastered that posture or *āsana*. That is called *āsana-siddhi*. Basically, what it means is that while meditating, the body must not draw our attention enough to cause distraction; it is best to choose a comfortable posture in which the body does not create any distraction.

In *haṭha-yoga*, the *āsana* or posture assumes great importance because the intent is to arouse the *kuṇḍalinī* or potential power in the body. There are various postures that are very important for that. Different postures activate different *cakras*, but that is a different thing. The Pātañjala Yoga Sūtra describes the posture of meditation as *sthira-sukham āsanam*<sup>3</sup>, that which is steady and comfortable. Gaining a steady posture requires much effort and hard labor in the beginning, but when perfected, the posture becomes steady and does not cause any trouble to the body. *Āsanam* also means the seat upon which one normally sits for meditation. One should not keep on changing the place of meditation or the cloth upon which one sits in meditation, or even the posture in which one sits. This way, the mind also gets used to the place and the surroundings.

*Samagrīvaśīraḥśarīraḥ* means keeping the body, neck, and head in alignment. *Sama* means in one line. Hold the trunk, neck and head in one straight line, as best as you can. If doing so causes pain, it need not be done. The idea is that the base should be broad so that the center of gravity is maintained; otherwise, one may slump. Therefore, it is recommended that one must sit erect. Keep the eyes lightly closed, as in not firmly closed, but not open either, because, if the eyes are open, movements are visible and the tendency of the mind is to follow what the eyes see. Sometimes, it is interesting to watch people in the audience during a lecture; when somebody gets up from his seat, you find many pairs of eyes following that person, as though escorting him all the way to the door! Even though the Swami is sitting here and talking, their attention goes to that person and then comes back. This is the nature of the mind; it is habitual, one may not even be aware that this is

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<sup>3</sup>Pathaṅjali Yoga Sūtra 2.46

happening. Therefore, it is recommended that the eyes should be closed during meditation.

In the Bhagavad Gita<sup>4</sup>, Lord Kṛṣṇa says that one may focus the attention in the space between the eyebrows. There are certain techniques or methods given to us, so that we can steady our minds. It is said that if the pupils are steady, the mind will also become steady. If the mind is unsteady, the pupils will move around. Therefore, focusing at a point between the eyebrows is a way of steadying the pupils and steadying the mind. Some people get a headache in doing that, so one must only do whatever is comfortable. In the sixth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita<sup>5</sup>, Lord Kṛṣṇa also recommends that attention be focused on the tip of the nose. Sometimes, one is asked to gaze at a flame, just to steady the mind. It is also said that holding the tongue such that it does not touch either the palate or the lower jaw will help steady the mind. These are some of the methods for focusing the attention, the idea being that the mind should become steady.

The next step is purification of the mind. The mind may sometimes have *rāgas* or attractions and *dveṣas*, aversions, because of which issues that have not been resolved may come up during meditation. For instance, there may be some resentment for some person, some hurt due to a situation, or some anger that is unresolved and stored in the mind. Such things have an uncanny knack of showing up during meditation, because this is a good occasion for them to draw our attention. Usually, our minds are so busy and occupied that we do not confront feelings, such as hurt, guilt or other issues. We don't like them and avoid them by keeping our minds busy. During meditation, however, the mind is not actively engaged in doing anything and so those feelings may have an opportunity to draw our attention. It is like a child knowing when the mother is busy and waiting for her to become available; as soon as she is done with her work and becomes free, the child starts pulling her sari or tapping her arm or doing something so as to draw her

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<sup>4</sup> BG 5.27

<sup>5</sup> समं कायशिरोग्रीवं धारयन्नचलं स्थिरः ।

सम्प्रेक्ष्य नासिकाग्रं स्वं दिशश्चानवलोकयन् ॥

*samaṁ kāyaśirogrīvaṁ dhārayannacalaṁ sthiraḥ*

*sampreksya nāsikāgraṁ svaṁ diśaścānavalokayan* (BG 6.13)

attention.

When hurts, guilt, and the like come up, we should resolve them through *pratipakṣa-bhāvanā*, deliberately taking the opposite position. Suppose we are angry at somebody, the *pratipakṣa-bhāvanā* is forgiveness. Genuine forgiveness will neutralize anger. For jealousy, the *pratipakṣa-bhāvanā* is trying to be happy in the achievement of that person. Thus, for every negative feeling there is a positive feeling, because every negative feeling arises from looking at a person or situation from a certain standpoint. In making the mind deliberately look at it from the opposite standpoint, that impulse can be neutralized. It is necessary to neutralize disturbing feelings or impulses in the mind, so that it becomes calm and *suchih*, pure, free from such impurities as anger, etc.

*Atyāśramasthaḥ*<sup>6</sup> means remaining in the highest order viz., *sannyāsa*. At the time of meditation, one becomes a *sannyāsī*, a renunciate. Who is a renunciate? Pūjya Swamiji says that a renunciate is one who has no role to play. Normally, we keep playing different roles, such as that of a father, a mother, a son, a wife, an employee, and so on, because every situation demands that we respond in a suitable manner. But here is a situation where we have no role to play; we have no responsibility, no duty, and no accountability. We don't have to prove ourselves or achieve anything. We become free from all the demands that the world normally places upon us and those that we place upon ourselves. One is not a mother or father, one is not a son or daughter, and one is not a husband or wife. One is not a *brahmacarī* or student; neither is one a *gṛhastha*, householder, or a *vānaprastha*, a forest dweller or retiree. One is simply a *sannyāsī*.

What kind of *sannyāsī* is the individual at that time?

*Sannyāsīs* are of different categories. Here it means a *sannyāsī* who has no duties and responsibilities. At the time of meditation, one has no role to play. One who has no agenda, no ambition, and nothing to accomplish or achieve is a *sannyāsī*. If there are ambitions, one should not become a *sannyāsī*, but do what is required to fulfill those ambitions. But here, during meditation, one becomes a *sannyāsī*. One

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<sup>6</sup> आश्रमम् अतीत्य तिष्ठति इति अत्याश्रमस्थः । *āśramam atītya tiṣṭhati iti atyāśramasthaḥ*

has no claims, no demands, no competition, no agenda, and no ambition. There is nothing to be accomplished, at least for those 45 minutes. One gives up all roles at that time, and with that, also gives up all responsibilities, all commitments, all anxieties, and all worries, everything. The one who remains having transcended all the stages of life is *atyāśramasthaḥ*.

I know of one Swamiji, who used to give an orange cloth to everyone attending a Vedanta camp for a week or ten days. He would say that for the next 7-10 days they were all *sannyāsīs*. Even a married couple would wear the orange cloth and be renunciates for that period of time. People used to like that idea, because it had some effect on them. When they wore orange, they felt the spirit of renunciation and seemed to be impacted by that. It seemed to create a certain mood. Ideally, however, you should wear the orange cloth only if you are a renunciate.

*Sakalendriyāṇi nirudhya* means having restrained all the sense organs. It is necessary to disengage the sense organs from their activities. As far as the organs of action are concerned, such as the hands or legs, they can be restrained at will. One can also restrain speech. However, it is difficult to restrain the organs of perception. The eyes, of course, can be closed. Some people wear ear plugs so that no sound is heard. I remember one *brahmacārī*, who, when meditating in his room, used to get disturbed by the ticking sound of the clock. So he would wrap his clock in a blanket to smother its sound and put it as far away as possible. The interesting thing is that you normally don't even hear the sound of the clock, until you start meditating! Restraining the sense organs means withdrawing the sense organs from their preoccupations. The Kaṭhōpaniṣad<sup>7</sup> says, "When the five organs of perception come to rest together with the mind, and the intellect too does not function, that state they call the highest." Keeping the senses steady is considered

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<sup>7</sup> यदा पञ्चावतिष्ठन्ते ज्ञानानि मनसा सह ।

बुद्धिश्च न विचेष्टति तामाहुः परमां गतिम् ॥

*yadā pañcāvatiṣṭhante jñānāni manasā saha*

*buddhiśca na viceṣṭati tāmāhuḥ paramāṁ gatim* (Ka.Up. 2.3.10)

तां योगमिति मन्यन्ते स्थिरामीन्द्रियधारणाम् ।

अप्रमत्तस्तदा भवति योगो हि प्रभवाप्ययौ ॥

*tām yogamiti manyante sthirāmīndriyadhāraṇām*

*apramattastadā bhavati yogo hi prabhavāpyayau* (Ka.Up. 2. 3.11)

to be *yoga*.

When the senses are calm, the whole personality becomes quiet and composed. Some deliberate restraint may be needed in the beginning, but it is not possible to keep on applying restraint. That is why purification of the mind is so important. Purity of mind implies that one is cheerful by oneself and happy with oneself, and, therefore, the mind has no reason to run out. That degree of peace with oneself is established when there is total self-acceptance, in which one is not fighting with oneself. We keep fighting with ourselves because we want to be different than we are; we don't like ourselves as we are, and are not happy with the way we are: "Why am I like this, why am I...?" Stop it. Let there be peace. We must establish a truce with ourselves. That is how the whole personality becomes composed and self-centered, or gains abidance in the self.

*Svagurum bhaktyā praṇamya* means saluting one's own teacher with devotion. Meditation is best done when there is also devotion in the mind. It is possible to evoke devotion in the heart, and that is why many different *devatās*, different forms and names, are given to us. For somebody, Rāma may invoke devotion; for somebody else, maybe Kṛṣṇa, or whoever. Anyone who inspires us also invokes our devotion. But a teacher is a *pratyakṣa-devatā*, perceptible god. One is the recipient of his grace, his kindness, his love, and his teaching. Hence, thinking of the teacher invokes the devotee in us easily. We remember and salute the teacher, so that our hearts are full of devotion.

*To be continued...*

"You may be mortal from the standpoint of the body. You may be blind or deaf from the stand-point of the senses. You may be restless from the stand-point of the mind and wanting in knowledge from the stand-point of intellect. But from the stand-point of "I" that is aware of the body, senses, emotions, knowledge, memories, ignorance, you are self-evident, being simple consciousness or awareness."

- Swami Dayananda Saraswati