

Guru-pūrṇimā
Talk by Swami Paramarthananda
Saptabhūmikā

सदाशिवसमारम्भां शङ्कराचार्यमध्यमाम्
अस्मदाचार्यपर्यन्ताम् वन्दे गुरुपरम्पराम्
sadāśivasamārambhāṁ śaṅkarācāryamadhyamām
asmadācāryaparyantām vande guruparamparām

Today happens to be auspicious *guru-pūrṇimā* day which is very important for all spiritual seekers. For all the spiritual seekers, three factors are important - *īśvaraḥ*, *guruḥ* and *vedānta-śāstram*. Only by worshipping *īśvara* we will develop a desire for getting a *guru*, and we will succeed in getting a *guru* also. And *guru* is very important because, *guru* alone gives us the *śāstram*, the scriptures. The scriptures are the only means of self-knowledge and liberation which is the highest accomplishment possible in a human life. And the scriptures become a valid means of knowledge only when they are taught by a *guru*. Thus God gives *guru*, and *guru* gives the scriptural teaching and, the teachings give the knowledge and liberation.

All these three are revered throughout the life of a spiritual seeker. Before the self-knowledge we worship the *guru* for getting self-knowledge and after the self-knowledge we worship as an expression of gratitude.

आजीवितं त्रयं सेव्यं वेदान्तो गुरुरीश्वरः ।

आदौ ज्ञानाप्तये पश्चात् कृतघ्नत्वनिवृत्तये ॥

ājīvitam trayam sevyam vedānto gururīśvaraḥ
ādau jñānāptaye paścāt kṛtaghnatvanivṛttaye

And *guru-pūrṇimā* is the day in which we express our respects for *guru*, and for the entire *guru-paramparā*. Vyāsācārya represents the *guru-paramparā*. Today is *vyāsa pūjā* day, called *vyāsa pūrṇimā* or *guru-pūrṇimā*. Orthodox *sannyāsīs* start their *cāturmāsya-vratam* during which they stay in one place and share the knowledge with other people.

In keeping with that tradition I would like to share some thoughts on *vedānta*. And today I would like to take up a topic called *sapta-bhūmikā*. Literally *sapta-bhūmikā* means seven levels, *bhūmikā* means level, floor or storey. Seven levels of spiritual progress or journey, is the meaning of *sapta-bhumikā*. This is considered to be part of *vedānta*, a methodology of teaching, *sapta-bhūmikā prakriyā*.

This topic of *sapta-bhūmikā* is primarily found in a voluminous work called *yoga-vāsiṣṭhaḥ*, a voluminous work consisting of about 28000 verses. Originally it seems there were 32000 verses, but only about 28000 verses are available with Sanskrit commentary. This is the primary source of *sapta-bhūmikā*. This topic found in *yoga-vāsiṣṭha*, has been extracted by a great *ācārya* named Vidyāraṇya Swami, and he has presented this topic, comprehensively in a structured manner in his famous work *jīvanmukti-viveka*.

Another *ācārya* who has dealt with this topic is the great Madhusūdana Saraswatī who came after Vidyāraṇya Swami. And he incorporated this topic in his famous *Gītā bhāṣyam* called *Gūḍhārtha dīpikā*. And especially in the 6th chapter of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, he has given an exhaustive commentary dealing with this topic.

The author of *yoga-vāsiṣṭha* is supposed to be Vālmikī Maharṣiḥ who is the author of Rāmāyaṇam. It is a teaching that was given by Vasiṣṭha Maharṣi to Lord Rāma. Therefore, it is called *yoga-vāsiṣṭhaḥ*, supposed to have been written by Vālmiki Maharṣi. Many research scholars of east and west consider that this is a work which has been written after Ādi Śaṅkarācārya time.

Thus, the primary sources for this topic are Vidyāraṇya's *jīvanmukti-viveka* and Madhusūdana Saraswatī's *Gītā bhāṣyam* especially the 6th chapter. With this background, I will first mention the seven levels that are mentioned.

Seven levels are:

śubhecchā शुभेच्छा

vicāraṇā विचारणा

tanumānasā तनुमानसा

sattvāpattiḥ सत्त्वापत्तिः

asaṁsaktiḥ असंसक्तिः

padārthabhāvanī पदार्थभावनी or *bhāvinī* भाविनी

turyagā तुर्यगा or *turīyā* तुरीया

These are the seven *bhumikāḥ* or levels of the spiritual upward journey. Among these seven levels, the first four levels are well known levels and we have already learnt them in several *vedānta* works. The words are new, but the ideas are known.

The first level of *śubhecchā* means acquisition of 4-fold qualification through *karma-yoga* and *upāsana-yoga*. Gaining the qualification and desiring for

jñāna-yoga, - śubha icchā.

Then the second level of *vicāraṇā*, refers to *śravaṇam* and *mananam*. *Śravaṇam* is consistent and systematic study of vedantic scriptures for a length of time until we gain the knowledge. Through *mananam*, we remove all the doubts regarding the teaching.

श्रवणेन अज्ञाननिवृत्तिः मननेन संशयनिवृत्तिः

śravaṇena ajñānanivṛttiḥ mananena saṁśayanivṛttiḥ

Śravaṇam removes ignorance, and *mananam* removes doubt. These two put together is the second level, *vicāraṇā*.

Third level is *tanumānasā*, it is the practice of *nididhyāsanam*. *Nididhyāsanam* means *ātma-dhyānam* or meditating upon my own real self, as understood from *śravaṇam* and *mananam*. So *nididhyāsanam* is not for the knowledge. Also, it is not for removing the doubts. It is for removing our habitual thinking pattern about ourselves and the world, called *viparīta-bhāvanā* or *viparyaya*, *ahaṁkāra-mamakāra-rāga-dveṣa - duṣṭa-catuṣṭayam*. That habit will not go easily. By invoking my *brahma-svarūpam*, I get out of the *jīva-bhāva* ways of thinking. And by going through *śravaṇam*, *mananam* and *nididhyāsanam*, I have removed ignorance, doubt, and habitual tendencies. That means I have got firm self knowledge called *sthira-prajñā* or *jñāna-niṣṭhā*. *Śravaṇam* gives *jñānam*, *mananam* and *nididhyāsanam* give *niṣṭhā*. All these three put together gives *jñāna-niṣṭhā*.

The fourth level, *sattvāpattiḥ*, is *jñāna-niṣṭhā*. It is the result of *nididhyāsanam*. *Tanumānasā* leads to *satva-āpattiḥ*. The one who has reached the fourth level is *jñāna-niṣṭhah*, *sthira-prajñah* and therefore is liberated. He is a *jñānī*. He is *brahma-vit*. He is *muktaḥ*. And because of the older *prārabdha* continuing, the *jñānī* continues to hold the body or limb in the body for some time which is called *jīvanmuktiḥ*; he is called *jīvanmuktaḥ*; and when the *prārabdha* ends, the body falls. The *jñānī jīvanmuktaḥ* becomes *videhamuktaḥ*. *Videha-mukti* is a *jñānī* merging into *īśvara* from *vyāvahārika* angle, or merging into *Brahman* from *pāramārthika-dṛṣṭi*.

Thus, with the fourth level, the spiritual journey is really over, because one becomes *jñānī*, *jīvanmuktaḥ* and later *videhamuktaḥ*. Hence the first four stages, are known stages.

Then the natural question will be what is the role of the next three levels, known as *asaṁsaktiḥ*, *padārthabhāvanī* and *turyagā*. And *sapta-bhūmikā prakriyā* specializes on this topic only and introduces these three levels. Through

these three levels, the *sapta-bhūmikā prakriyā* introduces an optional project for a *jñānī*. He is a *jñānī jīvanmukta* because he has already come to fourth level. Fifth, sixth and seventh levels are an optional project for a *jīvanmukta-jñānī*. Some *jñānīs* take up this project, and some do not take up this project because it is optional. No book or *śāstram* can compel a *jñānī* to do something or not to do something. Because *jñānī* is beyond dos and don'ts. There is no *vidhi* or *niṣedha* for *jñānīs*. Some *jñānīs* take this up because of the inclinations due to their *prārabdha-karma* and *vāsanās*. Whereas some other *jñānīs* have a different type of *prārabdha-karma* and *vāsanās*, therefore they don't take up. It is purely because of their *prārabdha*.

सदृशं चेष्टते स्वस्याः प्रकृतेर्ज्ञानवानपि

sadrśam ceṣṭate svasyāḥ prakṛterjñānavānapi

To understand this project we should have some background knowledge. Before becoming a *jñānī*, in the fourth level, as a *sādhaka*, the *jñānī* had practiced *śravaṇam*, *mananam* and *nididhyāsanam*. And as a *sādhaka* he practiced *nididhyāsanam* which is called *ātma-dhyānam*, *svarūpa-dhyānam*. The purpose of *nididhyāsanam* was to remove the habitual tendency, that “I am a *jīva*”, “I am *kartā*, *bhoktā*”, etc. So *viparītabhāvanā-nivṛttiḥ*, removal of obstacles, was the purpose. And that purpose has been already served, by going through the level three and by coming to the fourth level.

Now the *sapta-bhūmikā prakriyā* introduces the same *ātma-dhyānam* once again. For the *jñānī* in the fourth level, the same *ātma-dhyānam* is reintroduced, but, for a different purpose. And what is the purpose? By practicing *ātma-dhyānam*, the meditator can experience, great spiritual joy or happiness, because the meditation involves invoking my own *ānanda-svarūpa*. And when I am invoking my *ānanda-svarūpa*, my real nature of *ānanda*, the very invocation of my nature gives me a great joyous experience. So *svarūpa-ānanda dhyānam* can give *ānanda anubhava* at the time of meditation which is called special spiritual habit. It is different from all sense pleasures. It doesn't come under *viśayānandaḥ*, because in this no sense object is involved. I am dwelling on my own nature. Therefore, it is a *viśeṣa-ānandaḥ* called *jīvanmukti-viśeṣa-ānandaḥ*, *jīvanmukti-vilakṣaṇa-ānandaḥ*, *jīvanmukti-ānanda-atīśayaḥ*, which is an experiential joy. It is *vyāvahārika-ānandaḥ* which is available only during meditation. Therefore, it is *pratibimba-ānandaḥ* only. Because *viśeṣa-ānanda* is always *pratibimba-ānandaḥ*, and the *bimba-ānandaḥ* is always *nirviśeṣa ānanda*.

A *jñānī* can choose to enjoy this spiritual *ānanda*. It will not become bondage for him because his desire is always a non binding desire. And this *viśeṣa-ānanda* cannot be an obstacle for becoming a *jñānī*, as already he is a *jñānī*. It is a harmless pursuit of internal mental joy by invoking my higher nature.

अहमन्नम् अहमन्नम् अहमन्नम् ।

ahamannam ahamannam ahamannam

हा^३वु हा^३वु हा^३वु ।

hā³vu hā³vu hā³vu

So this is the project given by *sapta-bhūmikā prakriyā* for a *jīvanmukta-jñānī*, for experiencing spiritual joy through deep *ātma-dhyānam*, leading to absorption.

If a person selects this object, what are the steps to be followed by that person to succeed in this project? These steps are comprehensively given by Vidyāraṇya in *jīvanmukti-viveka* and by Madhusūdana Saraswati in his *Gītā bhāṣyam*.

Four steps are mentioned for enjoying this spiritual happiness. First step is, *jīvanmukta-jñānī* should become a *sannyāsī* if he or she is not a *sannyāsī* already. If he is already *sannyāsī*, a *vividiṣā -sannyāsī* he has nothing to do. Otherwise the first step is, this *jīvanmukta-jñānī*, if he or she is a *gr̥hastha*, should take up *sannyāsa*. Only then one can drop all the external worldly transactions, so that quality time and quality mind are available for engaging in deep meditation for a long time. Thus, all the external disturbances and obstacles are blocked by dropping all the worldly transactions.

The second step that is mentioned is *yoga-abhyāsaḥ*, especially the *aṣṭāṅga-yoga-abhyāsa* developing an expertise in the practice of the eight steps of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*. Patañjali Maharṣi's *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* is specially designed for deep meditation leading to *dhyāna-samādhi*. One should become a *yogī*, an expert in *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*.

The third step is *vāsanā-kṣayaḥ*. Even if one blocks, the external disturbances by dropping all the worldly transactions, internal disturbances can come from one's own mind and registered memories. So much is there in the subconscious; these *vāsanās* keep on producing thoughts especially when one sits in meditation. These *vāsanās* produce internal blocks. One should take care of all these *vāsanās* which are responsible for disturbing or extroverted thoughts.

Vāsanā-kṣayaḥ is a big topic with several divisions of *vāsanās*. First they divide them into *śuddha* and *aśuddha* or *śuddha* and *malina*. Then *malina-vāsanā* is divided into three, *deha-vāsanā śāstra-vāsanā* and *loka-vāsanā*. Then the *deha-vāsanā* is sub divided into three, *śāstra-vāsanā* is sub divided into three, and so on. Huge topic, dealing with varieties of *vāsanā* which will obstruct one's deep meditation. Hence this *vāsanā-kṣaya* has to be diligently practiced by replacing *aśuddha-vāsanā* by *śuddha-vāsanā*. In due course, *śuddha-vāsanā* also will fade away. Thus, *vāsanā* obstructions will weaken. This is third step. Each step is really tough.

The fourth step is *mano-nāśaḥ*. For the special project given by *sapta-bhūmikā prakriyā* for a *jīvanmukta-jñānī*, for experiencing the special spiritual joy of meditation, this step is mentioned. *Mano-nāśaḥ* means *mano-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ*, stopping or blocking all the thoughts related to the *anātmā*. Because the aim is *ātma-dhyānam*, the *anātmā* thoughts should not come and obstruct. One should develop the skill of removing all the *anātmā* thoughts, so that he or she can get absorbed in *ātma-dhyānam*.

आत्मसंस्थं मनः कृत्वा न किञ्चिदपि चिन्तयेत्
ātmasaṁsthaṁ manaḥ kṛtvā na kiñcidapi cintayet

These are the four steps: *sannyāsaḥ*, *yogā-bhyāsaḥ*, *vāsanā-kṣayaḥ* and *mano-nāśaḥ*. And if one goes through these steps and engage oneself in deep *ātma-dhyānam*, he or she can enjoy and soak in one's own higher nature.

And the *pramāṇam* for the special spiritual joy, according to *sapta-bhūmikā prakriyā*, is the bhagavad-gītā verses of the sixth chapter. That is why Madhusūdana Sarasvatī chose the sixth chapter to elaborately deal with this subject, especially the verses from 20 to 28.

यत्रोपरमते चित्तं निरुद्धं योगसेवया ।
यत्र चैवात्मनात्मानं पश्यन्नात्मनि तुष्यति ॥
yatroparamate cittam niruddham yogasevayā
yatra caivātmanātmānaṁ paśyannātmāni tuṣyati BG 6-20

yogasevayā niruddham manaḥ, when all *anātmā-vṛttis* are removed, he can enjoy his own *ānanda*, reflected in the meditative mind. He enjoys his own *ānanda*, *svarūpa-ānanda* reflected in the meditative mind which is calm and satvic. Clearer the mind, finer the reflection, and greater the intensity of experiential *ānanda*,

सुखमात्यन्तिकं यत्तद् बुद्धिग्राह्यमतीन्द्रियम् ।
sukhamātyantikaṁ yattad buddhigrāhyamatīndriyam BG 6-21

That limitless *ānanda* which is beyond the sense organs and which is grasped by the intellect ...

And later,

प्रशान्तमनसं ह्येनं योगिनं सुखमुत्तमम् ।

उपैति शान्तरजसं ब्रह्मभूतमकल्मषम् ॥

praśāntamanasaṁ hyenaṁ yoginaṁ sukhāmuttamam

upaiti śāntarajasaṁ brahmabhūtamakalmaṣam

BG 6-27

Supreme *ānanda* comes indeed to this *yogī* who is free from impurities, whose agitations have subsided, whose mind is totally tranquil, (and) who has become *Brahman*.

युञ्जन्नेवं सदात्मानं योगी विगतकल्मषः ।

सुखेन ब्रह्मसंस्पर्शम् अत्यन्तं सुखमश्नुते ॥

yuñjannevaṁ sadātmānaṁ yogī vigatakalmaṣaḥ

sukhena brahmasaṁsparśam atyantam sukhamāśnute

BG 6-28

Thus constantly engaging the mind (in meditation), the purified *yogī* effortlessly attains the limitless *ānanda* which belongs to *Brahman*.

These are all the experiential versions for joy available for a *jīvanmukta* if he chooses to sit in meditation and enjoy, not if he is engaged in worldly *vyavahāra*. And a person who practices this and experiences this joy will progress. This progress is presented in the last three levels, which are - *asaṁsaktiḥ*, *padārthabhāvanī*, and *turyagā*. These are the deeper and silent, and of course greater experiential joy.

One who reaches the fifth level of *asaṁsaktiḥ* is given the title *brahmavid-varaḥ*. One who reaches the fourth level is *brahmavid*, and who reaches the fifth level *brahmavid-varaḥ*. When he comes to sixth level of *padārthabhāvanī*, he is called *brahmavid-varīyān*, when he reaches the seventh level of *turyagā* he is called *brahmavid-varīṣṭhaḥ*.

How does one differentiate? That is also mentioned. This *brahmavid-varaḥ*, who has reached *asaṁsaktiḥ* is able to remain in meditation and *samādhi* for a long time and enjoy the spiritual *ānanda*. He can afford to do that since he has dropped all the worldly *vyavahāra*. He will come out of *samādhi* and get engaged in minimum activities required for survival like bathing eating etc, and he wakes up out of *samādhi* by himself. This *svataḥ vyutthānam* makes him *varaḥ*.

Whereas in the sixth level, he is so much lost in meditation and *ānanda* ex-

perience that he does not of his own accord come out of meditation, *svataḥ vyutthānam nāsti*. Others will have to assist him to come out and make him to engage himself in doing whatever *vyavahāra*. He will be doing minimum *vyavahāra*, assisted and woken up by others, *parataḥ vyuttānam*. *Vyuttāna* means coming out of meditation, *svataḥ* means voluntarily, *parataḥ* means assisted by others.

In the seventh stage, he never comes out of meditation or *samādhi* by himself. If others try to bring him to *vyavahāra*, he is completely absorbed and lost in meditation. Even if they do something to his body like bathing, he will be completely oblivious of all these things. This person is *brahmavid-variṣṭhaḥ*, in the seventh stage of *turyagā*.

For all practical purposes, his connection with the world is completely broken. Neither the world can contact him. Nor he can contact the world. There is no difference between the seventh stage of this *sapta-bhūmikā* and *videhamukti*. Because from the seventh stage he smoothly goes to *videhamukti*, without anyone knowing.

So this is the project of experiencing the joy of *ātmā* meditation. But, even though we talk about four types (*brahmavid*, *brahmavid-varaḥ*, *brahmavid-varīyān*, *brahmavid-variṣṭhaḥ*), there is no gradation of *ātmā-jñānam*. In the sense of fulfilment there is no gradation because it is centered on the *brahma-svarūpam* which is common to all. *Jñānam* and *pūrṇatvam* will be uniform for all because it is not dependent on the degree of happiness that is experienced at the mental level. The degree of happiness experienced at the mental level has no influence on the fact that I am *nityamuktam brahma*. Essentially there is no gradation, but superficially there is a difference caused by this pursuit. Also the success in this pursuit also depends on both *prārabdha* and effort taken by this *jīvanmukta-jñānī*. And *sapta-bhūmikā prakriyā* is special only in introducing this special project of *dhyāna-ānandaḥ*.

This *prakriyā* has been talked about by another great author, Nīścaladāsa who has written the famous text, *vicārasāgara*. In the seventh chapter of this book, he briefly but brilliantly discusses this *prakriyā* and reconciles this *prakriyā* with the *prasthāna-traya-bhāṣyaṁ* of Śaṅkarācārya. He says a *jñānī* can choose this project or not choose this project. That will depend upon the inclination of a *jñānī*.

This is the *sapta-bhūmikā prakriyā* of *yogavāsiṣṭha*, of *jīvanmuktiviveka* and of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī's *gītā-bhāṣyaṁ*. It is worth knowing, whether we

choose to practice it or not. With this I would like to complete my *guru-pūrṇimā* talk.

ओं पूर्णमदः पूर्णमिदं पूर्णात् पूर्णमुदच्यते।

पूर्णस्य पूर्णमादाय पूर्णमेवावशिष्यते॥

ओं शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः

om pūrṇamadaḥ pūrṇamidaṁ pūrṇāt pūrṇamudacyate |

pūrṇasya pūrṇamādāya pūrṇamevāvaśiṣyate ||

om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ

*** Transcribed and edited by students of Swamiji ***

