

*This is the twelfth part of the serial article, continuation from April 2022 newsletter.*

There are some aspects of the world that make us feel good about ourselves. When someone says, "You are wonderful, you are so good," we like that. We have a natural attachment for the one who makes us feel good about ourselves. Then there are some other aspects of the world that make us feel miserable by reminding us of how limited we are. We do not like them at all. Therefore, our relationship with the world is one of aversion and attraction, both of which keep us from recognizing the truth about ourselves. In fact, we should recognize that nobody can make us happy or unhappy. It is we who make ourselves happy or unhappy, depending upon the kind of complexes we entertain about ourselves. For this to become clear, we should spend time with our feelings.

When we feel happy, it is a good idea to spend some time on analyzing that feeling. Why do we feel happy? It may appear as though it is because somebody did this or that for us. What was the result of that? It made us think that we were all right; it made us comfortable with ourselves and seem acceptable, worthy, and good in our own perceptions of ourselves. If it took somebody else to tell us that we are worthy, that would be a different matter. What makes us happy is that we feel worthy, good, or acceptable in our own perceptions. Conversely, feeling unworthy or unacceptable in our own perceptions causes unhappiness. Therefore, whenever the mind feels happy, we should pay attention to what makes us happy and whenever the mind feels unhappy, pay attention to what makes us unhappy. No doubt, something out there triggered the condition, but what happens as a result is that we do not like or accept ourselves. Clearly, that is the cause of our sorrow, and, as we have seen before, sorrow is nothing but the product of ignorance.

When it is clear that our sorrow is the result of ignorance, the only agenda we have is to get rid of ignorance through knowledge. That is when we become devoted to knowledge and to whatever is required to gain the knowledge. For this, one must go to a teacher and practice *śravaṇa*, listening to scriptures, *manana*, reflecting upon them, and *nididhyāṣana*, deep meditation. If we find that we need to

cultivate some qualifications, like *śama* or tranquility of mind and *dama* or the discipline of the senses, we will strive to cultivate them. When we do all these, our lives become directed to a single pursuit. This is called *bhakti*, devotion.

### ***Dhyāna*, meditation**

When *śraddhā* or an unquestioning trust in the scriptures and the words of the teacher and *bhakti* or devotion are cultivated, the mind is free from distractions; it is focused upon the self. That is called *dhyāna*. *Dhyāna* can be called meditation or focus of the mind. When *śraddhā* and *bhakti* are present, the mind is available without any resistance; it is willingly available for *śravaṇa*, listening to the teacher.

The means of knowledge are *śravaṇa*, *manana*, and *nididhyāsana*. *Śravaṇa* is listening to the teacher as he unfolds the nature of the self based on the scriptures. Listening to the scriptures is listening about ourselves, because the subject matter of the Upaniṣad is the self. Even if the Upaniṣad talks about other things, the purpose is only to unfold the nature of the self. Therefore, when we listen to the teacher, to the Upaniṣad or Vedānta, it is an unfoldment of the self. *Ātmā vā are śrotavyaḥ*. “Hey Maitreyī, *ātmā* must be listened to.”<sup>1</sup> It is during *śravaṇa* that our complexes and false notions are dropped.

After *śravaṇa* comes *manana*, during which doubts are resolved with the help of reasoning that is in keeping with what the scriptures unfold. *Nididhyāsana* or deep meditation helps us become free from habitual errors. Taken together, *śravaṇa*, *manana*, and *nididhyāsana* are referred to as *dhyāna* in the present context. We are meditating when we are listening. During *śravaṇa*, the mind is focused. As the teacher unfolds the scripture, the same unfoldment takes place in the mind, because we are in tune with the teacher. Having *śraddhā* and *bhakti*, faith and devotion, allows us to be completely in tune with the teacher. The teacher is then able to operate our minds so that we may deliberate upon the nature of the self with his or her help. During *śravaṇa*, an objective deliberation upon the nature of the self also takes place in our minds. So *śravaṇa* is not merely listening; it is *vicāra*, a deliberation upon the nature of the self.

*To be continued...*

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<sup>1</sup> Br.Up. 2.4.5