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To the Readers

Hariḥ Om Tat Sat. 'Brahmavidyā Abhyāsa' was the first book I wrote. As I was writing, the matter was being sent in installments to Geeta Press, Thrissur, for printing. Thus, printing and writing continued simultaneously. The first edition was released in October 1968. Over the past four decades, four more editions have been published, the last in 1997. Every new edition had some changes in content, language and presentation. It is so for this sixth edition too, but in a larger measure.

Apart from the improvement in presentation and get-up, I have particularly taken into account how the seekers understand and relate to the truth exposed or the instructions given. This has led me to make some important changes in the portion dealing with the 'practice', so as to avoid misunderstanding and delusion in the matter.

Brahmavidyā Abhyāsa or the pursuit of Self-realization, at one stage, revolves around meditational practice and experiences. By that, the desultory mind is led to a singular focus by a subtle, spiritual process. The mind then gets wholesomely absorbed in that focus, and finally gets dissolved into the inmost spiritual essence, the Self.

The manner in which this inner absorptional process works is ineffable. Yet, we have to explain it somehow using words and expressions taken from our life and interactions. All words denote ideas, which directly evolve from the mind or the consciousness. To reach the source of all words, inaudible words – that is, thoughts – alone will help. Mantra that is used for meditation is such an inaudible word. It has its mysterious, subtle but wholesome effect on the seeker's inner being.

The power and efficiency of a mantra depend upon its 'association'. Who all have used the mantra earlier over the ages

and with what sublimity and refinement, how assiduously the seeker holds on to the mantra for his sādhanā, and his relationship with the Guru who imparted it – a number of factors determine this associational effect.

Normally, as part of spiritual initiation (*Dīkṣā*), the Guru imparts a mantra to the disciple. This mantra becomes the inmost ceaseless connection between the disciple and his Guru. For a seeker who takes to the mantra with spiritual exclusiveness, it will work wonders. Mantra is not to be uttered loudly or to another's listening. It is a formula for the mind to be attuned to, absorbed in and dissolved into. This is what takes place in Vedantic meditation.

Considering all these factors, I have made some changes, hoping that it will provide right guidance to the seeking minds.

Hariḥ Om Tat Sat. Jai Guru.

Swami Bhoomananda Tirtha

Chapter 2.4

Vedantic Meditation

Śravaṇa, *manana* and *nididhyāsana* are the three aspects as well as stages of Vedantic *sādhana*. We referred to all these rather briefly. While discussing *nididhyāsana*, we digressed and stressed the point why Vedantic pursuit becomes necessary at all, and how it helps man to live his life creatively and contentedly. A little of theory was presented here and there for the purpose of convincing the reader about the principles and advantages of Vedantic study and practice. In as much as *nididhyāsana* is the final part of the *sādhana*, we shall now discuss its practice at some length. This is the main practice section. It is not possible to speak everything connected with practice. We shall deal with some of the basic points alone.

There are two parts in our being, the external part, that is the body, and the internal part, the *antaḥkaraṇa*. *Antaḥkaraṇa* literally means the internal instrument. It consists of all the internal faculties like the mind, intellect, will, etc.. Of these two, the awareness about the body is constant. It exists in us quite spontaneously. But this is not the case with regard to the *antaḥkaraṇa*. No one generally has a constant awareness of his *antaḥkaraṇa*. Nor is it easy to become aware of it. The mind being internal and not objective to the senses, generally eludes our grasp. When we consider that the mind is the vital part of our existence, that it is more important than the body, the fact that it eludes us will look very strange. Nevertheless, it is so. While devising the means for *nididhyāsana*, we have to take note of this fact.

The one object of meditation is to know what the mind or *antaḥkaraṇa* is. To know what the mind is, the mind's substance is,

means to know the Self itself; to know what we are in truth.

The essential nature of any intelligent being is **intelligence** itself. The non-intelligent part, the matter combination, is a sort of an accretion intended to merely subserve the intelligent part. We do not speak of any being as alive or active when the sentient part of it is severed from the material part. This very clearly proves that the essential nature of that being is Consciousness. The material part is the secondary one and is more an instrument than the wielder of it.

Thus, the intelligent or sentient side of yours, viz. the Consciousness, is the substantive part of your personality. Later on, when you attain enough progress in your spiritual pursuit, you will come to know that the material or body part of yours is nothing but **an effect** which the Consciousness, **the cause**, produces and retains in you. In other words, that which goes by the name 'body', is nothing but a name used to denote a certain kind of our awareness which the basic Consciousness works up. Of course, this is a very high spiritual truth, beyond the grasp of most people.

The mind or *antaḥkaraṇa* is invisible. It is this invisible mind that we have to employ for meditation. Meditation is strictly speaking an act wherein the mind alone is involved. The deliberate employment of the mind to glimpse the Truth, or to become the Truth, is what we call '**meditation**'. As the mind is invisible, to employ it for meditation is rather difficult. Hence one has to be very careful and clever in finding out how best the mind can be made to meditate, made to exert spiritually.

Anything in the world has its specific nature and features or qualities. The mind too must accordingly have its nature and features. The nature or quality of the mind is thinking or thoughts. As is heat the nature of fire, so is thinking of the mind. So wherever the mind exists, there will also be its nature, namely thinking. Thoughts or the thinking process are, by their very nature, self-revealing. Hence there will not be any difficulty for one to know that he thinks, that thoughts are surging within him. Although the mind remains invisible, as the thoughts are always self-revealing, it will be possible for us to handle

the invisible mind by handling the self-revealing thoughts. It is this handling of thoughts that we earlier referred to as 'changing the direction of the mind'. Now we go a step forward and say that **through the effect called thoughts, you should reach the source or cause, the mind.**

There is no doubt that we have an extent of freedom in the matter of thinking. We have the capacity to regulate our thinking, though this capacity may not be absolute. But many do not recognize that they have this capacity. By gradual practice you can awaken this dormant capacity, make it pronounced and in course of time, begin to think, as well as stop thinking whenever you want. I do not say that thinking can be stopped forever absolutely, or that complete control over thoughts is possible.

Permanent cessation of thoughts is not necessary for our purpose. Only temporary suspension is what we want. And it is possible no doubt. Sleep, which is a universal and recurring state, is an evidence. In sleep the thought-flow is completely suspended. This suspension takes place quite smoothly, spontaneously. When we wake up from sleep, we do feel quite refreshed, ready to remain active for another stretch. Actually it is from the sleep state that we get a clear indication that the mind's function can be set at rest temporarily, without any damage or disadvantage. When the mind's functions cease as in sleep, we also find that worldly miseries vanish. There is neither agitation nor discontent. In short, sleep or the mind-free state is a peaceful one in all respects.

Some may wonder whether it is possible to make use of the thinking process itself for the purpose of stopping thoughts. It is possible no doubt. Very effective too. Making use of a thorn for removing another that has entered one's foot, is a very common instance. Is it not effective? Another example is an iron tool used for cutting and shaping another iron tool. Does it not produce the desired result?

Removal of the thorn and shaping of the iron tool are external acts, whereas handling and restraining (a kind of cutting and shaping) the mind, using the mind itself as the tool for the purpose, is an

internal act. This is all the difference. Otherwise they are quite similar. The latter will be as effective as the former. The object to be shaped is the desultoriness and extrovert nature of the mind. The tool to be used for the purpose is a kind of philosophical or spiritual thinking.

Sage Vasiṣṭha while exposing the truth about spiritual practices to Sri Rama, has spoken thus:

मनसैव मनश्चित्वा कुठारेणेव पादपम्

manasaiva manaśchhitvā kuṭhāreṇeva pādapam

(Yogavāsiṣṭha Rāmāyaṇa 5.13.35)

“Cut asunder the mind using the mind itself, as one would a tree with an axe.”

The Importance of Self-effort

There is a general feeling among people that they are helpless in the matter of controlling or regulating their impulses and feelings, the physical and mental propensities. Believing in such a philosophy, they sit tight waiting for the Almighty to come down and help them in their spiritual life and pursuits. But such a line of thinking is entirely wrong. It is a **negative approach, harmful** to the core. Its main evil effect is that it gives open sanction for us to keep many unwelcome traits and habits.

The truth is that in every sphere of human life and activity, there exists a clear inter-alliance between man’s own deliberate effort and that of Providence. Man’s sphere fully belongs to him and generally Providence will not interfere with it. Providence intends that man should always do his part conscientiously and well. This is true with regard to the spiritual life and sādhanā also. Hence regulation or control of the thinking process is an attainment, which has to be gained **by our own deliberate, well-steered efforts, without deluding ourselves that it is something which God has to accomplish for us.**

About the capacity of the mind to control or refine itself, Sage Aṣṭāvakra’s gospel to King Janaka comes to my mind. Aṣṭāvakra says:

मुक्ताभिमानी मुक्तो हि बद्धो बद्धाभिमान्यपि ।
किंवदन्तीह सत्येयं या मतिः सा गतिर्भवेत् ॥

*muktābhimānī mukto hi baddho baddhābhimānyapi ।
kiṃvadantīha satyeyaṃ yā matiḥ sā gatirbhavet ॥*

(Aṣṭāvakra Saṃhitā 1.11)

“A person who intensely feels that he is a *mukta* (free), really becomes so. And he who considers himself a *baddha* (bound) verily remains that. The popular saying that ‘as one thinks, so he becomes’ is true with regard to the subject of liberation.”

In Bhagavadgītā, Krishna too reveals the secret of success concerning the shaping of one’s destiny. Krishna’s words are even more reassuring. He says:

श्रद्धामयोऽयं पुरुषो यो यच्छ्रद्धः स एव सः

śraddhāmayo’yaṃ puruṣo yo yacchraddhaḥ sa eva saḥ

(Bhagavadgītā 17.3)

“Man is an outcome of his *śraddhā* (assiduous application of the mind). The *śraddhā* is what shapes him throughout. As is *śraddhā*, so indeed is he.”

There should be no difficulty in understanding what Aṣṭāvakra and Krishna set forth. The growth or progress occurring in the life of an individual is always a feature that projects from the within to the without. What is already shaped within, that alone manifests without. For instance, take the sprouting of a seed. What shoots forth as stem, leaves, etc. were already there in the seed. In the seed they remained unmanifest. In the sprout they become manifest. So, is it not an outward becoming of the inward potential? In the same way, the entire phenomena that follow are purely an unfoldment from the within to the without.

The growth and becoming of man’s personality is similarly a direct result of the attitudes and aims which he fosters in his mind, in

his within. In other words, the thinking that he cultures, the thoughts which he steadfastly clings to, go to shape his personality. So, what the spiritual practitioner has to do with his sādhanā is to apply his mind properly and rigorously with a view to realizing his aim. Thus the entire emphasis is shifted from the without, from the bodily level, to the within, to the mental and intellectual level.

Feel and then Become

Sage Aṣṭāvakra defines the mental application which the seeker has to make as *abhimāna*. *Abhimāna* means conscious powerful recognition (of a certain truth or idea) by the mind. Krishna describes the same thing as *śraddhā*. *Śraddhā* means **devout** mental exertion, or **purposive tuning** of the psychological faculty. Whatever be the manner in which it is described, the practice is mental. It has to be strong and constant, backed by deep conviction.

Aṣṭāvakra's words clearly lay down the idea or thought which one has to revolve in his mind. Our goal is liberation. We want to become liberated in this life itself. For that, the Sage says, we have to remain absorbed in the idea of liberation or liberatedness itself. This is the meaning of his word '*muktābhimāna*'. The seeker has to become a *muktābhimānī*. He must start recognizing consciously that he is in fact liberated already. Liberation is not something at a distance from him. On the other hand, it is already in him. He fails to notice it, that is all.

This recognition, when persistently kept up, will work like magic and will ultimately bestow liberation to the sādhanaka. Of course, he may find trouble and resistance from his own within in keeping up this recognition. The resistance will be a genuine doubt as to whether the idea being evolved is true or not. It is to clear this doubt that we earlier explained the truth as to how every living being is in essence Consciousness, which is spiritual, single, universal and beyond all affectations.

Universality, the all-filling nature, makes the Consciousness

immovable. Its single nature makes it unconditioned also. *Vikāra*, change, can take place only when there is *karma*, action. Action is possible only when *calana*, movement takes place. So in a thing that remains non-moving, there is no scope for *vikāra*, mutation, at all. The absence of a second factor also contributes to the lack of *vikāra*. Once the *sādhaka* knows that he is essentially Consciousness, which by its very nature is single, non-moving, and without mutation, he must have no trouble in practicing the thought of liberatedness, in keeping up *muktābhimāna*. Any doubt or confusion that arises will be intellectual and will have to be cleared by grasping correctly the true nature of the Consciousness.

Body – Not a Hindrance

The existence of the body, which is evident, generally acts as a hindrance to the *sādhaka* in thinking that he is the Soul, the Consciousness. But it is not right. We may have the body, but that does not mean that we are the body. To have a thing is not to become that thing. Suppose you put on a shirt. Though it will be on you always, will you be that shirt? Will your nature be that of the shirt? Again, you are living in a house. Does it mean that you are the house itself, though the house is no doubt indispensable for your living? In the same way, will the fact that you walk holding a stick in your hand, mean you are in truth the stick itself?

Similarly the existence of the body should not make us think that we are the body. The body we know is inert and even to recognize it we must have the power of Consciousness. How can we be the body then? When the body becomes devoid of Consciousness, we consider it dead. If the personality of man is really bodily, if he is really the body, why should we take him to be dead, departed, when the body lies there inert? So there is no doubt that we are not the body, while it is true that we have a body.

Let the body exist and function in its own manner. That fact need not bother or hinder our spiritual practice. *Sādhana* consists mainly in pursuing in the mental level the ultimate truth of One-ness and the consequent conviction that the Soul is liberated by its very nature.

Certainly nothing can prevent us from taking to this pursuit. The existence of the body cannot hinder the mind in thinking what it likes, what it regards as true. Instead of being a source of botheration or hindrance, the presence of the body is really a help, as is the house for our life.

In the absence of the body, is there any life for us? Are there activities? Is there any need for liberation either? It is the body which tells us that we are not that, but the Soul. Only in the state of embodiment, liberation can be sought and attained. So the body is by all means a help, an assistance, never a hindrance.

I am the Soul

The thought that we are the body is what limits and binds us. For redeeming ourselves from limitation and bondage, what we have to do is to think that we are not the body but the Consciousness, which is by its very nature universal, single, unlimited and therefore, liberated already. It is the limitations and conditioning that bring misery and agitation. When limitations and conditioning fall off, all the miseries and agitations will stop and bliss will result. Therefore, if Consciousness is unlimited and unconditioned by its very nature, it is also by that very fact blissful. Bliss, undiluted happiness, is what we knowingly or unknowingly seek. The thought of the Soul, or the seeking of liberation is really a means we adopt for obtaining bliss. So the best and the most appealing manner in which we can characterize the Soul is that it is blissful. Immovability, reaction-freeness, etc. are all secondary attributes, less appealing to the ordinary man.

We said that the body-notion will prevail in us as long as we do not try to culture the Soul-notion. Consequently the feeling that we are limited, insentient, bound etc., will also linger. Therefore, the only means to get over the body-notion is to deliberately culture the Soul-notion. In other words, you will have to murmur to yourself the divine thought that **“I am the Soul, unconditioned and blissful in nature”**.