

## 4. Avoid Cycle Of Births And Deaths

*One can point at a thing and say that it is not Brahman, but no one can say that this is Brahman. Whatever is unchanging, eternally true, and whatever is knowledge, and is infinite is Brahman. It is not possible to explain this in terms of words.*

### **Sacred minded students!**

**M**an generally desires to get something and in fact gets something different. By his ambitions and in his imaginations, man builds up several ideas which are like the nests of various birds. These desires are not generally fulfilled in the manner in which he wants them to be fulfilled. Life is like a long garland. This garland has two ends, one the birth and the other the death. In between these two ends, the garland consists

of many flowers. Your dreams, thoughts, ideas, sorrows, joys and pleasures are the various flowers that make up this garland. We have to consider and come to a conclusion whether we shall regard life itself as the garland or whether we shall regard the connections of our body with life as the garland. When we look at the two ends of this garland, it will be quite clear that these ends, the birth and the death, are relevant only to the body and not to the *Jiva* inside the body. In that context, whether it is pain or pleasure, sorrow or happiness, dream or imagination, all of them are concerned with the body and not with the *Jiva*. It is the body which is undergoing many changes and transformations. The *Atma* does not undergo any change but remains permanent, steady, pure, selfless and firm. Truly, our body goes through various stages like boyhood, youth, adolescence and old age.

Depending upon the stage through which the body is passing at a particular moment, it will decide for itself the work that is appropriate for that particular stage. In the stage of boyhood, the individual engages himself in playing, singing, reading and in various other kinds of such pleasures and gets happiness out of those activities. In that stage, he does not think at all or worry himself about what is going to be his future. In fact, he then lives in such fantasy that he is free from all worries and enjoys the period of boyhood.

At that juncture, while he lives unmindful of the world and the worries of the world, he gets into what

we may call his youth. The moment youth sets in, his vision gets blurred and he becomes blind in the sense that he does not look at things in the proper perspective. He does not care to look at the earth or the sky. He forgets what is moral and what is immoral. He does not pay any attention to respect or disrespect. In fact, he gets so excited that nothing else matters to him except his personal and sensuous pleasures. In this manner, he makes his life somewhat useless.

Even as he is getting confused while enjoying sensuous pleasures, middle age enters his life. As soon as middle age enters, he begins to feel tied down with responsibility because he has a family and people to look after. He develops an attachment that goes with it. He feels that some power is binding him down and constantly strives to come out of that bondage. At this stage of his life, even as he is struggling to free himself from such attachments, he gets into a period that we call the old age. His eyes will be afflicted by cataract and he cannot see things clearly. He cannot walk fast. His hands will shake and tremble. He cannot hear well and he will be thinking about things that have gone behind him in his youth and in his adolescence. He will generally prefer to be in a reminiscent mood, occasionally wondering and fearing how the future will be for him. Although in his boyhood, youth, middle age and old age, he had sufficient and ample time to think about worldly matters, this aged person will be feeling

that he does not have sufficient time to think of God. Such a person will not have peace of mind nor will he find the bliss that goes with the realisation of *Atma*. He will be steadily declining, thinking only of the past and worrying about how he is going to spend the future.

Thus, man is born, journeys through his youth, grows old, declines and dies. Should people think only of these transformations and nothing else? Should they not think of something more sacred like the *Atma Thathwa*? During his youth and boyhood, man mixes with several people and spends his time playing with them. As he advances in age, he involves himself in satisfying his desires, runs after women and seeks love and affection. When he grows older, he wants to earn money and amass wealth so that he can use it for his pleasure. When he becomes quite aged, he does not think of the Divine but spends his time in many different ways and finds himself unable to give up the attachments which he has developed in his life. In this manner, man simply wastes his life, turns it into mud and becomes utterly useless in the end.

Young people generally do not have faith in God and they get into a despondent situation by asking themselves the question, is there God or no God? Even the first step of having faith in God is possible only for those who have done some good deeds in their past births. This reference to our past births is something which even the Indians are not able to believe today.

There is a small example for this. As soon as a person begins his life, you find that he shows an aptitude to one particular avocation. Some people become poets. Some become singers, while some others become artists and so on. What is it that gives each individual this special ability. Is it not what he is carrying with him from his previous birth? You may argue that it is the effort that the individual puts in that is responsible for his becoming either a poet or a singer. This is not the case. You will have to think how, without any special training, these individuals are sometimes exhibiting such special skills. Among Indians, there is a belief that one reaps the fruits of his actions, there is a belief in rebirth and also a belief in carrying with us the good or bad we had done in our previous births.

In modern times, people are asking questions regarding their connection with God. They ask why they should pray to God and have belief in Him. According to them, they can do anything they wish to do only with the help of modern science and technology. In this context, they question the need for thinking of God. Young people today argue and assert that it is a weakness to believe in God, whom they cannot see. While they regard any faith in God as a weakness because we cannot see Him with our physical eyes, they do not regard it a weakness to believe in so many other things, which we cannot see. Today, scientists are able to infer the presence of air by various aids, but are they able to see the air?

While moving about in the sky and having faith in the sounds that we are uttering and hearing as symbolic of the sky, are we able to see the sky? When people talk about their minds and when they complain that their mind is wavering and is not peaceful, are they able to see their mind? When one says that his heart is very quiet or that it is very troubled, is one able to see his own heart? When you say that your head is aching, does this convey anything more than the head, and is there a shape for the pain which the head is suffering from?

Thus there is no form for, and one cannot see things like happiness, sorrow, bliss, mind and so on. When you are having faith and belief in such things which have no physical form and which you cannot see directly, what is it that makes you disbelieve in something like God, whom you do not see? Thus when you talk of not having faith in someone or something that you do not see, is it not a weakness that you regard sorrow, mind, pleasure and so on as real, although you cannot see them.

The world is made up of five elemental substances. These elements do not have a form. For example, air has no form. It takes the shape of the container. Similarly fire has no form and it has only a specific power. It can heat and it can burn. Therefore, these elements have qualities or attributes that you can only describe. They do not have specific forms which you can see. That special aspect which is above and beyond these five elemental substances is Divinity. Because we look at this creation with the help of the body which continually

changes, the mind which continually wavers, and the vision which continually falters, we get all kinds of doubts.

There is some justification in our trying to first understand the aspects of the human body and then moving on to understand the aspects of the Divine. It is in this context that the disciples of Sankara proclaimed that various attributes of the human body, man's conduct, man's thoughts and his material desires have no permanent value and that a study of these things is not a study of the truth. Hence, they moved on to state that the proper thing to study is the *Atma Thathwa* since that is permanent and shows the way to God realisation. They spent their time and effort in getting together the *Bhaja Govindam* verses for the benefit of people.

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అయల తాటల బాల్యం బాయెను  
 వ్రాయములు చేయగాయలమా యెను  
 మునిమని సంకలు మువికొవ్రాయెను  
 సతబ్రహ్మకాబుజ్జక వ్రాయెను

One of the disciples gave a verse, the meaning of which is as follows: While one is in his boyhood, he has the desire to play and sing. When he grows into a young

man he begins to think of love and women. When he grows older, his failing mind is full of worries and doubts. When is he to turn towards spiritual affairs and ask questions relating to Brahman?

This is how one goes through his life. During the day, while he is awake, man gets involved with his mind, body, intellect and other organs and he establishes a relationship with material environment and enjoys the situation. During the night while he is dreaming, his body does not participate in any activity, his eyes are closed and he does not see anything with his eyes. In spite of this, he feels that he is going through different situations. While he is moving in many different places and participating in many different events in his dream, he is not able to find out which part of his body is truly participating in all those things. There appears to be no connection between the body that functions in the waking state and the body that functions in the dreaming state. Who or which of these two is the real body?

On the other hand, while he is in deep sleep, he does not have experience of any kind, but when he gets up, he says that he has had a sound and refreshing sleep. Is he able to state and identify who it was that had a sound and refreshing sleep? Can he even identify which part of his body enjoyed that sound sleep? If one who, completely forgetting the environment, sleeps well and wakes up and says, "I have enjoyed a good sleep", we have to ask the question, "Who is this 'I' who enjoyed a good sleep?" Thus in the waking, dreaming and deep-

sleep states, there is a self who has been present. This self is something different from the body and has been present witnessing all the states. It is wrong to think that this self is the same as the body. The body and the self are quite different.

Once Narada met Sanatkumara and asked for enlightenment. Sanatkumara asked Narada about the special power which Narada had acquired because of his learning. To this Narada replied that he knows all that is contained in the four *Vedas* and the six *Sastras*. Sanatkumara smiled at this reply and said that while it is a matter of great satisfaction that Narada had learnt the *Vedas* and the *Sastras* but he would like to ask whether he had learnt anything of the self and whether he had understood himself. Sanatkumara then told Narada that so long as one does not understand one's self, the knowledge of all the *Sastras*, all the *Vedas*, of the *Gita* and the *Upanishads* becomes quite useless. Your knowledge will become useful only when you are able to realise the nature of the self. What is important is the *Adwaita darshana*. You should be able to realise and understand the non-dual aspect that is pervading the entire universe.

Today in the world, without making an effort to understand one's own self, people are imagining that they are achieving many great things with the help of modern science, and in the process they are putting their feet into many difficult situations. By saying that they are able to travel far into the sky, see the stars, go to the moon and set up camps there, they are only building



castles in the air. They may partially succeed in doing such things, but if in the process they do not understand the Self and if they do not have peace of mind for themselves, they are very foolish indeed.

According to the words of poet Vemana, it does not matter even if you go to the world of Indra or to the land of the moon. You should try to get on the *Nandi* and see the Divine and understand the self. Ordinarily, the word *Nandi* means “bull”. But Vemana has used this word *Nandi* synonymously with *Buddhi* or intelligence. He means that if we make ourselves distant from our intellect and go to the moon, the happiness that we get will not be the right kind of happiness. The right kind of happiness is contained in our own mind and within our own thoughts. Without making proper use of our intelligence, without developing detachment to our body and without having faith in the Divine, we are not going to have the fruits of our actions. If you keep away from cleansing your mind, and if you stick to sensuous pleasures, you will never have the fruit of your actions, even if you go on praying to God for His blessings.

The one who lives in this world should first become a human being and understand what the nature of this body is. One who goes on praising the bad deeds of others is a fool. The way of understanding one’s self is the path for liberation. Realising the transient aspect of the human body, one of the disciples of Sankara described the boyhood, youth, adolescence and old age in such a manner that the description creates in you a

certain amount of repulsion and detachment. It does not matter how long each one lives. Everyone must leave his body sometime or other. It is very much necessary that so long as we live in this body, we use the available time for understanding God. It is necessary to find the means for ultimately merging with God. We do not know when we are going to leave this body. The body is made up of matter and it will die.

Our ancients have said that the limit for human life is a hundred years, but we cannot believe this. We do not know whether death will come in young age or in old age, in middle age or in the adolescence, or whether it will come in water, air or on land, in the village or in the forest. One thing is true and that is death is certain. If you are a wise man, you should strive to understand yourself while you are alive. Without knowing who you are and without realising the nature of your true self, whatever you may do in your life and whatever you may have achieved, you would have wasted your time and you would not have spent your life in a useful and purposeful manner.

You are spending all your time reading newspapers which come from different parts of the world, and you are anxiously waiting to get news about some individuals from various parts of the world. But you are not anxious to find out what news comes from within your own heart. This news is the most important news. This world is like a newspaper. You can read a newspaper from beginning to end only once, but no one

reads the same newspaper again and again, day after day. Similarly, we have come into this world and we have seen the newspaper of this world once. We should not attempt to see the same newspaper again. A newspaper of today is a wastepaper of tomorrow.

In this way, if we subject our life to the repeating cycle of birth and death, we will be turning our life into a wastepaper. Therefore, we should not agree to see this world again and again. We should make up our mind and strive to see the Divine which is really the paper of taste. In this direction, Sankara did many things to turn the thoughts of people towards God.

You young people should clean your minds, develop pure ideas, and take this opportunity to see what sweetness there is in understanding the Divine bliss. You must dedicate your lives to practising and propagating ancient Indian culture. When you go out of this summer school after one month, you should be able to re-establish the glorious traditions of our country and be messengers of peace for the rest of the people. That you have joined the summer school is not a matter of satisfaction for us. We will feel happy only when you are able to practise what you learn during this one month. You must help maintain the reputation of our country. I bless you that you may be able to do so.

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