

MASTERY OF THE SENSES

One may acquire great scholarship and come out
 victorious in assemblies of scholars;
 One may be a great hero and win battles galore;
 One may be born as a king of kings and rule a vast empire;
 One may generously give away in charity gold and cows;
 One may be able to count the countless stars that adorn the sky;
 One may be able to name the innumerable species of living beings;
 One may be well-versed in *ashtanga vidya* (the eightfold path of *yoga*);
 One may be successful in reaching the Moon;
 But no one can control their body and senses,
 Nor conquer their mind and keep it
 In a state of constant introversion and unshakeable equanimity.

It is true that the body wields some influence over the senses. But the senses have even greater influence on the body. There can be no body without the senses nor senses without the body. These two are inseparable and interdependent. Negative without positive, or positive without negative (in the case of electric current) will serve no purpose. Likewise, a body without senses, or senses without a body cannot function. Hence it is imperative for every person to take proper care of the body.

The role of the senses is remarkable. The wonders performed by the Divine defy description. But the part played by the senses is even more marvelous and mysterious. Strange, unpredictable and indescribable indeed are the ways of the sense organs. The senses are subtler than the body. Although the faculties of speech, touch, sight, hearing, and taste as well as gas, bile, and phlegm exist in the body, the senses exercise extraordinary control over all of them equally. Joy and sorrow, heat and cold, etc., are experienced only when the sense organs come in contact with external objects. Without the sensory objects, the senses cannot function even for a moment. All the activities of the senses are oriented toward the objects in the environment. It is not possible for us to comprehend or describe the myriad facets of sense organs and their activities.

The senses are also called by the name *maatrah*, which means “measuring instruments”. How is this measuring done by the sense organs? Take a fruit, for instance. Which of the senses has the capacity to determine whether it is sweet or sour? Which sense organ measures or decides the taste of an object? It is the tongue. The tongue determines the taste of an eatable, decides whether it is good or bad, and makes it known to all concerned.

Which organ is capable of declaring whether a picture is attractive or ugly? The eye alone is the measuring rod for this purpose. Similarly, the power to determine whether an object is fragrant or foul-smelling is vested in the nose. Likewise it is the ear that can discriminate between a melodious musical note and a discordant one. Thus, the sense organs are called *maatrah* in as much as they are endowed with the capacity to measure and determine the particular quality or characteristic of different sense objects.

In the *Kathopanishad*, the senses are described as horses yoked to the chariot of the body. What is the inner significance of naming the senses as horses (*aswa* in Sanskrit)?

Aswa means that which is always restless. It is common knowledge that a horse, whether it is standing or running or even sleeping, moves some part of its body or the other all the time, whether a tail, or the leg, or the back, or the nose, or the jaws. It is because of this restless nature of the horse that it is called *aswam*. Similarly, take the case of the *peepul* tree (*Ficus religiosa*). Whether there is any breeze or not, its leaves are constantly rustling. Hence it is called *aswatha* tree.

In ancient times, the Indian rulers used to perform a sacrifice (*yaga*) by name *Aswa-Medha Yaga*. “*Aswa*” means fickle. “*Medha*” means “*buddhi* (intellect)”. Thus, “*aswa medha*” means “fickle-minded”. Hence, the horse that is used in the sacrifice symbolises a fickle mind. Whosoever is capable of capturing and controlling that horse is described as *dheemantha* (a man of heroic intelligence), worthy of combat. Here we see the esoteric and exoteric meanings of the term *aswa-medha*. It is only when both meanings are taken together that we get at the whole truth. Today, it is the duty of every person to control the horse-like senses. Only then can he be called a hero in the true sense. Whatever *yagas*, *yajnas*, or other rituals one may perform, whatever Scriptures one might have mastered, if one has no control over his senses, all these accomplishments are worthless.

The term *maatrah* as applied to the senses has yet another meaning. It indicates that the limit to what can be experienced by each sense organ has been prescribed by the Lord Divine. For instance, the eye can only see but cannot hear. The mouth can only speak but cannot see. Thus, each organ has been endowed by God with a specific talent only. Only those who use these organs according to the divinely prescribed functions will be acting up to the Will of the Divine. Those who violate the prescribed limits will be transgressing the divine Will, thereby becoming liable for punishment.

Everyone, therefore, should make use of the sense organs with due regard to the functions and limits prescribed for each of them. For example, the nose has been allotted a specific assignment of inhaling and exhaling air for preserving one’s health and of distinguishing between good and bad smells, and take in only what is good and fragrant. Ignoring this specific role ordained for the nose, today’s man unfortunately is misusing it for taking snuff and inhaling foul odours. By such practices, he is violating the injunctions pertaining to the use of the nose. Thereby he commits a double offence; one, violating a divine injunction, and the other, causing damage to his health. No wonder, therefore, that man today has become a prey to all kinds of disease.

In the same manner, the tongue has been given to man to consume wholesome food that promotes his health as well as to speak gently and sweetly, so as to give joy to others, and to communicate his innermost thoughts and feelings to others. The tongue, which has been bestowed on us for such edifying purposes, is being grossly misused nowadays. It is being used for consuming drugs and narcotics, eating animal food, smoking, indulging in abuses of others, carrying tales, backbiting, speaking harsh words that hurt others, etc. Through such perverse use of the tongue, the divine injunctions are violated by setting at naught the ordained limits. Consequently, man has to experience numerous troubles.

It is only by properly using the God-given senses for the purposes for which they are intended that man can rise to divine heights. Just because you have the sense organs, you should not use them as you please. They are like horses yoked to a chariot. You must know how to handle them properly so that the chariot can run smoothly and safely along the right road to the ultimate goal of life. The horses must be in front of the chariot. Today, on the contrary, the horses are placed behind the chariot. This is leading to dangerous consequences. If, on the plea that the senses should be respected and given a place of

honour, you place the horses (senses) inside the chariot, how can the chariot move at all? While fostering the senses, no effort is being made to bring them under control internally. This amounts to feeding a horse excessively and unduly fattening it but not giving it adequate work. This is sure to have untoward results. Today, we are pampering the senses but not giving them any work. That is why they are running amuck, spelling disaster to the master himself. The senses should be put to right use as ordained by God; otherwise, man will have to suffer from lack of peace.

This situation may be compared to that of a man with many wives. King Uttanapaada had two wives, and, because of the differences between them, the child Dhruva had to go to the forest to perform penance. King Dasaratha had three wives. To comply with the demands of his youngest wife, he had to endure the exile of his dearest son, Rama, to the forest, eventually to lose his life due to the pangs of separation. If this is the plight of those having two or three wives, imagine the condition of one who has to manage ten wives! For, this V.I.P. (very important person), namely the mind, has to manage ten wives—the five sense organs and the five organs of action. Each organ insists on enjoying objects of its own choice. For example, the nose is attracted by the smell of *masala dosa* (a South Indian delicacy) and wants to have it. The ear wants the radio to be tuned, so that it can enjoy melodious music. The eyes hanker after a new film. Thus when all of them are keen about their own particular desires, how can the master (the mind) satisfy them all at the same time? Unable to satisfy them, the mind gets frustrated. How then can this mind wedded to ten wives enjoy peace? It is only when the senses are kept under proper control that man can be happy himself and share that happiness with those around him.

There is a method by which the demands of the senses can be reconciled and harmonised. This is by treating both good and bad with equal-mindedness. Tukaram is an illustrious example in this regard. He was a great devotee, and very gentle by nature. His wife was a shrew. Nevertheless, by his calmness and forbearance, Tukaram managed to get on well with her. Only when one is in the habit of retaliating word for word, tit for tat, tooth for tooth, and nail for nail does one have to face discord and trouble. But Tukaram was the very embodiment of forbearance. He used to cultivate his small farm of half-an-acre to maintain his family. At the insistence of his neighbours, he once raised sugarcane crop in that small plot of land. When the crop was mature taking undue advantage of Tukaram's good nature, many passers-by used to pluck a couple of sugarcanes and chew them. Finally, Tukaram harvested whatever crop was left behind, bundled the canes, and was taking them home in his cart. On the way, the children of the village gathered round him and pleaded for a piece of sugarcane each. In his usual generosity, Tukaram allowed the children to help themselves to the canes in the cart. At last when he reached home, there was only one cane left in the cart. Seeing this, his wife flew into a rage and strongly scolded Tukaram, condemning him as unfit for family life; she took out the only cane on the cart in a fit of anger and struck Tukaram with it. The cane broke into three pieces, out of which two fell on the ground, and the other was in her hand. Tukaram calmly remarked, "I was wondering all along the way how to distribute the remaining cane to the three members of the family. I am glad you have nicely solved the problem for me. You can eat one piece, which is in your hand, and give the other two, which have fallen on the floor, to the two children." Such forbearance and equanimity can rarely be found except in a few high-souled persons. These qualities can be acquired only through devotion and faith. You need not feel disheartened with the fear that you will not be able to control the

senses. By developing one-pointed devotion and complete surrender to God, the senses can definitely be brought under control.

Kabir is an example of another godly man in a different situation. Unlike Tukaram's wife, Kabir's wife was highly devoted and faithful, totally dedicated to serving the husband and obeying him implicitly. One day Kabir was plying his handloom, chanting, as usual, the name of "Ram" all the time. Suddenly he called his wife and saying that one thread has snapped, he asked her to bring a lamp. It was noon, and when she brought the lighted lamp, Kabir asked her to take it back as it was not necessary (because of daylight). Any other wife in her position would have retorted, saying, "Have you no eyes to see the daylight? Why did you waste my time and effort by unnecessarily asking me to bring a lighted lamp and to take it back? Do you think I have no other work?" etc. But Kabir's wife was made of a different stuff. She silently took back the lamp, without a murmur or uttering even a single word of resentment. Hence, with such a dutiful and obedient wife, Kabir was able to develop his devotion unhampered, and expressed his gratitude to God for His Grace in giving him such a good partner in life.

Here you have two examples of saintly men who, despite their contrasting family situations, pursued their spiritual path equally well. Hence, it is not the environment that matters in the control of one's senses and emotions. It is the purity of one's impulses, sincerity of purpose, and determination in treading the divine path that count rather than the environment which is of little or no consequence in this regard.

You must have heard about Einstein who was a great scientist as well as a man of wisdom—a rare combination. He had a very stupid woman. She was not only uneducated but also rude in her behaviour. Einstein was always engaged in experiments, investigations, and also contemplation. He was so much absorbed in his work that he never used to go in time for his food and refreshments, even though frequently reminded by his wife. His wife was upset and disgusted with the behaviour of her husband and used to lose her temper quite often. One day, she was feeling very hungry. She served all the dishes on the dinner table and repeatedly requested her husband to come and have his food. But Einstein paid no heed to her words, as he was engrossed with his thoughts forgetful of the world outside. His wife became enraged at this and rushed to him with a jugful of water and emptied it on her husband's head along with a shower of rebukes. Einstein was not upset, though fully drenched. He smiled at his wife and coolly remarked, "Everyday, it used to be only lightning and thunder. But today it is a heavy downpour on my head! Just imagine the forbearance, composure, and humour of Einstein in such a highly trying and provoking situation! If it were to be any other husband, he would have smashed the wife's head with the very same empty jug snatching it from her hand. But Einstein never thought in terms of such retaliation or even retort for that matter. Such was the control over his senses.

The ancient sages regarded sense control as a form of penance. To discipline the senses, one should understand how the senses function. Here is a small story to illustrate how a Christian priest learnt a lesson in sense control from the driver of a horse carriage in which he was traveling. The priest noticed that the driver was beating the horse severely as it was approaching a railway crossing. The priest, who was a strong believer in Christ's message of love and compassion, took pity on the animal and asked the driver why he was beating the horse unnecessarily, although it was running all right. The driver explained that at the level crossing there were some white painted stones, which created a fright in the horse. He was beating the animal because it was more afraid of the whip than

the white stones and would therefore proceed through the level crossing without halting due to the fear of the white stones. So the priest learnt the lesson that when the attention of any sense organ is distracted by something, it should be diverted to another desirable thing by means of a stronger incentive or disincentive. Then only will it give up its crazy digressions and take to the right path.

Suppose there is an animal that has developed the bad habit of stealthily grazing the crops in others' fields. How to wean it away from the bad habit? If you feed that animal in your cattle-stall with green fodder, which is even more palatable than the field crops, it will get used to stall-feeding and will thereby give up its bad habit of grazing field crops. Likewise, the senses should be weaned away from their bad habits and trained properly to take to good habits.

The senses have been compared to *pasu* (animals). The word *pasu* means the one whose vision is externally oriented. The one having an inner vision is called *pasupati* or "the Lord of animals" (Siva). Man should aspire and strive to become a "*pasupati*" or master of the senses, but not a *pasu*, a slave of the senses. It is a pity that today's man has become a slave of the senses. There are several ways of taming the senses and putting them on the proper path. In this connection, it is important to avoid pampering the senses.

If you investigate carefully about the birthplace of the sense-pleasures, you will find that they have their origin only in sorrow. That is why every sense pleasure carries with it the sting of sorrow. The pleasure derived from the senses is momentary and ultimately ends up in grief only. Desires arise this moment and subside the next moment. Suppose the desire to eat *laddu* (sweet) arises in you today. No sooner have you eaten two *laddus* than you develop satiation or aversion for the sweet. Desire this moment and disgust next moment! Pleasure and pain in quick succession! By thus contemplating the momentary and deceptive nature of the so-called sense-pleasures, we can develop discrimination and detachment and keep the senses under check. Another important point you should note is that, if the senses are kept busy in the right way, there will be no trouble from them. Otherwise, you will become their slave.

Even though I may not be physically present, I know what is going on at a particular place at a particular time as well as the inner feelings of the people concerned. For instance, this afternoon, Dr. Hemalatha, Principal of the Women's College, Anantapur, entertained all of you with a very illuminating lecture on Prahlada, interspersed with melodious songs and poems in Telugu. One of the most important things she mentioned was how Hiranyakashipu, who hated and abused Hari (Lord Vishnu), was killed by the latter and was redeemed thereby. Similarly in the case of Lord Krishna, he was being always abused strongly by people like Sisupala and Dantavakra. Once, in the great assembly hall of Dharmaja (Yudhistira), packed with a distinguished gathering of eminent people, the question arose as to who should be given the first offering (or primacy) of respect and honour, i.e. "*Agra Thamboolam*" (literally, meaning the first offering of *pan supari* or betel leaves and arecanut). Although there were several men of distinction like Bhishma, Drona, etc., the Pandavas decided to give this unique honour only to Sri Krishna, who was their all in all, who stood by them through thick and thin, and who came to their rescue during many a crisis. Dharmaja washed Krishna's feet and gave him the first offering of respect and honour.

Wicked persons cannot understand the inner meaning and motives of other people. Guided merely by external formalities and selfish considerations, they criticise and abuse others out of malice and envy. This was exactly what the narrow-minded Sisupala did on

that occasion. He could not tolerate Krishna being honoured thus in that great assembly of eminent personages. Right in front of the great teachers, great sages and great men of honour and distinction, the wicked Sisupala began showering virulent abuses on Sri Krishna, mentioning for instance that Krishna was a thief who stole butter from others' houses, and who robbed the innocent cowherd girls of their saris, outraging their modesty and indulging in fun and frolic with them, and that therefore it was a wanton affront to the august assembly to give the primacy of honour to Krishna. When this type of vituperative abuse by Sisupala exceeded the limits, Krishna suddenly threw at Sisupala the very plate in which Dharmaja made his offering to Krishna. Some say that Krishna threw His *Sudarshana Chakra* at Sisupala. But that is not correct. It was only with the throwing of the plate that Krishna severed Sisupala's head. Dharmaja was exceedingly happy that the wicked Sisupala was slain by Krishna. But the very next moment, his happiness turned into utter surprise and bewilderment, as if his mind was struck by a severe cyclone, when he witnessed the blood from the severed neck of Sisupala falling on Krishna's sacred feet, and what was more surprising when the life flame emerging from Sisupala's body merged in Sri Krishna. Amazed at this strange phenomenon, Dharmaja questioned Narada how such a traitor and vicious enemy of Krishna like Sisupala could have such a glorious end, by way of the merger of his spirit in Sri Krishna—a consummation that even devotees who have surrendered themselves to the Divine can hardly expect. To this Narada replied, "Abuse or praise, vilification or veneration pertain to the body only and not to the *Atma*, which is beyond all pairs of opposites. The one Supreme *Paramatma* alone dwells in all beings. That being the case, who is the reviler and who the reviled? Who is a friend and who a foe? All are the same. The blood that is saturated with the constant remembrance of God becomes an offering dedicated to God. Whether out of hatred or love, lust or envy, ego or surrender, whatever be the feelings, it is enough if the Lord's name is remembered incessantly." Sisupala remembered Sri Krishna's name more often than many devotees. Devotees remember God only when they see the temples and their towers or pictures and idols installed therein. But Sisupala, out of his intense hatred for Krishna, had Krishna in his mind in all places and at all times whether waking or sleeping. It was because of this ceaseless remembrance of Sri Krishna that Sisupala's soul could merge in Him.

Worldly persons look only at the superficial and external aspects of things and actions. But the Lord does not see things that way. He is free from hatred or envy, likes or dislikes. When these are attributed to the Lord, they are but a reflection of your own feelings. God is like a clean mirror. What you see therein is but a mere reflection of your own actions and postures—grin for a grin, smile for a smile, salute for a salute, and so on. For God, there is no action or reaction. God neither punishes nor rewards anyone. You are punished or rewarded by your own actions. Hence no one is entitled to question the actions of God, accusing God of favouritism to some and indifference to others. Who has the authority to dictate to God how He should conduct Himself? The Divinity present in every one may find expression in various types of behaviour. But the actions of the Divine are always full of love and entirely free from selfishness and therefore totally taintless. That is why God has several appellations like "attributeless, taintless, ancient, the abode for all, eternal, pure, enlightened (consciousness), free," etc. God's eye does not see purity or impurity. It is all in your vision only. As you think, so you become. You look at the world through coloured glasses and wrongly attribute those colours to the

world. It is your defective vision that makes you see defects which do not exist in creation.

The defects that you attribute to the senses are, in fact, the defects in your own thought processes and feelings. If the senses are properly used, they will offer you the right impressions. For example, Tukaram had good feelings and so gave a favourable interpretation to even the rude and negative behaviour of his wife; his senses did not stand in the way of his spiritual progress and equanimity, despite trying circumstances in his family. Likewise, Kabir was always engaged in remembrance of God, so his wife's behaviour was harmonious and conducive to his spiritual advancement, Einstein, too, had the quality of equanimity in him and was therefore not at all upset by the boisterous behaviours of his wife. From all these instances, it is evident that what you need to do is to harmonise your own thoughts and feelings through proper *sadhana* (spiritual discipline), rather than blame the environment or other persons for your shortcomings.

However, some stubborn people given to vain argumentation, blame God for giving an outgoing orientation to man's senses. They argue that God has given them eyes with doors that open to the outside world; ears that can hear external sounds; and noses that can only inhale the air from outside. They contend, therefore, that the fault lies with the creator only and not with them. They try to justify their sensuous behaviour, by saying that, "to err is human." Such misleading rationalisation is a travesty of truth and is worthy of strong condemnation, especially when it is indulged in by the youth. If animals behave wrongly, it is quite understandable, because they are not endowed with the faculty of discrimination to control and guide their senses. But if man, who is blessed by God with the power of discrimination, takes to the wrong path, yielding to his senses, it is highly unpardonable. How paradoxical and ridiculous it is to be born as a man and to behave as an animal; behave, therefore, as befits a human being.

Some students who consider themselves to be very smart, try to argue thus, "Look at the birds, cattle, and beasts. They are having full freedom to eat what they want, to mate as they like, and to fly or wander as they wish. Why should man be denied such freedom as is enjoyed by these lower animals?" A specious argument indeed! But let us ask these wiseacres, "What kind of freedom do the animals enjoy?" The answer undoubtedly is, "animal freedom". Animals enjoy animal freedom. There is nothing wrong in it. But being a man, is it not wrong and unbecoming of you to want to enjoy animal freedom? You try to give several wrong meanings and misleading interpretations to the word "freedom". What you should strive for is freedom from the senses and not freedom of the senses. True freedom is to control the senses and the lower self in an attempt to attain the higher (real) Self and experience the eternal bliss of the *Atma* (*Atmananda*).

Along with knowledge, it is important to have character also. Then only you can enjoy a perfect balance in life. It is a pity that today's education caters only to the development of intelligence and cleverness, ignoring character and human values altogether. What is the use of acquiring any amount of knowledge available in the world, if one does not have character? This is the reason for the loss of balance in the case of the modern men in general and the educated men in particular. If you lose your balance while riding a bicycle, you are liable to meet with accidents. Similarly, if there is a lack of balance between knowledge and character in your life's journey, you are surely exposing yourself to serious accidents. Therefore, you have to control the senses on the one hand and develop virtuous living on the other. It is highly essential for students to maintain the balance between the two. Students! It will not do if you merely exercise control over your senses.

You should also harmonise them. According to Patanjali, *yoga* is the control of the wanderings of the mind. However, such control of the mind is most difficult, if not altogether impossible, to achieve. The appropriate and easy method, on the contrary, is to achieve mental harmony or balance. Concentrate on what is good; then you will be automatically keeping yourself away from what is bad. It is the weakness of your mind that is responsible for all your problems. There was a foreigner by name Carlyle. He was highly intelligent, but due to lack of control over his senses, he became very weak. He was suffering from insomnia. One day, he called his neighbour and complained to him that he was unable to sleep during night time, because of the crowing of the cock in that neighbour's house. The neighbour replied that no cock would crow throughout night, but only twice or thrice and that in spite of having the cock in his house, he (neighbour) was able to sleep well. Carlyle's reply to this was that he too knew that the cock crows only two or three times, but he was unable to sleep because he was always thinking of the cock and its crowing at any time of the night. The lesson of the story is that Carlyle's loss of sleep was not due to the crowing of the cock as alleged by him but only due to his own imaginary fear. Likewise most people nowadays suffer not on account of their senses but only due to all sorts of wrong imaginations. So, man should completely give up such imaginations and baseless fears, which are detrimental to him. In the next few days, we shall consider some more aspects of the senses, their mastery and harmonisation.