

13. Spiritual Discipline (Sadhana)

Fear of sin has disappeared.
Wicked actions have become commonplace.
Devotion to Lord Vishnu is absent.
The world is a den of indescribably cruel acts.
Lord Vishnu is the refuge of sages and saints.
His Name alone can grant peace, O man
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His Name alone can grant peace, O man.

"I have read texts, mastered all sciences" —
Why pride yourself so on useless learning?
If you cannot join your palms and express devotion
to God,
Aren't all your studies a complete waste, O man?

To fill the tiny stomach, you undergo troubles,
You acquire a million forms of knowledge.
But such education does not grant lasting peace.
Why suffer so, having taken a human birth?
If only you meditate on the Lord,
Won't He show you the way?

Students!

To attain Divinity, to sanctify their body, time, and life, people perform countless good actions and makes various efforts. Despite ceaseless spiritual practice (*sadhana*), people are unable to achieve the purity they desire. Why? They do not recognise what spiritual practice means, its results, its goal. First recognise what spiritual practice means, and you can achieve your objective (*sadhya*). One wastes one's entire life by not grasping the true significance of the nine-fold path¹.

The meaning of spiritual practice (sadhana)

What is meant by spiritual practice? Recitation of the Name, meditation, devotional singing *yoga*, good deeds —do these constitute spiritual practice? Not at all.

To transform bad into good is true spiritual practice. To turn sorrow into happiness is spiritual practice.

Without grief, there is no joy. Good also cannot exist without bad. The world is an eternal battlefield where these duals struggle against each other. Difficulties and peace are inextricably intertwined. One is the beginning,

the other is the end. No one can separate them. Can the beginning exist without an end or vice versa? Only God is beyond beginning and end; everything worldly is compelled to start somewhere and end somewhere.

Sorrow is not pushed upon us by someone else. Bad thoughts and misery are not thrust into our heads from outside. Bad and sorrow occur naturally. Even the most sacred object slips down to a detestable state without spiritual practice. However priceless it may be, its value diminishes without spiritual practice, without refinement.

Suppose you find a raw diamond. Its value soars when you cut and polish it. Gold ore is mingled with soil and rock. After purification, it becomes precious. Spiritual practice transforms small into big, mean into lofty. No one is educated, knowledgeable, or virtuous at birth. Knowledge or character are obtained only by the dint of effort over several years.

Face troubles to attain Divinity

In the world, the good takes birth from the bad. Without the bad, the good cannot exist. For example, when you nurture a desire, there is an accompanying dissatisfaction, which prods you to seek the desire. One's life is a series of desires (*asas*) and disappointments (*niraasa*). Life is likes (*sankalpas*) and dislikes (*vikalpas*), union (*samyoga*) and separation (*viyoga*).

When our sages were asked about the nature of the world, they described it as a vast ocean of union and separation. While swimming in this ocean, we encounter the gems of troubles and sorrows. Only when we face obstacles can we attain a divine state. If you are frightened at every step, if you do not proceed forward, life is wasted. Life is full of hurdles. Sorrow and troubles alone lend value to life.

Worthwhile results are obtained only through difficulties (*Kashte phali*). In this world, everything can be attained through spiritual practice (*Sadhanamuna panulu samakooru dharalona*). Spiritual practice (*sadhana*) means transforming bad into good, sorrow into joy. The mind is crucial in this regard.

The mind is the root

One fails to appreciate the power and capacities of the mind. The mind is the root cause of all joys and sorrows. The divine power latent in the mind is beyond description. The nature of the mind is beyond words. It can go anywhere in an instant or stop in an instant. One

¹ Nine types of devotion: *Sravanam* (listening to the glories of the Lord), *Kirtanam* (singing), *Vishnu Smaranam* (remembrance), *Pada Sevanam* (saluting the Feet), *Vandanam* (adoration), *Archanam* (worship), *Dasyam* (service), *Sakhyam* (friendship), *Atma Nivedanam* (total surrender).

is bound to the world by (*Karma karmaanubandhene manushya loke*). The world is bound by the mind (*Manomoolam Idam Jagat*).

We know that the food we eat becomes nourishment for the body. No, no. It is not the food that gives nourishment but only the mind! If the mind is not enthusiastic and joyous during meals, food can even prove poisonous! The mind alone lends Divinity to human nature. Whatever we see, speak, think or do, we must make sacred. Without the mind's prompting, we cannot even put a foot forward. People foolishly gloat over physical prowess, intelligence, riches, and power, but they do not enquire into the demon of ego, which misleads them.

You have heard the words of blessing, "May you live a hundred years (*Satamaanam bhavati satayuh*)." But it is common to see people dying well before the century mark. You may be told you will live a hundred years, but don't believe it! You cannot tell when and where death will come—in childhood, youth, or old age, in water, on land, or in the sky.

If no one can decide the time of death, what is the significance of a 100-year lifespan? The *Vedas* use this number, so it cannot be superficial. A hundred years is the truth! How? Every person truly has a lifespan of a century. Pride, envy, and immorality are knives that slice away at life. Adherence to good thoughts, words, and deeds undoubtedly grants a century of life. This is the inner significance of the longevity enjoyed by our ancient sages.

Students, foster true and honest intentions without interruption. Let devotion and surrender flourish. Today, right conduct and belief in God are fast declining. How can humanity ever realise the truth in the ancient blessing "May you live a hundred years" with such behaviour?

Love God, fear sin

Develop self-confidence. One who doesn't trust himself cannot trust anyone else. A person is God Himself. But just as a blind man cannot see the sun, the egoistic man cannot see the *Atma*. Ego veils one's sight—ego must be renounced. All our degrees, riches, fame, and power are "passing clouds". People dedicate half their lives to the accumulation of money. Do they use even a fraction of that time in spiritual pursuits? Do they perform sacred service activities? The body has been given to serve others (*Paropakaara artham idam sareeram*.) Why are people unable to recognise this truth?

A person is a puppet in the hands of selfishness. Whatever one loves, one loves not for the sake of the object but for one's own sake. When one loves a person, that is for one's selfish sake as well. When you go deep

into intentions, only selfishness is found. Making selfishness as the foundation, one forgets the infinite *Atma*.

First and foremost, if selfishness is curbed, one can easily avoid bad traits and behaviour.

Fear of Sin	<i>Paapa bheeti</i>
Love for God	<i>Daiva preeti</i>
Morality in Society	<i>Sangha neeti</i>

These three precepts must be adored as the *Trimurtis*². Without fear of sin, people will not hesitate to do the most heinous act.

Sinning by losing fear of sin,
Adopting a path devoid of love for God—
This destroys human qualities.
This is the cause of uproar in the world.

India is full of agitation because there is no fear of sin, no love for God. Students! You are the hope of the future. Develop pure and sacred feelings. Understand that the body is given to serve the nation and be helpful to your fellow men. I hope that you cultivate such expansive hearts.

Help Ever, Hurt Never

Sage Vyasa wrote the 18 *Puranas*. What is their message?

The eighteen *Puranas* of Vyasa teach two instructions:
To help others is merit, to harm others is sin.

Ashtaadasa puraanesu Vyasasya vachanadyavam Paropakaara punyaaya paapaaya parapeedanam

"Help Ever, Hurt Never." Establish these words in your hearts. Do not hurt others, no matter what the situation. To the extent possible, see that you are not hurt by others, either. With "self" taken care of, you can begin to "help". Meaning, when you ensure security for yourself, you can proceed upon the pure path of service. Understand the importance of both "self" and "help".

Students! The world is afflicted with many problems, which seem only to worsen with time. What should be trusted and what should not be trusted? What must you do, what must you not do? Such power of discrimination—between the right and the wrong, between the temporary and the permanent—is beyond today's human being.

People rely on the most unreal and unreliable. They discard the trustworthy. Why? Selfishness is the reason. Recognise the workings of your mind. A person is called *manishi*³. One with a mind (*manas*) is *manishi*.

² The Trinity of Gods: Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva

³ Telugu word for "man"

People create the world of their experiences with their minds. What is the mind? Only a bundle of thoughts. What are thoughts? They are actions of day-to-day life.

Therefore, the progress or decline of the world is dependent on the intentions and actions of individuals. The world is not inherently evil. In fact, evil does not exist in the world! The world does not have any sorrow! All sorrow and evil is created by us alone. We invite misery by entertaining bad desires.

Maintain a pure mind all the time. As soon as you find amoral intentions surfacing, contemplate on God to nullify their effect. Do not recollect degraded feelings repeatedly and strengthen them, the way you grow plants with water and fertilizer!

Develop equal-mindedness

We have two kinds of plants: fruit plants and thorny plants. How must they be cultivated? When you plant the fruit tree in the centre and thorny bushes all around, you automatically nurture the fruits and ensure their safety. Meaning, even thorns are useful! The beneficial use of both fruits and thorns depends on us.

The world has heat and cold, like people have joys and sorrows. Do we not dress according to the seasons? What is our summer apparel? It is of very thin fabric. When we visit a hill-station, cold predominates. We cannot change the weather but we wear thick clothes. We adjust to the weather and remain happy in all conditions.

Similarly, during tough times, first accept the situation and then make efforts to get rid of the sorrow. Think of peace and joy when anguish dominates. Think of the bliss that follows difficulties. Develop such equal-mindedness, such wisdom to recognise what is temporary and what is permanent. Instead, if you want to have no difficulties in your life, is that ever possible?

It is impossible to live without bad experiences. Grasp the significance of both good and bad experiences and cultivate the right attitude in each situation. Such “understanding” and “adjustment” are most essential for students. Students have only “misunderstanding” but no “understanding”! They try to “adjust” externally with this flawed attitude. This causes bad reactions in them. First cultivate “understanding”. Then, “adjustment” is easy, effortless.

The all-pervading “I”

We should recognise the unity that exists in mankind. Go ask a beggar, “Who are you?” He replies, “Sir, I am so-and-so.” Go to a rich man and pose the same question; He introduces himself likewise. Ladies also give the same reply as do gentlemen.

If you approach man who is sad and ask him, “Why are you sad? Who are you?”, he answers, “I am so-and-so, and for such-and-such reason, I am sad”. He also uses “I” to identify himself.

All human beings, without exception, use the word “I” to identify themselves. What is this “I”? It is the *Atma* principle, which exists within everyone in equal measure. A certain person may have love, another may not. One might be peaceful, another might not. One might be truthful, another might not. But “I” is within everyone! All this is pervaded by God (*Isaavaasyam Idam Sarvam*).

The *Vedas* advise you to arrive at the *Atma* by the process of negation. Assert “Not this, not this (*neti, neti*)” to everything that is not the *Atma*, and you are left face-to-face with God. To enquire into the “I” principle is exactly this process. The “I” in me exists in you, in him, in everyone. With such unity in view, there is no scope for discord. Whoever you hurt, you hurt yourself. When you slander others, you fling mud at yourself!

Adi Sankara and the Lord

This is the significance of an important incident in the life of Adi Sankarcharya. Adi Sankara went to Kasi (Benares) with his disciples. As he was walking along, a person of low caste approached him. Adi Sankara exclaimed, “Keep your distance!” The man replied, “Who do you want to stay away? My body? The body is inert. Does one piece of inert matter have the authority to command another? Both are gross. Or, do you want my *Atma* to be away from you? The *Atma* is in you and in me. How can you ask it be distant when it is all-pervading?”

In this manner, the stranger clearly disjoined the body and *Atma* principles. Adi Sankara realised that one with such a clarified intellect, one who had realised the *Atma*, was none other than the Lord Himself, and he fell at His Feet. Then Lord Siva appeared to him in full glory and spoke words of blessing, “Child! I assumed this form only to rid you of your narrow mentality, to grant you true wisdom.”

Spiritual practice from the heart

God always assumes forms to rid people of their bad qualities and unhealthy behaviour. But no one can tell in what form, when, where, and how He will appear! We must not give scope to bad feelings but constantly strengthen pure intentions to the extent possible. This is true spiritual practice (*sadhana*). Instead, if you endlessly repeat the Name of God while fostering vices, what good is such repetition? This is only “artificial repetition”! Real repetition of the name and meditation must be from the heart!

A man sits for meditation, immobile, like a statue. People get the impression that he is absorbed in the Self. But let a mosquito land on him and he reacts instantly! What is he meditating upon? On God, or on the mosquito?! If he was truly contemplating on God, he would not have felt the mosquito on his body.

Today repetition of the Name, meditation, *yoga*, sacrifice are all artificial. Not surprisingly, the results are also artificial. As is your feeling, so is the result (*Yat bhaavam tat bhavati*). If you eat a cucumber, will you belch the taste of mango? God is never partial. They are favours done to you by yourself, your destiny written by yourself.

Therefore, do not criticise God. You alone determine your joys and sorrows. It is absolutely essential that you fix this truth in your mind.

Meaningful days

Students! During the past twelve days, you have blissfully heard discourses on the *Atma* principle, on eternal joy, and you have pondered on the right way to act in worldly and spiritual life. Such sacred days are real days, meaningful days. I have said on many occasions:

The day when true devotees gather
And remember God with music,
The day when you assuage the grief of the poor
And treat them as your brothers with love,
The day when you contemplate on God and
Feed your servants with tasty food,
The day when great persons come into our midst
And regale us with stories of the Lord —
Such days are real days.

These four types of days alone are meaningful and well-spent days (*dinam*). All other days are days of death (*tat-dinam*)! When you look after the comfort of others and make efforts to bring peace and joy to them, those are real days. I bless you with the wish that you fill your life with such sacred days and transform it into a glorious, divine life.

For the time we have spent together, tomorrow is the last day. However, I do not say that it is the last day for our vows, penance, and sacrifice. There is no such thing as conclusion to the sacred pledges we have taken during this fortnight. This is an endless, lifelong penance. What is penance? Discharging duties is penance. Avoiding duties leads to darkness (*thamas*) instead of penance (*tapas*).

Your duty is your penance
Your duty is your spiritual practice (*sadhana*)
Your duty is your sacrifice
Your duty is your destination

Therefore, students! Consider the welfare of others as your foremost duty throughout life. I hope that you sublimate your selfishness into selflessness and lead exemplary lives.

(Swami sang “*Bhava Bhaya Harana, Vandita Charana*” in His Golden Voice.)

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