

Chapter V. Cultivate the Blissful Atmic Experience

People are engaged in various forms of cultivation, but the most important of these is cultivation of spiritual experiences. All cultivation is based on spiritual cultivation. It is the king of cultures. The king makes laws, but he is above and beyond them. So too, all rules and laws, all distinctions of right and wrong, of sin and virtue, of joy and sorrow affect only the individual soul (*jivi*) that attaches importance to the inexperienced mind (*manas*) and intellect (*buddhi*) and not to the *Atma*. So, cultivation of the *Atmic* experience, which is pure, convincing, and self-transcending, is essential for all. It is also easy, for the *Atma* is as the mother of all, and hearkening to the *Atma* is like the child hearkening to the mother. Everyone is competent to have that experience; in fact, it is everyone's right to have it. That is why the *Atmic* discipline is being treated by me as so important.

The primary qualifications

The *Atma* is also known as Brahman, so learning the *Atmic* knowledge or Brahman knowledge (*Atma vidya*) is to be considered as the objective by every student.

Such students have to earn some primary qualifications. Then only do they deserve the status of studentship. These qualifications are: discrimination (*viveka*), renunciation (*vairagya*), and the six qualities that constitute a good character. Aspirants who have these qualifications can hope to attain the *Atma* with confidence and without much difficulty.

Lead a dharmic life

The highest *Atma* (*Paramatma*) has six chief characteristics: complete wisdom (*jnana*), complete renunciation (*vairagya*), divine beauty, the fullest splendour of power (*iswarya*), undiminished fame, and inexhaustible fortune. His nature is full existence (*sat*), full knowledge (*chit*), and full bliss (*ananda*). These are also related to people through the *Atma* in them. So all humanity has a right to realise and enjoy these characteristics and this nature. That is its ordained duty. The travail of the world today is due to people not performing this ordained duty.

In daily life, the common person acts quite contrary to the dictates of the *dharm*a of the householder (*grihastha*). People do not follow the path laid down by the scriptures (*sastras*) and by the law texts of Manu (*Manusmrithi*). They do not have an iota of truthfulness in them. Truth is the most holy virtue. So, leading a primitive type of life, people lose courage at the slightest upset and give up the adventure of life. People develop a kind of pseudo-renunciation. If only they would enter upon the householder's life with the attitude of performing their duty, they would not need to run away from it and seek caves and forests for escape. Each can realise the Lord in their assignment of duty, in their *dharmic* life.

The contemplation of the Lord must proceed in union with the *dharmic* life. This type of life has no need for status, scholarship, or vanity. The latter only lead people astray. It is only through this life that the mind and the intellect can be controlled, the knowledge (*vidya*) of *Atma* cultivated, and the will sublimated.

A good character is essential for the realisation of the *Atma*. In other words, all evil propensities have to be uprooted. Just as the army becomes dispirited and surrenders when the commander falls, so the army of evil qualities will surrender its arms as soon as egotism (*ahamkara*) is destroyed. The evil qualities are all natives of

the realm of anger, so if that region is devastated, the soldiers can never again raise their heads. It is enough to accomplish this alone, for what can commander Egotism achieve without a single soldier to march under his orders? So, all efforts must be directed to destroy the realm of anger so that no commander can venture to let loose the hounds of war. Let each spiritual aspirant preserve the region of his mind in peace, by putting a stop to the rise of this commander and these soldiers. Let each spiritual aspirant bask forever under the smile of the ruler, the *Atma*.

The eight gates

The destruction of the modifications and agitations of the mind is the prerequisite for getting an audience with that ruler. His reception hall has eight gates through which one has to pass for the audience: control of the inner senses, control of the outer senses, sitting posture, breath control, mind control, concentration, meditation, and super-consciousness (*yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, prathyahara, dharana, dhyana, and samadhi*).

Of these eight gates, meditation is the seventh and super-consciousness is the eighth. Meditation is the royal road to super-consciousness.

After the mind has been brought under control by these eight disciplines, the will can easily be developed. The will is the nature of the Lord; it is also referred to as the Lord's ordinance. The Lord, by mere willing, can do anything immediately and easily. But one cannot realise this will as soon as it is entertained. The power of the will is the deciding factor. The will is generally not so overpoweringly strong; when one achieves that power, one gets something equal to the power of the Lord. That is the meaning of merger (*laya*). Such merger is made possible through meditation (*dhyana*).

Wish versus will

Some people use “wish” and “will” as if there was no difference between the two. This is very wrong. The wish is related to the tendencies (*vasanas*) embedded in the mind (*manas*). The will is related to the fundamental character of *Atma*. Wish means the craving to get something; will is the determination to acquire it.

Both wish and will are based on the moral culture of the individual. Once the *Atma* is cultivated, they can be sublimated accordingly. But if they are cultivated without the *Atmic* point of view, the faults and failings of the mind will get mixed up with what is wished for and willed for.

Take it step by step

The lower step can be seen from the higher step, not the higher step from the lower. So, one should strive to go step by step, higher and higher—in other words, from the culture of the *Atma* to the culture of the will and thence to the culture of the moral conduct. Then, the enjoyment of the bliss of the *Atma* becomes quite easy and natural.

When the baby is unable to walk, the mother encourages it to toddle a few steps at a time at home before it is allowed to go on the road. Instead, if it is put on the high road first, how can it learn? Besides, what of the dangers of the road? So also, first the internal factors have to be strengthened, and then external factors, like moral conduct, become easy. Morals without the basis of internal uplift will not be deep-seated. So the cultivation of the attitude of the *Atma* is primary.

The aim of spiritual practice is to remove the motive, the wish, the attachment, the yearning for the fruit. Un-

derstanding this clearly, the spiritual aspirant must not give way to any dispiritedness, despondency, or feeling of failure or doubt. The aspirant must be patient and bear things with fortitude. Therefore, the aspirant must develop within themselves enthusiasm, faith, activity, and joy. Keeping the great big result of effort constantly in view, the aspirant must boldly discard all difficulties and temptations. Since the latter are but short-lived and weak, with a little patience, they can be overcome with ease. If the aspirant is not vigilant and patient, all already-achieved success will melt away in an unguarded moment.

Spiritual aspirants, *yogis*, and renunciants (*sanyasins*) have to climb a ladder, the steps of which are: argumentation, no argumentation, analysis, non-analysis, agreement, etc. (*sa-vitharka, nir-vitharka, sa-vichara, nir-vichara, samatha*, etc.)

No past or future

The knowledge of the world is not real knowledge. It is relative knowledge, the knowledge of the non-real. The knowledge of the eternal Absolute is the real knowledge. It is acquired by meditation. The fire of meditation and *yoga* will reduce the sapless activities of the mind (*manas*) to ashes. Immediately thereafter, the knowledge (*jnana*) of the Real will flash; it will shine with undiminished effulgence; its light will never go out. For those established in this real knowledge, there is no past and future; all ages are in the present, in the actual moment of experience.

Clean and feed the mind

Just as soap is necessary to make this external body clean, repetition of the divine name, meditation, and remembrance (*smarana*) are needed to clean the interior mind. Just as food and drink are needed to keep the body strong, contemplation of the Lord and meditation on the *Atma* are needed to strengthen the mind. Without this food and drink, the mind will just totter this way and that. As long as the waves are agitating the top, the bottom cannot be seen. When the waves of desire agitate the waters of the mind, how can one see the base, the *Atma*? The tottering causes the waves and is caused by want of food and drink.

So, clean the mind with contemplation of the Lord. Feed it with meditation on the *Atma*. Only meditation and spiritual practice (*sadhana*) can clean the depths of the mind and give it strength. Without purity and strength, the *Atma* recedes into the distance and peace flees.