

## Chapter XVI

Fixing the mind on God at death; 3 different ways to describe God; 8 aspects of God; what devotion consists of; repeating Om; the value of systematic practice.

Ordinary folk do not get their mind fixed on Madhava (a name for God) so easily at the point of death. It presupposes long training, previous achievement of certain accomplishments, what is called prior purification. The mind should have gone through a certain course of discipline; it has to be possessed of *yoga*. Even that is not enough. The mind must discard all other thoughts as low and inferior, even as defiling. This disgust toward all other objects should grow in strength. When these two are present, the thought of Madhava will certainly emerge and be steady during the last moments.

So your mind is the important thing; when the mind rots, all else rots. One moves as fast as the mind and in the direction that the mind takes. To tame and train the mind, good habits and disciplines have to be sought. Therefore, Krishna began describing how the Lord has to be pictured in the mind during the stages of spiritual discipline and with what feelings and emotions He has to be fixed in the mind.

“Arjuna! people describe Me in three different ways: as (1) without qualities, without form, (2) with qualities, without form, and (3) with qualities, with form (*nir-guna nir-aakaara*, *sa-guna nir-aakaara* and *sa-guna sa-aakaara*). I shall first tell you about the second and how you have to picture the Lord in this aspect.

“Listen, He is described as poet (*kavi*), ancient (*purana*), the independent master, subtler than the subtle, the sustenance and basis of all, having unpicturable form, with the splendour of the sun as His complexion, beyond all trace of ignorance and darkness.”

At this point, Arjuna interrupted Krishna. He asked, “Lord! You said He is a poet (*kavi*)! There are poets among ordinary mortals too. How, then, can you also call the Lord a poet and discredit Him? Or, does *kavi* denote something special when applied to Him? Make that point a little clearer.”

Krishna said, “*Kavi* does not mean merely a poet; it means also one who is aware of the past, present, and future, so it is a description of the Lord. He knows all; He sees all. Hence, the derivation of *kavi* is mentioned as ‘he who sees the next step (all-knowing (*sarva-jna*)), or seeing the next step’. It is the Lord who revolves in every heart and effects changes from step to step. For all creation, the poet (*kavi*) is the motivator, the prime basis. He is the poet; His poem is all this.”

Arjuna again inquired, “Lord, secondly, you said that He is ancient (*purana*); what is the significance of that?”

Krishna replied, “Of course, the Lord is the most ancient, but He is as modern as He is ancient. He is eternal (*sanathana*), primeval, beyond the beginning. He is also new every moment. *Purana* means formerly new, new every minute of the past, and the present.”

“What about the word ‘master (*anusaasitha*)’?”

“Independent, unchecked, master. He lays down the conduct of all. The five elements execute His orders. They cannot overstep the limits laid down by Him. His laws also govern the inner world of all beings as no human law can. He operates in the regions of the mind.”

“The fourth expression you used was that He is subtler than the subtle.

“Subtle? Perhaps, you thought that subtle indicates a diminutive microscopic body! No, no. The expression ‘subtler than the subtle’ means devoid of qualities (*nir-guna*); something that you cannot fathom with the help of the eye, the ear, and the rest of the senses. A thing becomes subtler with the reduction of its characteristic; if it has more it is less subtle.

“Sound, touch, sight, taste, smell —these are the characteristics of the five elements, which are ether, air, fire, water, and earth. The earth element has all five characteristics; water has only four; fire, three (sound, touch, sight); air, two (sound and touch); ether, only one (sound). That is to say, each of these is subtler than the rest and ether is the subtlest of all.

“This is self-evident. Earth is just stationary; water is subtler, so it flows. Fire is subtler than water, so it rises up. Air, which is even more subtle, can travel on all sides. Ether has just one characteristic, sound; it has no touch, form, taste, or scent. The Lord, who is beyond these five elements, has none of these characteristics, so He is subtler than the subtlest. He is all-pervasive, immanent in all. It is the characteristic that makes a thing heavy. The Lord has no such burden; so He is subtler than everything else.

“Next, about the fifth expression: the basis of all (*sarva-adhara*). There are two categories: the basis (*adhara*) and the based (*adheya*), the container and the thing contained. The based is all that is seen by the eye or heard by the ear —why, the entire creation is composed of the five elements. Well, all five elements are also the based, since they are based on the basis, *Brahman*. *Brahman* is the only basis; It is not based on another entity, for there is no second. Therefore, He is the Basis of all.

“The sixth too, I shall make clear to you. The sixth is an unpicturable form, a form that cannot be delineated or imagined. For He is beyond the reach of the mind, and it is the mind that pictures, delineates, or imagines. So, His form is incapable of being imagined by the mind. You might hesitate to accept this. The mind is matter; it is inert; it is fleeting. But *Brahman*, or the highest *Atma*, is pure ‘consciousness’; *Brahman* is eternal, everlasting, imperishable. *Brahman* and mind are at opposite poles; the fleeting and the fixed are totally unrelated. One dies and the other remains. The inert and the active are unrelated.

“The question may arise: what then should spiritual aspirants do? Oh, they are not deprived of hope. Let them picture the highest *Atma* as unpicturable, that is enough. Dwell on such thoughts as this and the fruit will be vouchsafed unto you. Aspirants must first learn the channels along which the thoughts should run.”

At this, Arjuna pleaded with Krishna thus: “Lord, let us proceed; time is running fast. We cannot be stationary in this battlefield without assuming responsibility or making a decision. War is facing us with open jaws, ready to swallow and overwhelm. I am ready to obey the instruction you may be pleased to give me; only, let there be no delay. Hence, quickly enlighten me about the seventh attribute of ‘with quality, without form (*sa-guna nir-aakara*)’.”

“Yes; the seventh is ‘with the splendour of the sun as His complexion’. This means, ‘He is self-effulgent as the sun; He is independent; He is the source of the light He shines with.’ He is the effulgence of the sun; He makes the sun shine. So, He is named ‘Sun (*Aditya*)’.

“I shall tell you about the eighth too, straight-away: ‘beyond darkness (*thamasah parasthaath*)’. He is the witness of darkness or ignorance. For *para* means ‘beyond’, one unaffected, and no darkness is as dark as igno-

rance; it is so deep and so dangerous. Delusion (*maya*) is another word for this ignorance, so ‘beyond darkness’, means ‘beyond delusion’.

“Arjuna! Just close your eyes for a moment; what do you experience? Complete darkness, right? How did you know that it is dark? You cannot see darkness; then how did you announce that there was darkness there? Two entities are there: darkness and the one who sees the darkness, right? If you are yourself darkness, how can you see the darkness? No; you are the seer, so you are not darkness. Darkness is that which is seen; the seer is you; you are the witness.

“Now consider another fact. People very often condemn themselves as ignoramuses, but if they really were ignoramuses or fools, how could they recognize their own ignorance? From where did people get that knowledge? When did that wisdom enter? And how?

“Ignorance (*a-jnana*) is the ‘seen’; inner wisdom (*jnana*) is the ‘seer’. You are the vision (*dhrik*) that sees the object (*drisya*) or ignorance. In the same way, all the eight descriptions above have to be contemplated upon. That is the correct meditation of the form of the Lord.”

Arjuna asked, “Krishna! Is such meditation enough by itself, or has it to be supplemented?”

“Of course, when this meditation is practised, care should be taken to see that the mind is concentrated on that thing only. It should not pursue diverse objectives. It must attach itself to that One Supreme, with love and devotion. Usually, a person’s love gets fastened on trifling temporary things and thus gets entangled in setbacks and sorrows. So the love has to be withdrawn from such objects and centred on the Lord.

“I shall tell you briefly what devotion consists of, listen! Devotion is the complete identification of one’s mental activities with those of the ideal on which the attachment is centred.”

Here, Arjuna intercepted and asked, “How is that ever possible, oh Lord?”

“It is possible, Arjuna. Control the senses, let the mind be effaced as much as possible, let the heart be purified, let the vital airs be uplifted into the highest region of the head, let the individual be established in the *Atmic* truth, and let *Om* be the only point of attention at the moment the breath leaves the body. One who does this comes to Me and joins with Me; their mental activities become the same as Mine,” said Krishna.

Here, readers should fix their attention on what the Lord told Arjuna. The Lord spoke of control of the senses, not their destruction. Control means: under one’s behest, obedient to the will. Destruction means: denial of activity, full inaction. The Lord also said this of all the senses, not just one or two. People must keep all senses under control and use them only when the purposes for which they have been devised are to be fulfilled. They should not be let loose, just because one has them. Give them the functions they are designed for, but do not allow them to master you and ruin you. Let them work strictly on regulated lines. That is the Lord’s intention.

There is another thing. You must yourself reason out and discover what exactly will expand your heart and what will breed disquiet; then, hold fast to the former and give up the latter. Or else, straying in devious paths like an insane ape, you will have to twist and turn in confusion. What is the cause of all the troubles and discontent to which many are subjected nowadays? It is the improper use they make of the senses.

You should decide and carefully watch out for who the proper people are to enter through each door of your home. Those who must enter by one door should not use some other door; if they do, then that house will have only discontent, confusion, disorder. It is wiser to take precautions against such disorder before entrance is ef-

fect than deal with the intruders after they have come in, through the wrong door. You may excuse the trespass, for the first time; but certainly, you must take enough care to see that it is not repeated. That is the better method, although not the best.

Again, Arjuna felt a doubt arising in him, and he wondered how, if the senses are bound, *Om* could be pronounced. Krishna understood this. He took up the matter Himself. “Arjuna! *Om* has to be pronounced in the mind, not through the mouth as a sensory organ!”

Next, Arjuna raised another question to relieve himself of another doubt. “You said, ‘he who does repetition of the name has no sin (*japatho naasthi pathakam*)’, but if repetition cures one from sin, what happens to liberation? Evidently, repetition is powerless to bring that about; repetition will not enable one to concretize the Lord.”

The Lord was happy when Arjuna mentioned this doubt. “Partha! Your question is important, but let Me tell you: liberation need not be sought after, separately, apart from other objectives. If *Om* is recited and the significance of the *Om*, that is to say, the Lord, is meditated upon, then the Lord is attained by you, in other words, you are liberated.”

Arjuna insisted on his point. He asked, “Lord! Can repetition bring about both results? Of course, it is easy for You to declare so, but trouble starts when we follow the path of repetition and meditation.”

Krishna replied, “It is just for this purpose that I mentioned at the very start about the value of systematic spiritual practice. Practice, steady practice, will ensure you both results —liberation and freedom from sin. Probably, you do not realize the importance of practice. Oh foolish Arjuna! Do you not see here how practice makes an animal execute difficult tasks? Look at these horses yoked to your chariot, these elephants ranged on the field; they render assistance in battle that even one with the superior equipment of reason cannot give! Consider how this was made possible. Where have elephants dwelling in the forest observed the tactics of battle? Or do you hold that fighting on the battlefield is their nature? No, their present skill is proof of the value of practice.

“Similarly, practise withdrawal of the mind from the senses, steadily; then it will develop skills that will release you from bondage. Let Me tell you, those who repeat the sacred *Om* with their last breath do attain the Lord.” Krishna said this with emphasis.

Arjuna made bold to put another query. “Lord! It is good that those who repeat *Om* with their last breath attain the Lord. But what about those who do not? Their number is certainly much larger. Have they no chance of release? In the court of the Almighty, are only some to be honoured with seats? Have the miserable and the poor no accommodation at all? Tell me where they go, where they will be admitted.”

“Arjuna! You are falling into a great error. Beware. The Lord does not discriminate between the weak and the strong or the high and the low. Such an attitude will never warp His vision. All are entitled to His grace; all are entitled to enter His reception Hall. Its doors are ever open. No guards are there to bar the entrance of anyone. No one is prevented; no one is invited. All are welcome to enter. What can anyone do if some do not approach the door? Those who desire warmth have to go near enough to the fireside and sit there. Those who stand afar can know only the light that emerges from that fireside. What do you say of the person who, standing afar, declares that the fire has no warmth? He certainly is not sane.

“All who yearn for the Presence, all who desire to enter the court of the Lord and who strive in their mind constantly for the fruition of that desire, all have admission and accommodation there. Not everyone can repeat

Om at the last moment; that is why constant remembrance of the Lord is said to have the power of inducing the Lord to bear the burden of your happiness here and hereafter. Of course, this has to be practised long. Spiritual discipline gains everything —strong and steady spiritual discipline.”