

Chapter XI. Obstructions of the Past, Present, and Future

Swami: If you dearly love a dog, that dog is also *Brahman*! The dog has a name and form. If you remove both your name and form and its name and form, then *Brahman* alone remains. Name and form are “past obstructions”. The absence of name and form is *Brahman*. Inherent in all the manifold names and forms is inherent just One, *Brahman*. You have to recognise that “is-ness” in all. The is-ness is being (*asthi*), the knowledge of the knower is effulgence, the shining splendour (*bhathi*). That is also *Brahman*.

There is a yearning, isn't there, to see it, experience it, to seek for it? That is due to the attraction (*priya*), the charm. These three are basically characteristic of *Brahman*, my dear boy!

Devotee: What is this being-awareness-bliss (*satchidananda*) they speak of?

Swami: *Atma* itself is known as being-awareness-bliss, because its nature is existence-effulgence-lovableness (*asthi-bhathi-priya*).

Devotee: Swami, since “lovableness (*priya*)” is also its nature, shouldn't everything be lovable? But scorpions, snakes, and wild animals don't evoke love!

Swami: You may not love them, but they love each other, don't they? A thief likes another thief, a devotee likes another devotee —each loves their own kind.

Devotee: I don't understand all this clearly, Swami. Give me some example, if there is any, of this existence-effulgence-lovableness from the present world.

Swami: My dear boy, why say, “if there is any”? When all is *Brahman*, which one is not an example of that? Now, you go to a picture. The picture exists on the screen; it persists, it is. That is existence (*asthi*). Who sees it and understands it? You. So it is splendour (*bhathi*). The names and forms, which are lovable (*priya*), come and go. Even if you set them aside without being deluded by them, the screen is always there.

One point has to be noted here. The pictures fall on the screen by means of a beam of light projected through a small slit in the wall of the machine room. But if it comes from the entire room without the slit, escaping from that limitation, the figures won't be seen! The screen will be fully bathed in light! So too, if the world is seen through the small slit of one's mind, the manifold multi-coloured creation will be cognizable. If the floodlight of knowledge of *Atma* (*Atma-jnana*) is poured, and you see it through the *Atma*, it will be One Unlimited Light, and no individual picture can be cognised. That is to say, all will be cognised as the one indivisible *Brahman*, do you understand?

Devotee: Swami! I have one doubt; can I ask you?

Swami: Certainly. Why do you say, “Can I ask you”?

Devotee: Some people describe *Brahman* as *asthi-bhathi-priya*. What does that mean? How are these related to *Brahman*?

Swami: Is that the doubt? *Asthi* means “that which is”; *bhathi* means “that which shines”; and *priya* means —of course, you know it, don't you?— pleasing, desirable, capable of satisfying. All that is dear (*priya*) to you is *Brahman*!

Devotee: I have understood it clearly, Swami. Now I know what is meant by the “obstruction of the past”. What

are the “obstructions of the present?”

Swami: Good, I’ll tell you. The obstructions of the present are of four types: attachment to sense objects, cynical criticism, dullness of understanding, and absurd conceit. The first is the cause of attachment to objects that attract the senses. The second makes people discover wrong meanings in the teachings of the *guru*. The third causes confusion, because things explained by the *guru* aren’t grasped at all. The last obstruction makes one feel that one is a great scholar, *pundit*, or ascetic, mistaking the body and the senses for the *Atma*.

Devotee: And the “obstructions of the future”?

Swami: Oh! They come always through sinful deeds. They come and obstruct unawares!

Devotee: How are we to meet them, Swami?

Swami: It isn’t possible for all. To some extent, the aspirant can be cognisant of the approaching wrong and its wiles. It creates a desire, which puts on the cloak of want. Then you must recognise it as an “obstruction of the future”. It is difficult to be forewarned like this as the result of the effort of one single life. It may take many births to acquire this education.

Devotee: Are there any who have so learned it?

Swami: Why, there are. The scriptures speak of Bharatha and Vasudeva; Bharatha required two or three births; Vasudeva had to be born once.

Devotee: That means these three obstructions cannot be overcome except after many lives. Can’t we succeed without all that bother?

Swami: Why? The aspirant can, by reasoning out the nature of these three, escape from being worried by them. Otherwise, it may take many lives.

Devotee: Swami, how can we get over the “obstruction of the present”?

Swami: There is a way for this also. Through *karma*, the appropriate *karma*. There is no obstruction that cannot be surmounted. Attachment to sense objects can be removed by control of the senses (*sama*), control of the outer senses (*dama*), control of the mind by withdrawal of the senses (*uparathi*), forbearance (*thithiksha*); by developing purity, self-control, withdrawal of desires, and the ability to suffer. Dullness of understanding can be removed by listening again and again. Constant meditation on the things heard will abolish the habit of cynical criticism. All absurd conceit will vanish through the teachings one imbibes.

Devotee: Swami, to master all this seems impossible for everyone! To make it easy for all, tell me which is important?

Swami: My dear fellow, to know a thing, a discriminating intellect (*vi-jnana*) is necessary. Stupidity (*a-jnana*) makes one ignorant, don’t you know?

Devotee: So many people say so many things about this highest intellect and stupidity. Please tell me the basic thing behind both.

Swami: Now you have come again to the very first step. Ignorance (*a-jnana*) is the mental attitude that has reference to the external object, and highest intellect (*vi-jnana*) is the mental attitude that has reference to the internal subject. Ignorance is known also as mind (*manas*) and subconscious mind (*chittha*). When activity and attitude turn inward, they are called intellect (*buddhi*) and the inner instrument (*anthah-karana*).

Devotee: Some say that the spiritually wise (*jnani*) will have only two things, the desire to attain the other world

and the burden of past *karma*. Is that true?

Swami: Both the spiritually wise and the ignorant will have desire, absence of desire for the other world, and the burden of past *karma*, all in equal measure. Their experiences will also be in equal measure. But the spiritually wise one will not have the consciousness of doership, so they won't be bound. The ignorant is conscious of doership and therefore gets bound. This is the distinction. I have already told you, haven't I, that "the mind" is the cause of bondage as well as of liberation? The mind is the cause of everything.

Devotee: Mind, mind, they keep on saying. What is it? What is its form?

Swami: "Cognition", "understanding" is its form. If you know the basis of that knowing, there will be no bondage at all!

Devotee: What is the basis?

Swami: The basis is what you refer to as I. Seeking for the I, if you are in that I state, however many "understandings" come or don't come, you will remain unaffected.

Devotee: Right. That is very good, Swami. Please make all this soak into our brains, so that we may realise the purpose of our lives. I shall take leave, Swami.

Swami: Do so. Depart gladly and return later. Take my blessings with you.