

Chapter XVI. Meditation

Devotee: Swami, I have a few doubts concerning the subject of meditation (*dhyana*), which You are now writing about. Can I ask You?

Swami: Of course, you can ask and have your doubts removed. It is good for you and it gives Me joy.

Devotee: Some people practise meditation, but they are unable to know whether the mediation has progressed or not. What do You say about that?

Swami: Progress in meditation means attainment of concentration (*ekagratha*). Each one can judge for oneself, without doubt, how far one has been able to succeed in concentration, right?

Devotee: Some say that they see all sorts of things during meditation, and some hear all types of sounds. Do these indicate progress?

Swami: They are delusions. They handicap progress. They implant conceit and disperse concentration. The distraction of sights and sounds is no sign of meditation.

Devotee: Then what is to be done when such are seen?

Swami: Don't allow the mind to wander on to them; never lose sight of the divine form that you have pictured for yourself. Be convinced that these are but obstacles designed to scatter your attention from the divine form. If you permit these sights and sounds to creep in, the original form will be dimmed, your ego (*ahamkara*) will increase, and you will lose your way.

Devotee: But Swami, some people do say that these things are signs of progress in meditation!

Swami: That means only that they themselves are not practising meditation properly! Besides, not knowing what meditation is, they delude their disciples by talking like this, to please them. That is the only profit earned.

Devotee: Well, does it mean then that, by means of meditation, we cannot see the Lord?

Swami: Why not? Certainly, it is possible. If you fix your attention on the sublimely beautiful form of the Lord and concentrate on That alone, you will receive His grace in that form Itself in various ways. While doing so, many a disturbance might intervene. You should not be deluded; be on your guard, never forget the auspicious form. Picture to yourself that all creation is immersed in it.

Devotee: But really, can we not know at anytime what stage we have reached in meditation (*dhyana*)?

Swami: You can identify the progress or decline of meditation only when you know this is stage number so and so, this stage is such and such etc., right? The form of meditation (*dhyana-rupa*) is beginning-less and endless, so its fruition also cannot be declared complete and finished.

Devotee: Then, do You say that meditation is endless?

Swami: What is generally called the end is the end of the I and the merging of all in the one form. Meditation has no end.

Devotee: How are we to understand its stages?

Swami: You can have an idea of the stage if you examine daily how you are able to concentrate, how far you have subdued the wandering nature of the mind, and how deeply you taste the divine form; that is all. The stage reached

cannot be cognised. What you receive, and at what time, depends on His grace. The spiritual aspirant's mission is to practise meditation, without deviating from the path. The rest is all His grace. It doesn't depend upon the number of days or the length of time. Some may require many births; others may realise the goal in a few days even. It depends on each one's faith (*sraddha*), devotion (*bhakti*), and spiritual exercise (*sadhana*). It cannot be calculated and reasoned out.

Devotee: So we shouldn't worry about our spiritual exercise —its progress, stage, and possible decline, etc.

Swami: Exactly. Worry about the discipline needed for the spiritual exercise, but not about its fruition. The reality and the realisation of the reality have no steps or limits. Don't yield to all sorts of delusions or desires for this stage and that. Stick to the goal and the journey. Never give up the discipline of the spiritual exercise. Don't change the time of meditation. With one aim and unchanging attitude, strive to attain it. That will vouchsafe the fruit. That will bless you with the bliss. Don't be led away by what others speak about their imaginary experiences. For you, nothing can be as genuine as your own experience. Therefore, first attempt to gain undeviating concentration (*ekagratha*); let that be your one aim.

Devotee: Meditation (*dhyana*) means vision of the form of the Lord, doesn't it, Swami? When such a form is actually seen, they say it is not real and genuine! What do they mean by this?

Swami: Seeing the form of the Lord is the goal of meditation. To achieve that is the aim. But before that goal is reached, there are some obstacles in the way. These are to be guarded against.

Devotee: What kind of obstacles? How are we to guard ourselves?

Swami: You have boarded a train to reach a village. You have heard that the particular village has a station. Many stations of the same type come during the journey and the train halts at each of them. But just because the train halts, you don't get down at any of them with your luggage, do you? If you get down, you won't reach the place where you have to go, will you? It is no good, alighting at intermediate stations, for you miss your goal and suffer many hardships, not to speak of delay. The wiser course is to note, even before starting on the journey, the names of the intermediate stations etc., by approaching people who have traveled that route before.

Devotee: Everyone appears as a seasoned traveler on the route! How are we to distinguish between those who pretend and those who know?

Swami: Of course, this has to be pondered. Each one might have traveled by a route of their own. Some might tell you the details of the route, the stations, etc., with only the aid of maps. If that is so, you should not follow their directions on that basis. Consider wherefrom they started and wherefrom you are starting; consider the route they traversed and the route you have to take. Moreover, it is impossible to consult those who have traveled as far as the goal, for they won't come back; they won't be available for consultation at the stage where you are.

So, you need not take the trouble to search and secure people who can tell you their own experience of the route. It is best to take the help and the advice given by the veterans in the *Gita*, the spiritual texts (*Sastras*), the *Vedas*, and the *Upanishads*. Rely on the words of the Lord and follow the teaching (*upadesa*) of the *Avatars* of the Supreme Spirit (*Avatara Purushas*). Besides, there are countless great men who can guide you as far as they themselves have traveled—but not beyond. For how can they tell you things they themselves haven't experienced?

Devotee: Well then, how can we get the opportunity to reach that path and attain that goal?

Swami: If one is destined for it, it won't be difficult at all; the chance will come seeking you. You must have heard the saying, "The person who went in search of a creeper tripped over it on the way." You need not doubt it; this

will happen.

Devotee: Swami, some people say that if we do not get some visions and sounds and lights during meditation, we can take it that our meditation has not progressed! Do You say that they are wrong?

Swami: It is the image of their own idea. Perhaps they do meditation in order to get such sights and sounds! Therefore, they experience them. They are things by which each one of them is deluded; they don't analyse the truth underlying the visions! Really speaking, they should not seek these impermanent delusions.

Devotee: Then what are we to seek, Swami?

Swami: Seek and desire the Principle of everything: that which, if known, everything is known; that which, if seen, all is seen and understood. Don't seek drops in your attempt to know the flood. When you have attained the Ocean (the basis of all the drops), you won't have the delusion of the drop.

Devotee: Some spiritual aspirants picture the *guru* to themselves during meditation. Is that correct?

Swami: The *guru* shows the path and teaches what is beneficial. So the *guru* has to be shown respect and gratitude. But the *guru* should not be taken to be all-powerful and all-inclusive. Of course, the Lord is in everyone, as the *Atma*; give each the status that is their due and no more.

Devotee: But some great men declare that the *guru* is both father and mother; that the *guru* is Brahma, Vishnu, and Maheswara all in one.

Swami: Based on the *Atma*, that is correct. But such *gurus* are rare. You can speak of such a *guru* as father, mother, God etc., on account of love and regard, that is all. How can the *guru* be so in fact? As loving as the mother, as protective as the father, you can say. But then, what do you say of those who gave you this body and brought you up even before you got the *guru*?

First and most important, be grateful to your mother and father. Serve them; make them happy; respect them. Respect the *guru* as the person who shows you the path, who looks after your progress and is interested in your welfare. Worship the Lord as the witness of everything everywhere, as the master of creation, preservation, and dissolution, and as the All-Powerful One. Remember, you can consider only the Lord as the universal form and as the universal friend and protector. All others have to be treated for just their individual status—mother as mother, father as father, *guru* as *guru*. In truth, these cannot be one.

Ponder this. If you seek direct experience of the Lord *Atma*, (*Atma-sakshatkara*), you have to install in your meditation the form of the Lord (the universal *Atma*) that you like most, and not the picture of your *guru*. It is not proper. The Lord is of a status higher than the *guru*, right? Of course, have His words as the foundation and try to attain the origin of all things; that will give the fruition of all efforts.

You are asked to treat the pebble as a gem and the gem as a pebble! Of course, through compulsion and bound by order, people may obey and accept, but can that feeling be genuine? It is no sign of meditation to have one idea outside and another inside. Unless this conflict is resolved and the same idea is outside as well as inside, there won't be any stability or success in meditation.

Devotee: Very good, Swami. Without knowing matters fully, many spiritual aspirants waste years in what they call meditation. They observe no law or limit. For all such, Your advice shows the Reality. It will establish them in the eternal. Today I am indeed blessed, Swami.