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## The Answer

Prasna means "question", Uttara means "answer", and Vahini indicates "a stream". This book is the stream of the questions that have evoked answers from Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. Among the tasks that Bhagawan has assumed while incarnating, He has declared as basic the one that He calls, "the clarification and purification of the religious scriptures of mankind." Every Vahini emanating from Him has done this service to some aspect or other of the spiritual upliftment of man.

This Vahini is one of the earliest in the series, since it seeks to elucidate the fundamental concepts and precepts of religion, especially the technical words and expressions that seek to concretise them. Hitherto published as an Appendix to a single Vahini, the Gita Vahini, it is now placed in the hands of seekers as a key publication, helpful for readers of all the Vahinis.

The Ancient Wisdom (Sanathana Dharma), the Perennial Path, has been communicated to posterity in words that have suffered distortion, devaluation, dilution and denigration through the efflux of time and the controversies among commentators. Varna, asrama, yoga, sanyasa, yajna, karma - these are interpreted by dialecticians and practitioners of varied schools and sects, in confusing and contradictory versions.

Bhagawan has resolved these tangles. His exemplary love and patience sweeten not only every answer but every question too, for, He has, by posturing as the interrogator, made the clarifications full and fruitful.

N. Kasturi

Editor, Sanathana Sarathi

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# 1. The Body And Senses

Q. Why is this human body called pancha-bhauthikam?

A. Because it is a product of the five basic elements (pancha-bhuuthas).

Q. What exactly are the five elements?

A. Ether, air, fire, water, and earth (akasa, vayu, agni, jala, and prithvi).

Q. From where did these originate?

A. Each subsequent element originated from the previous one.

Q. What is the cause of the first and therefore of all five?

A. Brahman, the Supreme, the Unmodified, the Fixed, the total Basis.

Q. What is the relationship between these five elements and this human body?

A. From Brahman originated all universal cosmic principles; from these was born ether; from ether, air; from air, fire; from fire, water; and from water, earth. The human body is the result of the combination of all five.

Q. In what form do these basic elements persist in the body?

A. Each element has again become fivefold and has gone into the composition of the body.

Q. What five has the first, ether, become?

A. The cogniser, mind, intellect, ego, and subconscious mind (jnatha, manas, buddhi, ahamkara, chittha).

Q. Speaking of "in the body", how are these indicated?

A. They are recognised as the "inner senses".

Q. Now, what are the five forms of the next element, air (vayu)?

A. Digestive, circulating, upward-moving, life breath, and downward-moving (samana, vyana, udana, prana, apana).

Q. And in the body, what are they called?

A. The five vital airs.

Q. And the fire element (agni)?

A. That element became the sensory organs: the ear, skin, eye, tongue, and nose.

Q. And how are they demarcated?

A. As the organs of knowledge (jnanendriyas).

Q. Tell me, what five did the water element become?

A. Sound, touch, form, taste, and smell.

Q. Do they also have a special name?

A. They are known as the five subtle or rudimentary elements (thanmathras).

Q. The earth element remains out of the five. How does it appear in the body?

A. The vocal organs, hands, legs, genitals, and the excretory organs.

Q. And they are known as?

A. As the organs of action (karmendriyas).

Q. Instead of considering this human body as constituted in this manner by the elements as a single unit, the vedanthins say there are many units in it! Is that true?

A. There are not many, but three. Some say there are four!

Q. Oh! What are they? What are they called? The third and the fourth?

A. The gross body, the subtle body, and the causal body (sthula, sukshma, and karana deha). Some aver that there is a fourth, called the super-causal body (maha-karana deha).

Q. What exactly is meant by the gross body?

A. It means the body that is constituted of the 25 elemental principles, which I already mentioned.

Q. What then is the subtle body?

A. The five organs of perception (jnanendriyas), the five subtlenesses (thanmathras), the five airs (pranas), the mind (manas), and the intellect (buddhi) - these seventeen categories combine to constitute the subtle body.

Q. Is this called only the subtle body (sukshma deha), or does it have any other appellation?

A. Why shouldn't it? It has. It is also known as the light body (taijasa).

Q. Is it indicated as belonging to any state?

A. Yes, it is.

Q. And what is the name of that?

A. The dream state (swapna avastha).

Q. Do you mean to say that the gross body has no state assigned to it?

A. Of course it has.

Q. Tell me the name of that state.

A. That is the wakeful (jagrath) state.

Q. What is the causal (karana) body?

A. There, the subconscious mind (chittha) is in association with the knower, the knowing principle (the jnatha).

Q. What is it known as?

A. The conscious inner individual Self.

Q. And the state?

A. The state is deep sleep (sushupti).

Q. Tell me also what they mean by the super-causal or transcendental body, the fourth.

A. The pure consciousness unmixed with any or elemental principle (thathwa), the witness eternal, the Self luminous. They refer to it as the Supreme Cause.

Q. Has it a name, like the rest?

A. It is known as Cosmic Intelligence (Hiranyagarbha).

Q. And the state?

A. It is stateless. It is beyond all states of consciousness, so it is described as the Imperishable (Akshara-purusha).

Q. Coming back to this gross body, what specific products are attributable to the five elements that united to form it?

A. To the earth: bone, skin, flesh, veins, hair.

Q. Of water?

A. Blood, urine, saliva, phlegm, brain.

Q. From fire?

A. Hunger, thirst, sleep, steadiness, mating.

Q. The element air produces?

A. Activity, movement, speed, shame, fear.

Q. Similarly, the element ether in the body must be responsible for some consequences.

A. Yes, for lust, anger, greed, pride, and envy.

Q. People have many addictions, don't they? Do these consequences of their composition have anything to do with their travails?

A. You seem to have some doubts. The reason for all the agony is this group of gross qualities. The addictions are also not many, although they may appear so. There are only four types. They are called mental inclinations (vasanas).

Q. What are the four habitual inclinations?

A. The body, mind, wealth, and sex; though there are others, all are ultimately based on these.

Q. People, in their pride, strut about blindly; what is this egotism that prods them on? How many varieties of egotism are there?

A. There are four types: vanity of clan, vanity of wealth, vanity of youth, and vanity of scholarship. Though there are other types, they can be grouped under these.



## 2. The Fourteen Worlds

Q. I have heard it said that the worlds (lokas) are all in the body of people! Some experienced people and some who are learned in the scriptures (sastras) have said so. Is that true? What are those worlds? Where are they situated?

A. Yes. They are: the earth in the feet, the atmosphere in the genitals, heaven in the navel, the great world in the heart, the world of good people in the throat, the world of virtue in the brow centre, and the realm of truth on the crest of the head. These worlds, called the upper worlds, are all situated in the body of people. There are also lower worlds. (The upper worlds, in the order given above, are the bhu-loka, bhuvar-loka, swar-loka, mahar-loka, janaloka, thapo-loka, and sathya-loka.)

Q. What are the lower worlds? Where do they exist?

A. The bottomless region in the soles of the feet, the depth of hell on the nails, the great depth in the heels, the bottomless pit in the hip, the infernal region in the knees, the great pit in the thighs, and deepest hell in the anus. (The lower worlds are the athala, vithala, suthala, thalathala, rasathala, mahathala, and patala.)

Q. If all worlds are in the body - the five elements being the components - what happened to the seven legendary seas? Are they also in the body or mind?

A. When the body is the residence for all the worlds, how could only the seven seas have a separate existence? They are also "in" the body. The Seas of Salt (urine), Cane-juice (perspiration), Wine (senses), Ghee (semen), Buttermilk (mucus), Milk (saliva), and Pure Water (tears).

Q. You spoke of several types of fire (agni). What are they, and how are they named?

A. They are called the five fires, because there are five in all: the fire of time, the fire of hunger, the cold fire, the fire of anger, and the fire of knowledge.

Q. Where do these reside?

A. In the feet, navel, stomach, eye, and heart.

Q. Besides these, there seem to be varieties of sound. I have heard some talk of them.

A. Yes, there are.

Q. Are they also in the body? How many types are there? And their names?

A. There are ten types, all in the gross body itself. They are the sounds of clapping, kettle-drum, insect, drum, bell, cuckoo, small bell, flute, bee, and finally, Om (pranava). These are the varieties of sound.

Q. If all creation is subsumed in this composite of the five elements, the body, please explain the words andanda, pinda-anda, and Brahma-anda.

A. Anda-anda means all this creation, liable to evolution and involution; the movable and immovable nature, as it is often called.

Pinda-anda is the name for the inner principle of all this duality, the seer and the seen, the doer and the deed, etc. It is duality that produces birth after birth, according to the karma of the birth.

Brahma-anda means the collection of the inner forces of the five great elements: Atma, related to the ether; soul (jivatma), connected with wind; the inner Atma (Prathyagatma), arising out of fire; Universal Soul (Chaith-anya-Brahma), associated with the water element; and Highest Atma (Paramatma), attached to the earth element.

These are all covered by that conception of Brahma-anda. This Force makes

the elements operate; beyond them is the Uncognizable or Unmanifest Absolute.

Q. Swami! I don't clearly understand this rather complex subject. Please explain it to me by means of some simple illustration.

A. Well, creation (anda-anda) is like the black retina of the eye, the inner principle is like the inner circle within it, and the inner forces of the five elements (Brahma-anda) is the light that shines therein. The splendour of that light is Brahma.

### 3. The Four Stages Of Life

Q. In this cosmos, which is the human body, what is the best dharma to follow? Which stage of life (asrama) is most conducive for that dharma? How many stages of life are there in all?

A. There are four stages of life. If you know about them, you can yourselves decide which stage of life you are to fulfil, examining your own achievement, progress, and aptitude. The four stages are: spiritual student (brahmacharya), householder (grihastha), forest dweller (vanaprastha), and renunciant (sanyasa).

Q. Different explanations are given by different people for the word spiritual studentship and the stage it denotes. I wish to know from you the real significance of that stage.

A. Very well. It is believed that all who haven't become householders are entitled to be called spiritual students.

This is very wrong. Only those who keep their minds away from the delusions of the world, who are constantly engaged in the thought of God, who don't look at or listen to light or merely entertaining stuff, who pursue good taste, who don't yield to joy or grief, who keep their minds, intelligence and self-consciousness in good trim by unremitting contemplation of the universal, eternal Supreme principle (Brahma-thathwa) - only such deserve the name spiritual student.

Q. What exactly does householder mean?

A. Being married and living with spouse and children do not constitute householdership, as most people think.

Without giving up the duties assigned to one's caste and status, the person has to treat all with equal consideration - kinsmen as well as others. One must

be aware of the rights of elders and the obligations of juniors; one has to be full of sympathy and willingness to help; one should treat all those who are dependent on one with loving kindness; one must grow wiser with each new experience of the world; one should acquaint oneself with the scriptures (sastras) and be alert to do righteous works (dharma) and avoid injustice; one must foster and protect one's spouse and children with a sense of responsibility; one has to trample down the eight egotisms, the conceit that develops from family, wealth, character, personal beauty, youth, scholarship, native place, and even accomplishments in austerity.

Conscious of the four goals of dharma, wealth (artha), desire (kama), and freedom (moksha), with no pride in material possessions though one might have them in large measure; utilising a portion of the day in the service of others; with no designs against any other household, deserving the trust of one's spouse and having a trusted spouse, each understanding the other and having full faith in the other - such are the ways in which the householder manifests.

Q. What, then, does forest dweller mean?

A. At that stage, one feels that all dualities are untrue and baseless. One gives up all desires, drops all attachment to the world, dislikes living in crowded places, and is anxious to achieve victory through repetition of a mantra.

So, one leads a life of austerity, eating only uncooked food, mostly fruits and leaves, and in moderation; moves in the company of sages and great teachers; listens to their teachings; and moves unfalteringly on the path of realising the Lord.

The forest dweller must get their spouse's approval when moving out into solitude for a life of spiritual practice, and they must also make sufficient provision for the children. If the spouse is willing to accompany, the two must take the spiritual journey together. They must henceforth live as brother and sister, and not as husband and wife. Provided this new relationship is

maintained, life in the home also can be transformed into a forest-dweller's life. On the other hand, if the old way of life is continued, life in the forest does not constitute forest dwelling.

Forest dwellers must not stay in the residences of married people. They must observe the vows prescribed for each season of the year. They have to brave the rain, sun, and cold during the seasons. They must be vigilant against being drawn toward physical pleasures by fickleness of the mind. They must seek and find pleasure only in contemplation of the Lord and in dwelling upon His glory.

Q. What does renunciation (sanyasa) mean?

A. Renunciation is above and beyond all promptings of sensual or objective pleasure. The renunciate deals with contemplation of the Lord as the very breath of life, an essential necessity always and at all places for sheer existence itself. The renunciate derives joy only from this contemplation and knows that wealth and kinship, affection and attachment are all momentary and liable to decline and end. The renunciate discards the external reminders even of caste status and ritual sacraments like the sacred thread ceremony (upanayana). The renunciate wears the ochre robe of the mendicant, doesn't live in populous places; lives on whatever little food they get; doesn't decry the place where there is no food; doesn't eat twice in the same place or sleep two days in succession in the same place; even conquers the temptation to sleep and eat; cares little for the rigours of the seasons; and is ever joyful and happy in the company of the Lord, who is invoked by meditation.

Q. Nowadays, many ochre-robed people move about as renunciates. Are they all equipped with the disciplines mentioned by you now?

A. There is, of course, no paucity of people who are so equipped. But it isn't possible to say that all are like that.

Q. Many, though renunciates, establish ashrams and get themselves established in worldly affairs and possessions and struggle for worldly pomp

and power. What is to be said of these?

A. For genuine renunciation and for detachment from all mental agitations, institutions like the ashrams you mention are great handicaps. For those who should give up all purposeful effort, the effort for the upkeep and progress of the ashram is an obstacle in the path. I need not tell you by what name such renunciates are to be called. I can only say that they don't deserve the name renunciate.

Q. Swami, how can the growth of the ashrams, which help people like us to know the means of liberation, be a bondage? And how can ashrams get on without money? I hope it is not wrong to accept help that is voluntarily offered.

A. My dear fellow! It is theft if the lock is broken and valuables are taken away, or if they are removed through an opening made in the wall; it is theft if by soft words in open daylight a person persuades you to part with your valuables. If renunciates cast their eyes on wealth, whatever the motive, it is harmful for their spiritual progress.

They should throw all such tasks on some trustworthy devotee and be only unconcerned witnesses. Their duty is to see that the people who seek support or shelter are assured of spiritual help, not to help the hermitage (ashram) to rise and prosper.

The flames of desire to make the ashram grow will rise into the bonfire of self-seeking egotism and burn out all that is commendable in the renunciate, especially, their Atmic bliss (Atma-ananda). The fire will destroy not merely the renunciate but also those dependent on the renunciate for guidance. The feelings of "I" and "mine" are such destruction-causing sparks. People must attach themselves to guides who are devoid of these. But once the ashram becomes the prime factor, the so-called "guide" has to become attached to people! It should be the other way. The guide must not be dependent on the world; the guide must be free from all dependence. That is the mark of the renunciate (sanyasi).





## 4. Freedom And Karma

Q. They also speak of blissful ascetics. Who are these? What are their qualifications?

A. Like the forest dwellers (vanaprasthas) and renunciates (sanyasis), ascetics have to be free from all attachment and hatred; they don't take any interest in their surroundings, be it a forest or town. They aren't worried in the least. They have no relation with others. They pay no heed to past, present, or future. They move about on thorn and stone, silent, smiling to themselves, ever joyous, ever alert, seeking no comfort and no shelter, seeking no place to sleep or eat. Spiritual bliss (ananda) is their food.

Even today, there are blissful ascetics in the Himalayas, in silent caves, immersed in their own inner Atmic bliss (Atma-ananda). Not all can see them. Only good luck can bring you to their presence.

But many pretend to be ascetics and go about with that name. The genuine ones would not seek people or appear in public. Even if they miss their way and come among people, they just slip away silently, lest they draw attention to themselves. When you find a blissful renunciate freely moving in company and mixing with human affairs, take him to be a monster!

Q. How long is one bound by the obligations and duties (dharma) related to the body?

A. As long as the individual Atma (jivatma) is not cognised. When that is discovered and known, there is no more need.

Q. How long is one aware of this individualized Atma?

A. Until the stream joins the sea. Till the stream of individual soul (jivi) reaches the source from which it came, the Sea of the Highest Atma (Paramatma).

Q. What is freedom (moksha)?

A. Freedom is liberation from all that binds. That is to say, the attainment of the ever-existing, ever-stable, everpure Atmic principle (Atma-thathwa); getting rid of the ever-changing, ever-unreal, impure body principle.

Q. That attainment is not for all, is it, Swami?

A. Why do you say that? Everyone who equips themselves can attain it; those who make the effort are attaining it.

Everyone who is ill is entitled to medicine; you cannot say that only some are. Yet, if the drug is costly, only those who can afford it can benefit by it. The Lord's grace is hard to get; you have to pay a heavy price. Pay the price, that is to say, earn it by spiritual discipline, and the grace of the Lord will save you from this disease of worldliness (bhava-roga).

Q. Who needs this spiritual discipline the most?

A. All who yearn to be saved from the flood of "birth-death", which is now sweeping them along.

Q. Baba! What is the cause of a person getting born?

A. The impact of actions (karma).

Q. How many varieties of actions are there?

A. Three! Bad, good, and mixed. Some add a fourth, the actions of the spiritually wise one (jnani), which are neither good nor bad.

Q. What is bad action?

A. Bad action are all acts done without the fear of God or of falling into sin; all acts done while under the influence of the six enemies - desire, anger, greed,

delusion, pride, and envy (kama, krodha, lobha, moha, madha, matsarya). Also, all acts that reveal the beast in people, that do not indicate that they have discrimination, keen intellect, and detachment; that are devoid of compassion, truth (sathya), dharma, peace (santhi), and love (prema) - these are negative acts.

Q. And the good acts?

A. All acts done in fear of God and sin; all acts done with truth, dharma, peace, and love - these are good acts.

Q. What are the mixed acts?

A. They are an interesting lot. Though the acts are good, though apparently they are prompted by fear of God and sin, still, they reveal impulses that are quite the opposite. People start rest houses and water-distribution centres, for example, but they don't pay the servants regularly and well. Their aim is just to win some fame. They give to the poor only useless clothes and worn coins as alms. Whatever they do, their purpose is to get publicity.

Q. You also spoke of wise acts, Swami.

A. Yes; "wise act" is the name used for an act done to learn from sacred scriptures, elders, or teachers the way to escape from bondage to duality and the falsity of the world and to develop faith in the values of truth, dharma, peace, and love - all acts that lead to the merging of the individual in the Universal Absolute.

## 5. Spiritual Wisdom And Devotion

Q. Swami, I have often heard people use the word a-manaska. What does it mean?

A. This entire creation, when it is realised as seen only by the eternal seer, the witness, simply disappears, as fog before the sun. That stage is known as a-manaska.

Q. What happens to the knowledge?

A. Even that disappears!

Q. This witness that you spoke of, where does it reside in the dream stage?

A. It is in the individual soul (jiva); it not only witnesses but also weaves and creates everything it sees.

Q. And during deep sleep?

A. It is in the full (the modification-less) reality.

Q. And, in the fourth stage (thuriya), the stage beyond deep sleep?

A. It is merged in the Changeless Entity (Iswara-sthana).

Q. What is meant by the term parama-artha?

A. Parama-artha, that is to say, beyond and above this world, which is limited by the body and senses.

Q. They talk also of Parama-padha. How will that be?

A. It will be devoid of name-form and deed-form.

Q. Swami! Does God transcend the universe, or is He immanent in the universe?

A. He fills the universe and is also beyond it, so there is no place outside Him. All places are inside Him; all names are His; no name is alien to Him.

Q. How is the Godhead who fills the universe to be referred to?

A. He can be called by many names: the Limitless Open, Supreme entity, the Highest Goal, the Bodyless, the Fullest Full, and also the Ungraspable-by-Word-or-Thought. He has many names. (He can be called Paramapadha, Parama-artha, A-sarira, Pari-purna, and also Avang-manogochara.) Q. Is this entity (sat) ancient or new?

A. Of course, it is ancient and not new.

Q. What is the ultimate goal of human life (purusha-artha)?

A. Why, freedom (moksha), of course.

Q. Swami, when talking of spiritual knowledge (vidya), I have heard people mention the four spiritual knowledges. What are they?

A. Metaphysics, the triple sacred science, vocational knowledge, and knowledge of administration of justice.

Q. These names are all new to me. What exactly is metaphysics?

A. The spiritual knowledge (vidya) by which one is able to discriminate between Atma and non-Atma.

Q. And the triple sacred science (thrayee)?

A. The spiritual knowledge by which one can attain heaven (swarga), through appropriate rituals and actions (karma).

Q. What does vocational knowledge teach?

A. Agriculture and other productive efforts.

Q. What is meant by administration of justice?

A. The rulers and guardians of society rule and guard according to this spiritual knowledge (vidya); it is essential for earning and enjoying riches and crops.

Q. Which of these plunge a person into a cycle of births?

A. All except the first, metaphysics.

Q. Mastery of the mind is held essential for spiritual victory. But to purge the mind of all evil, what virtues do we have to cultivate?

A. There are four chief virtues: comradeship, compassion, a kind of joy, and non-involvement (maithri, karuna, muditha, upeksha).

Q. Swami, I must trouble you to explain these also.

A. Comradeship and the company of the humble and the good, affection for the name and form of the Lord - these are included in maithri. Compassion is the kindness one feels toward the afflicted.

Q. What is the virtue that is a kind of joy?

A. That is the joy one feels when meeting people who are charitable, who serve others, who help those in distress, etc.

Q. Non-involvement?

A. Non-involvement is the feeling of unconcern toward the wicked; neither loving them nor hating them.

Q. Just like these four virtues, they also talk of four types of devotion. What are they, Swami?

A. My dear man, all the multifarious types can be included under four categories: the distressed, the desirer of wealth or power, the seeker of spiritual knowledge, and the wise one (artha, artha-arthi, jijnasu, and jnani).

The distressed is the person who is tormented by the agony of spiritual discontent and who prays to the Lord in distress.

Q. What does artha-arthi mean?

A. One who desires wealth or spiritual power (artha) and who worships God and prays to Him for that boon.

Q. Jijnasu, you said. Who are they?

A. Those who seek liberation steadily and strongly and who go in search of the Absolute.

Q. And the wise one?

A. One who has escaped from dual consciousness, who has known their identity with the basic truth of the universe.

Q. Tell us the names of some who have achieved fame through these types of devotion, Swami. Then it will become clearer to us.

A. Oh, there are plenty of names. Among the distressed devotees, I can tell you of Droupadi, Prahlada, and Sakkubai; among the seekers of wealth or power, Druva and Arjuna; among the seekers of spiritual wisdom, Uddhava and Radha; and among the wise, Suka and Sanaka.

## 6. Obstacles To Freedom

Q. Even those who proceed along the path of spiritual progress toward the goal of freedom (moksha) seem to have big obstacles, Swami.

A. Yes, the past, the present, and the future obstacles.

Q. What are they? What is the obstacle from the past?

A. Recollecting and remembering the past and getting affected by it.

Q. And the obstacle from the present?

A. That itself operates in four ways! Attending more to the peculiarities of textual criticism than the sense of the teaching, dullness of the intellect, which prevents one from grasping the words of the elders and the wise, crooked reasoning, and justifying one's own statement as correct, through an exaggerated conceit.

Q. What is the nature of obstacles from the future?

A. The future creates obstacles because you anticipate troubles and worry about them even before they come.

Q. I have heard people speak of four types of beings, but I'm not quite clear what they are.

A. Egg-born, sweat-born, earth-born, and mammals, Birds are good examples of the first group; lice, etc. of the second; ants, plants, and trees of the third; and people, cattle, etc. of the fourth.

Q. Well, Swami! Among these who are theists and who adore God, are there special types?



A. Of course! There are four types among them too.

Q. Their names?

A. Twice-born, ascetics, dull-witted, and knowers of the Atma (dwijas, sages, alpa-buddhis, and vidithatmas).

Q. Why are they called so? What is the special feature of each type?

A. The twice-born recognise God as in the fire they revere, and they worship Him with that conviction.

Q. The sages?

A. They recognise God in their hearts.

Q. What about the dull-witted?

A. They require images, pictures, or some other visible representation of His beauty and glory. They worship such.

Q. And the knowers of the Atma?

A. They recognise God as immanent in the universe and see only Him wherever they turn.

Q. May I ask who among these are the greatest?

A. Each is great in the stage they may have reached, but naturally, those who can experience the Lord everywhere at all times are the greatest.

Q. Swami! What traits of character do we have to avoid? That is to say, what are the obstacles in the path of one who seeks liberation from the cycle of birth and death?

A. Avoid the six enemies of people: desire, anger, greed, delusion, pride, and envy (kama, krodha, lobha, mada, and matsarya).

Q. What exactly is desire?

A. Desire for riches, property, honour, status, fame, children - why list the lot? Attachment to all things of this sensory world, this false, temporary, impure world.

Q. Anger?

A. Yearning to harm others and causing ruin to them.

Q. And greed?

A. Determination that no one else should partake of even a small fraction of what one has earned or what one has; also, that even in times of distress, one's possessions should not be diminished by use.

Q. What is the meaning of delusion (moha)?

A. The delusion that some people are nearer to one than others and the desire to please them more than others, leading to exertions for earning and accumulating for their sake.

Q. Pride?

A. Pride means the swagger that develops when one feels that one has more scholarship or strength or riches or fame than others. Even when people don't have these, pride makes people move about without reverence for elders and consideration for others' feelings and craving only their own comfort and security. Pride is extreme egotism.

Q. The last that you mentioned is envy. What does that mean, Swami?

A. When others are as happy as yourself, envy makes you miserable; you cannot tolerate it.

Q. There are also certain other traits too, like hypocrisy and conceit. What do they indicate?

A. Hypocrisy prompts people to do ceremonies and rituals and to give away vast sums in charity in order to win the applause of the world. Conceit is the pride that haunts a rich and happy person.

Q. What is the meaning of envy?

A. The desire that others should get the grief, the misery, and the worry from which one is suffering.

Q. So it is different from jealousy?

A. Yes. Jealousy means thinking always of doing evil to others, the preparedness to put up with any trouble in order to satisfy this desire to harm others.

All these are called inner foes. As long as one is caught in this net of delusion, which is spread by these foes, the yearning for liberation will not dawn in the mind.

## 7. The Five Sheaths

Q. How then can this delusion disappear?

A. Why, discrimination (viveka) and spiritual wisdom (vijñana) will make it disappear.

Q. For the individual soul (jivi) reflected in the intellect (buddhi) and the Changeless - does one of them superimpose on the other?

A. Though there may appear to be no superimposition, the superimposition exists.

Q. How is that?

A. The Changeless is unattached, unmoved, unaffected, and ever-free. Still, due to the superimposition, it appears differently. This is the result of their coexistence.

Q. Some elders say that "That (Thath)" and "you (thwam)" are the same, identical. How is that? What does it all mean? Please enlighten me.

A. Take the pot, house, and a pitcher. They are distinct, right? They are not identical. But the space (akasa) that is in all of them is the same. When the condition or limitation is removed, the space in the pot, hut, and pitcher all merge with the space that is unconditioned, unlimited. Light is also like this. The light inside and the light outside merge.

Q. Well, Swami, You have said that the human being in this body, which is composed of the five elements, has to realise the Atma encased in the five sheaths. What is a sheath (kosa), exactly?

A. A sheath is a case, a cover. A sword is put into a scabbard. Money is kept in a treasury. You must realise that the thing kept in this five-fold case is the

real "I". To see one's own truth, one has to remove the five cases.

Q. What are these five, Swami?

A. They are called the food, vital breath, mind, spiritual intelligence, and bliss sheaths (anna-maya, prana-maya, manomaya, vijnana-maya, ananda-maya kosas).

Q. What does food sheath mean?

A. This body grew in the womb of the mother with the help of the food (anna) taken by the mother. Even after birth, it has grown and is being sustained by food. After death, it becomes part of the Earth, which produces food. So it is called food sheath.

Q. Of what importance is this food sheath?

A. It is the gross body, which suffers grief and exults in joy.

Q. Is that its only name? Or does it have another name?

A. It does. It is also called "place of enjoyment".

Q. The sheath of vital breath, what does that mean?

A. The sphere of the five senses, the five vital airs (pranas); they form this cover.

Q. Swami! It seems there are not only vital airs but other subsidiary vital airs as well.

A. Yes. They are: belching, blinking, sneezing, yawning, and one that fills the body and causes it to grow fat.

Even after death, these affect the body and cause changes in the corpse. (In

Sanskrit, these vital airs are naga, kurma, krukara, devadatta, and dhananjaya).

Q. What does mental sheath mean?

A. The sphere of the five organs of perception (jnanendriyas), plus the mind, of which they have become the instruments. It is inside the sheath of vital air.

Q. You often say "mind, mind"; please explain what that mind is.

A. That which makes you feel you are the body and feel all things related to the body as "mine"; that which runs out through the senses to the objects in order to experience the pleasure therefrom. It is thus rendered very unsteady, always flitting from one object to another.

Q. Swami! How is one to realise that one is separate from, beyond, and above the food sheath?

A. The body is not evident before birth or after death. It is seen only during the intervening period of time. The body has a beginning and an end, a growth and decay. Such things are "products" or "effects", and effects are conditioned. So the body is also a limited, conditioned thing.

The wise one tells himself, "I exist always; I am not material; I have no cause and effect; I am separate from this gross body. Therefore, I cannot be this food sheath. I am the knower of the food sheath; I am the witness." When this knowledge is well established, one knows the truth. One must realise that one is beyond the food sheath.

Q. How is one to realise that one is beyond the vital air sheath?

A. At night, when the individual is asleep, the vital airs (pranas) are moving; but the individual doesn't know what is happening in them or around them. The individual doesn't fight if enemies come during sleep. The individual is inert, inactive, like a log. But "My nature is not this inertness. I am the ever-

conscious witness. I am separate from all the sheaths" - thus the individual must discriminate, reflect, and know.

## 8. Yoga And Freedom

Q. We commit many sins and do many meritorious deeds with this body and mind, Swami! They bring about grief or joy. This "I" of which you are speaking, is it "I" the doer, the consumer of the grief or joy?

A. Not for a moment. The one who does is the doer; doing is a modification. Doing produces a modification, doesn't it? So, one appears as if one is modifying. But the "I" is modificationless. It is the fixed; so it is not affected at all. Doer-ism is the quality of the inner psychosomatic instruments (anthah-karana). Thus, the "I" takes on the appearance of the doer and the gainer of the fruits of the deed.

Q. If so, how can we know about entry into this world and exit from this world into another?

A. The inner instrument, the subtle body (linga-deha), moves from this world to another, from one birth to another, according to the accumulated merit. It is the limited subtle body that has entries and exits. You, who are like the sky, omnipresent and unaffected, have no arrival into this world or departure to another. You are not of that nature.

Q. Then what is the means of gaining freedom (moksha)?

A. Spiritual knowledge (vijnana) is the means.

Q. Some great people say that yoga is the means. Is that true?

A. That is also true. There can be two roads to a place, can't there?

Q. Which is the better road?

A. Both are good and important. Both take you to the same goal; you just can't travel on both at the same time.



People can choose the road that suits their inner promptings and do the spiritual disciplines of that path. Both release spiritual seekers from bondage.

Q. Swami! Is spiritual wisdom (jnana) acquired by yoga or is yoga acquired by spiritual wisdom?

A. Yoga gives spiritual wisdom, which confers freedom (moksha) easily. This is the correct position.

Q. What is the effect of yoga? How does it benefit?

A. Yoga is like fire, which is why the phrase "fire of yoga (yoga-agni)" is used. It burns away all sins, so the inner instrument (anthah-karana) is rendered pure. When that happens, spiritual wisdom is born there. The splendour of that spiritual wisdom dispels the darkness of ignorance and delusion; that is the liberation.

Q. Does yoga have so much potentiality?

A. Why ask if it has? It has. However learned people are, however great the detachment, however deep the wisdom, unless they conquer the senses they cannot qualify for liberation (moksha). Without yoga, all these cannot rid themselves of sin. Unless they clear themselves of sin, their inner instrument doesn't become pure. Without a pure inner instrument, spiritual wisdom (jnana) cannot be acquired, and without spiritual wisdom, there can be no liberation. So, yoga is the very foundation.

Q. This is rather hard to follow, Swami! Give me some illustration to make it simpler, even for the unlearned.

A. When a storm is blowing, can anyone light a lamp? So too, when sensual desires are blowing strong, the wisdom-lamp can't burn; it will go out soon, even if it is lit.

Q. What are the gains from yoga?

A. It destroys all impulses and urges toward the sensual world. It puts down the mind and its agitations.

## 9. Spiritual Wisdom And Yoga

Q. You have been saying that spiritual wisdom (jnana) is essential. What exactly is the function of spiritual wisdom?

A. Spiritual wisdom makes you realise your own Reality (the Atma-swarupa).

Q. And yoga? If a person has no yoga, what happens?

A. That person is like a lame person.

Q. And if a person has no spiritual wisdom?

A. That person is like a blind person.

Q. They say that yoga destroys all blemishes, removes all faults. How does that happen?

A. Can rice become eatable unless it is boiled over a fire? By yoga and other disciplines, the subconscious mind (chittha) becomes soft. It is called severe austerity (tapas), heat; it becomes hot (taptha). Moreover, yoga and spiritual wisdom are like oil and flame. The oil is yoga and spiritual wisdom is the illumining flame of the lamp.

Q. Swami! Pardon me for asking this. So many people are teaching Vedanta, now. Have they all realised this truth, experienced this Reality?

A. How can this be said? You can judge them yourselves. See if they have purity of heart, purity of thought, purity of mind, knowledge of the inherent and immanent Highest Atma (Paramatma) - only such have the right to teach Vedanta, for only they can experience Vedanta.

Q. The teaching by those who have no such qualities, will it benefit to a certain extent at least?

A. Fine descriptions of the various delicacies and tasty dishes won't satisfy a hungry person. The Vedanta that stops with words is like that. Vedanta has to be experienced in order to satisfy. Again, listening without eagerness to learn is also ineffective. Unless the teacher has detachment from sense objects, the teaching is but parrot talk.

Those who come to listen, without desire to learn and benefit, are engaged only in showy demonstrations.

Q. Baba! You say that purity of heart, purity of mind, and knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Supreme Self (Paramatma) are essential. Then what use is spiritual practice done through the body, composed of the five elements? Isn't it enough if one acquires the wisdom (jnana) of one's essential nature?

A. Wonderful fellow! Simply because the rudder is essential, can you take it that the boat is unnecessary? How can you cross the river with only the rudder?

Believe that the Lord has conferred upon you the body as a boat to cross the sea of life (samsara) and subconscious mind stuff (chittha) as the main thing in it. That is the first step in Vedanta. Knowledge of the real form of divinity is the rudder. But that alone is not sufficient; physical habits and disciplines have also to be attended to. To attain the ethereal eternal stage, a disciplined body is important.

Q. Another doubt afflicts me, Swami. Talking of physical disciplines, may I know whether knowledge of Brahman (Brahma-vidya) makes any distinction between male and female?

A. Well, my boy! This boat has no such distinction. Knowledge of Brahman and cleansing of the subconscious mind do not depend on sex at all. All who are ill have the right to the drug that cures, right? So too, all who have the illness of birth and death have the right to knowledge of Brahman, the specific that will cure it. Perhaps not all can afford to have access to that

wonder drug, but you can't argue that some have no right to it.

Q. Why, Swami, some Vedanta scholars say that women have no authority to learn or practise knowledge of Brahman)! The boats are not of the same nature, it seems.

A. My child! As I have said, both have equal right to the specific. But both have to follow a regimen for the drug to act upon the system. Contemplation of the essential basis of oneself is the drug; along with it, the regimen of spiritual wisdom (jnana) and renunciation (vairagya) has to be rigorously followed.

Women may not be able to observe this disciplinary regimen as rigorously as men, since they are weaker.

Perhaps, the reason for those people denying women the right to this drug is this weakness. But all, whether men or women, who can observe the restrictions and regulations have an equal right to benefit by the drug of knowledge of Brahman (Brahma-vidya). That is my verdict.

## 10. Women And Knowledge Of Brahman

Q. You were talking of strict regimen. Men should also follow a strict regimen, right?

A. Of course! They are also flesh and blood, bone and marrow; they are also afflicted with illness. Each and every person who is afflicted with birth and death and suffering from this cycle is in need of this medicine. And whoever helps himself to this treatment has to follow the regimen. Man or woman, whoever neglects the regimen cannot get rid of the illness. People cannot afford to say that they are free from it; they have to stick to it closely and observe it strictly. Even if they have had initiation into the spiritual path of Brahma-realisation, if they are devoid of virtues like equanimity (sama) and control of the outer senses (dama), they cannot save themselves, whether they are men or women.

Q. But Swami, why do many scholars who are learned in the scriptures (sastras) declare that women have no right to acquire knowledge of Brahman (Brahma-vidya)? What is the reason?

A. There is no reason at all to declare that women are not entitled to knowledge of Brahman. Vishnu taught his wife, Bhudevi, the glory of the Gita, and the Supreme Lord (Parameswara) taught Parvathi the Brahman principle (Brahma-thathwa) through the Guru-gita. That is what the Guru-gita means when it says, "Parvathi spoke." What do these words mean? Besides, the Lord (Iswara) initiated Parvathi into yogic and mantra scriptures. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad mentions that Yajnavalkya taught Maitreyi this very same knowledge of Brahman.

This is a well-known fact. Now, you can yourself judge and draw your own conclusion whether women are entitled to knowledge of Brahman.

Q. Swami, others declare that women are not entitled to spiritual studentship (brahma-charya) and renunciation (sanyasa). Is it true? Do the Vedas prohibit

it?

A. The Vedas have two sections: Actions (Karma-kanda) and wisdom (Jnana-kanda). The section on actions is for beginners, for the undeveloped; the section on wisdom is for the more advanced, the developed intelligences.

There is no reference to men or women in connection with these. The beginners are worldly, so how can they understand the immortal message of the wisdom section about the Atma? In the Brihadaranyaka, we have mention of Gargi and Maitreyi shining in the spiritual splendour of spiritual studentship (brahma-charya) and renunciation (sanyasa). In the Mahabharatha also, we have Subha Yogini and other women who are ideal women, full of virtue.

Q. Can a woman win knowledge of Brahman even while leading a householder's life?

A. Why not? Madalasa and others got knowledge of Brahman while in the householder stage of life. You must have heard in the Yoga-vasishta and the Puranas how they attained the height of auspiciousness, Brahmic wisdom itself. Then again, don't the Upanishads declare that Katyayani, Sulabha, Sarangi, Viswavara and others were adepts in Brahmic wisdom (Brahma-jnana)?

Q. Swami, have any women attained knowledge of Brahman while in the householder stage? And who attained it while in the renunciate stage? And who realised it while in the forest-dweller stage? Did any women get it in the spiritual student stage of life?

A. Don't think that no women realised knowledge of Brahman in any of these stages. Chudala attained it while a householder; Sulabha Yogini, as a renunciant; Maitreyi, in the forest-dweller stage; and Gargi, in the student stage. Other great women of Bharath (India) also achieved this height. Why, even today, many are in this great category. I simply mentioned four names because you came up with that question. So don't in the least lose enthusiasm. There is no need for loss of heart.

Q. When we have so many examples of women who have attained knowledge of Brahman, why do so many argue against it? Why do they impose limitations on women?

A. It is sheer absurdity to deny women the right to earn knowledge of Brahman. But in worldly matters, it is necessary that some limitations be respected by them. They are laid down only in the interests of dharma and for worldly prosperity. For the sake of the upkeep of morals and the social health in the world, women have to be bound by them. They are too weak to maintain certain standards of life and disciplines. They have some natural handicaps; that is the reason for these limitations.

This does not mean any fundamental inferiority. Why, even pundits and people learned in the scriptures (sastras) acquire their spiritual wisdom (jnana) through the reverential homage they pay to the feminine deity Saraswathi. The patron deities of education (vidya), wealth, and spiritual wisdom are all feminine - Saraswathi, Lakshmi, and Parvathi. Even in customary correspondence, when women are addressed, they are referred to as, "To â, who is equal to Lakshmi", etc.

You always speak of mother-father, Gauri-Sankara, Lakshmi-Narayana, Sita-Rama, Radha-Krishna, etc. The feminine name comes first, then the masculine. From this itself, you can gather how much reverence is paid to women here.

Q. The distinction between man and woman - do you condemn it as false knowledge, or do you value it as Atmic knowledge?

A. My dear fellow! The Atma (the divine Self) has no such distinction; it is eternally conscious, pure, self-effulgent.

So it can only be ignorance; it can never be Atmic wisdom. It is a distinction based on the body mask, the limitation. The Atma is neither masculine, feminine, nor neuter; it is the form that limits and deludes and wears these names.





## 11. Life Stages And Castes

Q. Swami! Of the four life stages (asramas) - student, householder, forest dweller, and renunciant - which is basically important?

A. Just as all living things are dependent on the life-giving breath, so all life stages are dependent on the householder.

The householder provides food and drink to the rest and fosters them, promotes the study of the Vedas, and guards the scriptures. So the householder stage is the most important. In the scriptures (sruthis), in the Naradaparivrajaka Upanishad, and in the Manu Dharma Sastra, it is declared that the householder who strictly adheres to the dharma of their life stage is worthy of the greatest respect.

Q. But Swami, some people say that the renunciant is superior to the householder; how far is this correct?

A. Whatever the stage of life, if the person follows the dharma laid down for that stage, carries it out in practice, and steadfastly yearns for liberation, that person can get it. There is no doubt. To win knowledge of the true Self (Atma-jnana), one need not prefer this stage of life to that; all are capable of securing it. There is no superior or inferior. It is only conduct and character that can be labeled as superior and inferior.

A. Swami! They say that the householder stage binds, but the student and the renunciant stages liberate. How did that opinion arise?

A. I don't agree with that. Why, the one who earns money by lawful means, who honours his guests, who serves and pleases others, that one attains liberation along with those learned in the scriptures (sastras) and those who are well established in the fundamental philosophy of the spirit.

No one can cross the ocean of birth and death just because they are a

renunciant or student. High ancestry, attainments in asceticism, the status of a monk, profound scholarship - by themselves, these won't help. There must also be faithful and steady pursuit of one's own duty, study of the scriptures, like the Veda or the Bhagavad Gita, and a disciplined spiritual life of repetition of the name and meditation.

Q. Swami! What virtues should people in each stage of life (asrama) cultivate in order to be saved?

A. Ten virtues together comprise the basic dharma of the aspirants: compassion, non-stealing, intelligence, spiritual learning, truth, control of the senses, purity, patience, contentment, and non-anger. All people must cultivate these ten, whatever their stage of life. They are enough to save you, wherever you are. And if one has not acquired them, life is a waste, whatever the stage of life. The daily routine of life is the essential thing, and it should reflect these ten qualities. This is the very thing that Lord Krishna told Arjuna in reply to his question.

Q. Swami, you said that Arjuna asked this same question about the importance of renunciation of the fruits of action (nishkama-karma) observed with the ten conditions. What did Krishna reply?

A. Krishna said, "The highest stage of liberation that is attained by adepts of the yoga of wisdom (jnana-yoga) is also attained by those who are adepts at the yoga of renunciation of the fruits of action; both yield the same result.

Know that this is the truth. There is no difference in this between householder and the renunciant (sanyasi).

What is needed is unremitting practice and sincere endeavour. This requires renouncing desire, giving up egotism and the sense of possession, even discarding active thinking and single-pointed contemplation of the Supreme Universal Eternal Principle (Brahma-thathwa). For one who has achieved this, there is no grief, because there is no shade of ignorance. The wise one who has won this height can never be deluded by the false and the temporary.

Even if at the last moment of life one is able to realise this wisdom (jnana), one is certain to be liberated from the cycle of birth and death." Q. Then why were these castes (varnas) established?

A. They relate to the physical aspect; they don't affect the spiritual aspect at all. They indicate physical make-up.

Of course, "physical" includes the intellect, the subconscious mind (chittha), the inner instrument (anthah-karana), etc. Unless these are trained and regulated, the Atmic dharma cannot be understood. Race, religion, dharma are all to help in regulating and sublimating the instincts and impulses. That is why wise people accepted and honoured these. The Atma is truth (sath), awareness (chit), and bliss (ananda) - those are its nature, if somehow it has to be indicated. This can be realised only by purifying the heart, mind, and intellect of people.

People who have that purity, whatever their caste or stage of life, can attain liberation (moksha); that is what the scriptures (sastras) declare. A person who is beset by attachment to some and hatred toward others, even in the solitude of the jungle, will meet only evil. Even if one is leading the householder life in the midst of the family, if one has achieved victory over the senses one is a real ascetic. Engaged in action (karma) that is not condemned, one is entitled to become a wise person (jnani). For one who is unattached, the home is a hermitage. Then, even by means of progeny, of activity, of riches, and of holy sacrifices (yajna), oblations (yaga), and similar rituals, liberation can be achieved.

What is wanted for liberation is just freedom from the impurity of attachment. Attachment is the bondage.

## 12. The Scriptures And Renunciation

Q. Swami, you say that one has to do some things and that one shouldn't do some others. How are we to know which is which? What is the authority?

A. The scriptures (sastras) are the authority. The "Laws of Manu (Manu-smrithi)" itself declares, for example, that castes (varnas) and stages of life are only for physical purification and that they don't affect the gaining or losing of the Highest.

Q. If that is so, why all this bother of caste and stages of life and the rules and regulations binding them?

A. Ah, they are required until you become free from attachment. Until then and for the sake of that, the regulations, limits, and rules have to be obeyed to the very letter. The medicine has to be taken as long as the illness persists. Each type of illness has a special medicine for its cure, doesn't it? And a different course of diet and a special regimen. After one has gotten rid of the illness, one can partake of a feast with the rest. Without accepting this, if the well and the ill both demand the same feast, it will lead to calamitous consequences.

The castes and the stages of life are the medicine prescribed for those who suffer from the ills of worldliness and worldly attachment. Attachment (raga) is the illness (roga), and it can disappear only by a strictly observed regimen. Unless you get well, you cannot be liberated. This is the true meaning of Vedanta. The one who knows this, whatever the stage of life, attains liberation.

Q. Swami! Have any great souls achieved liberation (moksha) while in the householder stage?

A. Janaka, Aswapathi, Dilipa - these are examples of people who gained liberation as householders.

Q. Swami! Isn't it necessary to follow strictly the injunction of the scripture (sruthi) that enjoins on people the duty of completing the student stage and then, after passing through the next stage of the householder, to enter the forest dweller and observe all the limitations and regulations of that stage, before ultimately taking on the life of full renunciation? Or can one take renunciation even without going through the other steps?

A. Yes, whenever one gets detachment from objects, one can take renunciation. Unless such a chance is seized, one is bound to fall. Whatever stage you are in, when you get full renunciation, you can enter upon the renunciation (sanyasa) stage from that very moment. There is no iron rule that you must live through the three earlier stages. This too is the injunction of the scriptures. The reason is this: such a pure soul has undergone the training available in the other stages - purification in the crucible of life - in previous births. Destructive tendencies have been rooted out and the progressive ones, the uplifting ones, have been developed in past births.

Q. How are we to know that such transformation has already been earned in past births? Are there any signs by which we can discover that such and such a stage can be skipped? If there are, please tell me.

A. The fact that a person has no inclination for the other three stages, that one has no attachment or attraction toward them, is a clear sign. If detachment has developed in the past birth, the inclination will be absent. Since the awareness that only the Atma is real has dawned, the person is unattached to the three earlier stages of life. When renunciation has appeared, one can give up worldly life even though the series have to be overstepped. This is approved by scripture.

But the person who confers renunciation (sanyasa) must examine fully and convince himself that the person on whom renunciation is being conferred is devoid of sensual impulses and attachments. Renunciation should be given only to one who has no agitation in the mind, as they are called; only such can be said to be unattached.

The candidate should also examine themselves to see whether their inner consciousness is free from the qualities (gunas), dull, active, or even progressive. If it is not so free, the candidate will not only break the vows of renunciation and be outcast but may even break down under the burden and meet a calamitous end.

Q. Is renunciation (sanyasa) of one kind, or are there different kinds? Please tell me.

A. There are three types of renunciation: physical renunciation, mental renunciation, and Atmic renunciation.

Q. What does physical renunciation mean?

A. Renunciation in appearance, as far as the outer body is concerned. One wears the ochre robe, assumes the name, appears in the form, but has no awareness of the Atma; one wanders amidst all the objective desires clinging to external things. One is like an ordinary person, for all intents and purposes.

Q. And mental renunciation?

A. In mental renunciation, one gives up all decisions and desires; one has the mind under strict control; one is not guided by impulses or agitations; one is ever calm and collected.

Q. You mentioned Atmic renunciation as the third.

A. Here, one breaks through all thoughts about things that are unrelated to the Atma, because one is ever immersed in contemplation of the true reality, "I am Brahman (Aham Brahmasmi)." One is steady in the consciousness of being Atma. One's bliss (ananda) is continuous. This is called bliss-filled.

The thickest darkness can be destroyed only by the light that emanates from the splendid solar orb; similarly, without the splendour of Atmic renunciation, ignorance cannot be dispersed - the encasements that hide the heart can't be

shattered and the Atma can't shine in its own glory.

Q. How are these types attained? What are the signs that they have been attained?

A. Outward renunciation (deha-sanyasa) is attained by discrimination between the eternal and the temporary, the evanescent and the everlasting. Mental renunciation (manosanyasa) is reached by conquering the waywardness of speech, senses, and mind. Atmic renunciation (Atma-sanyasa) is won by filling oneself with the principles of Vedantic thought. When these educative influences become strong and you are well established in these virtues and attitudes, then you can get liberated as a result of their combined effects.

Q. Who among these are really fortunate, their lives being spent in a worthwhile way?

A. Well, the one who, like the bee, sucks the honey in the flower in silence and in great bliss, who is intent on uninterruptedly tasting the nectar of Atmic bliss; who ignores this world as only a "scene" - that one is the most fortunate, and their life is the most worthwhile.

Q. Then, Swami, what is it that is spoken of by the elders as attaining truth, indestructibility, purity, and inner peace (sathya, nithya, nir-mala, and santhi)? How are these to be attained?

A. As I said already, the one who does not get attached to the "scene" but is engrossed in their own Atmic bliss - that one attains truth, indestructibility, purity, and inner peace. Even if one of these is attained, that is enough; for one includes all.



## 13. Mantras And Repetition Of The Name

Q. Is there any mantra or repetition of the name (japa) that will give us this peaceful (santhi) state that you spoke about just now? If there is any, which is the important one?

A. Mantra and repetition of the name are essential for all types of people. What is a mantra? Ma means manana (reflection, understanding) and thra means saving, so mantra means that which can save you if you meditate on it.

A mantra will save you from being caught up in the coils of this worldly life, which is infested with death, grief, and pain. Of all mantras, the Om (pranava) is the highest and the best. It is the very head and crown of all of them.

Q. Suppose each one does repetition of the name of their chosen deity according to their own light. I believe it is not wrong. Or is it?

A. You mean that however savage or foolish people may be, they cannot but call on the Lord! Well, if the name is recited along with Om, it is bound to be beneficial. Just as the waters of the ocean are raised into the sky by the rays of the sun and then, falling as rain, form rills and rivers and rush toward the ocean to become the waters of the ocean again, so all sounds and mantras that were once only Om reach the Om through repetition and other disciplines and rites. They all get merged in Om, their source.

Q. Swami! Some elders have said that the more seed syllables (bija-aksharas) a mantra has, the more effective it is. Are such mantras to be preferred to others that have only a few seed syllables?

A. I don't agree with the view that fewer seed syllables diminish the chance for concentration in meditation. Spiritual seekers would be benefitted more if they repeat the five syllables or eight syllables with the Om (pranava) added in the beginning. When they have proceeded some distance thus, they can

give up even the words, concentrate on the form depicted through the sound, and transform the mantra into the God (Devatha) Himself. That is why the scripture (sruthi) says, "Brahma is silence, the absence of sound (Nish-sabdo Brahma Uchyathe)." Q. How are we to create a vacuum of sound? How can that be Brahman?

A. The scriptures declare that this objective world is worldly illusion (maya). They also say that He who has all this illusion under His control is the Master (Iswara). So try to have all this illusion under control and become the Lord yourself.

The stage when, as far as you are concerned, the objective world has come to nought is the stage when you attain the Supreme Absolute Brahman. Until the objective world is set to nought, you cannot attain Brahman; that is certain. Like the snake that discards its skin and assumes a new skin, the spiritual aspirant discards the old skin and puts on the skin of the deity indicated by the mantra upon which the aspirant concentrates.

Q. Pardon me, Swami! I can't understand all this. Make it clear through some more examples.

A. You have seen an egg, yes? When the bird sits on the egg for some time, the chick grows inside it to its full stature; when the shell of the egg is broken, the chick emerges and assumes its real form. In the same way, when the spiritual aspirant, with a purified consciousness, dwells on the mantra and its meaning and revolves its significance in the mind without break, the vision grows in his mind without break, the shell of ignorance (a-jnana) breaks, and the aspirant shines in the splendour of the divinity that has formed in their consciousness.

Q. All things originate from Om (pranava) and all things finally merge in Om, they say. Then why do the very elders who say this declare that some can pronounce this and some cannot?

A. What is the world, except the commingling of the five elements? The Om is

the very life of all the elements, so it is the life-breath of the world itself. The roar of waters falling down a cliff and the beating of waves on a promontory of the shore repeat only the Om. The sound of inhaling and exhaling is itself the sacred sound (pranava), isn't it? Whether they know it or not, the heigho of the men who carry a palanquin on their shoulders, the heave of those who lift weights, the heehoy of those who beat clothes on slabs by the riverside - all resound with the Om. Repeat it with a full knowledge of its inner significance, and you will soon be relieved of the burden of this world's worry.

The Om (pranava) of the breathing process is also the saviour from grief. It is meaningless to argue that some have the right to utter the Om and some don't. Those who don't breathe may not have the authority to utter it, but all who breathe are reciting it already in the process, so there is no sense in denying it to any one.

Do you know Krishna's reply when Arjuna asked how one should remember the Lord at the point of death?

He said that one should recall to mind the Om, which is undifferentiated from Him. He said that such a devotee will attain the highest goal. So everyone has the right to this great mantra, the Om sound (pranava).

Q. How can the goal be reached through meditation practice of the Om sound? How can the person who meditates become transformed into the thing meditated upon? Please make this unequalled mantra, and the way it helps us, clearer to me by means of easy illustrations.

A. Very good. The Om sound (pranava) is the bow; the Atma is the arrow; the Universal Absolute Brahman is the target. Like the practitioner of the art of archery, the spiritual aspirant must be unaffected by things that agitate the mind. The bowman who is paying one-pointed attention to the target is filled with the target and becomes the thing meditated on. In the Kaivalya Upanishad, the Mundaka Upanishad, and various parts of the scripture (sruthi), the Om is extolled in various ways.

Hence, this mantra, which liberates people, can be recited and meditated upon by all. All can practise Om worship. You need have no doubt on this point.

## 14. Spiritual Austerity

Q. Can one realise the Atma and merge, as You say, in the Om (pranava) with this material body composed of the five elements? Can the Atma be isolated from the body? How is that done?

A. By meditation and other disciplines, and by the recital of the Om mantra, one can discover the Atma and isolate it from the body. It is something like getting butter from curds, oil from sesame, water from the subsoil, fire from wood. Churning, squeezing, crushing, boring, turning - these processes are needed, that is all. What happens is the separation of the Atma from the body, the disappearance of the belief that the body is the Atma or the Self.

Q. Swami! Many elders and sages say that we should visualise the individual soul (jivatma) as the Supreme Atma (Paramatma), that we should cultivate that feeling, that conviction. How is that possible?

A. Why do you think it is difficult? Isn't it easier to speak the truth than to speak falsehood? You are now declaring a falsehood as true, so all kinds of difficulties arise. Accept the truth that the individual soul and Supreme Lord are the same, and things become easy. First, recognise the Atma, the "Self", as unrelated to the body; you can do this by meditation, etc. Just as scent is separated from flowers, sugar from cane, gold from rock, so separate the Atma from the physical body. Then, by means of single-pointed reflection and meditation, etc., you can visualise the individual Atma as one with the Supreme Atma. That is the consummation of intense spiritual practice (tapas), the final freedom (nirvana).

Q. What exactly is intense spiritual practice, Swami?

A. It means the end of the activities of the senses; one must be the master of all of them. There should be no trace of craving or appetite. It involves effort to attain Brahman, incessant yearning for the end. It must be expressed through moderate food and sleep. It means agony to realise the Principle.

Such spiritual austerity (tapas) is called pure (sathwic).

Q. What then is emotional spiritual practice (rajasic tapas)?

A. Those who simply starve the body and make it weak without curbing the senses and controlling emotions are doing only emotional spiritual practice. They don't study or meditate upon the Atmic principle (Atma-thathwa); they lay emphasis on physical asceticism.

Q. There must also be spiritual practice out of ignorance (thamasic tapas).

A. There is. To propitiate the Gods for favours and then, with the favours as instruments, to desire the exploitation of the world - that is spiritual practice out of ignorance. Only that intense spiritual practice is proper that has as its aim the attainment of God, the realisation of Brahman, the achievement of the highest wisdom. Only that type of spiritual practice is approved by the scriptures (sastras). All the rest will lead you astray, away from the goal. Only spiritual practices approved by the scriptures deserve that name. The others are ignorance (thamas), not intense spiritual practice (tapas). Tapas means "heat"; the heat burns out sin and reduces all fate (karma) to ashes.

Q. The scriptures (sastras) say that the sages had in their ashrams things like the wish-fulfilling gem, the wishfulfilling tree, and also the wish-fulfilling cow, which gave them whatever they wished for. I can't understand why they should do spiritual practice at all. Please make this clear to me.

A. Think about it well. Then you will know that the wish-fulfilling gem is not a jewel, nor the wish-fulfilling tree a tree, nor the wish-fulfilling cow a cow. They are all names for the fruits of intense spiritual austerity (tapas). They are powers that automatically accrue to a person as a result of spiritual austerity.

When one realises all that one wishes for, it is called the power of the wish-fulfilling tree. When one subdues all desire, it is called the power of the wish-fulfilling cow. What is the power of the wish-fulfilling gem? It is the stage when you have no worry or mental agitation, a stage in which all sorrow is

kept afar. When thought ends and the supreme spiritual bliss (ananda) is won, it is the power of the wish-fulfilling gem. Mental agitation must disappear from thought, word, and deed.

Q. They also speak of mental spiritual practice (tapas). What does that mean?

A. Observe control of speech; cultivate purity of feeling; practise humility; let your thoughts be always on the Supreme Absolute Principle (Brahma-thathwa). Then you can be said to be in mental spiritual practice.

Q. And physical austerity?

A. That is also good, in its own way. Revering elders, spiritual teachers, saints, sages, and God make for purity.

Non-violence, sympathy with all beings, straight-forwardness - all contribute to physical well-being, health, and wholesomeness. Mental austerity leads to purity of mind; verbal austerity, to purity of speech.

By these three, the precious possessions of wish-fulfilling cow, wish-fulfilling tree, and wish-fulfilling gem are attained. They are attainments, not just cows, trees, or jewels.

Q. Have any attained the Brahmic principle (Brahma-thathwa) and the dharmic principle with the help of their success in intense spiritual practice? Who are they? Please tell me.

A. Kapilamaharshi attained the Brahmic principle, the great sage Jaimini attained the dharmic principle, Narada became a Brahmic sage, Bhagiratha brought the Ganga down, Gautama persuaded the river Godavari to flow on the earth, Valmiki realised the force of the Rama mantra and was enabled to compose the Ramayana, Gargi was established in spiritual studentship (brahma-charya), and Sulabha in spiritual wisdom - all through intense spiritual practice alone.

Why go on quoting examples, one after the other? Through intense spiritual practice, even Brahma (the creator) and Rudra (the destroyer) become one's collaborators.

Q. Swami! In order to reach this high stage, do you say that birth in a high caste is necessary? Or is spiritual practice of a high order enough?

A. Caste without character is meaningless; it is just an empty label. Spiritual practice without the base of character is like the journey of a blind person. Morality, virtue, character - these are vital. On the basis of these, if spiritual practice is done according to the scheme laid down for the path one has selected, then there is no doubt of success. But you must take note of a caution that is essential. You must not give place to sloth simply because race is not important. Moral standards also accrue according to birth, so, to foster them, the consciousness of birth is helpful and important.

But, if, through the accumulated merit of past births, one has the treasure of goodness and virtue, then one need not attach much importance to birth. Only those who practised yoga in previous births and who could not complete the process will have that type of excellence. The main thing is to acquire the moral standards prescribed for the birth, foster the birth with moral standards, and make yourself fit and full, with a high status in life. For some distance on the path of spiritual practice and spirituality, both birth and moral standards will help. The qualities (gunas) will be sublimated through these two.

Q. Therefore, some have attained Godhead through the merit of previous lives. Give some instances, please.

A. My dear man! You should not seek to discover the source of a river or the ancestry of a sage. They may be quite unimpressive. You should be satisfied with their services. Their experience is what is most valuable. Be inspired by them, be led by them to similar efforts. If you go in search of the beginnings, you lose the vital core.



Still, since you raised the question, I will tell you. Vyasa was born of the fisherman caste; Sounaka was of the Sunaka clan; Agastya was born in a pot; Viswamitra was a warrior (kshatriya), and Sutha was born in the fourth caste. In addition, we have among those who were virtuous and good, who had their eyes always on their birth and moral standards, who renounced all and stuck to the ideal of liberating themselves from the bondage of birth and death and the illusion of physical values: Sanjaya, Sathyakama, and many more.

My dear man! Self-effort, discrimination (viveka), intense spiritual practice (tapas) - these qualify people for the highest status. Without purity of the inner instruments, no person, however high their caste, can reach the Highest.

If inferior copper is added to gold, the alloy loses value. Just as pure gold becomes an alloy through contact with copper, the Universal Form gets the inferior ego added to it in this ocean of worldly existence (samsara). The Universal becomes transformed into the individual soul (jivi). Now, what has to be done to get back the real gold Principle (thathwa)? Through intense spiritual practice and vows, through polishing and cleansing the intellect (buddhi), the original stage has to be regained.

You wash your feet after walking through the mire; your mind also has to be washed of the mire of attachment to objects. Only spiritual wisdom (jnana) can burn the seeds of attachment so that they may not sprout again.

## 15. Eightfold Discipline Of Yoga

Q. To get the fortune of escaping birth and death, elders say that yoga is very important. What yoga are they talking about?

A. The Yoga-sastra declares that certain postures have to be utilised in order to remove the ever-widening circles of mental agitations and purify the mind - also to steady faith, to establish spiritual wisdom (jnana), and to arouse the spiritual power that is latent in people (kundalini sakthi).

Q. It is said that yoga has certain auxiliaries or parts. How many are there, and what are their names?

A. They are eight parts in all: control of the inner senses, control of the outer senses, sitting postures, breath control, control of the mind, concentration, meditation, superconscious state (yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, samadhi).

Q. If liberation (mukthi) is to be attained, do all these have to be practised to perfection, or is one of them enough?

A. Oh, liberation can be won if the first two, control of the inner and outer senses, are mastered. Why, the universe is maintained by just these two!

Q. When we speak of yoga, do we mean only this particular yoga with the eight parts, or are there other yogas?

A. Yoga is not just this one; there are four in all.

Q. What are they? What are their names?

A. Their names are popularly given as mantra yoga, the royal yoga (raja-yoga), the yoga of merging (laya yoga), and the yoga of body postures (hatha yoga).

Q. What parts do these four have, in their turn?

A. Silly fellow! For all the millions of humans, the two eyes are the instruments of vision, aren't they? So too, for all the yogas, control of the inner and outer senses (yama and niyama) are the eyes; without them, nothing can be visualised. Purity of mind is essential for every yogi. And for that, control of the inner and outer senses are indispensable.

Q. What do you mean by control of the inner and outer senses? By any chance, do these also have auxiliaries parts or characteristics that mark them out?

A. Of course. Each has ten such. It is only when you are well-established in all these that you are liberated.

Q. Tell me the ten that are under control of the inner senses.

A. Nonviolence, truth, non-stealing, celibacy, compassion, honesty, patience, fortitude, moderate food, cleanliness (ahimsa, sathya, a-stheya, brahma-charya, daya, arjava, kshama, dhriti, mithahara, soucha). All ten are included in control of the inner senses.

Q. May I know the ten included in control of the outer senses?

A. Intense spiritual practice, contentment, piety, charity, worship of God, listening to spiritual texts, modesty, devotion, repetition of the name, spiritual vows. These ten form control of the outer senses. They are the very foundations of the mansion of liberation; all yogis must be well established in these - in control of the inner as well as the outer senses. (In Sanskrit, the ten are: tapas, santhosha, asthikya-buddhi, dana, Iswara puja, Vedanta vakya-sravana, lajja, mathi, japa, vratha.

Q. Yoga insists on postures also, you said. What exactly does that mean?

A. They are very helpful for wise men cognizant of the Atma (Atma-jnanis)

and yogis.

Q. There must be many varieties of physical postures, yes?

A. Yes, they are many. But the chief are perfect sitting posture, bound lotus pose, and shoulder stand. Besides, there are postures like peacock and seated forward bend.

Q. What are benefits result from these physical postures?

A. They give hardihood to the body and enable the mind to concentrate for long periods.

Q. Swami! You mentioned the part of yoga called breath control Now tell me about breath control (pranayama). How many types of breath control are there?

A. There are many types, but since in this present world most types are impossible in practice, only those that help meditation have to be adopted. They are simplified systems of breath control.

Q. Simplified systems? How are they beneficial?

A. Like metals purified over fire in a crucible, the slag of karma is removed by breath control and the mind is freed from contamination. This and bodily purification are brought about; both mind and body are rendered pure.

There are two types of breathing exercises: one with and the other without a mantra. The one without can at best transform only the body, but with a mantra, the mind is also transformed.

Q. Swami! How are we to practise it?

A. Two seconds inhaling, four seconds exhaling, and eight seconds holding the breath. Breath control has to be practised carefully for three months.

Later, the duration of inhalation, exhalation, and retention can be doubled.

When six months are spent in this steady practice, the activities of the senses are laid low.

If practised with faith and feeling, breath control will tame the agitations of the mind; otherwise, it becomes mere physical exercise, improving just physical health. Pure food, celibacy (brahma-charya), living in solitude, moderate speech - these conditions also have to be strictly observed.

Q. Swami! The next one you mentioned is control of the mind. How many mind-control methods are there?

A. Three methods: with form, without form, and attention to the Self, depending on the purpose for which the senses are controlled and the mind concentrated. If the purpose is to approach or worship a deity with qualities, it is with form; to approach or worship the quality-less, it is formless; to realise the truth-wisdom-infinite Highest Atma, it is attention to the Self itself.

Q. And concentration? Swami! What is meant by that? How many types of concentration are there?

A. My boy, there is only one type. The wise person steadily established in the awareness of the chosen deity or Brahma-consciousness, like the earth carrying a mountain - that is concentration.

Q. The next one is meditation, I believe. That must be of many varieties.

A. No, no. This also is one and only one. Whether of the formful or the formless, if it is one-pointed, devoid of deviations, it is entitled to be called meditation.

Q. The last part of yoga that you mentioned was samadhi. What does that mean?

A. Samadhi, or perfect equanimity, means the fixing of the mind, free from all impulses and agitations, on the Lord or on one's own reality. It indicates the state in which one is in one's own real nature. Perfect equanimity is freedom from all duality. The mind will be unshaken by dual experiences; it will shine like a flame in a windless room; it is unmoved, unmovable.

Q. Swami! That type of mind, how will it behave? Please make it clearer, by some examples.

A. My dear fellow, when you have to thread a needle, you have to be intent on the job, and the end of the thread has to be kept straight and pointed, right? Similarly, to enter the grace of God, which is subtler than the subtlest, the mind has to be steady and the eye and the senses have to be concentrated on the same process.