

Satsang with Pujya Swami Tadatmananda ji at Sri Anil Aggarwal's house, Milwaukee, USA, on July 1st, 2007.

Topic: "Common obstacles in Sadhana"

- 1) Commonly heard complaint from people is lack of time to pursue spiritual practice. To this Swamiji said we will make time for something valuable to us.. if we are busy at work but there is a function at home that we must attend, we will make it. Similarly if there is an urgent deadline at office inspite of much work at home, we will attend to the need. Likewise, if we value spiritual practice high enough then we will make time for it. Convert mundane actions like driving to/from work into Sadhana by hearing some bhajans or talks during that time.
- 2) What to concentrate on while doing Japa? Many things – you could concentrate on the sound; even in silent Japa there is a mental sound. Or you could focus on the meaning of the mantra – each mantra has a sublime good meaning. You can also focus on the source of Mantra and how it is completed. That means, you will be focusing on the period of silence between mantras.
- 3) Meanings of mantras like Gayatri mantra are often interpreted differently in different books – which is the true meaning? Often mantras are extracted from passages in the Vedas and there is a likelihood of it being misinterpreted when taken out of context. Example Gayatri Mantra appears in all 4 Vedas; the occurrence in Rig Veda is commonly used. For correctly interpreting scriptural meanings, the following three conditions should be met – a) The sanskrit meaning of the words must be accurate b) there should be continuity of context from prior sloka to current to next one c) Meaning should be beneficial. It may be okay for a stand-alone mantra to be interpreted differently from what was intended, as long as the given meaning is beneficial.
- 4) Mere repetition of stotras or prayers mechanically is almost no use (very little benefit); the bhava is important. Say whatever prayers give you the bhava of devotion or love to God.
- 5) How to get concentration in meditation – the mind keeps going away? It is very natural for mind to go in all directions. Exercise will to repeat your mantra. After each utterance, engage your will to repeat the mantra again. Keep the mind busy that way. After some practice with "mantra nishta" you will be able to repeat the mantra without having to use your will. At that time use the will to observe the mind repeating the mantra. When the mantra repetition stops due to some diversions, then engage the will to restart mantra repetition. It is like turning a cycle upside-down and rotating the tire with your

hand and watching it rotate. Once the tire slows down, then again use your hand to set it in rotation. Meditation should be done likewise.

- 6) How to react when bad/impure thoughts come to the mind while praying? If bad thoughts come without your intention then ignore them, just laugh at the mind and move on. If you try to struggle with it it may get stuck. Even Mahatmas might get impure thought from time to time and what they do is just laugh at the mind. You too do likewise.

Discourse by Swami Tadatmananda ji at Hindu Temple of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, USA on July 1st, 2007.

Topic: “Ego – is it a friend or foe?”

- 1) Meaning of Ego – from Latin for “I”. At superficial level this is often interpreted as Pride and that it must be eradicated. But we need to understand this Ego more carefully. The term for Ego in Sanskrit is “Ahankaara”. “Aham” means “I” and “Kaara” means “that which causes/does”. Ahankaara is literally that which causes the feeling of I-ness.
- 2) The important question is who is “I”? Is it the body? senses? mind? consciousness? When you do some action, like listening to something, the “I” is the “listener”. When you read, “I” becomes the “reader”. When you see, “I” becomes the “seer”. Generalizing this, when you do some action, “I” is the “doer” or “kartaa”.
- 3) At times, when you are deeply immersed in something, like listening to music, then you lose the sense of doing the action viz “listening”. You get absorbed into the music so much that there is no “kartaa” or “doer” remaining. What exists at that time is just the experience of music. This could happen while doing any action and getting immersed/absorbed in it..just experience remains. Who is the experiencer? “I” is the experiencer or “bhoktaa”.
- 4) Kartaa and bhoktaa are mental events – they are essential but are no more than mental structures, they are not the final consciousness which is the Atman. Ahankaara is a mental event too.
- 5) Some spiritual texts say that the goal of spiritual life is “Ahankaara nasha” – or destruction of Ahankaara. What does this mean? Destroying ahankara is destroying the kartaa and bhoktaa aspects. If there is no kartaa, no action is possible. In states of Nirvikalpa Samadhi, there is no kartaa so no action takes place so long as the person is in Samadhi. This is a very advanced stage of Yoga. But for the people who have responsibilities and have some actions to

perform in the world, the kartaa cannot be destroyed. Such people should aim for “Badhita Ahankaara” or “negated Ahankara”.

- 6) What this means is that even while performing actions, the person understands that the kartaa and bhoktaa are merely mental events and does not react to situations like one who identifies himself with the body/mind does. Consider a tree whose branch is broken and is hanging down. Does the tree become sad that one of its limbs is broken whereas other trees are flourishing well with all limbs? Consider a cow whose one horn has grown horizontally instead of vertically. Does this cow become sad that its horn is sideways whereas all other cows have upright horns? The tree and the cow would not care for these situations at all.. whereas when something happens to a man, the ahankaara mental event in him torments him. The right question to ask is, whatever unpleasant thing has happened - is this natural? If it is, is it fixable? If it is fixable then fix it, if it is not then don't worry about it.
- 7) Badhita Ahankaara is like a fried mustard seed. The fried mustard seeds cannot sprout. In the same way, a Badhita Ahankaara which is neated will not cause or become the source for any suffering.
- 8) How to practice this Badhita ahankaara? As part of Nidhidhyaasana, advanced enquiry, whenever a negative thing happens and the mind feels negatively (like: someone did some harm to you) then pick up two levels of enquiry – first at the emotional level, understand what happened and why it might have happened and pacify the mind to accept it. Second at the more deeper level, enquire why it caused the reaction, who reacted and to what and apply the above knowledge of Kartaa, Bhoktaa and Ahankara being mental events and not the true “you” and that there is nothing to really react because nothing happened to “you”. On prolonged practice of this kind of enquiry, the ahankara can be negated.