

## Satsanga with Sri Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati Arsha Vidya Gurukulam

### SAMĀDHĀNAM, CONCENTRATION OF THE MIND

We gain a mind free from distractions and disturbances as a result of the first four qualifications, *śama*, *dama*, *uparama*, and *titikṣā*. *Śama* is restraint of the mind, *dama*, restraint of the sense organs, *uparama*, an abidance of the mind and the sense organs, or a renunciation in becoming free from desires and duties, and *titikṣā* is forbearance or endurance. These enable us to focus and are the means of freeing the mind from distractions or disturbances. The fifth qualification or inner wealth is discussed next:

निग्रहीतस्य मनसः श्रवणादौ तदनुगुणविषये च समाधिः - समाधानम्॥

*nigrhītasya manasaḥ śravaṇādau tadanugūṇaviṣaye ca samādhīḥ - samādhānam*  
[Vedāntasāra, 23].

*Samādhānam* is the constant concentration of the mind, thus restrained, on the hearing etc. of the scriptural passages and other objects that are conducive to these.

*Nigrhītasya manasaḥ* is a mind thus restrained or withdrawn from its other preoccupations and distractions; a poised or abiding mind. That mind must be focused somewhere. This brings us to *samādhānam* or *samādhīḥ*. *Samādhīḥ* means absorption, concentration, or single-pointedness. Such a mind should be focused *śravaṇādau*, in *śravaṇam*, *mananam*, and *nididhyāsanam*. The inner qualifications are nothing but the conserving of the energy of the mind.

#### ***Concentration helps focus mental energy on the study and assimilation of the scriptures***

A lot of our energy is exhausted in entertaining various thoughts, chasing after different pleasures, reacting to various situations, and pursuing the various demands that situations make upon us. The practice of *samādhānam* helps conserve mental energy so that it can be applied to creative or profitable fields. A person now wants to focus all his energy on the pursuit of knowledge.

The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad [4-5-6] says, *ātmāvare dṛṣṭavyaḥ, ātmā* must be 'seen', meaning that it must be known. How should it be known? *Śrotravyaḥ mantavyaḥ nididhyāsitavyaḥ*. We must conduct an inquiry into the nature of the Self, and the method of performing that inquiry is through *śravaṇam*, listening to the scriptures from the teacher, *mananam*, reflecting upon what we have heard to clarify doubts, and *nididhyāsanam*, assimilating what we have learned. This is the method of knowing and assimilating the knowledge that is to be followed. The mind that has been withdrawn from its other preoccupations and distractions should be focused constantly on *śravaṇam*, *mananam*, and *nididhyāsanam*.

### ***Concentration includes developing other necessary inner qualities***

*Tadanugunaṣaye.* We may find that additional preparations are needed to listen to the scriptures. We may not be able to deliberate on Vedanta all the time because the mind needs a change, a certain distraction. Or we find that we are not able to consistently maintain that frame of mind because certain qualifications like *amānitvam*, humility and *adambhitvam*, non-pretentiousness, are not fully developed. This means that the mind has not yet acquired the maturity needed to apply itself fully to the pursuit of knowledge. *Samādhānam*, therefore, includes doing whatever is necessary to develop these inner qualifications of humility, non-pretentiousness, *ahimsā*, non-violence, *kṣāntiḥ*, forgiveness or accommodation, *ārjavam*, straightforwardness etc. These are qualities or values, frames of mind, which Lord Krishna enjoins upon a seeker of knowledge [Bhagavad Gita, 13-8]. When not listening or reflecting upon the scriptures, a student is advised to observe his own mind, introspecting and being alert to various thoughts and reactions that arise. There are traces of arrogance, pride, pretentiousness, violence, and jealousy in us. We need to slowly make ourselves free of these tendencies. The pursuit of knowledge includes not only listening, reflecting, and assimilating, but also self-introspection and constant work to remove the obstacles that come in the way of the pursuit of the study. All of this comprises *samādhānam*. While driving, part of your mind is always aware of the destination and whatever choices you make are automatically in keeping with the goal of reaching that destination. Similarly, the destination of self-knowledge should constantly remain in our minds. Lord Krishna speaks of these values in Chapter 13 of the Gita [13-12] as well:

अध्यात्मज्ञाननित्यत्वं तत्त्वज्ञानार्थदर्शनम्।

*adhyātmaññānanityatvaṁ tattvajñānārthadarśanam.*

..always (dwelling upon) knowledge centered on the Self, keeping in view the purpose of knowledge of the Truth.

When the mind gets distracted we have to bring it back and make it see what is to be gained as a result of self-knowledge, freedom, liberation, and fulfillment.

### ***Our choices are determined by our goals***

What we want is happiness, peace, security, and freedom. We have now understood that real freedom can be achieved only through the knowledge of the Self. Thus, there is a commitment to the knowledge and that is all that matters to the aspirants; knowledge is their only pursuit. Whatever we do, that commitment or goal always remains, and our choices are determined by that pursuit. Whenever you have to make a choice, e.g., deciding to sleep, go to a movie, watch a football game, study Sanskrit, pray, or learn to chant, ask yourself if that activity is conducive to what you are seeking. Is this action in keeping with the goal that you have chosen or does it contradict the goal? When you make a turn while driving, you ask the

whether the turn leads you to your destination. You do not choose a road that is easier to drive on, but the road that takes you to your destination, even if it is a difficult one to drive on. Your choice is determined by your destination and not by whether the route is fascinating, beautiful, or enables you to drive faster. Similarly, my life choices should be determined by my destination. I am seeking self-knowledge and, therefore, need to study the scriptures, which involves listening, understanding, contemplation, and assimilation. This, in turn, requires the knowledge of grammar, the Sanskrit language, prayers, and the ability to chant. You have to decide what is required to focus your attention on the pursuit of self-knowledge. Generally, in order to study the scriptures, one requires language for which we study Sanskrit and grammar, logic, and perhaps, other disciplines that are needed. This does not mean that you deny yourself any freedom or relaxation. The mind should also be relaxed. You might watch TV or allow yourself a treat so that the mind is happy and relaxed and can be applied to what you want to do. *Śṛma* and *viśṛma*, exertion and recreation, are both needed by the mind; there should be a balance. As Lord Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita [6-17], this pursuit of knowledge becomes pleasant for one who maintains a balance or sense of proportion in performing every action. When a person maintains a sense of proportion and is constantly alert, he has *samādhānam*.

***Concentration includes making our day-to-day activities a means to the pursuit of self-knowledge***

*Samādhānam* means single-pointedness or concentration of the mind. It does not mean that one has to withdraw oneself from all activities and simply focus the mind on one thing. Rather, it is desirable that the mind be focused upon the pursuit of self-knowledge. Thus, one's life becomes a means to the pursuit of self-knowledge. It is not necessary to deny life in order to pursue knowledge. On the other hand, one makes whatever life one is living a means to pursuing self-knowledge. This is why Lord Krishna teaches us *karma-yoga*.

One does not have to give up one's activities, rather, we are told to perform the activities in a manner such that those very actions become a means of knowledge. Sometimes, we do not have the choice of giving up things or getting away from situations. Even in an ashram, students are required to work or do *seva* for a certain number of hours every day. We can either resist what we are required to do or turn that very action into the means of knowledge. *Karma-yoga* enjoins us to perform our actions as an offering and thus make them a means of knowledge. Through the performance of our our day-to-day activities, we seek Lord's grace and purify our mind. This is also a part of *samādhānam*. *Samādhānam* means constantly maintaining the focus on our destination and making choices that will serve as a means of self-knowledge.

*As we develop concentration, gaining self-knowledge becomes a full-time pursuit*

Ultimately, as the mind becomes more focused it will be able to apply itself better to the study of the scriptures, reflection, contemplation and assimilation. Perhaps the time will come when we will do nothing except *svādhyāya*, study, and *pravacana*, teaching. It is not easy to study and think about this all the time. Vedanta requires the mind to be focused; it requires attention and alertness. The mind gets tired after studying for a length of time. After that, it wants some recreation or relaxation. However, as the mind becomes more focused, the need for other distractions reduces; study and teaching become full-time pursuits. In this context, teaching does not necessarily mean conducting classes, but includes studying and contributing, sharing. Says Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita [10-9]:

मच्चित्ता मद्गतप्राणा बोधयन्तः परस्परम्। कथयन्तश्च मां नित्यं तुष्यन्ति च रमन्ति च ॥

*maccittā madgataprāṇā bodhayantaḥ parasparam,  
kathayantaśca mām nityaṁ tuṣyanti ca ramanti ca.*

Those whose minds are in Me, whose living is resolved in Me, teaching one another and always talking about Me, they are (always) satisfied and they revel (always).

In order to achieve anything in any profession one must be totally devoted to it; otherwise, we will be mediocre. Similarly, the devotion to self-knowledge should become a full-time occupation. Our minds should be completely focused on it. The mind can be applied to the pursuit of knowledge to the extent that it is free from other distractions and pre-occupations. This is *samādhānam*, concentration or focus<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on Vedāntasāra lectures. Transcribed and edited by Malini, KrishnaKumar (KK) S. Davey and Jayshree Ramakrishnan.