

BHAKTI YOGA - PART 12

SWĀMI DAYATMANANDA

Class begins with the chanting of the following Shanti mantra:

ॐ सह नावतु ।
सह नौ भुनक्तु ।
सह वीर्यं करवावहै ।
तेजस्वि नावधीतमस्तु मा विद्विषावहै ।
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

Om Saha Naav Avatu |
Saha Nau Bhunaktu |
Saha Viiryam Karavaavahai |
Tejasvi Naav Adhiitam Asthu Maa Vidvissaavahai: |
Om Shantih Shantih Shantih: ||

Meaning:-

Om May Brahman protect us both |
May Brahman bestow upon us both, the fruit of knowledge |
May we both obtain the energy to acquire knowledge |
May what we both study reveal the truth
May we cherish no ill-feeling toward each other |
Om Peace Peace Peace be unto all ||

We are going to study a very important part of Bhakti Yoga, which is symbolism, rituals. What an important part these play in our lives! These days, we find that there are many young people who abhor rituals. They think they are absolutely redundant, outdated, just because they do not understand the meaning of these rituals. Part of this ritualism is that human life is based upon rituals, symbols, signs. Civilization would have been impossible without the usage of signs, symbols and rituals. Let us take some examples. I am speaking to you, and if you do not understand, then I cannot convey my experiences, my thoughts to you, and without conveying my thoughts to you, it is impossible to

exchange knowledge. Civilization is a gradual accumulation of knowledge from the very first person until now, a process of accumulating knowledge. Based on this knowledge, our lifestyle, our culture, our economy -- everything is dependent. Suppose we are not able to exchange our views, I cannot convey what is inside me to you, and you cannot do it to me, where do you think we live? If you want an example, bring up a baby without any contact with this world. Give him food, feed him via tube – what is he going to be when he grows up? He remains the same idiot he had been born, barely able to survive. (2.12)

So, how was so much of civilization made possible? It was through the exchange of knowledge. How did this exchange of knowledge take place? Mainly through one important vehicle. What is that? Language. Language is nothing but a symbol for the medium through which we interact or exchange with one another. There are funny things. Every person, in every nation, in every field of life, has some signs, certain symbols, certain rituals. I will try to briefly mention some of these things, before I go into the subject. (2.59) It is well-known that every religion has developed its own rituals and symbols. But are we aware that in every field of life, you name it and I can tell you, has its own symbols? (These include) economic symbols, fashion symbols, national symbols, scientific symbols, political symbols, psychological symbols and cultural symbols. I will give you some examples of these things.

How do I convey to the other person that I am economically well-off? How does a young man convey to the girls moving on the road that he is very well-off? Among animals and birds, they display varied colored feathers or sounds. Bullfrogs are known for making a peculiar sound by puffing their part of the body, which is a sign to the other females that this person is a very strong person. How does a youth convey these things to others? In the form of a BMW car! A student or a young man who does not have a BMW car, is not that good! Then there are Mercedes or Cadillac cars, a beautiful six-bedroomed

house, and the latest wearable computers¹. Then there are fashion symbols: torn pants, shaggy hair, pierced ears – these are some examples. If you put on a decent dress, then you are not supposed to be very fashionable. (5.05) Well-known national symbols are there, flags, flowers, animals, trees, national anthems -- these are all symbols signifying the nation, ‘I am separate’, ‘I am different’. There are political symbols (5.24) too. If somebody gains a victory, stands with a “V” sign, “V” means victory. Then, every party has its own flag symbolizing it. Gandhiji’s National Party had a Charka, some party had two oxen etc. There are psychological symbols to convey the states of our minds. Somebody had put his head like **this**², what does that symbolize? The person is depressed. This also differs according to the cultural differences. In India, if someone puts his head in his hands, it is supposed to be very bad, inferior or depressed state of mind. Here, there is one huge statue, the Thinking Man. If Sri Ramakrishna sees that what would he be thinking of? He (**the man**) must be suffering from depression! There are cultural symbols that we all use, like saying ‘Good Morning’, shaking hands, saying ‘Good to see you’ – a person who follows this is a cultured person, good or civilized person. But one who does not do that is not considered a civilized person. All these have their own place. But in no field have these things become so abundant as in the religious field. Why so? There is an important reason. Politics, psychology, culture – all these are known, experienced fields, whereas religion falls into the field which we do not normally experience. This is one field where one cannot convey one’s knowledge to anybody else. This is a point that we have already discussed -- for example, Swami Vivekananda wanted to find whether Sri Ramakrishna experienced God, and he asked: “Did you see God?” Sri Ramakrishna said: “Yes, I have seen God.” (8.01) But he did not stop

¹ People have their mobile phones, the only problem is, where they kept it, they would not be able to find. So, they will ask somebody to give them a ring.

² While stating this, probably he gestured a drooping head ... it is just my guess.

with that answer. He said: “I will also show you God.” Why? Because if I say that I have seen a cow, then I don’t need to show a cow to you, because it is an experience that you can have anytime at other places. But if I say I have seen God, you cannot just go outside the Vedanta Center and say: “Let me see whether Swami Dayatmananda has seen God or not”. Until you see God yourself, there is no way for you to corroborate my experience. And even if you see, that is absolutely an individual experience. It forever remains as your own experience – you cannot convey it to others. Why? Because, God is not an object, it is a subjective experience. No subjective experience can be conveyed to anybody else, until that person experienced it himself or herself. So various religions have started to convey their experiences, and the only way that they can do it, is through symbols, rituals, signs. Not only that, it is a fact that any experience, religious, spiritual or otherwise, can only be conveyed indirectly, (9.29) not directly. Suppose, I have eaten something, and it was wonderful. How do I convey my experience to you? I can show a happy face, but without eating also, I can show a happy face! How will you know what experience I had? I can only point out, this way you go to the shop, buy this particular thing, and eat it yourself. When you have eaten it yourself, you know what I am talking about. Until that time, it remains a kind of inadequate knowledge, until you have experienced it (yourself). So, to convey one’s experience, we can do that indirectly. That indirect way is called ritualism, symbolism, signs etc. Religion is always a mystery -- therefore the richest number of symbols, signs, and rituals have developed. I will take one simple example. (10.29) Especially when in India we do vesper service in the evening³, we use five items, and I am sure, you know them, but I am not so sure you know them in the correct order. In the special worship done here, there are five things we use. The first is light, the second is water, the third is cloth, the fourth is flower, and the last is the

³ What we call *Arati*, done at the end of the service.

waving of a fan, called *Chamara*. What do these things stand for? They stand for (the prayer): Oh Lord, I belong to you I and You are not separate. I and You are one and the same substance. To convey this experience, we show it ritually or symbolically in this form of vesper service -- whether you go to a Christian church or a mosque, this is the form in which it is conveyed. Take another example. In a church, they do mass. The priest does lots of rituals, and at the end he breaks the bread and tastes the wine. What does the bread symbolize? The flesh of Christ! And the wine symbolizes the blood of Christ.⁴ But it is not cannibalism in the old sense. In a highly spiritual sense, what is this cannibalism? An inferior person eats a superior person, so that the superior person's qualities become the qualities of the inferior person. In other words, the inferior person becomes equivalent to the superior person by eating the superior person. This fact was there, but some spiritual people have completely transformed the significance of it. So, when a devotee sincerely prays to God and partakes of the bread and sips the wine, the devotee presumes his identity with Christ. It is exactly the same symbolism expressed in the vesper service. What is the philosophy behind it? According to Vedanta, this whole universe has emanated from God. (13.28) And God manifested⁵ through the five *mahabhootas* (पञ्चमहाभूत) as we call it, or the five elements. These elements are *space, air, fire, water, and earth*. If any person sincerely practices spiritual disciplines, what happens is that he recognizes the fact that 'I am made out of these five elements, and these five elements are emanations of God. Therefore, I am God. I recognize my identity with God.' A wave recognizes its identity with the ocean. So, what are these five elements⁶? Light symbolizes *fire*, water symbolizes *water*, cloth symbolizes directions or *space*⁷, flower symbolizes *earth*, and the waving of *Chamara* symbolizes *air*. The showing of all these five

⁴ Pure cannibalism if you come to think of it, I am not joking!

⁵ Or degenerated, as it were.

⁶ Used in the vesper service.

⁷ Lord Shiva is called Digambara (दिगम्बर), means he is sky-clad or clothed in space.

elements symbolizes that ‘O Lord, these have come from you.’ Before a person attained this state, he says: ‘I am giving you this, I am offering you that’, but at the end he realizes, he himself belongs to God. Whatever he thinks as his, also belongs to God. (15.16) When a person recognizes that simple truth ‘I am one with God’, the unity of the individual with the Supreme Lord or Supreme reality, (he realizes) the symbolism of Arati. Of course, we do it without knowing the meaning, but we feel elevated by doing this, we feel satisfied. This is the symbolism of it. Then the worship becomes complete – no more need for worship. Why? Because who is going to worship whom? There is no “I” here, all that remains is God. Look at the life of Sri Ramakrishna, he started with ritualism. A time came, when he used to go and pluck flowers and come to then shrine, make beautiful garlands, and offer it to the Divine Mother. Then after some time, he realized that everything belongs to the Divine Mother, the seat on which he was seating, the utensils with which he was worshipping the Mother, and the food and flower offerings that he was giving, the altar and the image itself – everything is a vibration of the pure consciousness. After this he took flowers in his hands to offer to the Divine Mother. Where did his hands go? Straight to his (own) head! And the flowers fell on himself. When the food offering time came, he said symbolically, “Mother, do we want me to eat first?” It is a sacrilege to offer something that has already been eaten. But who was Ramakrishna at that time? He himself became the Divine Mother! A cat entered into the shrine room – he fed the cat. Was he feeding the cat? He was feeding the Divine Mother!

-- “Oh Mother! You came in this form now? Let me worship you in this form.”

After these experiences, one day he went out to pluck flowers, and he saw the trees had already offered all their flowers to the Divine Lord. Then he said,

-- “Why should I pluck flowers? They have already been offered to the Lord!”

This is called Virat Puja. The purpose of his going through these rituals have been fructified. There is no more any necessity for any rituals. This is an important point we have to keep in mind. Rituals by themselves do not have any meaning, unless they transform us into a higher state. So, what is the definition of a ritual? (18.01). After all, every ritual is an action. A person sits or prostrates, that is an action. Take an example: you come to the shrine and prostrate yourself on the ground. What is it? It is a ritual; it is a symbol. What is it a symbol of? Self-surrender. You surrender yourself to the Lord. But, what do we do? After making pranam, you get up and say: “What did you do? My daughter did not pass the exam! What are you doing?” That is not self-surrender! The idea is, O Lord, whatever you decide to do, I accept it. It would be good. This is the symbolism of pranam. (18.45). In South India there was a big center. South Indian pranam is a larger pranam -- it is called *sashtanga pranam*, the whole body falls on the floor. At 4 o'clock the temple opens, all the novices and Swamis stream – they sit and there will be Vedic chanting. They will be sitting for meditation, or they meditate after the chanting. One newly joined novice has entered into the shrine room, and with great devotion, prostrated himself with outstretched arms. People thought, what a great devotion -- 1 minute passed, 2 minutes passed, 3 minutes passed, but he was not getting up at all! And slowly the sounds of snoring started. This is, in yoga terminology, called *shabasana*, a very restful pose.

So, you see how important these rituals and symbols are. Without them, we cannot progress. What is the definition of a ritual? A ritual is a sacramental act, whereby the individual soul is united with the supreme soul. (20.11) It is a sacrament, which means a sacred act. Sacredness belongs to God -- it is a

sacred act, a godly act. You give a flower to somebody, that is not a sacrament – it is just an exchange of ordinary love. You offer a flower to the God, and thereby you feel elevated. You offer tea or coffee to your friend or relative, that is an ordinary act of worldliness. But you offer it to the Lord, and immediately it becomes an act of sacrament, because it reminds you of the Divine; it purifies, and slowly brings us near (God). This definition is very important. That act which brings us nearer to God, is a sacrament, a ritual. (21.10). This is the exact meaning of *pratika*. The (Sanskrit) meaning of the word *pratika* is “coming nearer.” It is used in a wider sense. Any icon, any image, or any symbol that is used in religions for worshipping the Lord, for reminding us of the Lord, is called a *pratika*. There are two types of such things: One is called *pratika*, the other is called *pratīma*. A three-dimensional symbol is called a *pratīma*. If anybody wants to progress in any field of life, then these rituals or symbols are very necessary. Three words are used: signs, symbols, and rituals. Of these, signs are the most inferior in this class of ritualism or symbolism. You know what a sign is? Suppose there is an ‘arrow’ sign. What does it indicate? ‘Go that way’, or ‘something is here’, like an office – these are called signs. Beyond directing a person, they have no further value. (22.39) However, symbols and rituals have deep meaning which affect our lives. If while talking to you, I show you a fist, what does it mean? There was a time when the Jews were being oppressed by the Christians in Rome. Jews are stubborn people; they were also fighting. The Christians wanted all the Jews to get out of Rome and go anywhere else. The Jews said, ‘We are living here for generations, and we are not going to move from this place.’ So, there was almost going to be a civil war. There was a Pope, who was a kind man. He decided, why is there all these bloodsheds? Let us have a conversation with the Jews and see what we can do, whether a peaceful solution can be attained. So, a representative of the Jews was called. (23.45) But unfortunately, this Jew could not speak Italian, and

the Pope did not speak the Jewish language. So, they said: “Let us have a talk.” They sat in a room, and depending on the outcome, the fate of the Jews will be decided. So, the Pope showed like “**this**”⁸. The Jew took out his heel and did like “**this**” The Pope showed three fingers, and the Jew showed one finger. Then the Pope took out his bread and wine. The Jew took out his Apple, and the Pope hung his head, went back and said: “I can’t do anything with these Jews. Let these fellows save me.”

Everybody was waiting; they said: “How did you come to this?”

The Pope said: “I said, this whole thing is the glory of God, and that fellow had the timidity to say that the Earth has also been created by God.”

-- “Then what happened”

I said: “I will not allow even three Jews to remain here.”

He said, even if one Jew is there, he would fight to the last . He was not going to leave this place. (25.00)

Then I said: “Bread and wine ... Christ is the only salvation through bread and wine.”

He said: “You stupid fellow, don’t you know how Adam and Eve fell? He took out his apple. He has the answer for everything! What can I do?”

The Jew went back and said: “The Pope threatened me, that not only on the earth, but also on the sky I won’t allow you to remain. I said: ‘As long as I am here, I am going to fight. Then he (the Pope) showed three. I said, not three Jews, even if we are only one Jew, we will fight to death.’”

-- “Then what happened?”

-- “He took out his lunch, and I took out my lunch. (all laugh).

The sign language is one way of communication⁹, and is a perfectly understandable language. A sign is the most inferior mode of communicating certain meanings. It is the lowest order. But the higher order comes in

⁸ Since the sign language is the only language that could be used.

⁹ Whenever there is a program on TV, for those who cannot hear, you see a person interpreting it in sign language.

symbolism. In the Vedic times, very interesting developments have taken place. The goal is to become one with the highest reality Brahman. But here is a person who is individualized, this is called individual self. What is individual self? It means Self individualized or limited by body and mind. How does this union take place? So, they developed Vidya, which means 'vehicle of knowledge'. I will give you an example of this. There is something called *Madhu Vidya*. The whole Vedic scriptures are full of these vidyas. Hundreds of such special techniques of contemplation have been completely lost because of copyright problems. What is this copyright problem? There is a Guru who discovers something, and he passes it on to some worthy disciples, students, or son. In course of time, this knowledge of the technique was passing from teacher to students or from father to son. At some point, people became degenerated, and they thought: 'if I pass on this knowledge to anybody, then my family will suffer. (27.51) I will pass it on to only my own family members'¹⁰. In those days, people used to die because of wild animals or diseases or something like that. If a person dies without passing on the knowledge, then that particular technique is lost forever. This is how, hundreds of Upanishads, hundreds of techniques have been lost. But at present, there are 32 beautiful techniques –these are called vidyas. I will give you a taste of one such vidya. It is called *Madhu Vidya* (knowledge of honey). You all have knowledge of honey, isn't it? This is a special technique. It is from the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, which says:

īyaṃ pṛthivī sarveṣāṃ bhūtānāṃ madhu

asyai pṛthivyai sarvāṇi bhūtāni madhu

yaścāyam asyāṃ pṛthivyāṃ tejomayo'mṛtamayaḥ puruṣo

¹⁰ Usually the oldest son.

yaścāyam adhyātma śārīrastejomayo'mṛtamayaḥ puruṣaḥ

ayameva sa yo'yamātma idam amṛtam idam brahma idam sarvam (Shloka 2.5.1)

This whole thing is nothing but Self. This whole thing is nothing but immortal. This whole thing is nothing but Brahman. Everything that we experience is nothing but Brahman, the highest reality. If somebody properly practices, i.e., meditates or contemplates of this particular technique, then the fruit is that he attains Brahman. What is the result of attaining Brahman? Everything becomes *madhu*, *madhu* means honey, which means bliss. (30.01). So, how does it work? The simple translation is as follows. This Earth is the honey of all beings. It is the essence and milk of all beings. People suck this Earth as if, they suck honey, which has such a beautiful taste, and the Earth sucks everybody and everything as if there is honey to it. The Earth is the honey of all, and everyone is the honey of the Earth. The Earth is absorbed into the being of everything, and everything is absorbed into this being of Earth. That is the meaning of the saying, 'the Earth is the honey of all beings, and all beings are the honey of the earth.' It is the simple English translation. Translations do not give the insight into these techniques. They are just but signs. What is the sign? You practice this for a long long time. Just one part of this is called Madhu Vidya. Just one part – take this Earth. We are born of this earth, we are sustained by this Earth, and we return back at the end unto to this Earth. Isn't it a fact? This means two things. First, I am not an individual. I am connected, just like a bubble in the ocean. One bubble is here, and a thousand bubbles are elsewhere. What is the connection among these bubbles? All the bubbles have one connection, the ocean – they come from the ocean, they are sustained by the ocean, and they go back to the ocean. This whole body has come out of Earth, the food, and is sustained by food, and goes back as food to the Earth. (32.12) This constant recycling is going on. This gives us the identity that I am

not individual at all. I am Universal Self -- I am one with the entire universe. Even if there is one being or one thing produced out of this earth, I am that particular object. See, the individual has expanded its identity into the universal, but it cannot be done by intellectually thinking about it. This is not an intellectual process. Here is an important point. (32.53) We all practice meditation. Meditation is not an intellectual process. Meditation is, becoming one with the idea on which we are contemplating. Suppose I say that I love Ramakrishna. Now, is it possible to show your love to a baby with a fork? You take a baby, take a fork with your gloved hands, and say "Baby, I love you, take this fork," and then go and bring it **on the back** (?). Does it show your love? What is love? You must *become* love -- your look, your very touch, your everything convey that feeling of love. People simply say, "It is good to see you." Do you believe for a moment that they are glad to see you? Because, it is at best just an intellectual idea, they don't think when they say it. When you shake hands and say, Good morning!" Do you really mean that the morning is very good? This is supposed to lead us to that idea – that is the usefulness of these rituals. So, when practiced for a long long time, we become one with that idea. That is the real, true meditation. There would be no difference between the meditator and the meditated. That is the definition of meditation.

When these kind of vidyas are practiced, the individual soul loses its individuality, and gains its true identity with its universality. That is the crux of these so-called vidyas. There are Dahara-vidya, Madhu-vidya, Sandilya-vidya etc. – we will not go into the details. These Vedic techniques of meditation have become expanded, have become transformed, because time and history invariably change them into various molds or expressions. (35.10) At the present time, we have several types of these expressions. One is called puja, rituals, or celebrations; another is called *mantra*, another is called *mandalas*, another is called *yantras*. Have you heard about these things? You

have heard about *mantras*. Mandalas are certain diagrammatic representations that are drawn, and usually practiced by Buddhists, whereas the Hindus invariably use what are called *yantras*. Especially in South India, where temples are standing for a long time, these things are more popular and more practiced. Unfortunately, in North India, the Muslims demolished most of the temples, and along with that, these things have practically disappeared. Whereas if you go to South India, several-century-old temples are still there -- you can imagine that in the 12th century, Ramanuja was one of the most important teachers, who introduced these wonderful variety of ceremonial worships or rituals, which are still going on here. By reading the life of Sri Ramakrishna, you also come to know a particular type of religious discipline, called *tantras*. Tantras are full of different types of deities or *devatas* as we call them, different types of *beeja* (seed) mantras, different types of yantras¹¹ for each deity, different types of special rituals. Even the whole human body becomes a vehicle for rituals, by touching various parts of the body. Really these things are not the products of human intellect -- they are the products of the intuitive understandings of the great sages. When Sri Ramakrishna practiced these things, he could actually feel the effect of these things. Just to remind you, I will give you one example. There is a particular mantra, called *agni*-mantra, which is the *beeja* mantra for fire. The mantra is “ram”¹² (38.08). We are asked to repeat that mantra and sprinkle water all around when we are doing the worship. The purpose of this mantra is: as if a wall of fire springs around the practitioner, protecting him from all sorts of obstacles, especially supernatural beings, like ghosts, and spirits, and other things. Most of you don't believe in these things, even if you think you are very advanced. Yes, it is a peculiar age we are living in. We don't believe in angels, we don't believe in gods and goddesses, we don't believe in ghosts and spirits, but these are all as

¹¹ When we do homa (होम), we draw these things on the sand.

¹² Not English rum ☺

much of a reality as we are reality-- different strata, different manifestations of God. Some of them do us harm. The great souls have discovered that this (means agni-mantra) prevents all these things. It keeps, as it were, a firewall¹³. Sages have discovered long time back that these security breaches can be stopped by simply uttering the mantra. You have read, when Sri Ramakrishna uttered this mantra and sprinkle water, he said¹⁴, “I have actually seen a wall of fire springing up and protecting me from all obstacles.” Anyway, this is an example to show that Tantras have specialized in these kinds of rituals and symbols that we are talking about.

Importantly, there are three kinds of symbols that we use, whatever be the religion. One is called *pratīka*, which can be an iconic diagram, or a piece of stone, or a picture, etc. This *pratīka* has also expanded into an image or *pratīma*. A three-dimensional symbol is called image, like an image of Christ, an image of Rama, and image of Ramakrishna etc. These are called visual symbols. There are also sound symbols, and symbols belonging to the mind¹⁵. These are three important parts of symbols leading to ritualism. (41.07). The meaning of *pratīka* has already been told, that which helps us to come near, which means, that which unites the individual soul with the supreme soul – whatever that be, is a *pratīka* or a symbol. That is the real meaning of symbol. Now, (**consider**) visual symbols and sound symbols. It is not that there are only two types of symbols. Why these two (**types of**) symbols have become famous? And how many symbols are possible? Five types of symbols are possible. Why five types? Because, we have five sense organs¹⁶. I will give you a funny example: what is ‘smell symbolism’? Smell symbolism is very important. Suppose you enter into our shrine room, and you get there the smell of fried pakoda. Where will be your mind? But suppose, you get the beautiful smell of incense. What happens

¹³ You don’t believe in it, but every computer man pays money to buy firewall, like Norton or MacAfee firewall!

¹⁴ Read this from the “Great Master”.

¹⁵ *mānasika* मानसिक

¹⁶ We have eyes, ears, sense of smell, sense of taste, sense of touch.

immediately, and why does it happen? (**This is**) because of our experience -- whenever we go to a restaurant, we get the fried pakoda smell, but whenever we go to a temple, we get the smell of incense. You know, a funny thing happened when I joined the order in North India. Whichever temple I was entering, I felt no spirituality at all! (43.02) I was wondering, what is this? North Indians don't any have spirituality at all! You enter any South Indian temple -- it is full of spiritual vibrations. Then I discovered why it is so. Because from my birth, I have been accustomed to smell camphor, and kumkum¹⁷ have a special smell. All South Indian temples have heaps of kumkum and other powders for offering to the Divine Mother Lalita, Kamakshi, Meenakshi etc. Naturally, from my birth, I have been associated with it; this particular smell means it is a temple. When I come to North India, I don't get the smell at all. That is how I discovered that there is no spirituality in North India at all¹⁸. (End of funny example)

We had a two-year course in the training center. Every novice who joins the Ramakrishna Order has to go to Belur Math and live there for two years for getting training. There were Bengali novices and South Indian novices. The Bengali novices always thought themselves as superior -- "you know, you fellows, Sri Ramakrishna is a Bengali -- we are a superior race! He is an incarnation of God, and you don't have any incarnations." South Indian novices are not that bad. They would say. "It is absolutely true, Sri Ramakrishna is an incarnation of God, and he was born in Bengal. But why was he born? It is said in the Gita:

यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत ।

अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम् ॥ (Gita Chapter 4, Verse 7)

¹⁷ Also called sindoor.

¹⁸ This is just to make fun of you.

yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānir bhavati bhārata
abhyutthānam adharmasya tadātmānaṁ sṛjāmyaḥam

Wherever there is a decline of virtue and growth of vice, there only God incarnates.” (Perfectly alright ... (laugh)).

So, you see, how much of slaves we are to these sights and sounds and smells and all those things. But they can also help us, because we have to progress through the help of these five sense organs. Incidentally, what is spiritual progress? It is the gradual purification of our five sense organs. The eyes want to see beautiful forms in this world – no, see the beauty of God. The ears want to hear every agreeable sound in this world, worldly sounds – no, you purify the sound, means you only hear the sacred sounds, spiritual sounds, devotional songs, praises of God. You want to smell, you want to eat, you want to touch peasant things; gradually turn the direction in which these sense organs are accustomed to travel, connect them somehow with God. That is called spiritual progress. (46.00) The moment we get greater amount of happiness by seeing an image of God, by reading a scripture, by hearing about God, by going to the temple and lighting up an incense, by smelling beautiful flowers offered to the Lord, we can definitely know that our mind is getting purified, and is slowly progressing towards God. Put in another way, what is spiritual progress? The more we remember God, which means we are connected with God, the more advanced we are in spiritual life. So, the sights, the sounds, the tastes, the smells, the touches – if these can remind us of God so that all the time we are in contact with God, then that is spiritual progress. Then a time will come when there will be no separation from the idea of God at all, because we have internalized all these things. That is the end of spiritual practice.

So, what is spiritual progress? It is the gradual purification of the five sense organs and (the ability to) direct them towards God. Another way of putting this is, we become emotional. Our emotions are connected with these five sense organs. You see somebody who is very beautiful to look at, you feel attracted, you feel happy. You see somebody who is not that attractive, and you feel repulsed. We are swinging between these two. You hear an agreeable sound -- somebody tells you, "You are wonderful", and you feel very happy. And if somebody says, "You are not very good," you immediately become depressed. Thus, all our emotions are connected with the five sense organs. Don't kill the emotions, you cannot (kill them) but let these emotions be associated with God. That is called Bhakti Yoga, the path of devotion. Emotion purified and directed towards God is called devotion. That is what we are discussing here.

Do you see now, what all these symbols are? The symbols are purifying our worldly associations of these very things that we experience, and instead of that, bringing our attention to God. As I said, there are three types of symbols, the visual symbols and the sound symbols. Visual symbols are icons, or an image or a diagram etc. Now, among human beings, there are two types of people. (48.54) Among the five sense organs, two are most important, the eyes (and the ears). 99% of our life is dependent on sights and sounds. Just imagine a world where we cannot see or hear – practically all our knowledge becomes destroyed (?). Religious people also have to take advantage of these two: the visual symbols and the sound symbols. What are the sound symbols? They are called *mantras*. Among the human beings, all do not have equal dominance of either the sight or the sound. It is an interesting psychological fact. Many people are 'visual', they remember the faces, but don't remember the names. These people, if they are talented, become good painters, good sculptors, good dramatists etc. Then there are people in whom the sound becomes dominant. Such people become good singers, because they have

wonderful knowledge of pitch. (50.17) If you want to know, just keep quiet when the *Arati* is going on after 6 PM. You will see that there are some voices which in no way anywhere near the singer's voice. The people in whom the sound is predominant, remember names, become good writers, and they have their own special ways of expressing their talent. So, you see, religion has to provide both these types of people. Therefore, for those who are visually dominant, the worship of images, icons etc. are very useful. But there are people who cannot imagine a particular form, let alone form, they cannot imagine a simple light¹⁹ -- for them only a blankness comes. But ask them to meditate upon a sound, imagine a sound, for example, 'Om' or 'Soham', they have no problem at all! To cater to that kind of people, sound symbols have also come. (51.43). It is important to recognize, to which category we fall. Suppose we fall into the category of **visual dominance**. For such people (**if you**) don't have any image worship, don't have anything connected with pictures or images or icons -- they find it very difficult to just sit and keep on meditating. That is why Hindu sages have recognized and evolved thousands of these varieties of visual symbols for the aid of these people. The sound symbols are for the other type of people. It is called 'nama upasana'. Upasana means contemplation. Pratika upasana means visual symbolization, and nama upasana means contemplation of the sound, the form of the mantras. Then there is a third type of upasana, called manasik upasana. Some people can focus neither on sights or forms, nor on sounds, but they can focus on ideas. Give the person an idea, and the person can focus on it. (52.59) Usually these people become abstract thinkers. You know there is "abstract mathematics" or "abstract painting"²⁰. Indian people are good at abstract thinking; software engineers are good this. Abstract thinking is not about a sound or a visual

¹⁹ It is a meditation -- meditate upon the light, not a particular image or a form.

²⁰ (Funny addition) An abstract painting is one which the artist doesn't know how or why he did. The critic is trying to explain how wonderfully it has been made without understanding to a public who are least interested.

symbol, it is about deep thinking on the ideas. People in whom these ideas are predominant, become abstract thinkers -- that is easy for them to do. To cater to them, a third type, 'manasik upasana' has been delineated in our scriptures. These are the three types of symbolism used in religion, especially in the Vedas: the visual symbols, the sound symbols and the ideational symbols. This is such an interesting subject – I will go through some more details with examples in my next class.