

BHAKTI YOGA – PART 14

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 have been discussing a very interesting topic, that in the path of spiritual practice, symbolism is of the utmost importance. And in my last class I mentioned, there is one particular *chakra*, called *Sri-chakra*. It is considered the queen of all *chakras*. Perhaps some of you might have seen, though from a distance. Please have a look at it. In brief, I will try to explain what it signifies.

This is all a very delicate, esoteric, but very deep, symbolic drawing. It's not a child sitting and drawing. But through intuition, the *Rishis* have discovered this.

What do you see?

- You see a number of triangles. Some up, upside down, some upright.
- And you will see lotuses.
- You will see concentric circles.

- You will see some squares.

First, just take a look, there is in the very middle, there is a dot. That is called *Bindu*. Just a dot! It is not a dot. This, in a way of speaking, we can say it is the point of singularity. What Stephen Hawking says, point of singularity!

Why do we compare it with this? Because that dot or *Bindu* represents **Divine Mother, Shakti!** And from Her the whole universe has emanated.

This diagram represents three things. It is -

- 1) It represents the whole of the Goddess in manifestation. It is the body of the Divine Mother.
- 2) It represents human body.
- 3) It represents - the entire cosmos is here.

This is the most simplified of the drawings that I have been able to print. Unfortunately I didn't have a color printer, otherwise we would have had an excellent picture of this.

Very briefly, what it means is, you see, **Creation is possible only when pure consciousness combines itself with the Divine energy.**
In Vedāntic terminology this energy is called *Māyā*.
But, in devotional literature, She is called the Divine Mother.

Sri is the Divine Mother.

Chakra means it is the diagram. This is the best diagram.

You will notice that the whole thing is enclosed by **4 squarish types**. These **4** are supposed to represent four doors, so that we can enter into the presence of the **Divine Mother** .

So you see the **triangles**. I know from a distance, it is difficult, later on you can take a look at it.

The inverted triangle represents the feminine principle.

The upright triangle represents the pure consciousness.

Creation is always a combination of pure consciousness, plus the Divine energy.

And there are deeper things here - That **these triangles cross each other**. And **wherever they cross each other, a point of energy is created.**

And, interestingly, you know, in Chinese system of medicine, what you call acupuncture, there will be several points. These are in a way comparable to that.

So the *Prāna*, or the energy is circulating wherever these crossings happen. If the crossings are not alright, then ill health results. If the crossings are alright, then good health results, in every sense of the term.

Then you will see the circles with lotuses.

In Indian symbolical system, a Lotus always symbolizes, signifies, a state of consciousness.

And interestingly, every classical Hindu temple is also represented by this *Sri-chakra*.

There is - 9 doored ways are there. But in *Tāntric* terminology, we say, there are, you know, 7 *chakras* are there.

- मूलाधार (Muladhara)
- स्वाधिष्ठान (Swadhisthana)
- मणिपूर (Manipura)
- अनाहत (Anahata)
- विशुद्ध (Vishuddha)
- आज्ञा (Ajna)
- सहस्रार् (Sahasrar)

These are the 7 *chakras*

(5:05 mins)

After this class, you please go out into this hall, and there is a temple there. A model of a temple. And the temple is enclosed with several compound walls, you know. You just try to... How many enclosures are there? You will see there are exactly 7 enclosures. Each represents an ascending state of consciousness. The deeper we go, the more advanced we are spiritually.

Here also, the practitioner, what he does? The *Guru* initiates secretly, because from outside we will not know. Here also it is not drawn.

Sanskrit alphabet consists of 51 letters. And here, all these places are filled with 51 letters of the Sanskrit alphabet. You can say, if it were English alphabetical letters, then there will be 26. What does this 26 or 51 really represent? Do you know what it represents?

Let me tell you a joke. There was a budding poet. He wrote some book of poems. It was published, and the great writer Mark Twain was invited to inaugurate it. He also came and sat down on the stage. And the young poet was asked to recite his own poems, and he did it. And was looking at these people on the stage, for their reaction. Everybody said it is very nicely written. Mark Twain said 'No, no, I have read this book somewhere. You only plagiarised the whole lot'. The poet got so angry. 'If it is true, Mr Twain, you must show me the book'. He said I will send you one. He went back and sent a dictionary! Because all the words, the whole language, are there in the dictionary, is it not?

Though I'm telling this in a jocular way, **the whole universe is represented through sounds**. And all these sounds are contained within this alphabet, is it not? So a combination of these alphabetical letters is what we call different names of the different objects.

But **what are these alphabetical letters, really speaking? They are the emanations of the Divine Mother**. That is why in Sanskrit they are called *Mātrika Nyāsa*. When we do worship, we touch various parts of the body with one one alphabetical ऐं ॐ (*āim om hrim*) like that - touching. It is symbolizing that the whole body is nothing but a representation of this whole universe. And by implication it means the whole body is microcosm.

What is microcosm? Is there, this microcosm is there.

Sri Rāmakrishna put it in His own inimitable way. There was a devotee and he once made a statement, which *Sri Rāmakrishna* liked very much. What was the statement? **A devotee is superior even to God**. How come? So *Sri Rāmakrishna* asked that devotee to explain it. And he said, 'Look, this universe, it is infinite. Nobody can imagine how big it is. And we are all in this universe. But God contains this whole universe within Himself. He transcends this universe, infinite universe, is it not? So who is great, God or the World? God is greater. But that God, who is even greater than the universe, is contained in the heart of the devotee. Then who is greater? God or the devotee?

So a Human Body, human personality - It represents microcosm. The entire cosmos is represented here. And this *Sri chakra* contains these three things

- symbolic of a human body.
- The body of the Goddess.
- And this entire universe.

When we can make all these 3, realize them - all these 3 - as one in three and three in one - as pure consciousness, then the goal is reached.

A triangle, as I explained in my last class, It is a combination of –

- the waking state, the dream state, and the dreamless state. Symbolism!
- Or it can be the gross body, the subtle body, and the causal body.
- Or it is a combination of God, Universe, and the individual soul.

Depending upon the person, practitioner, the *Guru* slowly advances him through telling these various things.

(10:03 mins)

So he not only makes it to be drawn. This is something which you cannot buy from a market, and then start staring at it. The *Guru*, when he initiates the disciple, then he instructs him how to construct this particular *Yantra*. Telling to him, what is the meaning, significance of each of these lines and all those things.

And this disciple has to construct this *Sri-chakra*, every time he wants to worship it. Painstakingly he has to construct. Why should he do it?

- Because that **concentrates his mind.**
- That **makes him think of the meaning.**
- And in course of time, **he will realize that he, the Divine Mother, and the universe are one and the same.**

In brief this is the symbolism of the *Sri-chakra*

Unfortunately though, this *Sri-chakra* is also reputed to give miraculous powers. That is why those who practice either black magic or white magic, they use it very much in India, at least.

And as I also mentioned that Hume, Dr Hume the famous psychologist, he indulged in the study of some of these things, he called *Mandalas*. I do not know if some of you have studied Tibetan Buddhistic scriptures. You will come across many *Mandalas*. They call it *Mandalas*.

They are much more graphic than Indian *Yantras*. There they fill them actually with the pictures of the Gods, various Gods and Goddesses. They are also hung on the walls – the different pictures of the Gods, Goddesses, demons, very ferocious figures, and all those things. And uneducated people, I do not mean illiterate, I mean those who do not understand these things, ‘O, these Tibetans are very gross minded. Like a child’s scribbling’.

They don't know what they are doing. They represent God in these various forms. They do not know how much deep significance it has for the people who know about it.

You see, each one of our religions or cultures produces certain types of symbols, which may not have that much of meaning for other cultures.

Take for example, *Cross*. You know, *Crosses* doesn't make much of a meaning for a Hindu. But whereas a *Swastika* makes a lot of meaning for a Hindu.

But it also, again, for a Hindu a *Swastika* is a very, one of the most auspicious symbols. But for a Jew. Let him think of the *Swastika*. He thinks, you know, like the Holocaust and pogroms and all those things.

Whereas a *Cross*, you mention the *Cross*, for a Christian the whole life is, as though is compressed in that one symbol – *Cross*. How many people have dedicated their lives to this *Cross*!

So it needs faith, it needs discipline, it needs tremendous focus of mind. All these things. It is a way of spiritually progressing. And we do it in our regular worship, in a very simplified way we do it.

The point we are discussing is all these are aids. So our topic is rituals, symbols, how symbols help us in our spiritual progress.

These are not the only things that are used in symbols. There are also other things. So one of the most important of these things is, what is called **The contemplation of sound**. In simple words, it means we all use *mantras*, including Muslims, including Christians.

Christians have a wonderful *mantra*, it is called *Jesus mantra*. Do you know what it is? *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me*. There are variations, but this is the most important essence of this *mantra*.

In Hindus, of course, they excel in *mantras*, and they create different types of *mantras*. It's a philosophy by itself. In case you do not know that philosophy is called स्फोट वाद (*Sphoṭa-vāda*). It is the philosophy of sound. In *Vedāntic* terminology, it is called शब्द ब्रह्म (*Shabda-Brahmā*), God in the form of sound!

Now sound, do not make a mistake is the sounds which we hear, which the ears hear. No! Here, by sound – *Shabda*, they do not mean this kind of physiological something, which strikes the ear-canal and produces certain reactions. That is the gross meaning. (15:06 mins)

The subtle meaning is, again, what we call the finest point from where this whole universe has emanated – *Shabda-Bramhā*. So, if this whole universe has come out from the sound; where from the sound has come out? The sound itself has not come out from anywhere. But **God perceived as sound, *Shabda-Bramhā*, in the form of sound. And the sound manifested itself in the form of this universe.** Therefore every name, in a way of speaking, is a *Mantra*.

You know, you may not have thought deeply about it. If you have watched nature films. You know, a tiger cub, it is playing, and it encounters some problem, some danger. And it cries out. And immediately... You know, it is crying out all the time, but when the danger comes it emanates a particular sound. As soon as the mother hears that sound it jumps up and runs to the rescue of its cub.

Now for us does that sound make any meaning? It is a *mantra*. The cub is repeating this *mantra*. ‘O God! Come and save me’. I’m putting it in that form. But what it’s telling is, ‘*Mā*, please come and help me’. Is it not a *mantra*?

When we are babies are we not crying? When we are hungry we cry. Of course we cry also when we are not hungry. That’s a different matter. We cry for all sorts of reasons. But when we’re wanting something we cry. And it’s a *mantra*.

Because what is a *mantra*? That which helps us is a *mantra*. By repetition, by uttering, whatever helps is a *mantra*.

A tiger cub is telling this *mantra*, ‘Mother, come and help me. There seems to be a danger.’ And a baby is crying, ‘Mother, I’m hungry. I need food’. So immediately as soon as that *mantra* is uttered, the Goddess comes, means the mother comes and feeds the baby.

So this whole universe is nothing but a play of the Divine Mother. So there is a special name for the Divine Mother in Sanskrit. It is called *Lalitā*. *Lalitā* means divine play! *Līlā*!

So this is also called, ***Sri-chakra* is also called *Lalitā-chakra*. Because it is the play of the Divine Mother. *Chit-shakti Līlā*, *Kṛidā*!**

So the whole universe is nothing but a matter of sound. And from a scientific point of view also it is absolutely true.

How is it true? You see, what are the objects in this universe consisting of? Molecules. And what are these molecules doing? They are whirling at light mind boggling speeds. Are they not?

They are in other words, nothing but vibrations. We are all vibrating all the time. But because of our limitation of our sense organs, we do not see. Are we vibrating now? We are. If you look through an electronic microscope, you will see nothing but vibration.

Of course, what about the mind? Is it vibrating or is it still? It is vibrating. Everything in this universe is vibrating.

And when something vibrates what happens? Sound is produced.

So this is the, in brief, the philosophy of sound. Everything has emanated from sound, from the God called *Shabda-brahmā*. And therefore, this whole universe is nothing but different types of sounds. These sounds are represented by the gross sounds that we call names. That is, these names are contained in the alphabet. So, an alphabet, or a language, is nothing but a symbol representing our various thoughts.

And the highest of these thoughts is God, and therefore God is nothing but a kind of *mantra*. God is a *mantra*! Any name would be sufficient to call upon God, but there are certain names which have good associations, therefore they're called *mantras*. But any name could be a *mantra*.

Now in this regard, if you are thinking that I am talking something, but it is not true. I am only talking about what *Sri Rāmakrishna* had experienced. He saw the Divine Mother in the form of the alphabets. He also saw the Divine Mother in the form of this triangle. *Swāmi Vivekānanda* also had that experience.

So therefore Hindu *Rishis* had found out one of the best ways of progressing in spiritual life is through the usage of certain combinations of the alphabets, which they call *mantras*.

(20:13 mins)

These *mantras* are not arbitrarily made. They are discovered in the depths of meditation by the *Rishis*. And they must also be conveyed by some great people who are really practicing it. So these *mantras* are extensively used in the Hindu system of philosophy. So this is another type of symbols we use, and most powerful.

And of all the symbols... As I mentioned,

- there are **visual symbols**,
- and there are **sound symbols**,
- then there are **ideational symbols**.

So these **sound symbols** are even more significant and influential than even **visual symbols**. That is why *mantras*.

We are all initiated by *mantras*, most of the disciples of *Sri Ramakrishna*, and many Hindus of their own particular chosen deity. So this is intimately connected with the theory of the chosen deity, which I will come later on.

So these *mantras* form such an important part in our life. Not only in the spiritual life, but also in our day to day life.

So what is the definition of a *mantra*? That which saves us!

मननात् त्रायते इति मन्त्रः॥ (*mananāt trāyate iti mantraḥ*)

That which saves by repetition is called a *mantra*.

But by extension, it also means whatever brings about a change within us, that is a *mantra*.

There was an interesting incident. My predecessor *Swāmi Bhavyānanda*. And he was talking with a devotee. Not really a devotee, a kind of friend. *Swāmi* probably was talking about the power of *mantras*. And this man said, 'I don't believe. These are all, you know, nonsensical things. There is no special power in *mantras*'. *Swāmi* became very serious grave. He looked at him and said, 'You rascal'. As soon as he, this man heard that word rascal, his face became red. Immediately the *Swāmi* laughed and said, 'See, you said you didn't believe in the power of words. This word rascal, how much change it has brought in you'.

We are all slaves to these sounds, even when it is untrue. How these words influence us. If suppose a beautiful lady is going, somebody calls her, 'You are ugly'. Does that make the person ugly? Or if an ugly person is going, and somebody just flatters, 'You are most beautiful'. Does it make her very beautiful?

There was a diplomat, and he used to please all the ladies, especially ladies. He used to call, 'All the women are angels fallen from heaven'. So one day he was attending a reception, and a snub nosed woman came to him. She heard that this man says that every woman is a fallen angel. She marched up to him and said, 'Do you say I am also

an angel, fallen from heaven?’ He said, ‘Of course madam. You are an angel fallen from heaven, but that you landed on your nose is not your fault’.

You know, ‘It's good to see you’; ‘O, you are wonderful’, even if it is not. These words, we are all slaves to these words. They have such tremendous influence upon us. But in the hands of a right person, a *Guru* or a teacher who says, ‘Go on, come on, you are doing very well’, encourages. How much wonderful it will be, you know?

A commander in chief, he can just turn to his soldiers and say, ‘You have done very well, you are very brave. Let us do a little bit more’. You know they will be prepared to give their lives up for him.

So it can, words can be used either to depress a person, or to encourage him. But a *mantra*, specifically means, always a positive, encouraging, optimistic something, which makes us better people in every way. That is why it is called a *mantra*.

And in Indian system of *sādhana*, Indian *sādhana*, these *mantras* have assumed utmost importance.

And another thing that we also discussed extensively, the usage of images, *Pratimās*. 3 dimensional figures! Every devotee goes to a temple, bows down to a particular image. Now here, in this context, **we also have to understand these images of various Gods and Goddesses are not arbitrarily drawn on a piece of paper by somebody sitting there, they are also revelations in the depths of meditation.**

(25:12 mins)

Then the question comes – are they realities? Yes and no.

How is it? **From the highest point of view, they are not realities. They are only a stage where we perceive God in a particular form.** But they are there as milestones, good milestones, telling us that you are approaching the goal, is a right path.

But from our standpoint of view – they are higher realities than the reality that we are experiencing.

There was a person who went to a great saint called *Ramana Maharshi*. You know, Hindus believe that there are heavenly places called *Vaikuntha*, the devotees of *Vishnu* go to this place. And the devotees of *Shiva* go to another place called *Kailash*. *Vaikuntha Kailash*! So this Devotee had this doubt, that this *Kailash* and *Vaikuntha*, are they real?

Now, you see, what do you mean by reality? This is a very peculiar question, you know? If somebody is seeing a ghost, and if he asks, 'I'm seeing a ghost. Is it real or is it unreal?' What would be the answer? It is both real and unreal. Because I do not see it, it is not real. But because you see it, it is real for you, because it is affecting your life. Whatever is affecting you is the real thing so far as you are concerned. Whatever affects me that is real for me.

So *Ramana Maharshi* gave a beautiful reply and said, 'As long as you think your body, your mind are real, they are also real. But when you think you are the pure consciousness, then of course there is no *Vaikuntha*, there is no *Kailash*, nothing is there'.

Does it mean that they disappear? No, they do not disappear. They become enlarged until they reach infinity. **Nothing is destroyed, everything is absorbed.** So *Vaikuntha*, *Kailash*, all these are included in what is called pure consciousness. After all what will you do when you go to *Vaikuntha*?

There was an interfaith seminary, some people came, we had a meeting since yesterday. Day before yesterday, and especially yesterday and today. So, many Christians believe that they will become angels, and they will be there, you know, with God. I made fun of them. You know, angels, I did not know how troublesome it is to become an angel. It is wonderful I thought to be an angel until I saw a harp. This is, this is what these fellows are supposed to carry around all the time. That huge harp! I would not want to be an angel.

So, all these are true, devils are there, ghosts are there, spirits are there. **There are many many many degrees of reality.** They are neither real nor unreal. Because **they are real as long as we experience them. They are unreal when we reach the highest point of view.** That is the only reality. But until we reach, it would be foolish and dangerous to say they do not exist.

So, these *Pratimās* or the 3 dimensional images, and elaborate rituals, they have helped Hindus to a very great extent. Wherever there are very rich fields of rituals, that becomes a ground, both for weeds also for good harvest. There is, how many number of saints India has produced?

In this context, there was a very interesting incident. *Swāmi Vivekānanda* went to a place called *Ghazipur* and met a great saint called *Pāvhāri Bābā*. Now this *Pāvhāri Bābā* was supposed to be a great realised soul. A Man of self knowledge, and He was a great *Yogi*. For months together He used to disappear from human view. Not that he was

moving in the air. There was an underground room. He used to go there and what he does nobody knew.

Now *Swāmi Vivekānanda* observed that this *Pāvhāri Bābā* had a beautiful, what is it called, swing where the images of *Rādhā* and *Krishna*... you know in Hindu temples you get? And with great devotion He was worshipping these images. Now *Swāmi Vivekānanda* was surprised and said, 'You are a great *Yogi*. Why are you worshipping these images?' Then you know what *Pāvhāri Bābā* said? He said, 'Why should you think that what I do is for my own self?' And *Swāmi Vivekānanda* appreciated that reply very much.

(30:00 mins)

So what is the implication? Why was He... For whose sake was He worshipping? For our sake! So that we can have devotion to God in that form, until we also realize Him.

Take the example of *Sri Rāmakrishna* Himself. You know, *Swāmi Vivekānanda*, when He used to go to *Sri Rāmakrishna*, He used to criticize *Sri Rāmakrishna*. 'What, even now He goes to the temples'? Because *Swāmi Vivekānanda* in the beginning didn't like image worship. He was a member of *Brahmo-samāj*, you see.

So why was *Sri Rāmakrishna* going to the temples? He used to fan the Deity with great reverence, He used to leave His slippers outside, stand there, and prostrate and fan the deity, and receive the sacramental food, and all those things. Tell me, for what purpose? Did he need all those things? He was doing it so that we would not imitate Him and discard all those things like fools, and we will never progress in spiritual life. It is for inspiring us, He was doing all those things.

So these images have helped people, 3 dimensional images have helped. I will give you another example, there was a great South Indian saint called *Thiagarāja*. He was supposed to be one of the three saints who were the grandfathers of South carnatic music. And this *Thiagarāja* was devoted to *Sri Rāma*. And he heard somebody telling him that if you repeat the name of *Rāma* 96 crores, several millions, it will take whole life, then you will have the vision of *Rāma*. And somehow he obtained the faith that if I can repeat *Rāma-nāma* so many times, I will have a vision of *Rāma*.

You have to understand, to complete that amount of number, every day if a person does several 1000, maybe 100,000, then at the end of 90 years or something, he can have the vision of God. But he said no, I will go on repeating, and he did it. And the last day, he knew that he was going to complete it. And he prayed, 'Lord, you had promised

that when I complete this you will give your vision. It is time for you to come and give your *Darshan* because I'm going to complete it'. And it is said that *Rāma* came.

So the incident I was going to describe, this is only as an introduction, was that when he was a young man he was so deeply devoted to *Sri Rāma*. There were small idols of *Sri Rāma* and *Lakshmana*, *Sita*, *Hanuman*. Somehow his brother, his own brother, became very jealous of *Thiagarāja*, and he didn't want *Thiagarāja* to be such a great saint, devotee.

So, one night, he stole these idols and threw them in a river. Now this *Thiagarāja* got up and his, those idols were his life as it was, and he went and saw the idols were not there. And his heart was broken. He started crying, wandering around like a mad-cap, 'O Rama! What have you done, I can't live without you. And why did you do this, why did you desert me'?

See the point? He did not tell some rogue has come and then taken away you, that you have deserted me. Why did you desert me? And after several days of prayer *Rāma* appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Why are you crying? I am here lying at the bottom of the river. You come and fetch me'. And he, *Thiagarāja* went to that... He told everybody, 'My Rama is here. He told me in a dream'.

And he went there, all the villagers, some out of curiosity, some out of faith, they all accompanied him. And the idols were there! Including the brothers who were also witnessing, that where they have thrown in the deep river, this man went and found out exactly where they were.

If you think this is a cock and bull story, I also mentioned *Kshudirām* was one day returning from a village. And He was lying at noon under a tree. Suddenly *Rāma* appeared to Him and said, 'I'm lying here without anybody taking care of me. Please look after me. Take me home and look after me'. And He got up and He saw the exact spot where *Rāma* pointed out to Him, and He went there. There was a hole in the field, and He saw that there was a beautiful what we call iconic, this *Shāligrāma*. And a snake, a hooded snake, was protecting that. But *Kshudirām* had no fear, He stretched His hand taking *Rāma*'s name, the snake disappeared. He brought the *Shāligrāma* home.

Well, this is another, there are innumerable stories, just I will mention one more story. You know, the *Holy Mother* used to be at *Udbodhan*. And there were so many women and women somehow like *Krishna*. He is very... Especially childless women, they like *Sri Krishna*, *Boy Krishna*, *child Krishna*, very much.

(35:09 mins)

So everybody has, every woman has her own child *Krishna*. There are so many small, small, small, small, you know, idols. And *Holy Mother* kept all of them on the shrine steps. And She used to put each one of them a little bit of offering, food – fruits or sweets. And there are so many in number! One day She forgot to put the food in front of one Idol. And that day this *Gopala* appeared and said, ‘Hmm I have not been fed, I am hungry’. And *Mother* smiled and said, ‘Okay, I will feed you’. And immediately She took a little bit of food and then...

You see, for a devotee they are not idols, they are living things, because he has that capacity to see God. This philosophically, after all everything is God. Everything is *Brahman*. If that is true, then even a stone also is *Brahman*. Then why do we not see anything there, consciousness? Because of our ignorance, not because it is not there. *Sri Rāmakrishna* never saw anything as living, nonliving. Everything is *Divine Mother* only in His eyes.

Another very interesting incident took place. Slightly related to our subject. You know *Holy Mother* used to have what is called... She also used to do dental meditation. Do you know what is that? Once somebody came and asked one of our *Swāmis*, at that time transcendental meditation was very popular, ‘*Swāmi*, can you tell anything about transcendental meditation?’ He said, ‘I’m sorry I don’t know anything about transcendental meditation, but if you are wanting to know about dental meditation, I am prepared to tell you’. You know, toothache!

So, *Holy Mother* also used to have teeth problems. If there is a head there will be headache. If there are teeth, there will be teeth ache, don’t think that it won’t have. So She used to use a kind of toothpowder, and it used to have some mixture of tobacco powder. You know it dulls the pain.

And so we have... devotees of *Sri Rāmakrishna* and *Holy Mother*, even now in traditional places, we offer that powder to Her as though She is living, and She uses.

Now, long after Her passing away, this was being offered in *Mother's* house in Calcutta, to *Holy Mother's* picture. And there was a *Swāmi*, who was devotedly worshipping her. And once that powder was finished. It had to be purchased. It is available in shops. But he thought, you know, we will purchase it after a few days. Where is the hurry? Everyday we are offering, one day if She doesn’t get what does it matter. So he didn’t offer. That night the *Holy Mother* appeared in a dream to a devotee somewhere, and said, ‘That fellow had not offered me this.’ So he came running, and he asked the

Pujāri, we call you know priest, 'Swāmi, is it true that you didn't offer this tooth powder to *Holy Mother*'? And the *Pujāri* got wild. He said, 'You know I have been doing this *Pujā* for the last 20 years. Why should She run and appear to you? Why could She not come to me and complain?

You know, this is a wonderful incident. How does the devotee know that this powder was exhausted? Nobody knew accepting the man who was worshiping. But you see, the devotee, somehow has that grace of the *Mother*. And why did the *Mother* appear? After all, could She not do without toothpowder? Does God require toothpowder? You know, we are all supposed to be without teeth, *Bedāntins*. So why do you need tooth powder when there are no tooth at all? It is for our sake.

We consider, as though It is the most honored guest. So our devotion to God will increase. God doesn't need fanning, and lights, and flowers, and fruits, and sweets. We need all those things, but offer it to God. So that slowly it purifies our heart, makes us, takes us nearer to God. So these are some of the examples.

Swāmi Rāmanujāchārya, a great *Āchārya*, in the 12th century, everyday He used to go to the temple and talk to the Lord. It's a wonderful story. I suggest you read this life of *Rāmanujā* by *Swāmi Rāmakrishnānanda*, it's a most wonderful book.

So, in every place you know? *St. Francis*, He used to go and worship *Christ* in a church in Assisi. And one day, he heard that you, 'Francis My church, My house is falling down. Why don't you rebuild it'. And you know, he thought that it was an old church, it was falling down, what *Christ* wanted was, you know, bring some stones and repair the church. Even now that church is preserved under a huge church, just as a holy place. Later on only he understood what *Christ* referred to was not this building made out of stones and cement, but the monastery community. They are not leading good lives, so 'repair my house'. Inner significance!

(40:27 mins)

Everywhere, all over the world we see devotees, how much they worship God. The God comes alive in that particular form and communicates with the Devotee.

Another example, you know, the *Dakshineswar* temple, *Rāni Rasmani* used to worship the Divine Mother. And she had the Divine Mother *Kālī*, before the temple came up, and she had a desire go go on a pilgrimage, and she went. And then, just she started, she had a dream, 'Why do you want to go to *Banāras*'? *Vārānasi*. 'Why don't you construct a temple for me? And I will accept your worship here'. And that is how the temple project had come.

Now another interesting thing was, the temple was progressing, almost complete. And the image of the Mother was made. And the person who was making the image, he was such a religious person. He used to eat once a day, he used to sleep on the floor, and with great devotion he carved this image out of basalt stone.

And the temple wasn't yet complete, so the image was put in a box. And one day the *Rāni* had a dream. Divine Mother appeared, 'How long are you going to imprison me in the box'? And that is why she consulted the people, and very quickly on a day sacred to *Vaishnavas*, she had to install the Divine Mother's image, this *Snān-yātra* day, I think, she had to do it.

So you see how these images respond to us. All over the world we get different examples. *Sri Rāmakrishna*, of course came, and He had reinforced our faith in these images. He started his spiritual life with this image-worship. So this **image worship is one of the most important aids in developing the devotion to the Lord.**

Then *Swāmi Vivekānanda* also mentions another thing, which is, which is called the worship of the books. And all of us are worshipers of the books. You see, especially there are some sects, one particular sect is called Sikhs, *Sikhism*. And what do they worship? It is the *Granth-Sāhib*. *Sāhib* means Lord. The book itself becomes the *Sāhib*, the God! You know, they fan the book, they change the dressing to the book, everything they do for the book. If you, those who are watching in the *Āsthā* channel, you will see the Sikhs, you know, taking fans, and then doing all those things.

Book worship is one of the most important aids in developing spiritual life. Book means here a holy scripture. So for the followers of Hinduism *Vedās* are the Holy Scriptures. *Gītā*, *Upanishads* are the Holy Scriptures. For Christians it is the *Bible*. And for Muslims it is the *Koran*, etc. Buddhists - *Tripiṭakas*.

It has advantages. The advantage is that a book gives tremendous strength to its followers. Because all of them regard these books, not written by some human being, but divine revelations. And it helps because, really, it contains the highest truths.

But there is also the danger, downside! What is the danger? We can become very fanatical about it. And whatever is written in these so-called Sacred Scriptures, can be taken as divine revelation.

Take for example the Bible. And you take, there are lots of stories of *Genesis*. This was the *David's* house, *David* had begotten so many... and that those so many begotten... on

and on and on pages after pages the story goes. Divine Revelation! So somebody asked me, 'Do you believe that it is a divine revelation?' I said certainly I believe it is a divine revelation. After all, you know, God has infinite time, how is He going to pass His time? By telling these stories. That is not scripture at all.

That knowledge, which we cannot obtain through our ordinary sense organs, 5 sense organs, that alone is the real scripture. Books gives us tremendous strength.

So *Sri Rāmakrishna* came and reinforced this faith in the books for Hindus, for Christians, for Muslims. And about this *Gītā* He used to say, you know, if a devotee may not have anything else, but he must have at least a copy of the *Gītā*. Because it really contains the supernatural truths, supersensuous truths. Truths about God. So book worship is also one of them.

(45:13 mins)

So these are some of the things that are connected with spiritual practices -

- Rituals
- And rituals consisting of symbols
- And rituals consisting of worshipping these images
- Using the *Mantras*
- Worshipping the books, etc.

In the *Upanishads* there is also the mention of one particular thing which may be very helpful to many of us. **Worship the mind as God.** This is a most wonderful *Vidyārūpāsānā* or contemplation, because we all realize and understand that everything depends upon our mind. If you think I am happy, then you are happy. You think you are unhappy, then you are unhappy. You think you are bound, you are bound. You think you are free, then you are free. You think you are courageous, then you are very courageous.

Say, take the example, Napoleon, Alexander the Great. You know how courageous they were? At the age of, before the age of 32, like *Swāmi Vivekānanda*, he conquered practically the whole world. But if you ask another person, why could you not have done the same thing? He would not do. Where is the difference? This man was fearless, he looked at everything in a courageous manner.

Swāmi Vivekānanda, you know, there were so many people who were much more talented than *Swāmi Vivekānanda*, who had more degrees than *Swāmi Vivekānanda*, who were more strong than *Swāmi Vivekānanda*. Who were more beautiful, even in a

physical way, taller and heftier and stronger than *Swāmi Vivekānanda*. But nobody can come even to the toes of *Swāmi Vivekānanda* as far as personality is concerned.

Now there was a *Swāmi* called *Swāmi Atulānanda*, and he saw *Swāmi Vivekānanda*. He wrote his reminiscences, and in that he was telling, first time I saw *Swāmi Vivekānanda*... There was a meeting, this man at that time he was called *Gurudās*. He went to attend the meeting, and he said I saw *Swāmiji*. And I was wondering, I heard so much about *Swāmi Vivekānanda*, I didn't see anything, I was not impressed. It was just, not even like tall Americans. I said why they exaggerated this greatness of *Swāmi Vivekānanda* so much? At that time, *Swāmi Vivekānanda* went on meeting His old friends, shaking hands with them, talking to them. Then the time came for Him to give a talk. *Swāmi Atulānanda* started telling, the moment *Swāmi Vivekānanda* stepped onto the stage, I felt and I am sure everybody else also had the same experience, as though *Swāmi Vivekānanda* had grown and He's touching the sky. And everybody became a Pygmy in front of Him.

You know, to understand even *Swāmi Vivekānanda*'s personality, we have to see Him at different moods. So the point we are discussing is what is that that made *Swāmi Vivekānanda* so great? Or *Swāmi Vivekānanda* *Swāmi Vivekānanda* - what is the difference? We are also having the same human body, we also speak Bengali language. What is the difference? It is personality!

What is the personality? The predominant thoughts in the mind. He used to say, 'I can do anything. I can achieve anything. I am *Brahman*'. That is the difference. Whereas we think we are small worms, inferiority complex.

You know there was a man who went to a psychiatrist. And the doctor asked him, 'What for did you come'? He said, 'Doctor I'm suffering from inferiority complex. Will you help me'? He said, 'Yes'. So he treated him for two years and called him in and said, 'I'm sorry I can't cure you, because you are not suffering from inferiority complex, you are inferior'.

We feel, you know, **whatever we feel about ourselves, that is how we express our personality.** This is all the difference.

If you want another example, you know, a dog in its own house behaves like a lion. Let it step out of its gate, you will see, its real nature will come out.

So, this worship of the mind - uplifting the mind with beautiful thoughts, creative thoughts, positive thoughts, optimistic thoughts. That's what we are supposed to do in meditation.

So Swāmi Vivekānanda had dealt with these things extensively. I mentioned –

- Worship of the books.
- Then worship of the mind.
- Worship of the *Nāma Shakti* or sound symbols.

(49:58 mins)

Then among the sound symbols, **according to Hindu philosophy, Om is the best sound symbol in the world.** I also explained why it is so? Because **it represents all the sounds that can ever be in this universe**, because it represents these combined sounds of all this vocal system.

So these are the important aids.

Now, all these rituals, worship of the, or repetition of the *Mantras*, worship of the images, etc, worship of the books, etc. must lead to the next point, upon which we have to concentrate.

What is that point? It is called chosen Deity, *Ishtha Devatā*!

Swāmi Vivekānanda devotes one entire chapter for this. And it's one of the most important chapters in the discussion of the *Bhakti Yogā*.

And one of *Sri Rāmakrishna*'s teachings is that nobody can advance towards God unless he has a special chosen Deity. And this also implies that there is not one chosen Deity, because if there is only one chosen Deity, what is the meaning of chosen?

You know Ford was manufacturing his cars. All were black coloured only. Somebody went and said that, 'Ford it's a very production, but why only black color? Why can't we can't we have green, red, yellow'? He said, 'No problem. You can have any color you like, as long as it is black'.

It is not one chosen Deity, because the very word implies we have the freedom to think of God in a particular way. And if we do not follow this ideal, what would be the consequences? Why so much of bloodshed in the world, in the name of religion, in the name of God?

One of the important teachings of *Sri Rāmakrishna* is, as many opinions – যত মত তত পথ (*joto mot toto poth*) As many opinions, so many paths! It's a statement of deep significance which we shall discuss in our next class.

ॐ शान्ति शान्ति शान्ति: ।

Om Shanti shanti shanti: |
(55:17 mins)