

8. Self-Realisation - The Supreme Goal of *Sanātana Dharma*

– *Sadguru Sri Madhusudan Sai*

We have learnt so far that the central philosophy of *sanātana dharma* is self-realisation which is to experience divinity within and without. The four goals of human life namely, *dharma* or righteous actions to fulfil one's duties, *artha* or righteous means to earn wealth and fulfil desires, *kāma* or righteous desires that are to be satisfied by righteous means, and finally *mokṣa* or liberation from the cycles of birth and death that bind the self, by realising the truth of all existence as divinity, have also been discussed earlier.

We have also learnt that the knots of the heart namely, *avidyā* - ignorance of our divine nature, *kāma* - unwanted desires, and *karma* - unnecessary actions undertaken to fulfil unwanted desires, distract oneself from the goal of life and thus render a person incapable of realising one's divinity.

The guidance and company of an enlightened master or *guru* helps one overcome the influence of illusory world or *māyā* and forge ahead on the path of self-realisation. We have learnt about the qualities of a true Master and a true seeker as well.

Now, we are about to discuss what it means to be self-realised, what is 'that' state of existence like, how does it feel to be a self-realised person who has attained liberation - the highest human potential?

There are many who have interpreted and explained self-realisation including the idea of its attainment only upon one's death, but those are way off the mark of truth. The first thing we must know is that realisation is not meant to be attained upon death, but it is the very existential reality of all. The word self-realisation or *ātma sākṣātkāra* is actually self-explanatory. When we say we have realised, it only means that we have understood or accessed something that was very much with us, unlike achieving or attaining something that was not there before. Like the forgetful old grandfather who

keeps his spectacles on his head and looks for it all around, till his grandchild tells him that it is right on his head, that is when he realises that the spectacles are with him. Similar to this case where the spectacles were not lost and so could not have been found, but had been forgotten on one's own head, likewise this realisation that we are divine is not to be found somewhere, it is right here within us, it's just that we are looking for it in the wrong place having totally forgotten about it.

So, with certain efforts and guidance when one realises divinity very much within one's lifetime, what does he or she truly experience? *Taittirīya Upaniṣad's Ānandavallī* declares that the self-realised person experiences supreme bliss equivalent in its quality and intensity to the bliss of Supreme *Brahman* - the divine origin of all! Just to give you an idea of the quality and intensity of the bliss of *Brahman*, *Ānandavallī* explains that the *ānanda* experienced by *Brahman* is 10^{20} times the *ānanda* experienced by a person who is in the prime of his youth, who is healthy, capable, intelligent and determined and who owns the entire earth and all the wealth that exists therein! Even with all the earthly efforts of a lifetime one cannot fulfil this condition of being young, healthy, intelligent and super-wealthy to own the entire earth and all its belongings, which collectively consist of only one single unit of human bliss, but the experience of 10^{20} times of this human bliss which is the divine bliss of *Brahman* comes to the one who is self-realised and thus freed of all desires (*akāmatah*). Do not take this calculation too literally, for it is only a way of the great seers of *Upaniṣads* to encourage people to abandon hankering after paltry worldly pleasures and motivate them to pursue the path of self-realisation.

Many might have this false notion that such a person intoxicated by the divine bliss, may end up growing a beard, wearing robes of a renunciate, disengaging from all societal actions and dwelling in far-off wild secluded caves; but these are all misconceptions. Yes, one may choose to lead such a life of a renunciate, but it is not necessary, not even true in the case of a self-realised being. In fact, *Mundaka Upaniṣad* on the contrary says that such a person who sees

oneness of all creation considers everything and everyone as the same divinity manifest in different forms, thus becomes ever engaged in the welfare of all even while revelling in the divine bliss within and without - *Ātmakrīda Ātmarathi Kriyāvān*.

Further our scriptures like the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* also say that such a person experiences permanent happiness and peace - *teṣāṃ sukhaṃ śāśvataṃ - teṣāṃ śanti śāśvathi*. The knots of the heart are cut asunder, all his doubts disappear, he is freed from the cycles of action- reaction and thereby of births and deaths. He perceives divinity within and without and thus gets rid of all duality and differences. *The Bhagavadgītā* calls the realised person as *sthitaprajña*- the one of steady awareness, who is unaffected by the dualities of pleasures and pains, is completely desireless and is freed of attachments, fear, and anger.

Thus, one thing that must be made clear is that this experience of self-realisation is something that can be had even while one lives in the society, and not to be considered as a post-death event or something that is reserved only for the monks and renunciates.

Another beautiful term for such a person who has realised divinity even while living as a regular human being is *jīvanmukta* – free from all bondages of life. Sri Adishankaracharya explains in *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* about the qualities of such a *jīvanmukta* in great detail in *ślokas* 426-445. But at the end of it all, the foremost quality of a *jīvanmukta* is what the Lord of death, Yama, tells to the curious young seeker Nachiketa in *Kaṭhapaniṣad*, which is the complete annihilation of all desires in one's heart. Such a desireless person is verily *Brahman* then and there.

One may wonder if eating, sleeping, working, earning, having a family and progeny, which are all prescribed by the scriptures as part of the four goals of life, are considered as desires that can be impediments in one becoming self-realised! Well, the answer is that anything which one does to get closer to

divinity is acceptable, and any desire or action that deviates from that ultimate goal of self-realisation is to be rejected. A *jivanmukta* also eats, sleeps, does his or her thing, but all that is done without any desire for oneself. He or she simply undertakes activities as dictated by the divine consciousness within, and exists only to allow divinity to express itself through his or her life like an actor in a drama who carries out the instructions of the director. 'Such a person does not find it difficult to either involve in or withdraw from whatever comes his or her way by the divine will. Such a person does things as divinely ordained and remains ever free and happy', says the *Aṣṭāvakraḡītā*.

Isn't it amazing to experience that exalted state of existence where one is ever free, ever happy, ever satisfied and ever at peace? This is the ultimate guidance and goal of *sanātana dharma*.

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