

PRASNOTTARA VAHINI

(Answers to Spiritual Questions)

by

BHAGAWAN SRI SATHYA SAI BABA



PRASANTHI NILAYAM

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THE ANSWER

Prasna means “question.” Uttara means “answer,” and Vahini indicates “a stream.” This book is the stream of the questions that have evoked answers from Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. Among the tasks that Bhagawan has assumed while incarnating, He has declared as basic, the one which He calls, “the clarification and purification of the religious scriptures of mankind.” Every Vahini emanating from Him has done this service to some aspect or other of the spiritual upliftment of man.

This Vahini is one of the earliest in the series, since it seeks to elucidate the fundamental concepts and precepts of religion, especially the technical words and expressions that seek to concretise them. Hitherto published as an Appendix to a single Vahini, the Geetha Vahini, it is now placed in the hands of seekers as a key publication, helpful for readers of all the Vahinis.

The Ancient Wisdom (*Sanathana Dharma*), the Perennial Path, has been communicated to posterity in words that have suffered distortion, devaluation, dilution and denigration through the efflux of time and the controversies among commentators. Varna, Asrama, Yoga, Sanyasa, Yajna, Karma—these are interpreted by dialecticians and practitioners of varied schools and sects, in confusing and contradictory versions.

Bhagawan has resolved these tangles. His exemplary love and patience sweeten not only every answer but every question too, for, He has, by posturing as the interrogator, made the clarifications full and fruitful.

N. Kasturi
Editor, Sanathana Sarathi
14 Jan., 1984

CONTENTS

1	The Body and the Indriyas	1
2	The Fourteen Lokas	9
3	The Four Asramas	13
4	Moksha and Karma	19
5	Vidya and Bhakthi	23
6	Obstacles To Moksha	29
7	The Pancha Kosas	35
8	Yoga and Moksha	41
9	Jnana and Yoga	45
10	Brahma Vidya and Women	49
11	Asramas and Varnas	55
12	The Sastras and Sanyasa	61
13	Manthra and Japa	67
14	Thapas	73
15	Ashtanga Yoga	81

CHAPTER I

THE BODY AND THE INDRIYAS

- Q. Why is this human body said to be composed of the Five Elements, the *Panchabhootas*?
- A. Since it is a product of the Five Elements.
- Q. What exactly are the Five Elements?
- A. *Akasa, Vayu, Agni, Jala* and *Prithivi*, which are usually referred to as ether, air, fire, water and earth.
- Q. From where did these originate?
- A. Each subsequent element originated from the previous one.
- Q. Which is the cause of the first and therefore of all the five?
- A. Brahman, the unmodified, the fixed, the Basis.

- Q. What is the relationship between these Five Elements and this human body?
- A. From Brahman originated *Yathna* and *Mahath* (Effort and Cosmos); from these was born Akasa, from Akasa was born Vayu; from Vayu, Agni; from Agni, Jalam; and from Jalam, Prithivi. The human body is the result of the combination of all these five.
- Q. In what form do these elements persist in the body?
- A. Each element has again become fivefold and has gone into the composition of the body.
- Q. The first—Akasa, what are the five which it has become?
- A. The cogniser (*Jnaatha*), *manas* (mind), *buddhi* (intellect), *ahamkaaram* (egoism), *panchakam* (existence, effulgence, bliss).
- Q. Speaking as “in the body,” how are these indicated?
- A. They are recognised as the “inner senses.”
- Q. Now, what are the five forms of the next element, Vayu?
- A. *Samaana* (balanced breathing), *Vyaana* (The life wind, diffused throughout the whole body), *Udhaana* (life wind which rises on throat and enters head), *Prana* (breath, vital airs) and *Apaana* (down breath).

- Q. And, in the body, what are they called?
- A. The Pancha Pranas, the five vital airs.
- Q. And Agni?...the Fire-element?
- A. That element became the sensory organs: the ear, the skin, the eye, the tongue, the nose.
- Q. And how are they demarcated?
- A. As *Jnanendriyas*, the organs of knowledge.
- Q. Tell me, what are the *Jalapanchakas*, the five which the Water-element became?
- A. *Sabda, Sparsa, Rupa, Rasa, Gandha*...Sound, Touch, Form, Taste and Smell.
- Q. Have they too any special name?
- A. They are known as *Panchathanmatras*...the Five Subtlenesses.
- Q. The Earth-element remains out of the Five. How does it appear in the body?
- A. The vocal organs, hands, legs, genitals and the excretory organs.
- Q. And they are known as...
- A. As *Karmendriyas*...the organs of action.
- Q. Instead of considering this human body, constituted

in this manner by the elements as a single unit, the Vedanthins say there are many units in it! Is that true?

A. There are not “many,” but three. Some say there are four!

Q. Oh! What are they? What are they called? The third and the fourth?

A. *Sthula deha* (the gross body), *Sukshma deha* (the subtle body) and *Karana deha* (the causal body). Some aver that there is a fourth, called *Mahakarana deha* (the Super-causal Body) also.

Q. What exactly is meant by Sthula deha, the gross body?

A. It means the body, constituted of the twenty-five elemental principles mentioned by me already.

Q. What then is the Sukshma body?

A. The five Jnanendriyas, the five Than-mathras, the five Pranas, the Manas and the Buddhi—these seventeen categories combine to constitute the subtle body.

Q. Is this called Sukshma deha only or has it any other appellation too?

A. Why should it not have? It has. It is known also as *Thaijasa*.

Q. And is it marked off as belonging to any state or *Avastha*?

A. Yes, it is.

Q. And what is the name of that?

A. The Dream State.

Q. Do you mean to say that the Gross Body has no state assigned to it?

A. Of course, it has.

Q. Tell me the name of that state.

A. That is the wakeful state, the *Jagrath*.

Q. What is the Causal, the Karana deha?

A. There, the *Chiththam* or Consciousness is in association with the Knower, the Knowing Principle, the *Jnaatha*.

Q. What is it known as?

A. The *Praajna*.

Q. And the state?

A. The state is *Sushupthi*, Deep Sleep.

Q. Tell me also, what they mean by the Super-causal Body, the fourth.

A. The Pure Consciousness unmixed with any *Thathwa* or elemental principle, the Witness Eternal, the Self Luminous. They refer to it as the Mahakarana Deha.

Q. Has it a name, like the rest?

A. It is known as *Hiranyagarbha*.

- Q. And the state?
- A. It is stateless, it is beyond all states of consciousness and so it is described as *Akshara Purusha*.
- Q. Coming back to this Gross Body, what are the specific products attributable to the Five Elements that have united to form it?
- A. Of the Earth, bone, skin, flesh, veins, hair.
- Q. Of water, Jala?
- A. Blood, urine, saliva, phlegm, brain.
- Q. From Fire?
- A. Hunger, thirst, sleep, sloth, comradeship.
- Q. The element Vayu produces...?
- A. Activity, movement, speed, shame, fear.
- Q. The element Akasa in the body must be responsible similarly for some consequences.
- A. Yes; for lust, anger, greed, pride and envy.
- Q. Man has many travails, is it not? Do these consequences of his composition, have anything to do with his travails?
- A. You seem to have some doubts. The reason for all his agony is this group of gross qualities. The travails, too, are not many though they may appear so. They are only of four types. They are called *Vasanas*.

- Q. What are the four Vasanas?
- A. The body, the mind, wealth and sex; though there are others, all are ultimately based on these.
- Q. Man in his pride struts about blindly. What is this egoism that prods him on? How many varieties of egoism are there?
- A. There are four types: vanity of clan, vanity of wealth, vanity of youth and vanity of scholarship. Though there are other types too, they can be grouped under these.

CHAPTER II

THE FOURTEEN LOKAS

- Q. I have heard it said that the *Lokas* (worlds) are all in the body of man! Some experienced persons and some men learned in the Sastras have said so. Is that true? What are those Lokas? Where are they situated?
- A. Yes. They are: *Bhu Loka* in the feet, *Bhuvar Loka* in the genitals, *Suvar Loka* in the navel, *Mahar Loka* in the heart, *Jana Loka* in the throat, *Thapo Loka* in the brow centre and *Sathya Loka* on the crest of the head. These are called the Upper Lokas. They are all situated in the body of man. There are Lower Lokas, too.
- Q. What are the Lower lokas? Where do they exist?
- A. *Athalam* in the soles of the feet, *Vithalam* on the nails, *Suthalam* in the heels, *Thalaathalam* in the hip, *Rasaathalam* in the knees, *Mahaathalam* in the thighs and *Paathaalam* in the anus.

- Q. If all Lokas are in the body—the five elements being the components—what has happened to the *Saptha Samudras*, the seven legendary seas? Are they too in the body or in the mind?
- A. When the body is the residence for all the Lokas, how can the seven seas alone have a separate existence? They too are ‘in’ the body. *Lavana* or Salt Sea (urine), Cane Juice Sea (perspiration), *Sura* or Sea of Wine (senses), *Sarpi* or the Sea of Ghee (semen), *Dadhi* or Buttermilk Sea (mucus), the Sea of Milk (saliva), and the Sea of Pure Water (tears).
- Q. You spoke of several types of Agni or Fire; what are they? How are they named?
- A. They are called *Panchagni*, because they are five in all: *Kaala* agni, the fire of time; *Kshudha* agni, the fire of hunger; *Seetha* agni, the cold fire; *Kopa* agni, the fire of anger, and *Jnana* agni, the fire of knowledge.
- Q. Where do these reside?
- A. In the feet, the navel, the stomach, the eye and the heart.
- Q. Besides these, there seem to be varieties of *Naada* or Sound, too. I have heard some talk of them.
- A. Yes, there are.

- Q. Are they too in the body? How many types are they? And their names?
- A. There are ten types; all in the gross body itself: *Laladighosha*, *Bherinaada*, *Chaneenaada*, *Mrudanganaada*, *Ghantanaada*, *Kalanaada*, *Kinkininaada*, *Venunaada*, *Bhramaranaada*, and finally, *Pranavanaada*. These are the varieties of Sound.
- Q. If all creation is subsumed in this composite of the five elements, the body, what are *Anda Anda*, *Pinda Anda* and *Brahma Anda*?
- A. *Anda Anda* means all this creation, liable to evolution and involution; the movable and immovable Nature, as it is often called. *Pinda Anda* is the name for the Inner Principle of all this duality, the seer and the seen, the doer and the deed, etc. It is the Duality that produces birth after birth, according to the karma of the *janma* (birth). *Brahma Anda* means the collection of *Mahabhuthas* or the Inner Forces of the Five Elements: *Atma* related to the *Akasa*, *Jivatma* connected with *Vayu*, *Prathyagathma* arising out of *Agni*, *Chaithanya-Brahma* associated with the *Jala* element and *Paramathma*, attached to the *Dharani* (Earth) element are all covered by that conception of *Brahma Anda*. It is this Force that makes the elements operate; beyond them is the *Avyakta-Brahma*, the Uncognizable Absolute.

- Q. Swami! I do not clearly understand this rather complex subject. Please explain it to me by means of some simple illustration.
- A. Well, Anda Anda is the black retina of the eye; Pinda Anda is the inner circle within it; Brahma Anda is the Light that shines therein. The splendour of that Light is Brahma.

CHAPTER III

THE FOUR ASRAMAS

- Q. In this cosmos which is the human body, what is the best *Dharma* to follow? Which *Asrama* is most conducive for that Dharma? How many Asramas are there in all?
- A. There are four Asramas in all. If you know about them, you can yourselves decide which Asrama you are to fulfil, examining your own achievement, progress and aptitude. *Brahmacharya*, *Grihastha*, *Vanaprastha* and *Sanyasa* are the four Asramas.
- Q. Different explanations are given by different persons for the word, Brahmacharya and the stage it denotes. I wish to know from you the real significance of that stage.
- A. Very well. It is believed that all who have not become

Grihasthas are entitled to be called Brahmacharis. This is very wrong. Only those who keep their minds away from the delusions of the world, who are constantly engaged in the thought of God, who do not see or hear light or merely entertaining stuff, who pursue good taste, who do not yield to joy or grief, who keep their minds, intelligence and self-consciousness in good trim by unremitting contemplation of the *Brahma Thathwa*—only such deserve the name, Brahmachari.

Q. What exactly does Grihastha mean?

A. Being married and living with the wife and children do not constitute Grihastha asrama as most people think. Without giving up the duties assigned to one's caste and status, the person has to treat all with equal consideration—kinsmen as well as others. He must be aware of the rights of the elders and the obligations of juniors. He has to be full of sympathy and willingness to help. He should treat with loving kindness all those who are dependent on him. He must grow wiser with each new experience of the world. He should acquaint himself with the Sastras and be alert to do Dharma and avoid Adharma. He must foster and protect his wife and children with a sense of responsibility. He has to trample down the Eight Egoisms, the conceit that develops from family, wealth, character, personal beauty, youth, scholarship,

native place and even accomplishments in austerity. Conscious of the four goals of Dharma, *Artha* (wealth), *Kama* (desire) and *Moksha* (Self-realisation), with no pride in material possessions though he might have them in large measure; utilising a portion of the day in the service of others; with no designs against any other household, himself deserving the trust of his wife and having a trusted wife, each understanding the other and having full faith in the other; such are the ways in which the Grihastha manifests.

Q. What, then, does Vanaprastha mean?

A. At that stage, man feels that all dualities are untrue and baseless. He gives up all desires; drops all attachment to the world; dislikes living in crowded places; is anxious to achieve victory through *Manthra-japa* and so leads a life of austerity, eating only uncooked food, mostly fruits and leaves, in moderation; moves in the company of sages and maharishis; listens to their teachings and moves unfalteringly on the path of realising the Lord. The Vanaprastha must get the approval of his wife when he moves out into solitude for the life of Sadhana and he must make sufficient provision for his children also. If however the wife is willing to accompany him, he has to take her on his spiritual journey. They must henceforward live as brother and sister and not as husband and wife. Provided this new relationship is

maintained, life in the home too can be transformed into Vanaprastha. On the other hand, if the old life is continued, life in the forest does not constitute Vanaprastha. The Vanaprastha must not stay in the residences of married people. He must observe the vows prescribed for each season of the year. He has to brave the rain, the sun and the cold during the seasons. He must be vigilant against being drawn towards physical pleasures by fickleness of the mind. He must seek and find pleasure only in the contemplation of the Lord and in dwelling upon his Glory.

Q. What does Sanyasa mean?

A. Sanyasa is above and beyond all promptings of sensual or objective pleasure. The Sanyasi deals with the contemplation of the Lord as the very breath of his life, an essential necessity always and at all places for sheer existence itself. He derives joy only from this contemplation. He knows that wealth and kinship, affection and attachment are all momentary and liable to decline and end. He discards the external reminders of even caste status and *samskaaras* (purificatory acts) like *Upanayanam* (initiation into Gayatri Mantra). He wears the ochre robe of the mendicant. He does not live in populous places. He lives on whatever little food he gets. He does not decry the place where he does not get food. He does not eat

twice in the same place or sleep two days in succession in the same place. He even conquers the temptation to sleep and eat. He cares little for the rigours of the seasons. He is ever joyful and happy in the company of the Lord whom he invokes by his *Dhyaana* (meditation).

Q. Nowadays, there are many ochre-robed people moving about as Sanyasis. Are they all equipped with the disciplines mentioned by you now?

A. There is, of course, no paucity of people who are so equipped. But it is not possible to say that all are like that.

Q. There are many who, though Sanyasis, establish Ashrams and get themselves established in worldly affairs and worldly possessions and struggle for worldly pomp and power. What is to be said of these?

A. For genuine Sanyasa and for detachment from all mental agitations, institutions like the Ashrams you mention are great handicaps. For those who should give up all purposeful effort, the effort for the upkeep and progress of the Ashrama is an obstacle in the path. I need not tell you by what name such Sanyasis are to be called. I can only say, they do not deserve the name, Sanyasi.

Q. Swami, how can the growth of the Ashrams, which help people like us to know the means of Liberation,

be a bondage? And how can Ashrams get on without money? I hope it is not wrong to accept help, voluntarily offered.

- A. My dear fellow! It is theft if the lock is broken and valuables are taken away, or if they are removed through an opening made in the wall. It is theft if by soft words in open daylight a person persuades you to part with your valuables. If a Sanyasi casts his eyes on wealth, whatever the motive, it is harmful for his spiritual progress. He should throw all such tasks on some trustworthy devotee and be an unconcerned witness only. His duty is to see that the persons who seek *Aasraya* (Succour) are assured of spiritual help, not to help the Ashram to rise and prosper. The flames of desire to make the Ashram grow will rise into the bonfire of self-seeking egoism and burn out all that is commendable in the Sanyasi, especially, his *Atmananda*. The fire will destroy not merely the Sanyasi, but also those dependent on him for guidance. The feeling “I” and “Mine” are such destruction-causing sparks. Man must attach himself to guides who are devoid of these. But once the Ashram becomes the prime factor, the so-called “guide” has to attach himself to men! It should be the other way. He must not be dependent on the world. He must be free from all dependence. That is the mark of the Sanyasi.

CHAPTER IV

MOKSHA AND KARMA

- Q. They speak of *Avadhuthas* also. Who are called so? What are their qualifications?
- A. Like the Vanaprasthas and the Sanyasis, they too have to be free from all attachment and hatred. They do not take any interest in their surroundings. Whether it is a forest or town, they are not worried in the least. They have no relation with others. They pay no heed to past, present or future. They move about on thorn and stone, silent, smiling to themselves, ever joyous, ever alert, seeking no comfort and no shelter, seeking no place to sleep or take food; for Ananda is their *Ahara* (food). There are *Avadhuthas* even today in the Himalayas, in silent caves, immersed in their own inner *Atmananda*. Not all can see them. Only good luck can bring you to their presence.

But there are many who pretend to be Avadhuthas and who go about with that name. The genuine ones would not seek men, nor appear in public. Even if they miss their way and come among men, they just slip away silently lest they draw attention to themselves. When you find an Avadhutha freely moving in company and mixing with human affairs, take him to be a *Yamadhutha*, a monster!

Q. How long is one bound by the *Deha Dharma*, the obligations and duties related to the body?

A. As long as the Jivatma is not cognised. When that is discovered and known, there is no more need.

Q. How long is one aware of this Jivatma itself?

A. Until the stream joins the sea. Till the stream of Jivi reaches the source from which it came, the Sea of Paramatma.

Q. What is Moksha?

A. Moksha is Liberation from all that binds. That is to say, the attainment of the ever-existing, ever-stable, ever-pure *Atma Thathwa*; getting rid of the ever-changing, ever-unreal, impure *Deha Thathwa*.

Q. That attainment is not for all, is it, Swami?

A. Why do you say so? Everyone who equips himself can attain it. Those who make the effort are attaining it. Everyone who is ill is entitled to the medicine. You

cannot say that only some among them are. Yet, if the drug is costly, only those who can afford it can benefit by it. The Lord's Grace is hard to get. You have to pay a heavy price. Pay the price, that is to say, earn it by Sadhana and the Grace of the Lord will save you from this *Bhavaroga* (the disease of worldliness).

Q. Who are those that most need this Sadhana?

A. All who yearn to be saved from the flood of "birth-death" which is now sweeping them along.

Q. Baba! What is the cause of man getting born?

A. The impact of Karma.

Q. How many varieties of Karma are there?

A. Three! Bad, good and mixed; some add a fourth, the Karma of the Jnani which is neither good nor bad.

Q. What is bad Karma?

A. It is called *Dush Karma*. All acts done without the fear of God or of falling into sin; all acts done while under the influence of the six enemies, *Kama* (desire), *Krodha* (anger), *Lobha* (greed), *Moha* (attachment), *Mada* (pride) and *Maathsarya* (envy); all acts that reveal the beast in man, that do not indicate that he is possessed of *Viveka* (discrimination), *Vichakshana* (keenness of intellect) and *Vairagya* (detachment); that are devoid of *Daya* (compassion), Dharma,

Sathya (truth), *Santhi* (peace) and *Prema* (love)—these are Dush Karmas.

Q. And the *Sath Karmas*?

A. All acts done in the fear of God and of sin. All acts done with *Sathya*, *Dharma*, *Santhi*, and *Prema*. These are the *Sath Karmas*.

Q. What are the *Misra Karmas*, the mixed ones?

A. They are an interesting lot. Though the acts are good, though apparently they are prompted by fear of God and of sin, still, they reveal impulses that are quite the opposite. People start rest-houses and water-distributing-centres, for example, but they do not pay the servants regularly and well. Their aim is just to win some fame. They give to the poor as alms only useless clothes and worn coins. Whatever they do, their purpose is to get publicity.

Q. You also spoke of *Jnana Karma*, Swami.

A. Yes, *Jnana Karma* is the name used for all acts done to learn from sacred scriptures or elders or teachers the way to escape from the bondage to duality and to the falsity of the world and to develop faith in the values of *Sathya*, *Dharma*, *Santhi*, and *Prema*. All acts that lead to the merging of the individual in the Universal Absolute.

CHAPTER V

VIDYA AND BHAKTHI

Q. Swami, I have heard people use the word, *Amanaska*, often. What does it mean?

A. This entire creation, when it is realised as but Seen by the eternal Seer, the Witness, simply disappears, as fog before the Sun. That stage is known as *Amanaska*.

Q. What happens to the knowledge?

A. Even that disappears!

Q. This Witness that you spoke of, where does it reside in the dream-stage?

A. It is in the *Jivi*. It not only witnesses but it also weaves and creates everything it sees.

Q. And during deep sleep?

A. It is in the Full (the Modificationless) Reality.

- Q. And, in the fourth stage, the stage beyond deep sleep, the *Thuriya*?
- A. It is merged in the *Iswara-sthana*, this changeless Entity.
- Q. What is meant by the term, *Paramartha*?
- A. Paramartha, that is to say, beyond and above this world limited by the body and the senses.
- Q. They talk also of *Paramapada*. How will that be?
- A. It will be devoid of *Nama-Rupa* or Name-Form and *Kriya-Rupa* or Deed-Form.
- Q. Swami! Is God transcending the Universe or immanent in the Universe?
- A. He fills the Universe and is also beyond it. So there is no place outside Him. All places are inside Him. All Names are His, no Name is alien to Him.
- Q. How is the Godhead who fills the Universe to be referred to?
- A. He can be called by various names: *Paramapada*: the Limitless Open, the *Paramartha*, the *Asarira* (the Not-Body), the *Paripoorna* (the fullest Full), the *Avaangmanogocharam* (the Ungraspable by word or thought). He has many names.

- Q. Is this Sath, this Entity, ancient or new, *Sanathana* or *Nuthana*?
- A. Of course, it is Sanathana, not Nuthana.
- Q. Which is the ultimate Purushartha?
- A. Why, Moksha, of course.
- Q. When talking of *Vidya*, Swami, I have heard people mention the Four Vidyas. What are they?
- A. Yes; they are *Aanveekshaki*, *Thrayee*, *Vaartha*, and *Dandaneethi*.
- Q. These names are all new to me. What exactly is *Aanveekshaki*?
- A. The *Vidya* by which one is able to discriminate between *Atma* and *Anatma*.
- Q. And *Thrayee*...?
- A. The *Vidya* by which one can attain *Swarga* or Heaven, through the appropriate rituals and Karma.
- Q. What does *Vaartha* teach?
- A. Agriculture and other productive efforts.
- Q. What does *Dandaneethi* mean?
- A. The rulers and guardians of society rule and guard, according to this *Vidya*. It is essential for earning and enjoying riches and crops.

- Q. Which of these plunge man into the cycle of births?
 A. All, except the first, the Aanveekshaki.
- Q. The mastery of the mind is held essential for spiritual victory. But to purge the mind of all evil, what are the virtues which we have to cultivate?
 A. There are four chief virtues: *Maithri*, *Karuna*, *Muditha* and *Upeksha*.
- Q. I must trouble you Swami to explain these too.
 A. Comradeship and the company of the humble and the good; affection for the Name and Form of the Lord—these are included in *Maithri*. *Karuna* is the kindness one feels towards the afflicted.
- Q. What is the virtue called *Muditha*?
 A. *Muditha* is the joy one feels when meeting people who are charitable, who serve others, who help those in distress, etc.
- Q. *Upeksha*?
 A. Non-involvement; the feeling of unconcern at the wicked; neither loving them nor hating them.
- Q. Just like these four virtues, they also talk of four types of *Bhakthi*. What are they, Swami?
 A. My dear man, all the multifarious types can be included under four categories: the *Aartha*, the *Arththaarthis*,

- the *Jijnaasu* and the *Jnani*. The *Aartha* is the person who is tormented by the agony of spiritual discontent and who prays to the Lord in his distress.
- Q. What does *Arththaarthis* mean?
 A. Those who desire *Artha* or wealth or spiritual power and for that sake, worship God and pray to Him for that boon.
- Q. *Jijnaasu*, you said. Who are they?
 A. Those who seek liberation steadily and strongly, and go in search of the Absolute.
- Q. And the *Jnani*?
 A. He who has escaped from the dual consciousness, the *Dwandwa bhava*; who has known his identity with the basic Truth of the Universe.
- Q. Tell us the names of some who have achieved fame through these types of *Bhakthi*, Swami. Then it will become clearer to us.
 A. Oh, there are plenty of names. Among *Aartha*-*bhakthas*, I can tell you of *Draupadi*, *Prahlada*, *Sakkubai*; among the *Arththaarthis*, *Dhruva*, *Arjuna* and others; among the *Jijnaasus*, *Uddhava*, *Radha*; among the *Jnanis*, *Suka*, *Sanaka* and others.

CHAPTER VI

OBSTACLES TO MOKSHA

- Q. Even those who proceed along the path of spiritual progress towards the goal of Moksha have, it seems, big obstacles, Swami.
- A. Yes, the past, the present and the future obstacles.
- Q. What are they? What is the obstacle from the past?
- A. Recollecting and remembering the past and getting affected by it.
- Q. And the obstacle from the present?
- A. That itself operates in four ways! *Vishaya Aasakthi*, (attending more to the peculiarities of textual criticism than the sense of the teaching), *Prajnaamandyam* (dullness of the intellect which prevents one from

grasping the words of the elders and of the wise), *Kutharka* (crookedness) and *Viprayayaduraagraha* (justifying one's own statement as correct, through an exaggerated conceit).

- Q. What is the nature of the obstacle from the future?
- A. The future creates obstacles since you anticipate troubles and worry about them even before they come.
- Q. I have heard people speak of four types of beings, but I am not quite clear what they are.
- A. *Andaja*, *Swedaja*, *Udbija* and *Jarayuja*.
- Q. What do these words mean?
- A. *Andaja* means egg-born; *Swedaja*, sweat-born; *Udbija*, earth-born and *Jarayuja*, mammals. Birds are good examples of the first group; lice, etc. of the second; ants, plants and trees of the third; and men, cattle, etc. of the fourth.
- Q. Well, Swami! Among these who are theists and who adore God, are there special types?
- A. Of course! There are four types among them too.
- Q. Their names?
- A. *Dwijas*, *Munis*, *Alpabuddhis* and *Vidithatmas*: the Twice-born, and Ascetics, the Dull-witted, and the

Knowers of the Atma.

- Q. Why are they called so? What is the special feature of each type?
- A. The twice-born recognise God as in the Fire they revere, and with that conviction they worship Him.
- Q. The Munis?
- A. They recognise God in their hearts.
- Q. What about the Dull-witted?
- A. They require images, pictures or some other visible representation of His Beauty and Glory. They worship such.
- Q. And the knowers of the Atma?
- A. They recognise God as immanent in the Universe and see only Him wherever they turn.
- Q. May I ask who among these are the greatest?
- A. Each is great in the stage he may have reached; but naturally, those who can experience the Lord everywhere at all times are the greatest.
- Q. Swami! What are the traits of character that we have to avoid, that is to say, which are the obstacles in the path of one who seeks Liberation from the cycle of Birth and Death?

- A. The six, the *Arishadvarga*: Kama, Krodha, Lobha, Moha, Mada and Maathsarya; these are to be avoided.
- Q. What exactly is Kama?
- A. Desire for riches, property, honour, status, fame, children; why list the lot? Attachment to all things of this sensory world, this false, temporary, impure world.
- Q. Krodha?
- A. Yearning to harm others and causing ruin to them.
- Q. And Lobha?
- A. Determination that no one else should partake of even a small fraction of what one has earned or what one has; also, that even in times of distress, one's possessions should not be diminished by use.
- Q. What is the meaning of Moha?
- A. The delusion that some people are nearer to one than others and the desire to please them more than others, leading to exertions for earning and accumulating for their sake.
- Q. Mada?
- A. Mada means the swagger that develops when one feels that he has either scholarship or strength or riches or fame, more than others. Even when one has not got these, Mada makes men move about without reverence

- for elders and consideration for others' feelings and craving only for one's own comfort and security. Mada is extreme egoism.
- Q. The last that you mentioned is Maathsarya. What does that mean, Swami?
- A. When others are as happy as yourself, Maathsarya makes one miserable; one cannot tolerate it.
- Q. There are certain other traits too called *Dambha* and *Darpa*. What do they indicate?
- A. *Dambha* prompts people to do *Yaga* (sacrifices) and *Yajna*, to give away vast sums in charity, in order to win the applause of the world. *Darpa* is the pride that haunts man when he is rich and happy.
- Q. What is the meaning of *Eershya*?
- A. The desire that others should get the grief, the misery and the worry, which one is suffering from.
- Q. So, it is different from *Asuya*?
- A. Yes. *Asuya* means thinking always of doing evil to others; the preparedness to put up with any trouble in order to satisfy this desire to harm others. All these are called Inner Foes. So long as man is caught in this net of delusion spread by these Foes, the yearning for liberation will not dawn in his mind.

CHAPTER VII

THE PANCHA KOSAS

Q. How then can this delusion disappear?

A. Why, Viveka and *Vijnana* (higher wisdom) will make it disappear.

Q. For the Jivi reflected in the Buddhi and the *Kootastha* (unchanging base)—have they any superimposition, one upon the other?

A. Though there may be no superimposition for all appearances, the superimposition exists.

Q. How is that?

A. The *Kootastha* is unattached, unmoved, unaffected, ever-free. Still due to the superimposition, it appears differently. This is the result of their coexistence.

- Q. Some elders say that “*Thath*” and “*Thwam*” are the same, identical; how is that? What is its meaning? Please enlighten me.
- A. Take the pot, the house and a picture. They are distinct, is it not? They are not identical. But the Akasa that is in all of these is the same. When the *Upadhi* or Condition or Limitation is removed, the Akasa in the pot (*ghata*), house (*mata*) and picture (*pita*) all merge with the Akasa that is unconditioned, unlimited. Light too is like this. The light inside and the light outside merge.
- Q. Well, Swami, You have said that the human being in this body composed of the five elements has to realise the Atma encased in the *Pancha Kosa*. What is Pancha Kosa, exactly?
- A. Kosa means a sheath, a case, a cover. A sword is put into a scabbard. Money is kept in a treasury or Kosa. You must realise that the thing kept in this fivefold case, is the real “I.” To see one’s own truth one has to remove the five cases, the Pancha Kosa.
- Q. Which are these five, Swami?
- A. They are called the *Annamaya*, the *Pranamaya*, the *Manomaya*, the *Vijnanamaya* and the *Anandamaya* Kosas.

- Q. What does Annamaya mean?
- A. This body grew in the womb of the mother with the help of the *Anna* or food taken by the mother. Besides, even after birth, it has grown and is being sustained by food alone. After death, it becomes part of the earth which produces food. So it is called Annamaya.
- Q. Of what importance is this Annamaya Kosa?
- A. It is the *sthula deha*, the gross body, which suffers grief and exults in joy.
- Q. Is that the only name it has? Or has it any other name?
- A. It has. It is called “*Bhogaayathanam*.”
- Q. The Pranamaya Kosa; what does that mean?
- A. The sphere of the five senses, the five Pranas. They form this cover.
- Q. Swami! It seems there are not only Pranas; there are *Upa-pranas* also?
- A. There are. They are called: *Naga*, *Kurma*, *Gridhra*, *Devadatta* and *Dhananjaya*.
- Q. What is the action of each of these?
- A. Naga causes belching; Kurma causes blinking of the eyelids; Gridhra is responsible for sneezing; Devadatta causes the yawn; Dhananjaya fills the body and causes it to grow fat. Even after death, these affect the body and cause changes in the corpse.

- Q. What does *Manomaya Kosa* mean?
- A. The sphere of the five Jnanendriyas, plus the mind, of which they have become the instruments. It is inside the Pranamaya Kosa.
- Q. You say often mind, mind; please explain what that mind is.
- A. That which makes you feel you are the body and feel all things related to the body as “Mine”; that which runs out through the senses to the objects, in order to experience the pleasure therefrom. It is thus rendered very unsteady; always flitting from one object to another.
- Q. Swami! How is man to realise that he is separate from, beyond and above the Annamaya Kosa?
- A. The body is not evident before birth or after death. It is seen only during the intervening period of time. The body has a beginning and an end, growth and decay. Such things are “products,” “effects”; and effects are conditioned. So the body too is a limited, conditioned thing. The wise man tells himself, “I exist always. I am not material. I have no cause and effect. I am separate from this gross body. So, I cannot be this Annamaya Kosa. I am the knower of the Annamaya Kosa. I am the witness.” When this knowledge is well established, he knows the truth. He must realise that he is beyond the Annamaya sheath.

- Q. How is one to realise that he is beyond the Pranamaya Kosa?
- A. At night, when the individual is asleep, the Pranas, or vital airs are moving; but one does not know what is happening in him or around him. He does not fight if enemies come during his sleep. He is inert and inactive like a log. But “My nature is not this inertness. I am the ever-conscious witness. I am separate from all the sheaths.” Thus he must discriminate, reflect and know.

CHAPTER VIII

YOGA AND MOKSHA

- Q. We commit many sins and do many meritorious deeds with this body and this mind, Swami! They bring about grief or joy; now, this “I” of which you are speaking, is it “I” the doer, the consumer of the grief or joy?
- A. Not for a moment. He who does is the doer; doing is a modification. Doing is producing a modification, is it not? So the person appears as if he is modifying. But the “I” is modificationless. He is the fixed; so he is not affected at all. Doer-ism is the quality of the *Antahkarana*. So, the “I” takes on the appearance of the doer and the gainer of the fruits of the deed.
- Q. If so, how can we know about the entry into this world and the exit from this world into another?
- A. It is the *Antahkarana*, the *Linga Deha*, that moves from this world to another, from one birth to another,

according to the accumulated merit. It is the limited Linga Deha that has the entries and exits. You who are like the sky, omnipresent and unaffected, have no arrival into this world or departure to another. You are not of that nature.

Q. Then what is the means of gaining Moksha?

A. Vijnana is the means.

Q. Some great men say that Yoga is the means. Is that true?

A. That is also true. There can be two roads to a place, isn't it?

Q. Which is the better road?

A. Both are good and important. Both take you to the same goal. Only, you cannot travel on both at the same time. People can choose the road which suits their inner promptings and do the sadhanas of that path. Both release the sadhakas from bondage.

Q. Swami! Is Jnana acquired by Yoga or is Yoga acquired by Jnana?

A. Yoga gives Jnana. That Jnana confers Moksha easily. This is the correct position.

Q. What is the effect of Yoga? How does it benefit?

A. Yoga is like fire, that is why the word "*Yogagni*" is used. It burns all sins away, so the Antahkarana is rendered pure. When that happens, Jnana is born there. The splendour of that Jnana dispels the darkness of ignorance and delusion; that is the Liberation.

Q. Has Yoga got so much potentiality?

A. Why ask if it has...It has. However learned a person is, however great his detachment, however deep his wisdom, unless he conquers his senses, he cannot qualify for Moksha. Without Yoga, all these cannot rid themselves of sin. Unless they clear themselves of sin, their Antahkarana does not become pure. Without a pure Antahkarana, Jnana cannot be acquired; and without Jnana, there can be no Moksha. So, Yoga is the very foundation.

Q. This is rather hard to follow, Swami! Give me some illustration to make it simpler, even for the unlearned.

A. When a storm is blowing, can anyone light a lamp? So too, when the sensual desires are blowing strong, the Jnana-lamp cannot burn. It will go out soon, even if it is lit.

Q. What are the gains from Yoga?

A. It destroys all impulses and urges towards the sensual world. It puts down the mind and its agitations.

CHAPTER IX

JNANA AND YOGA

- Q. You have been saying that Jnana is essential. Well, what exactly is the function of Jnana?
- A. Jnana makes you realise the *Atma Swarupa*, that is to say, your own Reality.
- Q. And Yoga? If a person has no Yoga, what happens?
- A. He is like a lame man.
- Q. And, if a person has no Jnana?
- A. He is like a blind man.
- Q. They say that Yoga destroys all blemishes, removes all faults. How does that happen?
- A. Can rice become eatable unless it is boiled over a fire? By Yoga and other disciplines, the *Chiththa* (seat

of intellect) becomes soft. It is called *Thapas*, heat; it becomes *Thaptha*, hot. Moreover, Yoga and Jnana are like oil and flame. The oil is Yoga and Jnana is the illumining flame of the lamp.

- Q. Swami! Pardon me for asking this. There are so many teaching Vedantha, now. Have they all realised this truth, experienced this Reality?
- A. How can this be said? You can yourselves judge them. See if they have purity of heart, purity of thought, purity of mind, knowledge of the inherent and immanent Paramatma; only such have the right to teach Vedantha, for they alone can experience the Vedantha.
- Q. The teaching by those who have no such qualities, will it benefit to a certain extent at least?
- A. Fine descriptions of the various delicacies and tasty dishes will not satisfy the hungry man. The Vedantha which stops with words is like that. It has to be experienced in order to satisfy. Again, listening without eagerness to learn, is also ineffective. Unless the teacher has detachment from sense-objects, his teaching is but parrot talk. Those who come to listen, without desire to learn and benefit, are only engaged in showy demonstrations.
- Q. Baba! You say that purity of heart, purity of mind, and knowledge of the immanent and transcendent

Paramatma are essential. Then, of what use is Sadhana done through the body, composed of the Five Elements? Is it not enough if one acquires the Jnana of *Swaswarupa* (one's reality)?

- A. Wonderful fellow! Simply because the rudder is essential, can you take it that the boat is unnecessary? How can you cross the river with the rudder alone? Believe that the Lord has conferred upon you the body as a boat to cross the sea of *Samsaara* (flux), and Chiththa as the main thing in it. That is the first step in Vedantha. Swaswarupa jnana is the rudder really. But that alone is not sufficient. Physical habits and disciplines have also to be attended to. To attain the ethereal eternal stage, the disciplined body is important.
- Q. Another doubt afflicts me, Swami. Talking of physical disciplines, may I know whether *Brahma Vidya* makes any distinction between male and female?
- A. Well, my boy! This boat has no such distinction. *Brahma Vidya* and *Chittha Suddhi* (purity of consciousness) do not depend on sex at all. All who are ill have the right to the drug that cures, is it not? So too, all who have the illness of *bhava* (birth and death) have the right to *Brahma Vidya*, the specific that will cure it. It may be that not all can afford to have access to that wonder drug; but you cannot argue that some have no right to it.

- Q. Why, Swami, some Vedantha scholars themselves say that women have no authority to learn or practise Brahma Vidya! The boats are not of the same nature, it seems.
- A. My child! As I have said, both have equal right to the specific. But both have to follow a regimen in order that the drug might act upon the system. *Brahma Bhavana* or the contemplation of the essential basis of oneself, is the drug. Along with it, the regimen of Jnana and Vairagya has to be rigorously followed. Women may not be able to observe this disciplinary regimen as rigorously as men, since they are weaker. Perhaps the reason for those people denying women the right to this drug is this weakness. But all, whether men or women, who can observe the restrictions and regulations, have an equal right to benefit by the drug of Brahma Vidya. That is my verdict.

CHAPTER X

BRAHMA VIDYA AND WOMEN

- Q. You were talking of strict regimen. Men too should follow this, is it not?
- A. Of course! They too are flesh and blood, bone and marrow. They too are afflicted with illness. Each and every person who is afflicted with birth and death and suffering from this cycle is in need of this medicine. And whoever helps himself to this treatment has to follow the regimen too. Man or woman, whoever neglects the regimen, cannot get rid of the illness. Men cannot afford to say that they are free from it. They have to stick to it closely and observe it strictly. Even if they have had *Brahmopadesam* (initiation into the spiritual path of Brahma-realisation), if they are devoid of virtues like *Sama* (purity) and *Dama*, (control of sensory organs) they cannot save themselves, whether they are men or women.

- Q. But then, Swami, why do many scholars learned in the Sastras declare that women have no right for acquiring Brahma Vidya? What is the reason?
- A. There is no reason at all in declaring that women are not entitled to Brahma Vidya. Vishnumurthy taught Bhudevi the glory of the Geetha. Parameswara taught Parvathi the Brahma Thathwa through the Guru-Geetha. That is what the Guru-Geetha means when it says, “*Parvathi Uvaacha.*” What do these words mean? Besides, Easwara initiated Parvathi into Yoga Sastra and Manthra Sastra. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad mentions that Yajnavalkya taught Maitreyi this very same Brahma Vidya. This is a well-known fact. Now, you can yourselves judge and draw your own conclusion whether women are entitled to Brahma Vidya or not.
- Q. There are some others, Swami, who declare that women are not entitled to Brahmacharya and Sanyasa. Is it true? Do the Vedas prohibit it?
- A. The Vedas have two sections: Karma Khanda and Jnana Khanda. The Karma Khanda is for beginners, for the undeveloped; and the Jnana Khanda is for the more advanced, the developed intelligences. There is no reference to men or women in connection with these. The beginners are worldly. How can they understand the immortal message of the Jnana Khanda about the Atma? In the Brihadaranyaka we have

- mention of Gargi and Maitreyi who shine in the spiritual splendour of Brahmacharya and Sanyasa. In the Mahabharatha also, we have Subha Yogini and other women who are ideal women, full of virtue.
- Q. Can women win Brahma Jnana, even while leading the householder’s life?
- A. Why not? Madaalasa and others were able to get Brahma Jnana while in the Grihastha stage of life, the householder status. You must have heard of these from the Yogavasishta and the Puranas, how they attained the height of auspiciousness, Brahma Jnana itself. Then again, do not the Upanishads declare that Kaathyayini, Sarangi, Sulabha, Viswaveda and others were adepts in Brahma Jnana?
- Q. Swami, are there any women who have attained Brahma Jnana while in the Grihastha stage? And who attained it while in the Sanyasa stage? Or any who realised it while in the Vanaprastha Stage? Are there women who got it in the Brahmacharya stage of life?
- A. Do not think that there are no women who have realised Brahma Jnana while in any one of these stages. Choodaala attained it while a Grihastha; Sulabhayogini won it while a Sanyasini. Maitreyi attained it while in the Vanaprastha stage of life. And Gargi got it in the Brahmacharya stage. There were other great women of Bharath who have achieved this height. Why, there

are even today many who are of this great category. I simply mentioned some four names because you came up with that question now; so do not in the least lose enthusiasm. There is no need for loss of heart.

Q. When we have so many examples of women who have attained Brahma Jnana, how is it that so many argue against it? Why do they impose limitations on women?

A. It is sheer absurdity to deny women the right to earn Brahma Jnana. But in worldly matters, it is necessary that some limitations are respected by them. They are laid down only in the interests of Dharma and for *Lokakalyan* (peace and prosperity all over world). For the sake of the upkeep of morals and for social health in the world, women have to be bound by them. They are too weak to maintain certain standards of life and disciplines. They have some natural handicaps. That is the reason for these limitations.

This does not mean any fundamental inferiority. Why, even Pundits and men learned in the Sastras acquire their Jnana through the reverential homage they pay to the Feminine Deity, Saraswathi. The patron Deity of Vidya, as well as of Wealth and Jnana are all three feminine. They are Saraswathi, Lakshmi and Parvathi. Even in customary correspondence, when women are addressed, they are referred to as, “To...who is equal

to Lakshmi” etc. You always speak of Maatha-Pithaa, Gowri-Sankara, Lakshmi-Narayana, Sita-Rama, Radha-Krishna, etc. The feminine name comes first and then the masculine. From this itself you can gather how much reverence is paid to women here.

Q. The distinction between man and woman—do you condemn it as *Mithya* (real and unreal) *Jnana* or do you value it as *Atma Jnana*?

A. My dear fellow, the Atma has no such distinction. It is eternally conscious, pure, self-effulgent. So it can only be *Mithya Jnana*; it can never be *Atma Jnana*. It is a distinction based on the Upadhi, the mask, the Limitation. The Atma is neither masculine, feminine nor neuter. It is the form that limits and deludes and that wears these names.

CHAPTER XI

ASRAMAS AND VARNAS

- Q. Swami, of the four Asramas, the Brahmacharya, the Grihastha, the Vanaprastha and the Sanyasa, which is basically important?
- A. As all living things are dependent on the *Pranavayu* (life-giving breath), so are all Asramas dependent on the Grihastha. It is he who provides food and drink to the rest and fosters them. He promotes the study of the Vedas; he guards the scriptures. So, the Grihastha asrama is the most important. In the Sruthis, the Narada Parivrajakopanishad and in the Manu Dharma Sastra, it is declared that the Grihastha who strictly adheres to his Asrama Dharma is worthy of the greatest respect.
- Q. But Swami, some people say that the Sanyasi is superior to the Grihastha; how far is this correct?

- A. Whatever be the Asrama, if the person follows the Dharma laid down for that stage and carries it out in practice and steadfastly yearns for Liberation, he can get it; there is no doubt. To win Atma Jnana, one need not prefer this Asrama to that. All are capable of securing it. There is no superior or inferior. It is only conduct and character that can be labelled as superior and inferior.
- Q. Swami! They say that the Grihastha asrama binds while Brahmacharya and Sanyasa liberate. How did that opinion arise?
- A. I will not agree with that. Why, he who earns money by lawful means, he who honours his guests, who serves and pleases his fellowmen, attains liberation along with those learned in the Sastras and those who are well established in the fundamental philosophy of the Spirit. No one can cross the ocean of birth and death because he is a Sanyasi or Brahmachari. High ancestry, attainments in asceticism, the status of a monk, profound scholarship—nothing will help, by itself. There must also be the faithful and steady pursuit of *Swadharma*, the study of the scriptures, like the Veda or the Bhagawad Geetha, and a disciplined spiritual life of Japam and Dhyanam.
- Q. Swami! What virtues should persons in each of these four Asramas cultivate, in order that they may be saved?

- A. There are ten virtues which together comprise the basic Dharma of the aspirants: *Daya* (charity, compassion), *Astheya* (non-stealing), *Dhee* (discrimination), *Vidya*, *Sathya*, *Indriyanirgaha* (control of senses), *Soucha* (inner and outer cleanliness), *Kshama* (patience and fortitude), *Dhrithi* (steadfastness) and *Akrodha* (no anger). These ten all persons must cultivate, whatever their Asrama may be. They are enough to save you, wherever you are; and if one has not acquired them, his life is a waste, whatever be his Asrama. The daily routine of his life is the essential thing and it should reflect these ten qualities. It is this very thing that Lord Krishna told Arjuna, in reply to his question.
- Q. Swami, you said that this same question about the importance of Nithya Karma observed with the ten conditions was asked by Arjuna. What was the reply that Krishna gave?
- A. Krishna said: “The highest stage of liberation that is attained by *Sankhyayogis* (those on path of knowledge), adepts at Jnana Yoga, is also attained by those who are adepts at *Nishkama Karma* (renunciation of fruits of action) *Yoga*. Both yield the selfsame result. Know that this is the Truth. There is no difference in this between the Grihastha and the Sanyasi. What is needed is unremitting practice and sincere endeavour. This requires the renouncing of desire, the giving up of egoism and the sense of

possession, even the discarding of active thinking and single-pointed contemplation of the Brahma Thatwa. For one who has achieved this, there is no grief, for there is no shade of ignorance. The wise man who has won this height can never be deluded by the false and the temporary. Even if at the last moment of his life one is able to realise this Jnana, he is certain to be liberated from the cycle of birth and death.”

Q. Then why were these castes, these Varnas, established?

A. They relate to the physical aspect of man. They cannot affect the spiritual aspect at all. They indicate physical make-up. Of course, “physical” includes the intellect, the mind, the Chiththa, the Antahkarana, etc. Unless these are trained and regulated, the Atma Dharma cannot be understood. *Jaathi* (class), *matha* (school of learning), dharma are all to help in regulating and sublimating the instincts and impulses of man. That is the reason why wise men accepted and honoured these. The Atma is Sath, Chith and Ananda; those are its nature, if somehow it has to be indicated. This can be realised only by purifying the heart, mind and intellect of man. Persons who have that purity, whatever their Varna or Asrama, can attain Moksha; that is what the Sastras declare. When a person is beset by attachment to some and hatred towards others even in the solitude of the jungle, he will meet only

evil. Even if one is leading the Grihastha life in the midst of the family, if he has achieved victory over the senses he is a real *Thapasvi*. Engaged in Karma that is not condemned, he is entitled to become a Jnani. For one who is unattached, the home is a hermitage. Then, even by means of progeny, of activity, of riches and of Yajna, Yaga and similar rituals, Liberation can be achieved. What is wanted for Liberation is just freedom from the impurity of attachment. Attachment is the bondage.

CHAPTER XII

THE SASTRAS AND SANYASA

- Q. Swami, you say that one has to do some things; that one should not do certain other things. How are we to know which is which? What is the authority?
- A. The Sastras are the authority. The Manu Smrithi itself declares, for example, that Varnas and Asramas are only for physical purification and that they do not affect the gaining or losing of the Highest.
- Q. If that is so, why all this bother of Varna and Asrama, and the rules and regulations binding them?
- A. Ah, they are required until you become free from attachment or Raga. Until then and for the sake of that, the regulations, limits and rules have to be obeyed to the very letter. The medicine has to be taken, so long as the illness persists. Each type of illness has a special medicine for its cure

and a different course of diet and a special regimen. After one has got rid of the illness, one can partake of a feast with the rest. Without accepting this, if the well and the ill both demand the same feast, it will lead to calamitous consequences. The Varnas and the Asramas are as medicine prescribed for those who suffer from this Bhavaroga, the ills of worldliness and worldly attachment. Raga (attachment) is the roga (illness) and roga can disappear only by regimen, strictly observed. Unless you get well, you cannot be liberated. This is the true meaning of Vedantha. He who knows this, whatever his Asrama, attains Mukthi.

- Q. Swami! Have any great souls achieved Moksha or Liberation while in the Grihastha asrama, the Householder Stage?
- A. Janaka, Aswapathi, Dileepa—these are examples of persons who gained Moksha as Grihasthas.
- Q. Swami, is it not necessary to follow strictly the injunction of the Sruthi which enjoins on man the duty of completing the Brahmacharya stage and then, after passing through the next stage of the Grihastha, to enter Vanaprastha and observe all the limitations and regulations of that stage, before ultimately taking on Sanyasa, the life of full renunciation? Or can one take Sanyasa even without going through the other steps?
- A. Yes, whenever one gets detachment from objects, one can take Sanyasa. Unless such a chance is seized,

man is bound to fall. Whatever may be the stage or Asrama you are in, when you get full renunciation, you can enter upon the Sanyasa stage from that very moment. There is no iron rule that you must live through the three earlier Asramas or stages. This too is the injunction of the Sruthi. The reason is: such a pure soul has undergone the training available in the other stages—the purification—in the crucible of life in previous births. His destructive tendencies have been rooted out and the progressive ones, the uplifting ones, have been developed in past births themselves.

- Q. How are we to know that such transformation has already been earned in the past births? Are there any signs by which we can discover that such and such an Asrama or stage can be skipped? If there are, please tell me.
- A. The fact that a person has no inclination for the three Asramas, that he has no attachment or attraction towards them is a clear sign. If detachment has developed in the past birth, the inclination will be absent. Since the awareness that the Atman alone is real has dawned, the person is unattached to the three earlier stages of life. When renunciation has appeared, one can give up worldly life, even though the series have to be overstepped. This is approved by Sruthi. But the person who confers Sanyasa must examine fully and convince himself that the person on whom he is conferring it is devoid of sensual impulses and

attachments. Sanyasa should be given only to one who has no agitation in the mind, or *Vrittis* as they are called. Only such can be said to be unattached. The candidate too should examine himself and see whether his inner consciousness is free from the Gunas, dull, active or even progressive. If it is not so free, he will not only break the vows of Sanyasa and be outcast, but he may even break down under the burden and meet a calamitous end.

Q. Is Sanyasa of one kind or are there different kinds? Please tell me.

A. There are three types of Sanyasa. They are *Deha Sanyasa*, *Mano Sanyasa* and *Atma Sanyasa*.

Q. What does Deha Sanyasa mean?

A. Sanyasa in appearance, so far as the outer body is concerned. He wears the ochre robe, assumes the name, appears in the form, but, he has no awareness of the Atma. He wanders amidst all the objective desires clinging to external things. He is like ordinary men, for all intents and purposes.

Q. And Mano Sanyasa?

A. In Mano Sanyasa, he gives up all decisions and desires, He has the mind under strict control. He is not guided by impulses or agitations. He is ever calm and collected.

Q. You mentioned Atma Sanyasa as the third.

A. Here, he breaks through all thoughts about things that are unrelated to the Atma, for he is ever immersed in the contemplation of the true reality, "*Aham Brahmasmi*." He is steady in the consciousness of his being Atma. His Ananda is continuous, *Akhanda*. This is called *Amritha Sanyasa*. The thickest darkness can be destroyed only by the light that emanates from the splendid solar orb; similarly, without the splendour of Atma Sanyasa, ignorance cannot be dispersed—the encasements that hide the heart cannot be shattered and the Atma cannot shine in its own glory.

Q. How are these types attained? What are the signs that they have been attained?

A. Deha Sanyasa is attained by discrimination between the eternal and the temporary, the evanescent and the everlasting. Mano Sanyasa is reached by conquering the waywardness of speech, of the senses and of the mind. Atma Sanyasa is won by filling oneself with the principles of Vedanthic thought. When these educative influences become strong and you are well established in these virtues and attitudes, then you can get liberated as a result of the combined effect of these stages.

Q. Who among these are really fortunate, their lives being spent in a worthwhile way?

- A. Well, he who like the bee sucks in silence and in great bliss the honey in the flower, who is intent on uninterruptedly tasting the nectar of Atmic bliss; who ignores this world as but a “scene,” a *Drsya*; he indeed is the most fortunate. His life is the most worthwhile.
- Q. Then, Swami, what is it that is spoken of by the elders as attaining Sathya, Nithya, *Nirmala* and Santhi? How are these—Truth, Indestructibility, Purity and Equanimity—to be attained?
- A. As I said already, he who does not attach himself to the “scene” but who is engrossed in his own Atmic bliss; it is he who attains Sathya, Nithya, *Nirmala* and Santhi. Or even if he attains one of them, it is enough. For one includes all.

CHAPTER XIII

MANTHRA AND JAPA

- Q. Is there any Manthra or Japa that will give us this Santhi state that you spoke about just now? If there is any, which is the important one?
- A. Manthra and Japa are essential for all types of men. What is a manthra? *Ma* means *manana* (ruminating) and *thra* means saving; so manthra means that which can save you if you meditate on it. Manthra will save you from being caught up in the coils of this worldly life which is infested with death, grief and pain. Of all manthras, the Pranava is the highest and the best. It is the very head and crown of all of them.
- Q. Suppose each one does the Japam of the name of the Ishtadevatha, according to his own light; I believe it is not wrong. Or is it?

- A. You mean that however savage or foolish a man may be, he cannot but call on the Lord! Well, if the name is recited along with the Pranava, it is bound to be beneficial. Just as the waters of the ocean are raised into the sky by the rays of the sun, and then falling as rain, they form rills and rivers and rush towards the ocean to become once again the waters of the ocean, all sounds and mantras that were once only Pranava, reach the Pranava through the Japa and other disciplines and rites. They all get merged in the Pranava, their source.
- Q. Swami! Some elders have said that the more *bijaaksharas* (seed sounds, root letters) a mantra has, the more effective it is. Are such mantras to be preferred to others which have only a few *bijaaksharas*?
- A. I don't agree with the view that when the number of *bijaaksharas* diminishes, there is less chance for concentration in Dhyana. Sadhakas would be benefited more if they repeat the Panchakshari or Ashtakshari with the Pranava added in the beginning. When they have proceeded some distance thus, they can give up even the words and concentrate on the Form depicted through the sound and transform the Mantra into the Devatha Himself. That is why the Sruthi says, "*Nissabdo Brahma Uchyathe*"—"Brahma is Silence, absence of Sound."

- Q. How are we to create a vacuum of sound? How can that be Brahman?
- A. The Sruthis declare that this objective world, this Prakriti, is Maya. They also say that He who has all this Maya under His control is Easwara. So, try to have all this creation under control and become Easwara yourself. The stage when, so far as you are concerned, the objective world has come to nought, is the stage when you attain Brahman. Until that is set at nought, you cannot attain Brahman; that is certain. Like the snake that discards its skin and assumes a new skin, the Sadhaka discards the old skin, puts on the skin of the Deity indicated by the mantra that he concentrates upon.
- Q. Pardon me, Swami! I cannot understand all this. Make it clear through some more examples.
- A. You have seen an egg, is it not? When the bird sits on the egg for some time, the chick grows inside it to its full stature and then, when the shell of the egg is broken, it emerges and assumes its real form. In the same way, when the Sadhaka, with a purified consciousness, dwells on the mantra and its meaning, and revolves its significance in his mind without break, the vision grows in his mind without break, the shell of Ajnana breaks and he shines in the splendour of the Divinity that he has formed in his consciousness.

- Q. All things originate from Pranava and all things finally merge in Pranava, they say. Then why is it that the very elders who say this declare that some can pronounce this and some cannot?
- A. What is Prakriti, except the commingling of the Five Elements? The Pranava is the very life of all the elements and so it is the life-breath of Prakriti itself. The roar of waters falling down a cliff, the beating of waves on a promontory of the shore, both repeat the Pranava only. The sound of inhaling and exhaling breath is itself the Pranava, is it not? Whether they know it or not, the heigh-ho of the men who carry along a palanquin on their shoulders, the heave of those who lift weights, the heehoy of those who beat clothes on slabs by the riverside; all resound with the Pranava. Repeat it with a full knowledge of its inner significance and you will soon be relieved of the burden of this world's worry. The Pranava of the breathing process is also the saviour from grief. It is meaningless to argue that some have the right to utter the Pranava and some have not. Those who do not breathe may not have the authority to utter it, but all who breathe are reciting it already in the process and so there is no sense in denying it to anyone. When Arjuna asked how one should remember the Lord at the point of death, do you not know the reply that Krishna gave? He said that he should recall to his mind the Pranava which is undifferentiated from Him.

- Such a Bhaktha will, He said, attain the highest goal. So everyone has the right to this great manthra, the Pranava.
- Q. How can the goal be reached through the Upasana of Pranava? How can the person who meditates become transformed into the thing meditated upon? Please make this unequalled manthra, and the way it helps us, clearer to me by means of easy illustrations.
- A. Very good. Pranava is the bow. The Atma is the arrow. Para Brahman is the target. So the Sadhaka must, like the practitioner of the art of archery, be unaffected by things that agitate the mind. He should pay one-pointed attention to the target; then the bowman is filled with the target; he becomes the thing meditated on. In the Kaivalyopanishad, the Mundakopanishad and in various parts of the Sruthi, the Pranava is extolled in various ways. Therefore, this Manthra which liberates man can be recited and meditated upon by all. All can practise the Pranava Upasana. You need have no doubts on this point.

CHAPTER XIV

THAPAS

- Q. Can one realise the Atma and merge, as You say, in the Pranava with this material body composed of the five elements? Can the Atma be isolated from the body? How is that done?
- A. Man can, by Dhyaana and other disciplines, by the recital of the Pranava manthra, discover the Atma and isolate it from the body. It is something like getting butter from curds, oil from sesame, water from the subsoil, fire from wood. Churning, squeezing, crushing, boring, turning—these processes are needed, that is all. What happens is the separation of the Atma from the body, the disappearance of the belief that the body is the Atma or the Self.
- Q. Swami! Many elders and sages say that we should visualise the Jivatma as Paramatma; that we should

cultivate that feeling, that conviction. How is that possible?

- A. Why do you think it is difficult? Is it not easier to speak the truth, than to speak falsehood? You are now declaring a falsehood as true and so all kinds of difficulties arise. Accept the truth that the Jivatma and Paramatma are the same, then things become easy. First, recognise the Atma, the “Jivatma” unrelated to the body; you can do this by Dhyaana, etc. As scent is separated from flowers, sugar from cane, gold from rock, thus separate the Atma from the physical body. Then by means of *Nidhidhyasana*, etc., single-pointed reflection and meditation, you can visualise the Jivatma as one with Paramatma. That is the consummation of Thapas, the final Nirvana.
- Q. What exactly is Thapas, Swami?
- A. It means the end of the activities of the senses; one must be the master of all of them. There should be no trace of craving or appetite. It involves effort to attain Brahman, incessant yearning for the end. It must be expressed through moderate food and sleep. It means agony to realise the Principle. Such Thapas is called *Sathwic*.
- Q. What then is *Rajasic* Thapas?
- A. Those who simply starve the body and make it weak without curbing the senses and controlling the emotions

are doing only *Rajasic* Thapas. They do not study or meditate upon the Atma Thathwa; they lay emphasis on physical asceticism.

- Q. There must be *Thamasic* Thapas also.
- A. There is. To propitiate the Gods for favours and then, with the favours as instruments, to desire the exploitation of the world—that is *Thamasic* Thapas. Only that Thapas is proper which has as its aim the attainment of God, the realisation of Brahman, the achievement of the highest Wisdom. That type of Thapas alone is approved by the Sastras. All the rest will lead you astray, away from the Goal. Only the Thapas approved by the Sastras deserve that name. The others are *Thamas*, not Thapas. Thapas means “heat”; the heat burns out sin and reduces all Karma to ashes.
- Q. The Sastras say that the Rishis had in their Ashrams things like the *Chinthamani* (wish-fulfilling) jewel, the *Kalpavriksha* (wish-fulfilling tree) and also the *Kamadhenu* (wish-fulfilling cow), which gave them whatever they wished for. I cannot understand why they should do Thapas at all. Please make this clear to me.
- A. Think about it well. Then you will know that *Chinthamani* is not a jewel, nor *Kalpavriksha* a tree, nor *Kamadhenu* a cow. They are all names for the fruits of Thapas. They are powers that automatically

accrue to a person as a result of Thapas. He realises all that he wishes for. It is called Kalpavriksha Siddhi. When he subdues all desire, it is called Kamadhenu Siddhi. What is the Chinthamani Siddhi? It is the stage when you have no *Chintha* or worry or mental agitation, a stage when all sorrow is kept afar. When *Chintha* ends and the supreme Ananda is won, it is Chinthamani Siddhi. *Chintha* must disappear from thought, word and deed.

- Q. They also speak of mental Thapas. What does that mean?
- A. Observe control of speech; cultivate purity of feeling; practise humility; let your thoughts be always on the Brahma Thathwam. Then you can be said to be in mental Thapas.
- Q. And physical Thapas?
- A. That too is good, in its own way. Revering elders, spiritual teachers, saints and sages and God make for purity. Non-violence, sympathy with all beings, straightforwardness, all contribute to physical well-being, health and wholesomeness. Mental Thapas leads to the purity of the mind. Verbal control or Thapas leads to purity of speech. By these three, the precious possessions of Kamadhenu, Kalpavriksha and Chinthamani are attained. They are attainments, not just cows, trees or jewels.

- Q. Are there any who have attained Brahma Thathwa and Dharma Thathwa with the help of their success in Thapas? Who are they? Please tell me.
- A. Kapilamahamuni attained Brahma Thathwam, Jaiminimahamuni attained Dharma Thathwam, Narada became a Brahmarishi, Bhagiratha brought the Ganga down, Gouthama persuaded the Godavari to flow on the earth, Valmiki realised the force of Rama manthram and was enabled to compose the Ramayana, Gargi was established in Brahmacharya and Sulabha in spiritual wisdom—all through Thapas alone. Why go on quoting examples one after the other? Through Thapas, even Brahma and Rudra become one's collaborators.
- Q. Swami! In order to reach this high stage, do you say that birth in a high caste is necessary? Or is Sadhana of a high order enough?
- A. Caste without character is meaningless; it is just an empty label. Sadhana, without the base of character, is like the journey of a blind man. Morality, virtue, character—these are vital. On the basis of these, if Sadhana is done according to the scheme laid down for the path one has selected, then there is no doubt of success. But you must take note of a caution that is essential. You must not give place to sloth, simply because Jaathi or birth is not important. *Neethi* or moral standards accrue according to Jaathi also; and

so, to foster them, the consciousness of Jaathi is helpful, and important. But if through the accumulated merit of past births, one has the treasure of goodness and virtue, then one need not attach much importance to Jaathi. Only those who practised Yoga in previous births and who could not complete the process will have that type of excellence. The main thing is to acquire the Neethi that is prescribed for the Jaathi, foster the Jaathi with Neethi, and make yourself fit and full, with a high status in life. For some distance on the path of Sadhana and spirituality, both Jaathi and Neethi will help. The Gunas will be sublimated through these two.

- Q. Therefore, there must be some who, through the merit of previous lives, have attained Godhead. Give some instances, please.
- A. My dear man, you should not seek to discover the source of a river or the ancestry of a Rishi. They may be quite unimpressive. You should be satisfied with their services. Their experience is what is most valuable. Be inspired by them, be led by them to similar efforts. If you go in search of the beginnings, you lose the vital core. Still, since you raised the question, I shall tell you. Vyasa was born of the fisherman caste, Sounaka was of the Sunaka clan. Agasthya was born in a pot. Viswamithra was a Kshathriya. Sootha was born in the fourth caste. In addition, we have among those who were virtuous

and good, who had their eyes always on the moral standards of their Jaathi and Neethi, who renounced all and stuck to the ideal of liberating themselves from the bondage of birth and death and the illusion of physical values: Sanjaya, Sathyakama and many more. My dear man, self-effort, Viveka, Thapas—these qualify man to the highest status. Without purity of the inner instruments, no man, however high his caste, can reach the Highest. If inferior copper is added to gold, the alloy loses in value. Just as pure gold becomes an alloy through contact with copper, the Universal, the *Viraat-rupa*, gets the inferior ego added to it in this Samsaara. The *Viraat-rupa* becomes transformed into the *Jivi*. Now, what has to be done to get back the real gold Thathwa? Through Thapas and *Vratha* (vow), through polishing and cleansing the *Buddhi*, the original stage has to be regained. You wash the feet after walking through the mire; the mind too has to be washed of the mire of attachment to objects. Jnana alone can burn the seeds of attachment so that they may not sprout again. So, if a person has the treasure of Jnana, he gets liberated easily.

CHAPTER XV

ASHTANGA YOGA

- Q. To get the fortune of escaping birth and death, elders say that Yoga is very important. What is that Yoga of which they speak?
- A. Yoga Sastra declares that certain Asanas have to be utilised in order to remove the ever-widening circles of mental agitations and purify the mind; also to steady faith, to establish Jnana and arouse the *Kundalini Sakthi* (vital energy) latent in man.
- Q. It is said that Yoga has certain *Angas* or auxiliaries. How many are they and what are their names?
- A. They are eight in all, *Ashtanga*, in fact: Yama (giving up attachment to the body), Niyama (purity), Asana, Pranayama, *Prathyaharma*, (withdrawing senses from external objective world), *Dhaarana* (concentration), Dhyana, Samadhi—these are the names of the eight.

- Q. If Mukthi is to be attained, have all these to be practised to perfection, or is any one of them enough?
- A. Oh, Mukthi can be won if the first two, Yama and Niyama, are mastered. Why, the universe is maintained by just these two, Yama and Niyama!
- Q. When we speak of Yoga, do we mean only this particular Yoga with the Ashtanga, or have we many other Yogas too?
- A. Yoga is not just this one; there are four in all.
- Q. Which are they? What are their names?
- A. Their names are popularly given as Manthra Yoga, Raja Yoga, Laya Yoga and Hatha Yoga.
- Q. What Angas or auxiliaries have these four, in their turn?
- A. Silly fellow, for all the millions of humans, the two eyes are the instruments of vision, are they not? So too, for all the Yogas, Yama and Niyama are the eyes; without them, nothing can be visualised. Purity of mind is essential for every Yogi. And for that, Yama and Niyama are indispensable.
- Q. What do you mean by Yama and Niyama? Have these also, by any chance, auxiliaries, Angas, or characteristics which mark them out?
- A. Of course. Each of them has ten such. It is only when

- you are well-established in all these that you are liberated.
- Q. Tell me the ten included under Yama.
- A. Ahimsa, Sathya, Astheya, Brahmacharya, Daya, Aarjavam, Kshama, Dhrthi, Mithaahaaram, Soucham; all these ten are included in Yama.
- Q. May I know the ten included in Niyama?
- A. Thapas, Santhosha, Aasthikyabuddhi, Daana, Easwara Puja, Vedanthavaakyasravana, Lajja, Mathi, Japam, Vratham—these ten form Niyama. These are the very foundations of the Mansion of Moksha. All Yogis must be well established in these; in Yama as well as Niyama.
- Q. Yoga insists on asana also, you said. What exactly does that mean?
- A. They are very helpful for Atma Jnanis and Yogis.
- Q. Asana too must have many varieties, is it not?
- A. Yes, they too are many. But the chief are *Sidhasana*, *Baddhapadmasana*, *Sarvangasana*. Besides, there are Asanas like *Mayura* and *Paschimothasana*.
- Q. What are the benefits that result from these Asanas?
- A. They give hardihood to the body and enable the mind to concentrate for long.

- Q. Swami! Now tell me about Pranayama also. How many types of Pranayama are there?
- A. There are many types but since in this present world most types are impossible in practice, only those that help Dhyaana have to be adopted. They are *Laghupranayama* or Simplified Systems of Breath Control.
- Q. Simplified systems? How are they beneficial?
- A. Like metals purified over fire in the crucible, the slag of Karma is removed by Pranayama and the Mind is freed from contamination. This and *Kaya Suddhi* are both brought about. The mind and the body are both rendered pure. There are two types of Pranayama: the one with manthra and the other without it. Without manthra, it can at best transform the body only, but with manthra, it transforms the mind also.
- Q. Swami! How are we to practise it?
- A. Two seconds long *Purakam* (inhaling), four seconds long *Rechakam* (exhaling), eight seconds long *Kumbhakam* (holding the breath). Pranayama has to be practised carefully for three months. Later, the duration of *Purakam*, *Rechakam* and *Kumbhakam* can be doubled. When six months are spent in this steady practice, the activities of the senses are laid low. If practised with faith and feeling, Pranayama will tame the agitations of the mind. Otherwise, it becomes mere

- physical exercise, improving just physical health. Pure food, Brahmacharya, living in solitude, moderate speech—these conditions too have to be strictly observed.
- Q. Swami! The next one you mentioned is Prathyahara. How many are the methods of Prathyahara?
- A. Three: *Saakaara*, *Niraakaara* and *Atmabhava*, depending on the purpose for which the senses are controlled and the mind concentrated. If it is for Saguna Upasana, it is *Saakaara*; if for Nirguna Upasana, it is *Niraakaara*; if for realising the Sathyam-Jnanam-Anantham Paramatma, then, it is *Atmabhava*.
- Q. And, Dhaarana? Swami! What is meant by that? How many types of Dhaarana are there?
- A. My boy, Dhaarana is of only one type. The wise man steadily established in the awareness of his *Ishtadevatha* or Brahma-consciousness, like the earth carrying a mountain—that is Dhaarana.
- Q. The next one is Dhyaana, I believe. That must be of many varieties.
- A. No, no. This also is one and only one. Whether of the Formful or the Formless, if it is one-pointed, devoid of deviations, it is entitled to be called Dhyaana.
- Q. Lastly, there is Samadhi. What does that mean?
- A. Samadhi means the fixing of the mind, free from all

impulses and agitations, on the Lord, or on one's own Reality. It indicates the state in which one is in one's own real nature. Samadhi is when one is free from all duality. The mind will be unshaken by dual experiences. It will shine like a flame in the windless room. It is *nischala*, unmoved, unmovable.

Q. Swami! That type of mind, how will it behave? Make it clearer, please, by some examples.

A. My dear fellow, when you have to thread a needle, you have to be intent on the job and the end of the thread has to be kept straight and pointed, is it not? Similarly, to enter the Grace of God, which is subtler than the subtlest, the mind has to be steady and the eye and the senses have to be concentrated on the same process.