

Continuation from Nov 2024 edition of AV Monthly Journal...

Aparokṣānubhūti – Two-week retreat

Covered in November edition of the Arsha Vidya Monthly Journal

Highlights

Abhedagarbha Namaskāraḥ

Covered in the November edition of the Arsha Vidya Monthly Journal

What is Aparokṣānubhūti?

Covered in the November edition of the Arsha Vidya Monthly Journal

Sādhana

Broadly speaking, there are three main classifications of means to Self-realization. These means are not necessarily constrained by space-time causality, as the very act of perceiving them as a process and contemplating the time required introduces false ideas of psychological time, which is a form of bondage. Moreover, a contradiction arises when a timeless reality already within oneself is approached through the prism of a space-time bounded process.

Sādhana consists of Bahiraṅga Sādhana, Antaraṅga Sādhana, and Sākṣāt Sādhana. The latter refers to learning through Śravaṇam, Mananam, and Nidhidhyāsanam. The verses of this text describe the former two. Bahiraṅga Sādhana involves developing an attitude of karma yoga, which goes beyond the mere conception of execution of duties without desire for the results thereof. Even knowing what is one's duty is often not easy because of wrong ideas in the mind. For example, a person taking themselves as a 'grandpa' has really no duty towards 'grandchildren' assuming their parents are there to attend to the children's needs.

To fully comprehend a passing statement by Swamiji on this topic, the following background is provided:

The laws of nature and the second law of thermodynamics reveal that any system moves from order to disorder, with entropy, a precise measure of this process, increasing in any system. Where life forms are present, there is an assertion of negative entropy, though the total entropy of the organism and its environment continues to increase. A blade of grass, through photosynthesis, converts the disorder of dispersive carbon dioxide and water into orderly glucose molecules, a feat exceptionally difficult to replicate in a lab. Similarly, a vulture consuming a carcass gains negative entropy to sustain its life.

Thus, there is a continuous struggle at every level of an organism, from single cells to complex life forms, to seek negative entropy, even at the cost of predation. Organisms discriminate in their quest for negative entropy. In humans particularly, the gene pool seemingly provides a mechanism for deceiving the truth of oneness by instilling a sense of separateness from the whole. This intelligence at the genetic level appears necessary for the survival of any life form. The neurons in brain cells, deceived by the truth of oneness, can bind a human being to a false sense of 'me and mine,' governing all thinking and action.

Unlike other life forms, humans are uniquely endowed with the gift of Viveka, the discernment of what is real and what is unreal. Sādhana aims to counteract genetic deception, and in karma yoga, the teaching is to recognize the wisdom of not succumbing to desire for the results of any action. While the sense of doer-ship remains, the sense of enjoyer-ship is relinquished. In the language of bhakti, Hari is pleased with tapas of this kind. Tapas involves the mind's willingness to endure difficulties in the search for truth, fostering an attitude and calmness of mind to face situations with equanimity and endurance.

To do justice to this topic, in addition to listening to these lectures, readers should procure a set of eight lectures given in 2014 by Swamiji on the topic of karma yoga (<https://avgbooks.org/shop/yoga-sound-14-mp3karma-yoga/>). Additionally, a book (<https://avgbooks.org/shop/vision-of-karma-yoga/>) based on these lectures, is available at the ashram bookstore and is highly recommended

Sādhana Catuṣṭaya

This is classified as Antaḥkaraṇa Sādhana, involving introspection and self-analysis. It consists of four traits:

- Viveka: Discernment between the timeless and time-bound entities.
- Vairāgya: Dispassion towards sense objects.
- Ṣaṭ Sampatti: The six-fold inner wealth of gaining quietude of the mind.
- Mumukṣutva: A deep longing for freedom from the life of becoming.

Śrī Śaṅkara compiled this list of sādhanas from many Upaniṣads, such as the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, and made them available in these verses as well as in his commentary on the first Brahmasūtra. Swamiji has extensively taught this list of sādhanas, resulting in a book being available at the ashram bookstore. Here, only a brief description is provided.

Interestingly, these verses in this text begin with Vairāgya, which is dispassion with respect to all sense objects and desires. It asserts that one's interest in sense objects should be like that of interest in bird droppings. A verse in the Bhāgavata 11th Skandha says that if one can conquer the taste buds, then vairāgya towards other sense objects will come under control. Often, the sense of bhokṛtva dictates our food consumption instead of eating for health. The gut bacteria, in trillions and in enormous variety, tend to outnumber our DNA cells by order of magnitude. The 'me and mine' from brain cells often dictate enjoyer-ship over what would be friendly to gut bacteria, leading to lifelong diseases. Such an understanding can help develop an attitude that food is for health alone and not for enjoyment.

When viveka is strong, vairāgya is effortless. Viveka leads to an ascertained understanding. Viveka means discerning wisdom in a given context, such as Ātma-Anātma Viveka, Dharma-Adharma Viveka, and Nitya-Anitya Vastu Viveka, which is knowing what is time-bound and subject to destruction versus the timeless entity. In the study of Vedanta, beginners are drawn to the wisdom of cause-effect descriptions, such as how Brahman is both material and efficient cause. The human mind is in the spell of space-time and causality, hence the appeal to the cause-effect origin of the universe. A mind mature in viveka can grasp that this world is my creation and that the waking state is no different from the dream state regarding their nature being false. These are extensively addressed in the Vaitathya Prakaraṇa of the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad. Such a mind can also understand that 'Aham' (I) is bliss, while 'Idam' (all else objectified by me) leads to sorrow if there is identification of 'I' with 'idam'.

The sixfold sādhana of the mind is described in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad to achieve quietude. It starts with Śama, which means dousing the fire in the mind. Like an electron stimulated to reach an excited state, the mind gets perturbed and excited. Śama is the quality to bring the mind back to its natural state of quietude. The mind is often plagued by inadequacy, compulsive thoughts, dispersed thinking, and listlessness. A restless mind is incapable of knowing the truth. Tradition and robotic habits can dull the mind; śama is Vāsanā-Tyāga. Vāsanās are not stray thoughts but deep-rooted impressions that cause fire in the mind as situations arise. The antidote is to acknowledge the vāsanā, which requires attention to know what is going on in the mind. This watching and acknowledging is the dawn of wisdom. Surrender to Īśvara can also help develop the quality of śama.

Dama, which involves having command over sensory values, helps build śama if it is weak. The contact of the indriyas and associated sense objects leads to sensations the

mind interprets as likes and dislikes. These go into the Buddhi as vāsanās, leading to delusion about associating pain and pleasure with sense objects. This cycle can be broken at the mind level by śama or by the indriya-level contact to sense objects via dama. Pleasure assigned to sense objects is born out of ignorance and is transient. One must know that happiness lies within, and no happiness is to be found in any sense object of the world. All human beings, from an old woman in a hut living alone with one eye begging for food to a queen in a royal palace, go through the same pain-pleasure cycle. The idea of increasing pleasure and reducing pain itself is the cause of misery.

Holding onto only Nitya and Naimittika karmas while letting go of all others, even those enjoined by the Vedas, is Uparati. This includes total withdrawal from all sense objects and actions motivated by desires and insecurities. There is virtue in abiding in being, not in 'becoming' incessantly throughout life. This is the essence of Vedantic, or true religion, as defined by Mahatmas like Swami Rama Tirtha and Swami Vivekananda.

Titikṣā means patient endurance or the ability to endure hardship with resilience. The body and mind represent a flowing phenomenon like a river, not a thing. Human experience appears as a river-like flow bounded by the banks of pain and pleasure. Humans are driven by birthdays and anniversaries, living in past memory-based events, losing all freshness of the present moment. Desire-based actions always end in pain, and all pleasures are bounded by pain. The cause of pain is seeking pleasure and avoiding pain. If this is reversed, by learning not to seek pleasure and to meet pain halfway, the mind will achieve quietude. People celebrate all kinds of events mainly to escape pain. Escapism could extend to many activities, including studying Vedanta, but escapism never works. There is no way to alter the inexorable pain-pleasure cycle. You cannot keep one and not the other. Hence, endurance, namely Titikṣā, is key to the quietude of the mind. If someone is no more, understand that it is nature's intelligence at play, and acceptance will be natural.

Śraddhā is not belief or faith. The word 'śraddhā' is understood as follows: Reality is sat, and it is understood provisionally as the other and somewhere remote. In Sanskrit anything which is parokṣa, is indicated by the syllable, ra which is the letter repha. For sat, if you attach repha it becomes śrat because sa becomes śra. So śrat is the reality, sat, taken as the other and parokṣa. Hence 'śrat dadāti iti Śraddhā.' Śraddhā is the right mental attitude, which is the capital in this journey of discovering reality. Swami Vivekananda translated it as intense enthusiasm to know the truth.

Patanjali popularized the term Samādhi, while in Vedanta, the emphasis is on

Samādhāna. To see the contrast, consider this: Samādhi is induced by intense effort that may stun the mind, leading to total silence, but it ends when the external forces cease. Unlike this, when the mind resolves in I AM (Ātmā), that is samādhāna. Concentration is emphasized in Patanjali's system and requires effort to exclude, while in samādhāna, the awareness and observation are without an observer, making it effortless. Watching the mind's movements with full attention without condemnation or judgment allows the mind to quieten by itself and reach its natural state without excluding any sensations in the environment. This leads to the resolution of all thoughts, resulting in the samādhāna of the mind.

Mumukṣutvam is an intense commitment and longing for freedom from samsara. It is freedom from artha, kama, and dharma, all primarily driven by desires and insecurities. It also represents freedom from pleasure-pain cycles and birth-death cycles. There is no jñānam without jijñāsā, no mokṣa without mumukṣutvam, and no sādhyā without sādhanā.

Atma Vicāra

What is emphasized in these teachings is the importance of proper questions, since teaching and the right teacher will emphasize that one is a light unto oneself. Śāstras and teachers only point to the inner guru that ultimately leads to the transcendence from persona. The entire sādhanā prepares one to do Self-enquiry, namely Ātma-vicāra. The Sādhyā is not separated in space-time bound by causality turning into a process. Paraphrasing a well-known philosopher, it is a timeless journey in a pathless land wherein the destination is already reached but the journey continues. If a guru offers a formula, that is not vicāra, but a preceptor can help with the enquiry itself. In the end, one is a light unto oneself.

Vicāra can lead one to know that one is not bound by cycles of pleasure and sorrow, for they are states of the mind that 'I am' aware of. By examining closely, I realize I am not the mind and hence free of its states. Vicāra, requiring an open mind, enables opportunities to resolve fundamental problems of life, while topical problems are resolved in the wisdom of the resolution of the fundamental problems. Ask "Who am I?" relentlessly at every moment. Do not accept any ready answers because they arise from a mind saturated with rāga and dveṣa. Questions lead one to silence. Ask "What am I?" and "What am I up to?" This alone will let you know you do not need to do what you were about to do without proper enquiry. Ask "What is the meaning of life?" and if there is any purpose to this life. Ask "What is time?" and ask why Ramana Maharshi said in Saddarśanam that

what we call past and future are in the present only. How is that possible? Do I have a past or future? There will be realization at a most basic level, not from the mind (which I am not), that there is no past or future for me.

All this striving to become has always been bound by sorrow. What is the reason? Self-enquiry has the capacity to be conducted alone, without the color of rāga-dveṣa, prejudices, and fixations of the mind. It can lead one to 'see' the false as false. It is not to be known by the mind. Psychological past and future drop off, and there is freshness in the abidance in the present moment, which is the presence. It all starts with asking "Who am I?" Any conclusion to know the truth being supplied by mind is always wrong, since mind is another name for ignorance. It can only help in knowing all that is false. That is why in all teachings, it is staying with the question with earnestness that liberates. It is as in the first Brahma Sūtra, "Athāto Brahma-jijñāsā," not "Brahma-jñāna," meaning after prerequisites, hereafter, let there be enquiry into Brahman, not get Brahma Jñānam.

Vyakaraṇam Example

Swamiji, in his characteristic style of presenting material, often delved into the etymology and Niruktam of many words throughout the entire camp.

He often explained the various steps involved in the construction of a word to provide a crystal-clear meaning. That clarity helped to provide the right context to make sense of the profound message being conveyed.

Here is one example in explaining the word 'I am' or aham. The etymology is simple and is based on Bhagavad Gita verse 2.19. The definitions are:

1. na hanti iti aham – That which doesn't kill/hurt (kartari vyutpatti: a obviously is coming from the avyaya nañ, the negative particle, and ham from dhātu vhan
2. na hanyate iti aham – That which cannot be killed/hurt (karmaṇi vyutpatti: rest same as above)

Aham has no birth or death and is a non-doer that cannot be acted upon.

Aitareya Upaniṣad with Bhāshya – Five-week retreat Topics

A summary of the five-week course highlights will be presented in the future editions of the Arsha Vidya Monthly Journal.

- Report by Sri. T.K. Srinivas, USA

To be continued...

photos in cover page #31