

Part 15 (...Chapter V concludes)

The last time...

1. The state of quiescence: A mind that does not work but of one that works when needed and as needed and in the light of wisdom.
2. Going beyond - the no-mind: When we bring the inner and outer in the same field of view and sustain it – the feeling of spatial separation begins to melt and the psyche starts to heal into oneness.
3. Reality - The seed for consciousness: self-effort is the path to grace. The entitlement mentality runs counter to self-effort. In the spiritual path, all are entitled but there are no free rides as you are not working for something, or from someone else. You have to undue the knots on the heart and mind that are self-caused and self-sustained.

Today's focus...

Let us lightly go through a review of the important teachings of the fifth chapter as these are right at the heart of inner change and inner ascent is inner change. Our topics today include:

1. The state of pure being
2. Attain a quiet mind first
3. Inner ascent
4. Control of mind
5. Cause and cure of samsara
6. Avoid conceptualization
7. Relentless self-inquiry

Let us begin...

1. The state of pure being

Simply put, a state of pure being is when one does not experience sorrow again. Sorrow, is the reaction of the mind to its own notions and is not dependent on others, circumstances or things. When the mind stops reacting to itself, it regroups or rests in itself. When the mind rests in itself, everything reflected just as objects are reflected in a mirror and the mind attains perfect peace.

The mind that attains to perfect peace, soon attains the pure state where appearances do not affect the reality in which one abides.

2. Attain a quiet mind first

A noisy mind is a mind where the energy built up in the mind feeds on conditioning and conditioning feeds on energy. Energy is built up by our erroneous attitude towards things as favorable or unfavorable. This energy is harnessed from and in consciousness itself and resides in the mind causing unrest till resolved.

Usually, attempts at resolving this only result in an increase in either like or dislike and this becomes a vicious cycle that feeds in itself and generates more and more turmoil. As long as the mind is not quiet, conditioning does not cease; unless conditioning ceases, the mind does not reach quiescence. The yamas and niyamas of yoga are a good restorative prescription for our habitual reactions and these, along with simple living and focus on the goal of self-realization will reset the mind gradually.

Just as in a calm and placid pond, reflections are seen without distortion - quiescence of mind and knowledge of truth are interdependent. Similarly, cessation of mental conditioning and the realization of truth are also interdependent.

3. Inner ascent

With inner quiescence, mental conditioning ceases and as conditioning ceases, one's true nature is seen. When one abides or remains in the state of pure being for even a little while—one gradually gets established in that state. This cycle to abide in one's true nature replaces the prior cycle of being tied to conditioning and feeds in itself with sustained effort.

This abidance is an easier way to uproot mental conditioning compared to contemplation or meditation. Abidance has a steep price tag up front which is 'total sincerity' – one has to be fully on board the train of change and be willing to restructure all and everything in ways that support the goal. If one is not able to muster this level of sincerity, meditation and contemplation is the other means but it is a difficult path as one constantly goes against one's own counter-currents or likes and dislikes.

4. Control of mind

If one has firm resolve, the path becomes much easier. This is why a good foundation with sama or control of self; vicharana or the state wherein the mind is constantly observed; santosha or contentment and satsanga or company of the wise is essential. Rather than fight against the currents of habit, it is easier to cut new groves and let the old ways weaken by disuse.

While setting a new foundation, it is necessary to stop feeding old habits. For this, resolutely abandon the pursuit of pleasure—this takes mighty self-effort accompanied by right understanding. We are not talking about abandoning all of what may give pleasure but the

pursuit of pleasure as pursuit strengthens the values which is the glue that holds conditioning together. Simple joys are those which are not the result of pursuit but the feeling of delight in things as they come about.

Gradually, the mind is rendered stable and one can advance one's practice to focus on: further quiescence of mind, eradication of mental conditioning and direct knowledge of truth. When these three are practiced simultaneously for some time relentlessly, the knots of ignorance are rent asunder. This samsara or world-appearance begins to appear as an appearance as one gets firmly established in one's true nature with persistent effort for a considerable time.

Pranayama or the restraint of prana (life-force) has equal value to the destruction of vasana or conditioning, hence practice pranayama also. Prana is controlled by pranayama, the practice of yoga asana, discipline in eating, etc., among other methods.

5. Cause and cure of samsara

Cause: contact of the ego with its own conditioning which are the likes and dislikes are the cause and sustenance of samsara. When these likes and dislikes are abandoned, the heart is purified and one is liberated—no longer affected by pain and pleasure, good fortune or misfortune.

Cure: one should do what needs to be done on its own merit – just because it needs to be done and do all things wholeheartedly, is the way to be free refrain from contact with existing conditioning and get established in equanimity. In equanimity, the mind is no longer stirred up reactively and begins to rest in itself.

The cure does not happen at one stroke so it is advisable for one intent on spiritual progress to lead a disciplined life while restoring the mind and heart.

6. Avoid conceptualization

When one wishes, 'May this be mine', such desire or thought is known as a concept. We really do not know what 'this' or the object is and there is an erroneous notion of 'I'. Therefore, all thinking or remembering is conceptualization which is based on notions of the object and without any real basis.

When the mind does not desire, only the object is, the corresponding thought or concept is abandoned. This abandonment of desire is usually misunderstood as a rejection of things outright. You may need to simplify your life or the outer as this may be necessary till you can simplify the inner or rid the mind and heart of the strong currents of likes and dislikes based on conceptualization.

A wise person lives without the thought of what has been or has not been experienced and does what needs to be done wholeheartedly on its own merit. Vasistha gives us a very beautiful analogy towards this: "He functions as the feet of one who walks function, without volition or desire". Once again, bring back to mind that functioning without volition or desire does not mean

living joylessly but rather living joyfully as desires, their fulfillment and the avoidance of all that seems contrary to the desirable is itself sorrow.

7. Relentless self-inquiry

We have discussed six important points so far – the heavy work of the spiritual path is transforming the mind from its habitual ways, closer to its natural state. This is essential for self-inquiry as there is no other instrument with which to inquire. The source of the mind is the source of being and this has to be realized or become real to us by direct experience. If the heavy work is not done upfront, it will take a bigger toll later, especially as age sets in with all its afflictions.

In ancient days, knowledge of yoga along with the goal of life and its attainment was taught along with secular subjects by which one would earn one's livelihood. The 'what' was guided by the 'why' and the 'how' about things became clear. This sharp focus allowed one to progress through the stages of life progressively and make good progress in each life journey towards to goal of life – self-realization.

Those days along with their structure are long past but we still have the same goal of life and being unaware of it is not an excuse just as ignorance of the laws where we reside are not. The challenge before us is to come to the understanding and acceptance of the lofty goal of self-realization, take advantage of the availability of some aids with the advent of technology and start in the quest of self-realization. You are never alone in the spiritual path so rest on the belief that help comes when one strives sincerely. Sincerity and self-effort merge in the call to grace.

I wanted to talk about these few things to once again stress that the heavy work of the spiritual path is non-glorious but a struggle only till one is fully on board the train of change. Just like the farmer does the heavy work of preparing the soil and planting, we too must cultivate the inner field as that is not only the field but also the instrument. Self-inquiry now has a good amount of capital of 'self' for the inquiry and it must as the Self can only be known by the self. There is no other instrument or means for the task on hand.

Now back to Vasistha's teachings. Inquire into the nature of truth relentlessly to attain the fruit of this birth. Take the idea of gradual work out of the mind as the habitual mind will offer trickle-down cooperation which will at best be one step forward, two back. Swami Sivananda has a perfect recipe for our approach: a firm resolve, an effective system of daily self-accountability, and, an intelligent but effective way of self-punishment which deters habit.

With this triad, sit to realize – with this solid foundation, you will be unshaken by even the most turbulent distractions. It is not that distractions and turbulence will absent soon, but that you would be very well grounded and anchored to sail over the rough seas.

Self-inquiry is looking directly into one's self and not thinking or rationalizing. You are not satisfied by an answer or explanation – a direct experience must be had. Inquire thus: "What is

this world? Who am I?” Such inquiry is the essence of the science of self-knowledge, and the answer will be found in the question itself.

One who engages himself in self-inquiry is fearless, for he knows that the infinite consciousness is pure and is the only truth. He looks upon all with equal vision. The wise restrain their senses from apprehending the unreal world-appearance, whereas those who are unable to rest in the self are prey to their own senses.

Summary

Today, we have gone over the important teachings of the fifth chapter.

1. The state of pure being
2. Attain a quiet mind first
3. Inner ascent
4. Control of mind
5. Cause and cure of samsara
6. Avoid conceptualization
7. Relentless self-inquiry

Next time...

We start with the important teachings of the sixth chapter by going a little more in-depth into some of what we have already discussed in the 9th talk – The Seven Planes or States of Wisdom. This is a virtual roadmap for the seeker and we will discuss these one at a time.



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