

Part 18 (...Chapter VI continues) Seven States or Planes of Wisdom

Last time we discussed vicāraṇā or direct and steady observation of the mind, the second of the seven states or planes of wisdom. Vicāraṇā is not just steady observation, but while observing, empowering the inner intelligence to do what needs to be done as situations arise and is the very heart of spiritual progress and ascent. Lack of direct and steady observation thwarts spiritual progress and will stagnate or set-back all efforts. These help towards direct and steady observation of the mind: study of scriptures, right conduct, practice of concentration and meditation; company of the wise and the good; knowing what is good, harmful, right and wrong; and; resolutely giving up all negative qualities like pride, envy, vanity, desires and delusion.

III. Tanumānasa or the thinned and weakened mind

The mind gets thicker or more conditioned when it feels that pleasure resulting from sense contact is experienced. Simultaneously, attachment arises in the mind as the mind wants to preserve the experience which it feels gives pleasure and an aversion to anything that would inhibit the experience. This phenomenon is widespread across all of our lives so much so that it feels natural and goes unexamined.

This phenomenon goes unexamined and the means for pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of all that would disallow pleasure blossoms from apparently harmless mild preferences to strong currents of like and dislike. The mechanism that was allowed to take root to further pleasure and reduce or avoid displeasure soon grows into a destroyer of peace as it keeps the mind on the current of pursuit and avoidance.

There is nothing wrong with the simple pleasures of life which come by very naturally and do not require 'pursuit' and resulting 'avoidance' which change to likes and dislikes. Seeing this clearly, a feeling of disinterestedness in the pleasure of the senses arises in one and this gives rise to non-attachment.

There is a difference between the 'pursuit of pleasure' and not the 'simple pleasures that come about naturally' which require no pursuit. Pursuit and avoidance energizes likes and dislikes and these become deeper cravings and aversions. In giving up these inner ties that bind, the mind's likes and dislikes are weakened and the mind becomes subtle and transparent or tanumānasa. This is the third state of the seven states or planes or wisdom of Vāsiṣṭha and is also known as non-attachment and freedom. Tanumānasa is characterized by...

1. One assimilates the teaching of the scriptures, lives with masters and listens to their teachings.

Assimilation is a different from ‘internalizing’ that we hear so much about nowadays. Internalizing is having the teaching within – perhaps, ready to use. But, the user stays the same with this ‘so called teaching’ in his hip pocket. This does nothing at all but increase vanity. Assimilation is very different – *the teachings become flesh* so to say and are empowered to act unrestricted and unhindered across all life.

For assimilation, the approach to study has to be more than a daily activity – one among others. Study becomes the way of feeding the soul’s hunger to merge in its source. One does not merely study but through study – there is immediate and irreversible change in ones thinking at deeper levels and one ponders on how to practice the teachings across the spectrum of life. Along with this, one also considers all that is not conducive to self-knowledge and immediately uproots them root and branch.

It is rare that one can bring about total transformation within without contact with others who have done so. Towards this, one seeks the company of the masters and listens to their teachings as well. What was studied in the scriptures now meets practical experience and this gives tremendous momentum to one’s practice.

2. Being indifferent to this world, one leads a very disciplined life, away from society and completely free from all contacts.

Having studies and read, one is steady in the inner journey and becomes indifferent to the outer world. This does not mean that one abhors or hates the world but it does not lure the seeker who now knows that the inner journey is far more rewarding and durable.

One leads a very disciplined life as discipline is the pivot that makes teachings come alive within. A disciplined life is not a life of punishment and denial but an avoidance for what is not truly good and lasting for what is indeed good and lasting. As in any big change, there is a strong pull of habit and to prevent backsliding, one sets-up a structure for managing one’s self and one’s time with a way of self-accountability.

Real change is most difficult while still living amidst kith, kin and friends as they will insist on the ‘old you’ which you have gradually grown out off or gone beyond. Initially, all change is a novelty and hence taken with a grain of salt but soon, non-acceptance and even disdain come to the surface and situations deteriorate drastically for many reasons.

To prevent these sort of difficult situations and to protect one’s spiritual flame – it is best to be free from all contact unless very necessary for some reason so you can be clear in your heart and mind and have no ties that bind.

3. By the practice of the teachings of holy ones and scriptures and by doing good actions, one attains right perception of what is.

Sincerity in study is interest in self-change and not just knowing about some topic. In spiritual life, you—your true nature is the topic. You are learning about yourself and feel a strong urge to burst out of this cage of habit into the infinity of your true nature. This means that you are to grow into the likeness of your aspiration till you melt into your aspiration. This is the practice of the teaching.

Growing into the teachings is at once leaving the habitual self behind. Towards this, it is most helpful to do as much good actions and deeds as possible. We have to learn to do good not for any other reason but because it needs to be done. This is the way to understand that the practice of goodness is: goodness in you must do good deeds till goodness in you increases and fills all being. This will squeeze out all that is not good or habit just as you squeeze out the last toothpaste from a tube.

Here too, it is difficult to truly practice good in familiar environments as the initial surface acceptance will soon give way to total rejection as others shift from the good intent to the means and scrutiny intensifies. All of this makes it difficult to plunge deep within and there is constant inner conflict. This is so even more today in the times of ‘connectivity’ than earlier and all of this will have to be well-thought off and resolved.

The difficulty in progress is backsliding and hence, one has to have tremendous clarity, inner conviction and readiness to let the outer take its own course as you journey within. With this sure footing, relentless perseverance and God’s grace – one attains right perception of what is.

4. The spirit of non-attachment increases.

Non-attachment does not mean one is cold, clammy or that one does not care. It is quite the opposite. Just think about it – in all the so-called ‘warm talk’ and more – how much of it is really sincere? A shrewd and calculating mind could be working overtime while pleasantries are exchanged. I am merely suggesting that one needs to go beyond the convenient face of the outer to even understand what non-attachment is. Towards this, let us go beyond theology, differences in doctrine and the rest of it as one cannot inquire if one is biased to begin with.

Non-attachment is a very deep field, let us look at the high-end and work our way back. If God is All, all must be in God somehow or just who may I ask controls the real estate between God and all of us? If God is all, the differences in all their forms must be appearances with God as the only reality. The final approach to God, the only reality must be one of non-separation till this is actualized or directly experienced. This melting or surrender requires tremendous inner courage, fortitude, faith and unrelenting perseverance.

This is not easy and hence, the masters have laid out two forms of non-attachment: ordinary non-attachment and superior non-attachment. The difference is qualitative and requires the highest level of all those qualities and more that we have just talked about. Ordinary non-attachment when sustained and fuelled by sustained inner discipline and unrelenting love for God, bursts into superior non-attachment.

Ordinary non-attachment: One who has not directly realized the truth, ascertains to himself: “I am not the experiencer nor the doer; I have nothing to do with anyone nor has anyone anything to do with me. Whether what happens is because of past karma or because of divine will, whether it is pleasure or pain, what have I to do? Pursuit of pleasure is a dire disease, prosperity is calamity, meetings are only for parting, and time is all-devouring”. In this manner, by the company of the holy ones, by avoiding the contact of all that is not supportive of one’s aspiration, sustaining self-awareness, and by intense self-effort—one gains correct understanding of the truth concerning everything.

Superior non-attachment: One who has directly realised the truth: “I am not the doer; the doer is either past karma or the divine will”; when he has crossed this ocean of saṃsāra and rests in peace and silence that is known as superior non-attachment or freedom. There is no division between inside and outside, above and below, substantiality and insubstantiality inertia and consciousness, appearance and non-appearance. Then, there arises in the heart real wisdom, characterized by contentment and right action, and which yields the fruit of total freedom.

Summary

Today, we discussed the third of the seven states or planes of wisdom: tanumānasa or the thinned and weakened mind. We also talked about the characteristics of one in this state: (1) one assimilates the teaching of the scriptures, lives with masters and listens to their teachings; (2) being indifferent to this world, one leads a very disciplined life, away from society and completely free from all contacts; (3) practice of the teachings results in right perception of what is; (4) the spirit of non-attachment of both types increases.

Next time

We take up the fourth of the seven states or planes of wisdom: satvāpatti or natural turning away from sense pleasure and dwelling in truth.

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