

Soham - The Right Sadhana

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*“Brahma is the Creator of the whole Universe Vishnu is the Sustainer,
and Shiva is the Destroyer of all sins
This is the Truth I am revealing to you.”*

Embodiments of Love!

What is man, immersed in an ocean of sorrow, seeking in this vast and limitless universe? What for is he doing *sadhana*? Some are seeking fulfillment in worldly things; some others are wasting their valuable time in trying to seek satisfaction of their unfulfilled desires. Yet, others are entering the spiritual path with a desire to have *darshan*, *sparshan* and *sambhashan* of Divinity. Human beings contemplate on God as Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara. But these are not Gods with a human form. They have neither a form nor a place. If one enquires into the nature of their form, it will become clear that they have only some attributes, with no specific *upadhi* (vesture).

It is said “*Easwarah Sarva Bhoothanaam*” (God is the indweller of every living being). But, with what form? How can one contemplate on God with an invisible form? What is the use of such contemplation? Divinity is the very life breath that can be perceived and heard. How can one recognize and experience the sound of this Divine breath? The Upanishads have given the names of “*Brahman*” and “*Atma*” for this invisible Divine breath in human beings. But, one cannot understand these abstract concepts, with any amount of explanation. What is the meaning of *Easwarathwa* (Divinity)? It can be

understood as the Divine, auspicious breath of *soham* that emanates from a human being. *Soham* means “I am that” (Divinity). The sound of the breath in human being, i.e., *soham* establishes the nature of Divinity. If one tries to contemplate on the form without recognizing the sound, he will not be able to understand the nature of Divinity. *Soham* is *sathwic* in nature. This *sathwa guna* is *Easwarathwa* (the Shiva Principle). There is another principle that emanates from this Divine breath, namely, *Vishnuthwa* (the Vishnu Principle). What is the form of this Vishnu Principle? The feelings in the mind. In other words, mind is the Vishnu Principle. There is yet another form which emerges from the navel of Vishnu, namely, Brahma. Thus, the principles of Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara are emanating from the *Soham Tathwa* in a human being itself. In this trinity, Shiva is the *Soham Tathwa*, Vishnu is the Mind and Brahma is the *Vak Swarupa* (in the form of words). It means, every word that emerges from the human being is Brahma; every resolve (*sankalpa*) emerging from the mind is Vishnu and every breath coming out of the body is Easwara. Thus, Divinity is permeating the entire human body. The body is living, as long as the life breath emanates from the body. Mind is made up of *sankalpa* (resolution) and *vikalpa* (negation or dissolution). This is the

Vishnu Principle. The Principle that emerges from the navel of Vishnu is Brahma. What is the root cause for this Brahma Principle? That which attracts the sound (*sabda*).

It is said *Sabda Brahmamayi* (sound is Brahman) *Characharamayi* (that which is permeating the whole universe, movable and immovable is Brahman) and *Vangmayi* (word is Brahman). Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswathi are the embodiments of these three, namely, sound, pervasiveness and word. In every breath of the human being there is this *soham* chanting. Without this *soham* sound, the breath cannot exist. Similarly, devoid of mind *sankalpa* cannot arise. And, without *sankalpa*, the word cannot emerge. Thus, there is inseparable and interdependent relationship between the *soham* sound, the *sankalpa* in the mind and the word. Several efforts are being made by several people to recognize this relationship. However, this principle cannot be understood by *sadhana*. It can be realized only through enquiry.

Man today is engaged in the study of several Upanishads. What is the essence of these Upanishads? The essence of Upanishads is the principle of unity in diversity. We are nourishing and nurturing the body. For what purpose? What is the benefit accruing out of this nourishment? In fact, nothing. As long as the body exists, we have to feed it. As long as we take food, we sleep as well. During sleep, we experience happiness. But, once we wake up, are we able to experience the same happiness? No. Therefore, in order to experience everlasting bliss, we have to realize the essence of the Upanishads. Divinity has no names. All

names and forms belong to God. There is no place in which He does not exist. Nor is there an object in this world, which does not belong to Him.

Embodiments of Love! The essential nature of Divinity is Love. However, few make the effort to recognize this principle of love. There are several systems in the human body like the digestive system, nervous system, etc. But, there is one main switch, which controls all the systems in the body. The eyes see several colors. The tongue tastes several delicacies. The ears hear several types of sounds. But, what is the basis for all these experiences? That basis is called the fundamental principle, because of which man is able to experience all these things. That fundamental principle is given the name of *Atma*. Because of this *Atma Tathwa*, several *sankalpas* and *bhavas* arise in our heart. *Hridaya* (heart) is the Veda. The *sankalpas* are the *sruthis*. The essence of these *sruthis* is Vedanta. Hence, it should not be presumed that the Vedas are somewhere in a distant corner. The all-pervading sound of the *sruthis* is constantly in us, with us and is part of us. Therefore, we have to recognize the sounds that emerge from the Veda of our heart. During the past three days, in the morning you must have observed the Pundits chanting the Vedic *manthras* with several intonations, in the Poornachandra Auditorium. When you hear the sound of the *manthras*, you feel very happy, even though you are not able to understand their meanings. There may be several meanings for the words in these *manthras*. But, the very sound emerging from the chanting of these *manthras* will make you happy.

In order to know the true meanings of the words in these *manthras*, one must enter into the process of spiritual enquiry in an environment of deep silence. For, it is only in the depth of silence, the voice of God can be heard. Yesterday, I was mentioning to you in My discourse about the inherent nature (*sahaja*) of an object. How did sweetness come into the sugarcane? How did hot taste come into the chillies? How did bitterness come into the neem leaves? How did fragrance come into the jasmine flower? We call it nature. No, no. The Divine Nature is expressing itself through these forms.

In order to understand the nature of Divinity (*Paramatma*), we must engage our mind in the contemplation of the Transcendental Principle (*Parathathwa*). Where does the mind come from? It comes from the *sankalpa* (resolve). and *vikalpa* (negation or dissolution). They in turn come from the nature of *sabda* (sound). Sound is the real *Brahma Thathwa* (the Principle of *Brahma*). The *soham* principle in the *Brahmathathwa* is *Atmathathwa*, in essence. Therefore, in order to understand *Atmathathwa* one has to recognize the nature of the *swaasa* (Divine breath). *Soham* is also called as *Hamsa Gayathri*. “*So*” (*sah*) means that, and “*ham*” (*aham*), means I. Thus, *soham* means “I am that”. What is this “that”? What is it that proclaims “I am that”? Is it mind? If so, the mind, becomes an obstacle to realize the *soham* principle, since it is like a mad monkey. How can you march forward in your spiritual journey by relying on such an unsteady mind? This kind of approach is not correct. *Manas* (mind) is verily the embodiment of Vishnu, who is all-pervading. Without such a

mind there cannot be the *swaasa* (breath). It is only on account of the life breath the mind functions. In order to understand such subtle meanings, one has to depend upon the method of enquiry. When you sit for meditation on the *soham* principle, you will observe that the “*so*” comes in and “*ham*” goes out while inhaling and exhaling. This process has to be watched carefully. Here “*so*” relates to the Divine Principle and “*ham*” to *ahamkara* (ego). Thus, while Divinity enters into our body, ego leaves us. And that Divine Principle which has entered into our body must be held firmly in our system by the process of *Kumbhakam* (holding on). People doing *pranaayama sadhana* call these processes *puraka* (inhaling), *kumbhaka* (holding) and *rechaka* (exhaling) of the breath. *Soham*, the *Hamsa Gayathri* consists of inhaling the breath through one nostril while chanting “*so*” and exhaling the breath through the other nostril while chanting “*ham*” and in between holding the breath for sometime. The most effective method lies in observing strict timings for all the three processes involved in the *soham*. Disregarding timings, if one does *pranaayama*, it will endanger one’s life itself. The time spent for the three processes of *Puraka*, *Kumbhaka* and *rechaka* must be exactly the same. Time is the essence of this *pranaayama sadhana*, since God is *Kalaswarupa* (the embodiment of time). Our *sankalpa* (resolutions) must always be *sathwic* in nature. In order that we have *sathwic sankalpas*, our *swaasa* (breath) must be pure in nature. Thus, the principle of *Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Maheswara* are inseparable and interdependent. They are one and the same. We must try to understand the essential nature of their unity.

Today, no one is able to realize the true meaning of the Upanishads. It will take at least a month to describe, analyze and understand the inner meaning of each one of the *slokas* in the Upanishads. There are several meanings for each word and we must take that meaning that is appropriate to a given situation. A small example. There is a young boy who is still in the process of learning to talk. Considering his age, if you say orally the word "Rama", he will pronounce it as "Lama". That is the correct pronunciation at his age, so far as he is concerned. But, in our view, it may be wrong. It is only when we take into consideration all factors like the age, time and the particular word used, it is possible to decide whether it is right or wrong. There are many educated boys. If you ask them to spell *chaapa* (mat), they will pronounce it as *chepa* (fish). It is only when one knows what *chaapa* is, he will be able to distinguish it from *chepa*. Otherwise both *chaapa* and *chepa* would mean the same for him. In the Gajendra Moksha episode in Bhagawatha, Lord Vishnu was rushing to the rescue of the elephant from the jaws of the crocodile. His consort, Lakshmi was on his side at that time. She wanted to ask Him where He was rushing to, but there was no time. The famous poet Pothana was describing that scene beautifully thus:

*"Running fast behind Lord Vishnu
To enquire as to what has happened;
But, she was not sure,
Whether He would reply;
Anxious and confused,
Her locks of hair loosening while running
Unable to catch up with Him
She sat down dumbfounded".*

Thus, each language and each country have some beautiful ways of portraying a given situation, which are specific to them.

Dear students! If you want to know the meanings of the Upanishads, you have to approach the great souls who are well-versed in them. The essence of all the Upanishads is derived from the *Brahmathathwa*. And this *Brahmathathwa* expresses itself through the *vaak* (word). *Vishnuthathwa* is based on the mind. It consists of good thoughts. When there are good thoughts in the mind, they will find expression through good words. The good words in turn, give good meanings. The Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara are not three separate entities. Brahma is *swaasa* (breath), Vishnu is *manas* (mind) and Maheswara is *vaak* (word). The unity of these three is the *Atmathathwa*.

Embodiments of Divine Love! You will not be able to understand these concepts, if I go on repeating them like this. It is also possible that those who do not know the real meaning of the Upanishads may have some misconceptions. Therefore, the Upanishads have to be taught in a peaceful, sacred and calm environment. The *manthras* have to be chanted with a clean breath. A particular *manthra* has been prescribed in the Upanishads for cleansing the breath, while explaining the *Swaasathathwa*. If you chant this *manthra*, several diseases will be cured. First and foremost our breath will become clean. The blockages in the vascular system will be removed and blood will flow freely; the cataract in the eye will get dissolved; the sound coming out of our throat will be

purified. However, we must chant these *manthras* with correct intonations. Only then the proper meaning of these *manthras* will be revealed to us. The entire nature of the body will be revealed by the essence of the Upanishads. How does the tongue know the taste? The tongue is able to reveal different tastes of different food materials. How is it possible? There are *lakhs* of taste buds on the tongue, with the help of which the tongue reveals the different tastes. Similarly, there are *crores* of light rays in the eyes. Thus, the *Upanishadic manthras* will be able to cure several diseases of the body, when chanted properly. Also, when you realize their correct meanings, your behavior itself will undergo a tremendous change. Along with the change of behavior, sacred feelings arise in your heart. Ultimately, these sacred feelings find their expression as sacred words.

Embodiments of Divine Love! There are several words in several languages in the world. They have several meanings as well. But, there must be an intimate relationship between the words and their meanings. There is no use spending all your time in dilating on the meanings. It will become an exercise in futility, especially in the spiritual field. The proper *swara* (sound) in chanting the various *manthras* is very important. I often quote the example of people chanting the *Aum manthra*. Several people do not chant *Om* with correct intonation as they do it in a most mechanical way. The chanting of this *manthra* is done with three syllables, namely, 'A', 'U' and 'M'. 'A' comes from the throat, 'U' from the tongue and 'M' from the lips. The combined form of these three

syllables, namely, AUM emerges from the navel. Several people when asked to chant AUM they give us the spelling. This is not what is required. All the three syllables must be chanted simultaneously in unison. The chanting of *Om* can be compared to the taking off, soaring in the sky and finally landing of the airplane. It is only when a *manthra* is chanted in the proper manner that you get good feelings. Several people tell Me, "Swami, I am doing *Om* for several years. But, I am unable to have a steady faith." Yes, I know. How is it possible when you are not chanting with correct intonation and not understanding its true meaning?

The Upanishads appear to be very difficult to understand. But, if you know the meanings of the various concepts nothing is more easy. Those who have lost their teeth will have difficulty in chanting various *manthras*. Even the sounds while chanting the *manthras* will be different. While practicing, you need not chant the *manthras* loudly. You do it within yourself. In music, some people concentrate on the *swara* (note). They will change their tone to be in tune with the *swara*. While doing so, they change their physical posture also. Very often this posture appears awkward. People know that when the *swara* is not in tune with the *sruthi* it becomes *apaswara* (discordant note). In order to avoid this, one has to control his body also. You must have observed several people, while singing *bhajans*. When they sing loudly there will be a change in their tone (*swara*). This should not happen. This must be controlled. Some people while singing devotional songs close their eyes. Some

people raise one eye while the other eye is kept at a low level. All these contortions present an awkward picture. That is why some people while playing on the harmonium keep a small mirror over it in order to observe their lips, eyes, etc. If the song is not sung in a proper *swara* he can see that his own face looked awkward. He will himself feel disgusted with this. It is important that one's posture is also good while singing a *keertan* or a *bhajan* song. He should not make others unhappy by the contortions of his face. Absolute concentration is necessary while performing such things. We often do certain acts inadvertently. For example, while drinking milk or coffee we indulge in conversation. Then the milk will spill and spatter on our dress and may even get our throat choked. We should never talk while drinking something or eating. In the olden days the great *Rishis* used to maintain silence while eating or drinking. Not only that; they invariably used to chant the following mantra before partaking of the food.

*Brahmarpanam Brahma Havir
Brahmagnou Brahmanahutam
Brahmaiva Thena Ganthavyam
Brahma Karma Samadhina.*

You affirm that the food is an offering to Brahman. Then where is Brahman? He is within. So, immediately God replies from within:

*Aham Vaishvanaro Bhutva
Praninam Dehamasritah
Pranapana Samayuktah
Pachamyannam Chaturvidham.*

If you talk while taking food, the digestive system will be spoiled. Once

the digestive system is spoiled, several diseases will confront you. Pray to God silently keeping your eyes closed and then partake of your food. Most of the children do not know this rule. Take your food in silence in a calm atmosphere. Do not howl, talk and chitchat. Do not laugh or cry while taking food. Do not entertain any worry before or while taking food. These are some of the precautions one has to take to lead a happy daily life.

Embodiments of Divine Love! You speak of *sadhana*. But, *sadhana* is not that easy. It is easier to repeat names of the nine forms of *Bhakti*, like *sravanam*, *keertanam*, etc. When do you get into the ultimate step of *atmanivedanam* (self-surrender)? It is only after you establish *sneham* (friendship) with God. Many people do not know what is real friendship. In their opinion, friendship means wishing each other 'hello, hello'. What is this 'hello, hello'? Nothing. It simply does not mean anything. It is only a casual accosting. This is not friendship. Friendship presupposes an inseparable relationship between two individuals. Their bodies may be different. But their life principle is one and the same. When the two individuals have different thoughts and feelings, it is not friendship. It is said: "A man with a dual mind is half-blind." Where there are two kinds of thoughts, it becomes a dual mind. How then can you contemplate on divinity with a dual mind? Children are serious of doing *sadhana*. Considering their *sraddha* (earnest spirit of enquiry) I wish to elaborate on this aspect. Do not ever leave the sacred path. Then only will you have a sacred life. You can definitely achieve this. Do not waste time. At present you are wasting

a lot of time in vain pursuits. Time is our life. It is said *Kaalaya Namaha, Kaala Kaalaya Namaha*. Time is everything. If you spend such a valuable time indulging in vain and unsacred things, how can you get it back? It is only to sanctify the time that God has given you your span of time. If you channelize your thoughts in the right path, your actions will be right. The *kaala* (time) *karma* (action) *kaarana* (cause) and *karthavya* (duty) must be harmonized to become one. What is this human body after all? It is just a water bubble. Any moment it may burst. It is bound to perish any day either today, tomorrow or day after. We should not grieve over such a perishable body for that which has come is bound to go; that which has gone is bound to return. Therefore, we need not attach much importance to this coming and going. We must make effort to realize that which has no birth and death; which is sacred and which is unsacred; which is happiness and which is sorrow. What are difficulties? In My view, difficulties are better than pleasure and comforts. It is not prudent to pray for happiness and comfort. The wisdom you gain in times of difficulty is not available in happy times. You ask any realized soul or a saintly person as to how he acquired this great wisdom? He will tell you that he underwent several sorrows and difficulties and then only he could get that wisdom. Today, people desire to have *kaivalya* (liberation) without undergoing any difficulty or spending a pie. How is it possible? You must work hard. Just by sitting somewhere and happily enjoying things you will find difficulties painful. It is only after undergoing difficulties you must enjoy happiness.

Once Krishna came to Kunti to enquire about her welfare. Kunti asked Krishna, "When did You come? How is the war going on?" Krishna replied, "Mother, birth and death, good and bad - these are common to everybody. You forget about these things. You tell Me what do you want". Then Kunti requested Krishna, "My son, until I leave my body and merge in your Lotus Feet, please continue to give me difficulties". Krishna enquired, "Oh Mother! You have been undergoing difficulties right from the time you married King Pandu. Will that not suffice? Why are you asking for further difficulties"? Then Kunti replied, "Oh Krishna, You do not know the happiness in undergoing difficulties. I only know about it. Because I had undergone several difficulties, I am enjoying your divine presence constantly. All my sons earned your grace. The sons born out of my womb became the recipients of your Divine Grace. That itself gives me great pleasure. What is the use of having several children without earning your Divine Grace? What happiness do I derive from that?"

"King Dhritarashtra had a number of sons but ultimately what was his fate? Sage Suka was not married and had no son, but did he suffer on account of this?"

"There is no happiness by having sons nor is there any loss by not having sons. The children that are born must bring credit to the family. They must lead a life of good behavior. They must join good company. My sons are under your Divine umbrella. From morning till evening they constantly chant your Divine Name. What more happiness

do I desire? I pray that I continue to enjoy the bliss. Oh Krishna". Will the mothers of present times pray like this? Do they court difficulties of their own accord. No, no. They want sons. But they do not desire that they live in the Divine presence of God. They are afraid of such a prospect. What is the use, if they sit somewhere, without reaching the Divine presence. The purpose of a human birth is to reach the Lotus Feet of the Lord.

*"Having grasped
what ought to be grasped,
Do not let go of the grip
till you succeed.
Having desired
what ought to be desired,
Hold on till your desire is fulfilled.
Having asked what ought to be asked,
Hold on till you obtain
what you had asked for.
Having thought what ought to be
Hold on till you succeed.
Either God should yield to your prayer
Or you should ask
wholeheartedly with intensity,
This is the path
a true devotee should pursue."*

There will be several sorrows, losses and difficulties confronting us in life. You should not mind them. We should always consider the Divine presence as the greatest treasure that we can seek. You must develop an unwavering and abiding faith and devotion in the eternal truth that is Divinity. That is the only thing you should pray for. Your devotion should be steady, pure and selfless. People want devotion as well as everything else in the objective world. How is it possible? You have only one mouth and you want to drink both milk and water simultaneously.

That is not possible. Therefore, you must desire only one, that is divinity. If you develop yearning for God, He will Himself look after all your needs. Divine presence will give you real happiness. It is the only permanent happiness in this world. There is no sorrow, no unhappiness and no worry in the Divine presence. Someone came to Me and enquired. "Swami, I am a devotee of God. How is that I am always deep in sorrow?" I replied, "If you are really a devotee, how did this sorrow come to you?" What you derive from God is happiness and not sorrow. If you say that you are experiencing sorrow, it is not correct. God always gives happiness and bliss. There is nothing like sorrow with God. What you experience is not God's sorrow. You must have borrowed it from somebody and attributed it to God. That is not correct. God is the embodiment of bliss. He always gives happiness only. *Mamaivamsho Jeevaloke Jeevabhuta Sanathanah* (The eternal Atma in all beings is a part of My Being) is the declaration of Lord Krishna. You, who are the *amsa* (part) of the divine will get only divine feelings. Will God's *prasada* be ever bitter? No, never. But people out of their ignorance think that way. Madhwacharya, the great exponent of dualism used to live in the Kannada region. He was a great devotee of Lord Krishna. Once he told his disciples that they should observe the *Ekadashi vrata*. Commencing from that day, for three days, they observed fasting constantly contemplating on God without even taking any food or even water. On the third day, in the night, Madhwacharya appeared in their dream and advised them "My dear disciples, this is not *sadhana*. You hold on to the principles,

to the Divine Feet of Lord Krishna; not to the formalities. Otherwise when will you sanctify your life? This is what I have practiced throughout my life". People observe *Ekadashi vrata* and fast for three days. On the fourth day they make preparations, for making forty *dosas* (savory pan cakes). Is this *Ekadashi vrata*? This is not correct. What you have to do on the fourth day is to add love to your *sadhana*. Once you cultivate love for God, you will forget hunger and thirst. Sage Viswamithra was taking Rama and Lakshmana to the forest to protect the *yajna* being performed by him. Rama and Lakshmana, sons of King Dasaratha were of tender age at that time. They never experienced any difficulties till then. Dasaratha was much worried about their welfare in the forest. When they reached the banks of river Sarayu, Viswamithra wanted to teach them the *manthras* of *Bala* and *Athibala* so that they would not be bothered by hunger and lack of sleep. They happily followed Sage Viswamithra who initiated them into the *manthras*. Did Sage Viswamithra not know that Rama was an Avatar? In spite of knowing this fact, why did he initiate Rama into these *manthras*? Several people argue like this. It is true

that Rama and Lakshmana were Divine personalities. But, they had taken up human frames, which needed food and sleep. Therefore, in order that they did not suffer from hunger and lack of sleep Viswamithra initiated them into *Bala* and *Athibala manthras*. If one is not troubled by hunger and lack of sleep, any amount of *sadhana* can be undertaken. Anything can be achieved. Even the most dreadful demons can be defeated in a battle. That is why Sage Viswamithra initiated them into these *manthras*. After walking some distance, Lakshmana enquired as to why they were initiated into these *manthras*. Viswamithra replied, "My dear sons, you are of tender age. You cannot bear the hunger and lack of sleep. While you are taking food or sleeping if the demons confront you, you will be in trouble. Therefore you must always be alert and on your guard. These *Bala* and *Athibala manthras* now relieve you of hunger and lack of sleep". *Mahatmas* (great souls) teach *manthras* to establish peace in the world. Therefore one should not put silly questions like, "Did Viswamithra not know that Rama was an Avatar?" The *manthras* were taught to them keeping in view the requirement at that time.

