

PATHWAYS TO SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE & APPROACHING A GURU

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Human birth is very rare. Only human beings are given the opportunity to know God and understand that we are not separate from Him. Only human beings have the freedom to choose – to choose between right and wrong, between pleasurable and beneficial, etc.

We have four goals in life. *Dharma* – righteous living for heaven going; *Artha* – acquiring financial security for a comfortable life; *Kama* – fulfilling needs and desires; *Moksha* – attaining liberation.

However, heaven going, acquiring wealth and pleasure gives only temporary happiness whereas liberation or *Moksha* gives absolute happiness. To achieve the above four goals, there are two disciplines – two *Yogas*.

First is Karma Yoga which is action oriented – like prayers, doing *pujas*, chanting, meditation, selfless service, etc. This is purely for the purification of the mind, to steady the mind, to prepare the aspirant for *Jnana* Yoga – for knowledge.

Jnana Yoga is inquiry in the *Sashtra* – our Vedas – which is the means to understand our oneness with God and the Universe. This is absolute knowledge and absolute knowledge destroys the ego in us which is borne out of our own ignorance.

When we gain this knowledge, we become the whole. We lack nothing. Then, there is nothing more to be gained. This is *Moksha* – Freedom. Freedom from;

- 1) The sense of limitation;
- 2) Wants and desires;

- 3) Being effected by the pairs of opposites like pain and pleasure, wealth and poverty etc. which are the inherent nature of this world.

In *Moksha* we gain ABSOLUTE HAPPINESS – PARAMANANDA. In *Paramananda* all the other three goals i.e. heaven going, security and pleasure are included. That is why it is said Karma Yoga resolves into *Jnana* Yoga. First, to gain this knowledge, there are two primary requirements.

One, we must find a Guru. One who is wise and has the vision of the Truth – *Jnaaninas Tattva Darshinah*. Two, we ourselves must be ready with a disciplined mind, become a purified vessel to receive this knowledge. Only then can we begin this path towards spiritual evolution through *Jnana* Yoga. In this respect, Lord Sri Krishna mentioned three (3) other secondary requirements in preparation. Reference is made here to Chapter 4, verse 34 of the Bhagavad Geeta.

*Tat Viddhi Pranipaatena
Pariprashnena Sevayaa
Upadekshyanti Te Jnaanam
Jnaaninas Tattva Darshinah*

Understand that – *Tat Viddhi*
By prostrating – *Pranipaatena*
By asking proper questions - *Pariprasnena*
By doing service – *Sevayaa*
Approach a Guru who is wise – *Jnaaninas*
One who has the vision of the truth
- *Tattva Darshinah*
To teach you this knowledge
- *Upadekshyanti te Jnaanam*

1st: How to approach the Guru

- By *Pranipaatena*

When we approach the Guru, we prostrate – we offer our salutations to the Guru. The literal meaning of *pranipaatena* is falling down properly – with the right attitude. This right attitude is also called *namaskara* to show one's respect and readiness. There are different forms of *pranipaatena* / falling down.

1. One way is to bend down and touch the Guru's feet.
2. Another is to place our hands together and bend our heads slightly.
3. A third way is *Ashtanga Namaskara* – with the eight limbs we touch the ground backed by a sincere and mental attitude of reverence and worship.
4. By words also we can pay our respect – “O *Bhagavan*, I salute to You.”

Prostration implies certain surrender on one's part and being ready to give up one's ego. Surrendering to the Guru as well as the teaching is important for gaining this knowledge.

2nd: Asking Pertinent Questions

- *Pariprashnena*

While studying, appropriate questions should be asked, at the right time taking into consideration the subject matter being taught. For example, when studying the Geeta we can ask: “What is bondage? How has it come about? What is released from this bondage? How does this release take place?” Only when bondage is clear will *Moksha* become clear. In this way, certain questions may arise and whenever appropriate, they should be asked because the subject matter is something that must be understood. This type of questioning is what is meant by *pariprashnena*.

3rd: Service to the Guru - *Sevaya*

Anything that can be done for the Guru must be done. There is no other payment while the student is gaining this knowledge. No tuition fee. No charge for room and

board, etc. Guru Seva is an attitude which is important for gaining this knowledge.

And what happens when these threefold means of preparation are followed? The teacher who has been won over by our devotion, our commitment, our seriousness will teach us this knowledge.

What are the qualities of those – who are wise and who have the vision of the truth? - *Jnaaninas Tattva Darshinah*

1. They know the *Shastra*
2. They know the methodology of unfolding the *Sashtra*
3. They have a clear vision of the truth – about themselves, the world and God
4. They themselves personify the content of these words of the *Sashtra*

These teachers are called “*Tattvadarshis*”. Only they, with their patience, kindness and compassion can unfold the *Sashtra* to reveal our true nature of the Atman within us which is all pervasive.

How Do They Teach?

- *Upadekshyanti Te Jnanam*

These teachers who are themselves the meaning of the words of the *Sashtra* can make us see the Atman within us by negating what the Atman is not – thus freeing us from our sense of limitation. They lift us up to see what they see. That we are not this limited body-mind-sense complex but We Are the Whole. We Are *Purnam* (complete). We are *Sat-Chit-Ananda – Atma*.

This is how- our oneness with God and the Universe is taught – *Upadekshyanti Te Jnanam*. This is how the Atman within us is revealed to us. Otherwise our pursuit will never end. Caught in the cycle of *samsara*, we will have to take rebirth after rebirth – until such time we gain this knowledge.

Hari Om Tat Sat

