

*Sadbanas According to
Yoga Vasishtha*



Swami Shantananda Puri

**SADHANAS
ACCORDING TO
YOGA VASISHTHA**

Swami Shantananda Puri

**Parvathamma C.P. Subbaraju Setty
Charitable Trust**

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- Author : Sri Swami Shantananda Puri
- © Publisher : Parvathamma C.P. Subbaraju Setty
Charitable Trust
13/8, PMK Road
Bangalore - 560 004.
- First Edition : July 2005
(Guru Poomima)
- Cover Page Design : P.V. Ashwini
- Type Setting & Printing : Omkar Offset Printers
1 st Main Road, New Tharagupet
Bangalore - 560 002
Ph: 26708186, 26709026.
e-mail: omkar@blr.vsnl.net.in
website: www.omkarprinters.com

SADHANAS ACCORDING TO YOGA VASISHTHA

SAMARPAN

*This book is dedicated with veneration
to the Lotus Feet of my revered Guru*

*Swami Purushottamanandaji
of Vasishtha Guha, Uttaranchal, Himalayas,*

*but for whose infinite Compassion
I would not have been able to formulate
my thoughts and put them down
in this book*

and

*to the thousands of Spiritual
Sadhakas all over the world.*

– Swami Shantananda Puri



H.H. Srimad Swami Shantananda Puri Maharaj

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Introduction

Yoga Vasishtha also known as Vasishtha Maha Ramayana is one of the greatest classics in Advaita Vedanta. Its importance and greatness have been extolled by many a scholar like Swami Ramtirtha, Dr. Ganganath Jha, Bhagavan Das etc. Many of the verses in Upanishads like Maha Upanishad, Annapurna Upanishad etc. are found repeated in Yoga Vasishtha. This is one of the best scriptures on Self-knowledge. It is said that whatever is not found in this book cannot be found elsewhere and whatever is contained in other texts is all to be found in this book.

This text has been divided into six prakaranas (parts) called Vairagya, Mumukshu, Utpatti, Sthiti, Upasana and Nirvana respectively and is supposed to contain in all 32,000 verses (Actually the total as available is only about 28,000). The author of this text is Valmiki, the author of 'Ramayana'. The book is mainly in the form of instructions from Vasishtha to Sri Rama who was disgusted with his normal life

of a prince and was prepared to end his life by fasting. In this current booklet, an attempt has been made to summarise the subject matter of the first three prakaranas only highlighting the Sadhanas prescribed for a seeker. In addition, a gist of the story of Chudala & Sikhidhwaja from the last prakarana (Nirvana Prakarana) has been included as it is a remarkable story containing certain essential teachings. But this summary can be held to be a representative brief presentation of the subject matter of the entire original text (i.e. 6 prakaranas), as the balance three parts contain only a repetition of the theme covered in the first three parts by elaborately illustrating them with various parable-like stories and examples.

The influence of "Gaudapada's Karika on Mandukya Upanishad" on Yoga Vasishtha e.g., Ajata Vada (the theory of non-creation) and the example of the Alata (firebrand) is clearly seen. Yoga Vasishtha is famous for a number of unique stories. This has been quoted often by Vidyananya in Panchadasi (he has cited this work by name and has quoted as many as 253 verses from it).

In rare places as when Valmiki says that "the one who is convinced that he is liberated is truly liberated and the one who considers himself bound remains bound", one is reminded of Ashtavakra Samhita.

It is the scholars who are bothered about the date of composition of this book. As far as real aspirants are concerned, they should only be content with the savour of the excellent contents of the book. Anybody with some insight should be able to be convinced that whosoever had written Yoga Vasishtha must necessarily have been a realised soul of a high order.

Those who cannot go through the original text will do well to go through at least "Laghu Yoga Vasishtha" in which Sri Abhinand Pandit has selected 6000 verses out of the original text. The slokas of books like Yoga Vasishtha should not be read like a story book. The meaning of each sloka or 4 or 5 of them should be meditated upon daily for hours so that it will seep into our inner being and transform us.

The philosophy of this text is meant mainly for householders so that they can practise it while leading their normal life.

By just reading or hearing the highest truths contained in Yoga Vasishtha, by constantly contemplating and mulling over them, it becomes a Sadhana and it can lead one to the samadhi stage.

This book would not be possible without the support of my friend Sri D.N. Anand who has been a great source of strength in printing meticulously. May the Divine Mother bless him and his family with all the best in life.

As usual, Sri P.S. Venkatesh Babu and his associates in M/s. Omkar Offset Printers have printed the book in an exquisitely beautiful way. May they continue to prosper in all walks of life.

A very thoughtful and beautiful cover design has been provided by young P.V. Aswini. May Divine Mother bless her with all the best in life.

Hari Om

PART I

VAIRAGYA PRAKARANA (Dispassion and Detachment)

Yoga Vasishtha begins with a postulate that liberation is not possible by performance of Karma (acts prescribed in scriptures) alone or by Jnana (knowledge) alone but that both together, in conjunction, constitute the means therefor. The book is mainly in the form of an exhortation by the great sage Vasishtha to Rama (the hero of the Ramayana), when the latter was seized at the age of fifteen, with an intense disgust for worldly life soon after he returned from a long pilgrimage to all the important holy places.

DESIRE - THE CAUSE OF ALL MISERIES

According to Valmiki, the author of this book, it is our desire¹ for worldly objects which sustains the body-mind complex and thus leads us into

1. अयं वासनया देहो ग्रियते भूतपञ्जरः। (I-3-10)

bondage. In reality, the entire world is only an appearance like dream objects. The conviction² of the falsity and non-existence of worldly objects will efface all the impressions of the mind and lead to the extinction of all desires which, in turn, will result in dissolution³ of the mind. This is liberation with its attendant bliss. Thus, at the very start, the path to liberation has been indicated in the form of a mini-capsule.

Many sadhakas (seekers) have fallen into the grievous error of assuming that their desires have become extinct and that they have become enlightened. Further, the conviction of the unreality of the world as also the futility of being attracted to worldly objects can come only through a discriminative analysis of the major objects of temptation. Such an analysis is done beautifully by

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2. दृश्यं नाऽस्तीति बोधेन मनसो दुश्यं मार्जनम्।
संपन्नं चेत्तदुत्पन्ना परा निर्वाणं निर्वृतिः ॥ (I-3-6)
 3. क्षीणायां वासनायां तु चेतो गलति सत्त्वरम्। (I-3-9)

Rama when asked by Vasishtha and Visvamitra, two great sages, to explain the cause of his dejection and disgust for worldly life, as follows :-

Every man is subject to the transmigratory cycle of birth and death. There is no stability in objects, whether movable or immovable. The possession of these objects invariably leads to catastrophe and disaster. It is the mind which creates the illusion of reality of the world so that we get tempted by the alluring objects (like riches, enjoyments, sex, etc), oblivious of the ultimate miseries that result and unaware of the waiting ravages of time in the form of old age, reversals in fortune, etc.

The entire worldly life is evanescent and fleeting like a flash of lightning in the sky. Youth forsakes us quickly and we are faced with the ravages of old age and the deadly diseases which afflict the body. A true life⁴ is that which attains what is worthy of

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4. प्राप्यं संप्राप्यते येन भूयो येन न शोच्यते।
परया निर्वृतिः स्थानं यत्तज्जीवितमुच्यते ॥ (I-14-10)

attainment, so that there will be no cause for sorrow and a state of supreme tranquillity is reached.

Riches and prosperity do not lead to happiness but result in miseries and sufferings due to various anxieties, worries and fear. Fortune never remains steady.

The worldly life fosters our ego which leads us to sufferings and difficulties. Ego is actually a disease. As a result of Ego, one easily loses peace and equanimity of mind. It is the ego which is the cause of expansion of our desires.

In this worldly life, the mind continues to wander and roam about aimlessly like a street dog in a village. It is from the mind that all our pleasures and pains arise. The entire world, which is a fabrication of imagination, has risen from the mind and when once the mind subsides, the entire world also disappears⁵. This very idea has been incorporated⁶ by Bhagavan Ramana, in his "SAT-Darsanam."

5. तस्मिन्क्षीणे जगत् क्षीणम्॥ (I-16-25)

6. धिया सहोदेति धियास्तमेति लोकस्ततो धीप्रविभास्य एषः॥

(verse 7 of SAT-Darsanam)

A common man, motivated by greed, tries to accumulate riches by both fair and foul means all his life. He never gets time to enjoy his wealth before death snatches him away. Wife, sons and friends are all transitory and the union with them is just like meeting people on the way during a journey and then parting from them. A man looks at the death of others with commiseration just like a herd of sheep bound to the stake staring complacently at the slaughter of their companions, unaware of a similar fate awaiting to overtake them.

When old age creeps in silently, the body gets withered, worn out and weak. All the beauty, glow and grace of youth disappear without a trace. It is pitiable to see an old man with all his carnal desires unsatiated, yet unable to get fulfilment on account of his strength having ebbed away and his senses having lost their capacity to function. Old age heralds the impending advent of death whose very thought makes one shiver with fear. The all-devouring⁷ time spares nobody. Time is the source of all decay and

7. न तदस्तीह यदयं कालः सकल घस्मरः। (I-23-4)

death. Seeing this destructive quality of time, who can afford to place his confidence in time? Life is highly unsteady⁸; death is relentless in its march, youth is very fickle and boyhood is carried away by dullness and ignorance. All individual beings are liable to disappear and dissolve; all desires bind a man tightly to the world; and all beings are carried away forcibly by time to a destination unknown. The mind is delighted⁹ one moment (in this worldly life) but afflicted with depression in the next. It attains tranquillity in another moment, thus changing every moment like an actor.

Rama concluded these reflections by saying that he preferred to abandon his body, the seat of all miseries and suffering by restraining his breath.

It is like this that one should reflect over the futility of worldly enjoyments resulting ultimately in

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8. आयुरत्यन्त चपलं मृत्युरेकान्त निष्ठुरः ।
तारुण्यं चातितरलं बाल्यं जडतया हतम् ॥ (1-26-9)
9. क्षणमानन्दिता याति क्षणमेति विषादिताम् ।
क्षणं सौम्यत्वमायाति सर्वमिन्नटवन्मनः ॥ (1-28-38)

misery and unhappiness, the evanescence of worldly riches, pride of youth and companionship of relations and friends, the dreadful Damocles' Sword of death hanging over our head, the falsity of the alluring objects of the world and the inexorable ravages of time on our body and fortunes, as also possessions. It is this state of Vairagya which will lead us to the next state viz., the desire for freedom and also to seek a path which will release us from bondage.

After having recounted all his reflections about the world, Rama requested his Guru, Vasishtha, to instruct him as to how to escape (once and for all) from the miseries of the world and how to restrain the mind in order that it might always remain in the highest state of tranquillity, and to reveal the path by which the enlightened ones were able to achieve that state of peace and bliss. If it were not possible to achieve such a state, Rama was prepared to part with his life by refraining from all activities (including eating and also drinking water).

MUMUKSHU PRAKARANA
(The Way of Liberation)

All the sages and courtiers including Sage Visvamitra were highly impressed with the Vairagya of Rama and his longing for the Supreme Truth. Visvamitra then narrated the story of Suka, the son of Vyasa, as a parallel to the state of Rama.

SUKA'S STORY :

Suka, from birth, possessed immense wisdom. By constant reflection and enquiry, cultivated through dispassion by his own experience, he was able ultimately to realize the highest truth; yet Suka continued to have doubts about the validity of his knowledge. When approached by him, the great sage Vyasa, his own father, also corroborated the same truth, but Suka was not convinced. Vyasa then sent Suka to King Janaka, his own disciple, who was equally enlightened. Janaka, who was informed of Suka's arrival, guessed his purpose but chose to

detain him at the outer gate for seven days, at the outer compound for seven days more and then in the inner apartment for another seven days. In the inner apartment, Suka was entertained with abundant varieties of food, numerous damsels of bewitching beauty and other objects of enjoyment, but Suka remained unaffected with a tranquil mind, firm as a rock.

When Janaka found that neither the unreasonably long wait nor the enticing objects of attraction had produced any reaction or created any sense of annoyance or anger in Suka, he invited the latter into his presence and revealed the same truth as realized by himself and confirmed by Vyasa. Upon being proclaimed by Janaka as a liberated soul, Suka went away and remained absorbed in the Supreme Consciousness on the summit of Mount Meru until the dissolution of his body. Janaka's final verdict to Suka Deva was,¹⁰ **“The one whose mind has ceased to be interested in earthly pleasures or fame stands verily liberated.”**

10. भुवि भोगा न रोचन्ते स जीवन्मुक्त उच्यते। (II-2-8)

SELF-EFFORT

On being directed by Viswamitra, Vasishtha the family preceptor, advises Rama. His exhortation begins with one of the main themes of the Text - Self effort (Purushartha) versus Destiny (Prarabdha), an extremely complex subject discussed by various saints in different ways, some of them apparently contradictory to each other.

None can disagree with Vasishtha's assertion¹¹ that Self-effort is absolutely essential for attaining Brahma-loka (the region of the conditioned Brahman) as also for God-realization. It is also equally necessary for material success and attaining riches of the world. On the contrary, the one who remains inactive, depending solely on destiny and the actions of past lives coming to fruition (Prarabdha), will be deprived of success in all fields. Vasishtha vehemently attacks 'Destiny' and Fatalism with strong words. Ignorant people alone believe in destiny, which is a fabrication

11. पौरुषेणैव यत्नेन सहसाम्भोरुहास्पदम्।
कश्चिदेव चिदुल्लासः ब्रह्मतामधितिष्ठति ॥ (II-4-14)

of imagination created by wrong conditioning through books since time immemorial, perverted misunderstanding and erroneous conceptions. He gives many logical examples. For example, he asks whether a person who discontinues his schooling based on an astrologer's prediction that he will become highly learned will ever become learned at all. This way of establishing a point is adopted in the Puranas and Vedas as well and the purpose is not to condemn a concept approved in various scriptures but mainly to eulogise and emphasise the importance of another concept. This is popularly known as Artha-Vada. **As no one can know what his destiny is going to be, self-effort is a must.** Further, destiny (or Prarabdha) is applicable to all physical events and happenings. An actor in a drama, while acting according to the prescribed Drama Script (equivalent to destiny), can no doubt be thinking of his wife and children and this cannot be restricted. Similarly, a common man, though acting as per destiny, is fully entitled to keep his mind on God and / or reflect on spiritual truths and the latter is not capable of being restrained by any destiny. **This exercising of mind by meditation, enquiry, etc.,**

and study of scriptures is what is called personal effort.

The actions of men are propelled by desires and the desire is not different¹² from the mind itself. It is the mind which has become the individual soul. The mind, the heart, desires, actions and destiny are all names of the individual soul only. Desires are of two kinds - good and evil. The mind has to be gently turned¹³ by our own efforts from evil tendencies to the right course by getting mastery over bad desires by constant practice.

One should thus reach¹⁴ a clear understanding of the ultimate goal which is bereft of all sorrows by following the virtuous path, then forsake even that enquiry and remain silent.

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12. वासना मनसो नान्या मनो हि पुरुषः स्मृतः (II-9-17)
 13. अशुभेषु समाविष्टं शुभेष्वेवाऽवतारय।
स्वं मनः पुरुषार्थेन बलेन बलिनां वर॥ (II-9-31)
 14. यदति सुभग मार्यं सेवितं तत् शुभमनुसृत्य मनोज्ञभावबुद्ध्या।
अधिगमय पदं सदा विशोकं तदनु तदप्यवमुच्य साधु तिष्ठ॥
(II-9-43)

Hence by self-effort, control your senses from running towards worldly objects, so that the mind could be concentrated. It is necessary for a person to subjugate and control his desires and thus subdue the mind. When one conquers his mind, peace and contentment results. He¹⁵ who keeps his senses and desires under subjection, deals with all beings equally and impartially and neither longs for any object nor renounces anything (i.e. remains indifferent) is a man full of peace.

He¹⁶ whose mind is calm at the time of death or during festivities or while fighting is a peaceful person.

The one who neither feels pleasure or unhappiness on contact with anything good or bad (pleasant or unpleasant to the senses) is a man of quiescence.

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15. यः समः सर्वभूतेषु भावि काँक्षति नोज्झति।
जित्वेन्द्रियाणि यत्नेन स शान्त इति कथ्यते ॥ (II-13-73)
 16. तुषार कर बिम्बाभं मनो यस्य निराकुलम्।
मरणोत्सव युद्धेषु स शान्त इति कथ्यते ॥ (II-13-75)

Control¹⁷ of mind, enquiry (vichara), contentment and meeting with saints are the four guards keeping a watch at the gate of Liberation. It is by association with good people that discriminative faculty (viveka) is generated. With a mind sharpened and purified by a study of scriptures, one should resort to Self-enquiry which will take one to the supreme goal.

Self-Enquiry means a reasoning and analysis of 'Who am I?' and 'Whence has this phenomenal world arisen?'

One¹⁸ who has renounced all desires for things not possessed by him, having a neutral attitude towards things in his possession and never having the reactions of pleasure and pain is known as a man of contentment.

It is the company of holy and virtuous men which generates the faculty of discrimination and

17. मोक्षद्वारे द्वारपालाः चत्वारः परिकीर्तिताः ।
शमो विचारः सन्तोषः चतुर्थः साधुसङ्गः ॥ (II-11-59)
18. अप्राप्तं वाञ्छां मुत्सृज्य संप्राप्तं समतां गतः ।
अदृष्टखेदाखेदो यः स सन्तुष्ट इहोच्यते ॥ (II-15-6)

serves as a torch light to light up and lead one to the right path. Thus contentment, company of holy saints, Self-enquiry and control of mind are the means for breaking away from the bondage of Samsara (phenomenal world). Even if one of these virtues is cultivated strongly, the bad consequences of the uncontrolled mind can be eliminated.

UTPATTI PRAKARANA

The Genesis

It is the one who is born in this world, who continues to evolve and finally either gets liberation or is consigned to Heaven or Hell. Hence Vasishtha starts here with a narration of the creation of the world, its prior state, etc.

The entire world along with the movable and immovable things is but an appearance like a dream which becomes extinct at the end of the Kalpa (a period consisting of 4 yugas). What exists afterwards and at all times is called Reality, Atman (Self), Brahman (Supreme Being) and Truth. It is this Reality which manifests itself as the embodied soul or Jiva as also the mind. This mind itself, by exercising its desire and by the power of its thought projects this extensive magical scenery of the world. The mental delusion as a result of which this unreal world appears as real is called avidya (ignorance), maya (illusion), moha (delusory attachment) and bandha (bondage).

It is not easy to get rid of this bondage. The method of 'negation' (Not This - Not This) advocated by the Vedantins is useless for this purpose. Even the undifferentiated Superconscious state (Nirvikalpa Samadhi) produces only a temporary lull or euphoria because as soon as one gets up from the Samadhi, one finds oneself in the same world full of miseries, birth, decay and death. In this connection, Vasishtha narrated the story of Akshaja.

STORY OF AKSHAJA

Once there lived a highly religious minded Brahmin named Akshaja who was solely established in meditation. As he had been living for a long time, Death (Mrityu) went to devour him. Even with all his hundred hands he was unable to grasp the Brahmin. Perplexed, Mrityu went to Yama, the Lord of death to learn the reason why he could not approach the Brahmin. Yama directed that as the Karmas (actions) of a person constitute the main factor for one's death, he should find out the previous actions done by the Brahmin and take their help.

After searching far and wide in the entire earth, Mrityu was unable to find any vestige of any karma (action) ever done by the Brahmin. When he went and again reported it to Yama, the Lord of death, explained the matter on the following lines:-

This Brahmin, having been born from the Sky (Space) directly has no Karmas to his credit. He has no actions of prior existence left. He is just as pure as the sky as he has not also done any acts in this present state too. Consequently, with a mind unruffled, he remains absorbed in his own source or cause. Even the acts of breathing, etc., which are seen by us are only appearances to the senses but do not belong to him. As he remains one with his cause, he is a self-born. Actually speaking, he was neither born nor he has an individual existence. He is only the light of that highest intelligence (Vijnana). Yama advised Mrityu to desist from his attempt to lay hands on this Brahmin who had neither a body, nor a sense of doership nor any latent tendencies (vasanas) of the past and was verily an

immense space of Pure Consciousness (Chidakasa). Actually this entire story is about Brahma (the Creator), the unborn. It is the cosmic mind which is called the Brahma. He is nothing but the Infinite Consciousness which in its mind has manifested as Brahma. These unborn beings without a cause have only one everlasting spiritual body called Ativahika while other created beings have two bodies - the gross and the subtle. This Ativahika body is made up of mind alone and has no connection with the elements like earth, water, etc. **The entire universe is a mental creation or projection from Brahma who himself is in the form of the (Cosmic) mind.** The entire world is as unreal as the dream object and has no solid corporeal existence. All the world and its objects which are visible have come out from the bosom of the mind.

This conversation between Vasishtha and Rama goes on for days. Rama requested Vasishtha to define the nature of the Mind and the cause of the entire world.

NATURE OF MIND

Mind has no substantial form. It is¹⁹ only a name for the thinking principle which reveals the various objects - whether real or unreal. The entire world is a reflection of the mind which has no other form²⁰ than the visible world. The soul functioning²¹ in the subtle (atimahika) body is called the mind and carries thoughts or ideas visualizing the entire world.

If these thoughts of the world which look as having a real existence are removed from the mind by reasoning and contemplating on the lines mentioned above, in the absence of objects to be seen, the observer remains alone with nothing to be seen. In that state all attachments, hate and similar vasanas (latent conditioning tendencies) cease to exist.

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19. यदर्थं प्रतिभ्रानं तन्मन इत्यभिधीयते।
अन्यत्र किञ्चिदप्यस्ति मनो नाम कदाचन॥ (III-4-42)
20. न हि दृश्यादृते किञ्चिन्मनसो रूप मस्ति हि। (III-4-48)
21. आतिवाहिक देहात्मा मन इत्यभिधीयते। (III-4-46)

The Infinity²² of creation is a projection of the Infinity and plenitude (Being Purna) of the Supreme Lord and the Peace of the world rests in the Peace of the Lord. Just like the Space coming out of immense Space, the world is nothing but Brahman established in Brahman itself as the substratum. Rama then questioned how this world full of diseases, death, miseries, mountains, etc., which are visible can be called as non-existent. Vasishtha explained that this was also the mind's play of imagination just like a city seen in the dream. The mind itself is an unreality, not produced in the beginning of creation.

Who created the Mind?

The mind, all the worlds, etc., stand revealed in the light of consciousness emanating from the Lord, who is cause of all causes.

No amount of austerities, charities, observance of vows will be of use. It is only by the knowledge of one's own nature that one can realize God.

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22. पूर्णे पूर्णं प्रसरति शान्ते ज्ञान्तं व्यवस्थितम्।
व्योमन्येवोदितं व्योम ब्रह्मणि ब्रह्म तिष्ठति॥ (III-4-69)

By what means can God be attained?

It is only by self-effort in Self-enquiry that God can be known and not by austerities or rituals. One should exert himself to have the company of holy men and to study Scriptural books which will ultimately result in the removal of ignorance.

Where is God located and how to know Him?

God is located in all our bodies as Consciousness. He has become the World also and is Siva, Vishnu and Brahma too.

If the entire world is also consciousness and God is also consciousness, why all the teachings warn against our association with the world?

The World is made of Consciousness as its sub-stratum. But it cannot be equated with the Supreme and Pure Consciousness. The Jiva is ignorant and is afraid of old age and death. So long as one remains attracted to the visible form of the World, he will not have the longing for God. When

once²³ a person comes face to face with the Supreme Being, all doubts will be set at rest and all his karmas responsible for future births get wiped off.

What is the nature of this ignorant jiva? What is the nature of the Supreme Soul called Brahman?

The Jiva himself is the Samsara (the world of relationships) and causes unceasing series of miseries and unhappiness. **He** is the Supreme Soul by knowing whom the external world as also the differentiated sense of seer and (objects) seen disappear. The one²⁴ which lends the sense of Reality and Being to all the objects of the world by pervading them both inside and outside is the form of the Supreme Soul.

23. भिद्यते हृदयं ग्रंथिः छिद्यन्ते सर्वं संशयाः।
क्षीयन्ते चास्य कर्माणि तस्मिन्दृष्टे परावरे ॥ (III-7-10)

24. स बाह्याभ्यन्तरं येन सर्वं संप्राप्य सङ्गमम्।
स्वरूपसत्तामाप्नोति तद्रूपं परमात्मनः ॥ (III-7-24)

How do we say that Lord's nature is Reality or Existence?

When once a person is able to negate the visible world and is convinced of its unreality, this transcendental Reality called Brahman reveals itself. He cannot be known by any other acts.

The world was never created nor is its perception real. This is only a projection of the consciousness of Brahma. The conception of the world is just like the water seen in a mirage in a desert. Whatever is seen by us is the ever-existent Supreme Being itself. By seeking the company of saints and by the study of holy scriptures (Sastras), this knowledge will become firmly entrenched.

JIVANMUKTA

Those who are established in Self-enquiry will attain Jivanmukti (liberation even while alive) in the same manner as those who get Videhamukti (liberation after leaving the body).

In reply to Rama's query, Vasishtha explained the nature of Jivanmuktas as follows :

One²⁵ who remains without any reaction both in happiness and sorrow in his natural unperturbed state is a jivanmukta. The one who neither gives any cause for offence to others nor takes offence, who is awake even while asleep and whose knowledge is untainted by any conditioning is a Jivanmukta. He is one whose world has become extinct and is insensible to all impressions though possessing a mind.

One²⁶ who is bereft of the sense of I and mine and whose intellect remains untainted by any object of the world is a Jivanmukta irrespective of whether he engages himself in any activity or not.

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25. नोदेति नास्तमायाति सुखे दुःखे मुख प्रभा।
यथा प्राप्त स्थितेर्यस्य जीवन्मुक्तः स उच्यते ॥ (III-9-6)
26. यस्य नाहंकृतो भावो यस्य बुद्धिर्न लिप्यते।
कुर्वतोऽकुर्वतो वापि स जीवन्मुक्त उच्यते ॥ (III-9-9)

REALITY OF WORLD & JIVA

The Sadhana as per Yoga Vasishtha is to hear²⁷ all these truths propounded in the text and do vichara (enquiry). It is by repeated practice of vichara that the illusion of the world is dispelled and one gets knowledge of the Self.

“Oh Rama, you are²⁸ that unborn Self, free of old age, having no beginning, endless and eternal, auspicious, stainless, infallible, worthy of worship, blameless, bereft of all relationships, the ultimate cause of all causes, the witness of all and the one in the form of the world too. That thou art.”

One should be thoroughly convinced of the fact that the world which is seen is only an illusion. Just

27. य इदं शृणुयान्नित्यं तस्योदारचमत्कृते ।
बोधस्यापि परं बोधं बुद्धिरिति न संशयः ॥ (III-8-13)

28. अज मजरमनाद्यं शाश्वतं ब्रह्म नित्यं
शिवममलममोघं वन्द्यमुच्चैरनिन्द्यम् ।
सकलकलनशून्यं कारणं कारणानां
अनुभवन मवेद्यं वेदनं विश्वमन्तः ॥ (III-9-76)

as the illusion of a serpent is seen in the substratum of a rope mistaken as a serpent at dusk, the world has Brahman (the Supreme Being) as its substratum and is not different from Brahman. This²⁹ entire world is seen in the Self and has neither been created at any time nor is subject to dissolution or destruction. In answer to a question from Rama as to whether the Jivas (individual souls) are many or one collective whole, Vasishtha explained that as the Supreme Self (Brahman) alone exists, the existence of Jivas is also as much an illusion as the world. In reality, there is not a single Jiva. In order to illustrate these points, Vasishtha tells the story of Mandapa (more popularly known as the story of Leela).

STORY OF LEELA

There was once a king called Padma and his wife was Leela. They had many sons. She loved her husband to distraction and wanted him to remain

29. यदिदं दृश्यते किञ्चित्सदैवात्मनि संस्थितम् ।
नास्तमेति न चोदेति जगत्किञ्चित्कदाचन ॥ (III-11-18)

immortal. As this was not possible, she pleased Saraswati, the Goddess of learning by worship, austerity, meditation etc. When at last Saraswati appeared before her, she beseeched her to grant the following two boons :

- “(1) If and when my husband dies before I do, his soul should remain confined within the portals of this palace where I live.
- (2) Whenever I pray for your vision, you should appear before me and grant me the boons I seek.”

Saraswati readily granted the boons. One day king Padma who was mortally wounded by his enemies in a battle left his body inside the palace. Leela became disconsolate in her grief in this bereavement. As per instructions from Saraswati, she kept the body of her husband covered with flowers inside the palace. Both the flowers and the body continued to remain fresh without any changes. A few days later, Leela called Saraswati and requested her to take her to her husband in whatever place he

was after death, as she was unable to bear the separation.

Saraswati said - “Your husband is in the infinite space of **Pure Consciousness (chidakasa)**. There are two other illusory spaces namely,

- (1) The **Psychic space (chidakasa)** whose projections are made up of our past conditioning or latent tendencies called Vasanas.
- (2) The empirical or phenomenal space made up of all the basic elements (Bhootakasa or Mahakasa).

If one were to abandon all the desires leading to the exercise of the will-power and concentrate on the chidakasa in a single minded manner one reaches a state of undifferentiated plane of super-consciousness (Nirvikalpa Samadhi) where one could have a direct experience of chidakasa”. The queen was able to reach the state of Nirvikalpa Samadhi without any effort just by abandoning her body-

sense, ego and the mind. She then saw her husband sitting on a throne surrounded by his courtiers and attending to the affairs of the kingdom. The king looked to be sixteen years old without any sign of old age. Even though she moved freely among the courtiers, the latter were unable to see her. Within a minute she got out of the Samadhi state and found all the people in the palace sleeping, as also the body of her dead husband lying hidden under the flowers. She was puzzled as to which one of these visions was illusory and which was real (The creation seen in Samadhi state and the earlier creation were both false as both were objects seen (DRISYA). The Pure Consciousness alone is the reality).

Saraswati said :- "The second creation of the king seen by you was only the result of the projection of the past memory of your husband in the memory - space (Smrityakasa). The earlier creation was also similarly stimulated by the memory of a householder called Vasishtha (not the Vasishtha of Ramayana fame)". She began to narrate the story of that Vasishtha. His wife was Arundhati. They were living

in a village underneath a far away mountain. One day he saw a king going for hunting by that way along with his followers. On seeing his grandeur, a thought arose in his mind - "How nice and lucky it would be to live the life of a king surrounded by courtiers and beautiful queens! When will I be blessed with such a life?". The brahmin who used to lead a virtuous life began to spend his life in these thoughts of a kingly life. On his death, as a result of the strong thoughts of his previous life he became a powerful king in his next birth and became your husband i.e., king Padma. His wife Arundhati also got a boon from Saraswati that her dead husband's soul would remain confined in her house till her death. On her death Arundhati was reborn as yourself (Leela). Thus your creation in previous birth is also on illusion whose image had been projected in the Chidakasa (The space of Pure Consciousness). It is unreal from the view point of creation but it is real from the view point of its substratum which is Brahman, the Pure Consciousness. In the same manner as a person loses his memory of the waking state while seeing a dream and a different memory

arises, in death also the memory of the earlier births is completely erased and an absolutely different memory arises. Even though the jiva is embodied in a form due to the imagination resulting out of the conditionings of latent tendencies (Samskaras) in the mind (Chitta), in reality nothing has been created. There remains³⁰ only the pure Space of consciousness just like the consciousness alone remaining while a dreamer is seeing a dream. Just as the pure consciousness in the dreamer takes the external form of all objects in the dream, it is the consciousness which appears as the objects of the phenomenal world. When all the objects seen are unreal, there cannot be a seer or observer who sees the objects. Thus both the seer (the subject) and all objects seen happen to be unreal. There³¹ is no lack of enquiry, no ignorance, no bondage and no liberation

30. न किंचिदप्यभ्युदितं स्थितं व्योमेव निर्मलम्।
स्वप्ने द्रष्टरि यद्वच्चित् तद्वद् दृश्ये चिदेव सा॥ (III-20-37)

31. तस्मान्निवाऽविचारोऽस्ति नाऽविद्यास्ति न बन्धनम्।
न मोक्षोऽस्ति निराबाधं शुद्धबाधमिदं जगत्॥ (III-21-72)

(Moksha). The world is nothing but infinite Pure Consciousness.

One can get the true knowledge / enlightenment only by hearing it and practising (Abhyasa) it. Continuously³² thinking of these truths, talking of them, awakening each other to these truths and to be solely engaged in this task is called Abhyasa.”

At Leela's request, Saraswati took her to the mountain village house of Vasishtha which was situated in a different far off universe several millions of miles away. This feat was done while in Nirvikalpa Samadhi with their subtle divine bodies. Leela met her son Jyeshtha Sarma (born to her in the body of Arundhati) who was extremely grief stricken and weeping copiously at the bereavement of his parents, which took place eight days earlier. Leela consoled him by placing her hand on his head. Both Leela and Saraswati disappeared quickly from that place. As Saraswati informed her of the rebirth of her

32. तच्चिन्तनं तत्कथनं अन्योन्यं तत्प्रबोधनम्।
एतदेकपरत्वं च तदभ्यासं विदुर्बुधाः॥ (III-22-24)

husband (king Padma) as king Viduratha, Leela expressed a desire to see the third incarnation of her husband. Here Vasishtha explained to Rama that both Leela and Saraswati had the experience of the trip to the mountainous village house in another universe while sitting inside the palace of queen Leela. The entire experience, though it looked realistic was only like the experiences in the dreamworld of a person who remains asleep while he is engaged in movements and activities in the dream. Actually there was no universe, no phenomenal world or houses or distances. The entire thing is an empty space over which the illusion of the several worlds appear.

When both Leela and Saraswati went into the house of king Viduratha, they put all the inmates to sleep except the king. They apprised him of his previous births and also how this life of the king (who is now seventy years old) whose body as Vasishtha was lying dead in another universe was all part of a grand illusion. In fact the king was never born nor did he ever die (in earlier incarnations). He

is of the form of Pure Consciousness alone. None of the objects seen by him were real or substantial.

Even when this conversation was going on, a sudden commotion took place in the palace with all inmates running helter skelter on account of a fight with a number of looting bandits. At that time, the chief queen of king Viduratha came running into the room for safety and protection. Leela was surprised to see that the queen was the exact replica of her own self as she used to be in her youth. She also found that the minister, the soldiers and the citizens were the same as the ones who were with her late husband Padma. Saraswati explained to her that even as the impressions of the waking state and the same people seen in waking life take shape and appear in the dream, the consciousness assumes these forms due to illusory superimpositions. The world made of impressions is all in the mind (chitta) and they appear as if they are seen outside. When the king Viduratha rushed outside to lead his army against the enemies, the second Leela who had also been worshipping Goddess Saraswati

pleaded with the latter that wherever her husband goes after meeting his death (as predicted by Saraswati) in the ensuing battle, she should continue to remain with him as his wife. A frightful battle ensued between a king called Sindhu and king Viduratha. King Viduratha was brought back to his home after having been mortally wounded in the battle. Saraswati reminded Leela that all these scenes in this kingdom were taking place inside the mountain village house of the brahmin in the space proximate to the place where the dead body was kept. This entire universe containing the kingdom of king Viduratha was an appearance inside the women's section of the brahmin's (Vasishtha's) house. There was never a battle and nor did Viduratha die. It was all an illusion like a dream. The meeting of king Viduratha with the second Leela and the meeting of the first Leela with Viduratha was all due to the strong Vasanas (latent tendencies) transformed into desires which materialised into various forms as desired and willed for.

When king Viduratha breathed his last, his soul went back to the lifeless dead body of king Padma. The second Leela had already reached the side of the king's body when it became alive. In the meantime, the body of the first Leela by the side of the dead king Padma, who was making all the trips with Saraswati in her subtle body, dissolved into the Supreme Brahman within 15 days as and when she became mature in her knowledge of the Self through the repeated instructions from Goddess Saraswati. She was now left only with a body made up of consciousness (chit). She along with Saraswati revealed themselves to Viduratha (in the body of king Padma) and the second Leela. As king Padma was baffled on seeing two identical Leelas, the entire story of his previous births was narrated to him. Saraswati, after blessing him with the knowledge of the ultimate Reality and a long life of ruling over the kingdom along with his two wives, disappeared. Thus the story of Leela was told by Vasishtha with a view to remove the illusory knowledge of the objects of the phenomenal world which appear real.

One can do effort to remove something which exists. The only way to remove the apparently real impressions of the world is by refusing to believe in the truth of the existence of the objects of the world which have no real existence. This is the sadhana of Vichara to be done by a seeker.

How has this world arisen as an illusory scene without any reason whatsoever?

In answer to Rama's question, Vasishtha said - "All the various illusions are established inside the infinite power of Pure Consciousness and not anywhere outside it. This Pure Consciousness is only one, all-pervasive and without both beginning and end. Just as the waves of the ocean are not different from the water, the world is not different from God. Hence there is no separate cause for the world. The world is only a superimposition on the Lord in the same manner in which the serpent is a superimposition on the rope which was mistaken for a serpent. The trees and mountains reflected in a

transparent³³ crystal are not different from the crystal. So also the appearance of the sense of "I" and "the world" is not different from Pure Consciousness. The world arises only through the mind which is full of the vasanas of the world. These vasanas, the sense of 'I' as an individual soul and the mind (chitta) are all being experienced though unreal. The only way to stop the arising of the world and 'I' sense is **annihilation of the mind (Manonasa)**. This annihilation of the mind is to be done through great effort i.e. through repeated practice of Jnana yoga (Vichara i.e. enquiry and contemplation etc.). When³⁴ a seeker develops dispassion by refusing to be tempted by any enjoyment of objects, he is progressively released from bondage. Nobody who has abandoned the ego (sense of I am the body) will ever enter into the realm of the illusory cycle of birth and death.

33. लेखीघानां यथा भेदसन्निवेशः शिलोदरे।
तथाऽनन्यजगदहं चेत्यन्तश्चिद्धने घनम्॥ (III-61-8)

34. यतो यतो विरज्यते ततस्ततो विमुच्यते।
अतोऽहमित्यसंविदन्कः एति जन्म संविदम्॥ (III-61-35)

MIND AND THE WORLD

Vasishtha told Rama - The phenomenal world is actually our mind which is full of likes, dislikes, attachment etc. **When we get released from the hold of these emotions it is called the destruction of the world.** The mind which is like the infinite space imagines the creation of all the three worlds and holds that vision within it. At the same time, when the body and the senses get engaged in their respective activities, an ego sense ("I" sense) goes on increasing that "I do all these activities." The mind which is partly of the nature of consciousness is completely pervaded by the all-pervasive Atma (Self), just like pure water is pervaded by the Sun-light. It is due to an inexplicable ignorance that the mind manifests as the world which is a pure illusion. One should try to leave all the three worlds created through imagination and remain as the Self alone. The child called the mind sees the illusory ghost in the form of the world due to its ignorance. If this child gets enlightened as to the Reality, it will begin to see its own changeless supreme nature. To illustrate these points, Vasishtha narrated the story of the ten

sons of Indu, a brahmin. When the father died, all the ten sons were full of grief and left for Mount Kailas. They began to talk among themselves :- "All the glories and prosperity of this world come to an end. What is the use of them? What is it that is supreme?" The eldest brother advised them all "I hold that among all the glories, the best is to become Brahma the creator who does not get destroyed till the end of the Kalpa (cluster of 4 yugas)." So, all of them sat in lotus posture and meditated for many years as "I am the effulgent Brahma, who is the creator of these worlds, and I am the doer, the experiencer and god of gods. All the worlds including the heaven and the netherworld are in me." Thus deeply meditating with an one pointed mind, all the ten became ten Brahmas and ten universes were manifested in their mind-space (Chidakasa). All the ten became indestructible as their firm conviction had been practised in the mind for a long time. **When³⁵ a thing or a concept is practised in the mind for a long**

35. बहूकालं यदभ्यस्तं मनसा दृढनिश्चयम्।
शापेनाऽपि न तस्याऽस्ति क्षयो नष्टेऽपि देहके ॥ (III-88-20)

time it can never be destroyed even though the body may fall away.

The mind is extremely powerful. As per Mahabharata, a sage called Deerghatapas while going out for collecting the necessary articles for performing a sacrifice fell into a deep well. He performed the entire sacrifice mentally through his imagination while lying inside the well. God Indra was so pleased that he took the sage out of the well to the heaven. Hence³⁶ it is essential that a man should use all his efforts through his own mind to engage his mind on the holy spiritual path. **The mind can easily attain the object of its meditation.**

It is the activity of the mind in the form of latent tendencies (Samskara) which manifest as the result of the unseen forces (adrishta) and materialise in the form of a body, heaven, hell etc. Thus the body which is the support for actions (Karma) was originally in the form of the mind.

36. मनसैव मनस्तस्मात् पौरुषेण पुमानिह ।
स्वकमेव स्वकेनैव योजयेत् पावने पथि ॥ (III-92-28)

The ultimate infinite reality of the Self which apparently appears to be qualified and conditioned by its power of Maya creates a form with the power of thinking, which is called the mind.

When the same Pure Consciousness identifies itself with the insignificant body etc., it is known as 'Ego'. It is the ego which is the root of all evil and binds us to the world. The mind³⁷ is neither sentient (chetana) nor insentient (Jada). It is the mind which has been named as ego, intellect and Jiva (individual soul). The person³⁸ whose mind is bound (by like, dislike, love, enmity etc.) remains bound. The one whose mind is free from all conditioning (vasana) and has the firm conviction that he is liberated remains liberated in reality. The entire world full of joy, miseries and activities is itself a creation of the mind. **There is no world³⁹**

37. मन इत्युच्यते राम न जडं न च चिन्मयम् ॥ (III-96-41)

38. बध्यते बद्धचित्तो हि मुक्तचित्तो हि मुच्यते ॥ (III-96-59)

39. चित्तादृतेऽन्यद्यस्ति तदचित्तस्य किं जगत् ।
सर्वस्य भूतजातस्य समग्रं प्रविलीयते ॥ (III-96-65)

apart from the mind and when the mind is annihilated the entire world also disappears. There is no use of bothering about the body complex which is insentient like grass, creeper etc. One should enquire into the nature of the mind. It is the mind which is converted into action (karma) and is the cause of the body. It is the mind which arises and dies. Such changes do not occur in the Self. It is the mind which should be dissolved by enquiry (Vichara). The very dissolution of the mind leads us to the greatest good (Moksha). It⁴⁰ is because of the gross ignorance that the ideas of bondage and liberation have been created. In reality there is neither bondage nor liberation.

The entire world is a play of the mind just like a dream. As there is only one transcendental Reality and nothing else, there is neither a thing called Ego nor anything called vasanas - which are all the result of an illusion. Self can never be

40. एवमज्ञानकादेव बन्धमोक्षदृशोऽस्मृतेः।
वस्तुतस्तु न बन्धोऽस्ति न मोक्षोऽस्ति महामते ॥ (III-100-40)

destroyed even if the body is destroyed or cut or subjected to death. The main Sadhana is to enquire into the truth, leaving off all unreal and untrue things. Leave off the world and other non-existing illusory objects and take recourse to Samyag darsanam (developing conviction about the Reality of Self alone and perceiving all objects as they really are). **Realising one's own Self is the best method of annihilating the mind responsible for the creation of the illusory world.** Attaining the highest goal of realising the truth results⁴¹ in annihilation of mind and puts an end to all miseries and sorrows once and for all. One should therefore put all one's effort towards destruction of the mind and restraining the mind from all external activities.

The mind is full of vasanas (conditionings) and uprooting of these vasanas is the way to make the mind subside. One who restrains the mind from thinking of worldly objects is enabled to make his mind subside. The illusion of the world can be

41. महोदयो मनोनाशो महोच्छेदस्य त्दयः।
मनोनाशे प्रयत्नं त्वं कुरु मा मनसो जवे ॥ (III-102-39)

dispelled only by the control of the mind. It is the thoughts which bind a man. One who is wholly convinced that 'I am not the body, I have no sorrows or miseries, I am not bound - I am the Self' and one who lives in consonance with this conviction becomes liberated and his ignorance is dispelled. One who leaves off thinking of worldly objects and concentrates on the feeling of "I am the Brahman-the Pure Consciousness" attains absolute peace.

THE SEVEN PLANES OF JNANA (JNANA BHOOMIKAS)

Even though absolute Consciousness has no gradations or levels, from the ignorance point of view, the progress in the Sadhana for knowledge has been divided into seven planes known as :

1. Subhechha - Desire for the goal
2. Vicharana - Enquiry and practice of good-conduct
3. Tanu Manasa - Thinning of the mind

4. Satwapatti - Remaining identified with the Self
 5. Asamsakti - Complete detachment
 6. Padarthabhavana - Non - realisation of sensual objects
 7. Turyaga - The Absolute state
1. Subhechha⁴² : Arisal of the desire to attain liberation by developing dispassion with a determination "I will realise the final Truth by seeking the company of holy people and scriptural texts" is Subhechha. This is the first stage of the Sadhana where one develops an intense volcanic longing for Self-realisation by engaging oneself in selfless activities charities, etc. without any motive and abstaining from prohibited sinful actions.

42. स्थितः किं मूढ एवाऽस्मि प्रेक्ष्येऽहं शास्त्रसज्जनैः ।
वैराग्यपूर्वमिच्छेति शुभेच्छेत्युच्यते बुधैः ॥ (III-118-8)

2. Vicharana⁴³ : To cultivate and repeatedly seek the holy company of spiritually advanced souls, study scriptures while practising detachment from all worldly objects as also to be engaged in righteous conduct like serving the Guru, to keep oneself pure (Soucha), and hearing and contemplation (Sravana and Manana) etc., is called Vicharana.
3. Tanumanasa⁴⁴ : The thinning of the interest in the sensual objects by detachment of the mind developed through hearing, contemplation and absorption of the mind (Sravana, Manana & Nididhyasana) by long practice in the earlier two planes is called Tanumanasa. This represents the stage of conditioned (Savikalpa) Samadhi.

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43. शास्त्र सज्जन सम्पर्क वैराग्याभ्यास पूर्वकम्।
सदाचार प्रवृत्ति र्या प्रोच्यते सा विचारणा ॥ (III-118-9)
 44. विचारणा शुभेच्छाभ्यां इन्द्रियार्थेष्वसक्तता।
याऽत्र सा तनुताभावात् प्रोच्यते तनुमानसा ॥ (III-118-10)

4. Satwapatti⁴⁵ : To remain absorbed and established in the Self as pure Existence on account of absolute detachment from the world attained as a result of the practice in the earlier three planes is called Sattwapatti. All the four stages starting from Sattwapatti belong to liberated persons who have got enlightened. (The person in this stage is called Brahmavit - a knower of Brahman). Here one reaches the Nirvikalpa Samadhi (undifferentiated superconscious state).
5. Asamsakti⁴⁶ : As a result of continuous practice in the four earlier states, one gets maturity in his Samadhi state. Here the person experiences complete identification of the Self with the Brahman and the consequent unique bliss. This plane is called

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45. भूमिका त्रितयाभ्यासात् चित्तेऽर्थे विरतेर्वशात्।
सत्यात्मनि स्थितिः शुद्धे सत्त्वापत्तिरुदाहृता ॥ (III-118-11)
 46. दशा चतुष्टयाभ्यासात् असंसंग फलेन च।
रूढ सत्त्व चमत्कारात् प्रोक्ताऽसंसक्ति नामिका ॥ (III-118-12)

Asamsakti. Such a liberated person is called Brahmaavidvarah.

6. Padartha Abhavana⁴⁷ : On account of being firmly established in the five previous states one begins to revel in one's own Self. He never even once thinks of any object external or internal. Such a Jivanmukta is called Brahmaavidvareeyan.
7. Turyaga⁴⁸ : One who remains firmly established in the state of his own nature (Brahman) as a result of long practice in the earlier six stages and who cannot be shaken from that state by any effort is stated to be in Turyaga state. He is also called Brahmaavidvarishtha.

There is a stage beyond the seventh also which is a transcendental stage called Videha-Mukti

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47. भूमिका पञ्चकाभ्यासात् स्वात्मरामतया दृढम् ।
आध्यन्तराणां बाह्यानां पदार्थानामभावनात् ॥ (III-118-13)
 48. भूमिषट्क चिराभ्यासात् भेदस्याऽनुपलम्भतः ।
यत् स्वभावैक निष्ठत्वं सा ज्ञेया तुर्यगा गतिः ॥ (III-118-15)

(liberation after disembodiment) - which is beyond description.

These Jivanmuktas are never overwhelmed by joy or sorrow. Persons in the sixth and the seventh planes may or may not be engaged in activities. These seven planes are not attainable by animals, trees and other immovable objects as also purely materialistic persons who consider the body as the Self. These are for experts in the knowledge and experience of the truths expounded by the scriptures.

Vasishtha then emphasised the need for Satsanga i.e., company of holy men, in attaining these states. Only those whose minds have become pure through good deeds in previous births can get satsanga. Study of scriptures and satsanga are essential for crossing the river of ignorance. Then only a person develops discrimination between things to be accepted or rejected and enters into the first realm of Subechha.

The Self of all beings is called Brahman. One who gets the knowledge of Brahman comes to know the truth of the entire world. **The perfect and**

plenary Brahman - who is Existence, Consciousness and Bliss, who is the undivided essence of all and who has no relationship with the illusory world is our real nature and is the ultimate truth. One who realises this is bestowed with Absolute BLISS.

The Story of Chudala and Sikhidhwaja

Next in importance to the story of Leela is that of Chudala, which is inlaid with guidelines for the most essential aspects of Sadhana for attaining liberation. This occurs in the last prakarana viz. NIRVANA PRAKARANA (first half).

There was once a very prosperous king named Sikhidhwaja in the city of Ujjain. He was always engaged in welfare activities like digging of wells, ponds etc., and in performance of sacrifices. In due course he married a princess named Chudala. After having enjoyed the conjugal felicity for a number of years both of them progressively reached a state of vairagya (dispassion) and were disgusted with worldly pleasures. The couple, by contemplation came to the conclusion⁴⁹ that the serious disease known as

49. आत्मज्ञानैक मात्रेण संसृत्याख्या विपूचिका।

संशाम्यतीति निश्चित्य तावास्तां तत्परायणौ॥

(VI-78 F.H. - 11) F.H. = First Half (Poorvardha)

phenomenal world (samsara) with its attendant miseries could only be cured by attaining Self-knowledge. They began to attend (sravanam) lectures of scholars well versed in spiritual knowledge and began to contemplate (mananam) on the truths explained by them. Chudala understood that it is the Self (Atma) which is Pure Consciousness (Chaitanya) which, due to a process of superimposition called adhyasa identifies itself with the sense-objects and becomes insentient. It abandons the memory of its pure real nature. This happens on account of the veil drawn over its real nature by basic ignorance (Moola avidya) and thus wrongly identifying itself with the worldly objects (like our own body). It is only the knowledge of that Pure Consciousness which can tear off the veil and reveal itself. It is only the Consciousness⁵⁰ freed of all veils which has always existed at all times in this world. It is also known as the Supreme Existence and it is bereft of

50. महाचिदेकैवाऽस्तीह महासत्तेति चोच्यते।
निष्कलङ्का समा शुद्धा निरहंकाररूपिणी॥

(VI-78 P.H. - 32)

any defect, perfectly pure and devoid of any ego. After quite a long time Chudala got enlightened about the ultimate Reality. As a result of the absolute destruction of the delusion (moha) and a complete knowledge of the Self as the only Reality, she became completely peaceful having been rid of the products of ignorance like attachment, fear etc. As a result, her face began to shine with divine radiance. On being questioned by her husband when she tried to explain her exalted state, King Sikhidhwaja laughed at her as he was unable to understand it.

Even though Chudala was eternally contented and established in the Self, a desire arose in her to acquire the mystic power of being able to wander about in the sky like the gods. So she began to go to solitary places and practise the necessary breath control technique.

At this stage of the story, Rama inter alia desired to know how an enlightened soul or an ignorant person is enabled to acquire such Siddhis (mystic

powers) as flying in the air and as to what sort of vibratory force was responsible for bestowing these siddhis.

Vasishtha was reluctant to explain it in detail as all these siddhis are disruptive and become a stumbling block for spiritual aspirants. All these siddhis are to be acquired through practice of breath control by standardising the breathing process consisting of inhalation (Pooraka), exhalation (Rechaka) and stopping the breath (Kumbhaka) on the lines detailed in the Yoga Science. By controlling the breath it is easy for one to acquire all types of prosperity from a kingdom to liberation. It is the Sushumna Nadi (a subtle nerve) and the power of Kundalini which help in acquiring the siddhis.

The Sushumna Nadi passes from the base of the spine to the middle of the eye brows and keeps the thoughts wavering and vibrating outside by influencing the Prana (life-force). At its root lies the conscious power called Kundalini in the subtle form

of a coiled serpent. It is this which lends power to all senses, the vital force (Prana) and the intellect. It is this Kundalini which stands as the JIVA (individual soul) inside the body. The Kundalini is also called Samvit.

To revert to the original story, king Sikhidhwaja also began to spend his time in solitary places like caves and his vairagya (dispassion) began to grow. His mind became peaceful like that of a sanyasi (monk). He developed a distaste for the kingdom and all objects of grandeur. He told his wife that he wanted to go to the forest and live like a sage (muni). He wanted Chudala to look after the kingdom in his absence. That night he left in search of a jungle not easy of access to people. He reached such a jungle far away from his city, near Mandara Mountain. He constructed an abode of leaves and twigs (pamasala) and began to lead a life of austerity with minimum articles as kept by sages.

The first night after their separation, Chudala felt somewhat anxious about her husband. By means

of her yogic powers she went through the sky to the place where her husband was living and saw him. She was able to visualise the future of her husband and also that she had to come back to him later at an appropriate time to help him in his spiritual endeavour.

She returned to her bed in the palace without meeting her husband. Many years passed and King Sikhidhwaja became quite old. As Chudala felt that it was the appropriate time she went to Mandarachal by flying in the air. She was determined to enlighten her husband on the knowledge of the Self that very day. As the King will not have any respect for her or faith in her words if she met him as his wife, she took the form of a bright looking brahmin boy and appeared before him. The king was very much impressed with his personality and welcomed him. In answer to the King's query, the young man (Chudala) began to tell his story.

"Once the divine sage Narada used to do penance (austerities) inside a cave in the Sumeru

Mountain on the banks of the Ganges. One day when he got up from his meditation he happened to look at a number of beautiful divine nymphs taking bath stark naked in the river Ganga. At that very moment Narada felt an upsurge of sexual desire and he had an immediate emission. Narada collected the flowing semen in a crystal pitcher lying nearby. Within a few days a beautiful boy was born out of the pitcher. In due course the boy absorbed all the learning from his father Narada. Lord Brahma (the Creator) to whom the boy was taken made him all-knowing (Sarvajna) by his blessings alone and also made him an expert in the knowledge of the Self. I am that boy named Kumbha (pot), as I was born out of a pot. I go about wandering wherever my feet take me."

While narrating this story, the boy explained also how such a great sage like Narada could suddenly have his sexual instinct aroused in spite of his having reached a great spiritual height :-

"On account of an intense parabdha (the result of past actions of earlier births) the discriminative

faculty of even spiritually advanced souls vanishes in a moment and they succumb to the instincts of the body. Whether a person is ignorant or a man of knowledge, all the bodies are subject to joy and miseries till their destruction. Even Jnanis⁵¹ (men of Knowledge), when once they forget the Self even for a moment become vulnerable to dangers. Only by constantly contemplating⁵² on the Atman (Self) one ceases to forget his Self even for a moment. Even though the experience of prarabdha is the same for a Jnani or an Ajnani (ignorant person), on account of the identification of the Atman as the body, the effect of joy and sorrow is very strong and firm in the case of ignorant persons. Complete cessation⁵³ of thoughts of worldly objects is liberation

51. स्वरूपे निर्मले सत्ये निमेषमपि विस्मृते।

दृश्यमुल्लासमान्नोति प्रावृषीव पयोधरः॥

(VI F.H. 85-111)

52. अनारतानुसन्धानादप्युन्मेषमविस्मृते॥

(VI F.H. 85-112)

53. भावनातानवं मोक्षो बन्धो हि दृढभावना॥

(VI F.H. 85-119)

(moksha) while constant thinking of sense-objects is bondage. If a soul understands this truth that "In actuality there is nothing called joy or sorrow. They do not affect me; somehow I have come under their influence", that soul is considered as enlightened and attains liberation.

Then Sikhidhwaja confessed that inspite of his austerities for many years he could not reap any fruit and hence requested Kumbha Muni to instruct him.

Chudala began to instruct him in the following manner :-

Oh King, while all great saints including Brahma (Creator) have held that Jnana (Real Knowledge) alone is the best means for attaining liberation, why are you keeping all this staff, prayer-mat etc. and doing tapasya (austerities)? You have⁵⁴ only to do

54. कोऽहं कथमिदं जातं कथं शाम्यति चेति भो।

राजन्नावेक्षसे कस्मात् किमज्ञ इव तिष्ठसि॥

(VI F.H. 87-30)

Self-enquiry as to 'who I am', how has this world arisen and how can I get rid of the world etc. Why are you remaining like an ignorant man? One should⁵⁵ go to those saintly people who look at all alike without any prejudice, serve them, cultivate their company and question them on the path to attain salvation. This is the method to attain salvation immediately.

By pure motiveless renunciation of 'all', one can attain everything. In your attempt to renounce 'all' you have kept back your ego-sense that "I have left everything". Ignoring the 'renunciation of all' which is bereft of all vasanas (latent tendencies) you have taken up tapasya (austerities) which is conditioned by vasanas. This is all futile.

Sikhidhwaja, not being able to understand the import of these instructions offered to abandon the jungle, his own Ashram (the hermitage) and finally

55. साधूनां समदृष्टीनां परिप्रश्नेन सेवया ।
सन्नमेन च सा युक्तिर्लभ्यते मुच्यते यथा ॥

(VI F.H. 87-33)

his minimum possessions like the deer-skin. He brought out all his articles like the rosary, deer skin, etc., and set fire to them. He also set fire to his leafy abode and did not leave out even his loin cloth, Kumbha Muni still admonished him that he had not yet renounced the best portion of his possessions. The King construed this as referring to his own body which was still left. When he started to run towards the nearest mountain to jump down and end his life, Kumbha Muni stopped him and said :

"The body has done no offence. What is the use of abandoning it? It is the mind (Chitta) which is the culprit. It is the mind which projects all the external forms of the world. If the mind which is the seed for all worldly possessions like the kingdom, body etc, is renounced, then only 'renunciation of all' takes place. Then automatically one would realise the ultimate Reality. After renouncing⁵⁶ all possessions

56. सर्वं परित्यज्य महास्वभाव त्यजस्यथो येन च तद्विहाय ।
त्यागाभिमानं च मलं विमुच्य विमुक्तरूपो भव भूमिपाल ॥

(VI F.H. 93-64)

mentally, the mind, the medium through which all of them were renounced, should also be renounced. Lastly the ego in the form of "I have renounced" should also be abandoned. Then one becomes a Jivanmukta (liberated while alive).

The entire world is an illusion. On the practice of Jnana (path of knowledge) becoming mature, the basic ignorance becomes loosened, and the world is progressively destroyed. For this purpose one should reduce the extroversion of the mind by controlling the senses. The basic ignorance is of the mind. The form of the mind consists of vasanās or latent tendencies and desires. It is the mind which has created a false 'I' (ego). When the seed of this 'I' (ego) is destroyed the entire world (whose seed is ego) gets destroyed. The conviction that "I am not the body, mind, senses" etc., leads one to liberation. The absence of ego-sense is liberation. Oh King remain firm in the conviction "I am Brahman (the Supreme Being) and I am not the body-mind complex which is the basis of the ego." You will thus remain as the Self.

Thus having awakened the King to the ultimate Reality, Kumbha Muni left him and went back to the palace after changing into the form of Chudala. Here the King got himself absorbed in the undifferentiated Superconscious state called Nirvikalpa Samadhi.

Soon enough Chudala returned in the guise of Kumbha Muni and found the King seated unmoving and oblivious of the external world in Nirvikalpa Samadhi. With great difficulty she woke him up. They spent a number of days together wandering over forests and mountains conversing with each other and narrating spiritual stories. One day when Chudala went back and returned after finishing the affairs of the kingdom, she narrated to Sikhidhwaja a sorrowful incident where on her way back she was cursed by Sage Durvasa on account of an indiscretion committed by her as Kumbha Muni. The curse was that every night Kumbha Muni would be turned into a woman. Sikhidhwaja did not attach importance to the matter on the count that for a person of knowledge it mattered little as to what happened to the body due

to Prarabdha. The couple used to sleep together at night in the same bed and in the day time Chudala used to be transformed into Kumbha Muni and roam around with the King. Chudala now took the name of Madanika as a woman. In due course she persuaded the King to marry her and the marriage took place in the forest according to Gandharva method. The King having reached a high stage was not at all affected by these events.

Madanika wanted to test the stage reached by King Sikhidhwaja. By her Yogic powers she created an Indra, who came to the King and tried his best to tempt him with an invitation to accompany him to Heaven. The King firmly refused the invitation. Another day she created an illusion wherein the King came upon her sleeping secretly with a young lover after a love-play. The King went away without disturbing them and even when she went to him penitently and begged his forgiveness he refused to lend any importance to this incident at all. When Chudala was satisfied by these tests that the King had really become a Jivanmukta and has become

eminently fit, she resumed her original form as the queen and stood before him. She explained how she resorted to all these ruses in order to wean him to the right perception. The King was overwhelmed with gratitude for all the efforts Chudala had made to lead him to the right path for liberation. Even though both of them had no desire to enjoy the luxury and pleasures of royal life, by common consent both of them returned to their kingdom to the exuberant welcome of the subjects and courtiers. After having ruled over the kingdom for ten thousand years, they attained the final Nirvana (Videha Mukti or disembodied liberation).

Sikhidhwaja verily is a rare person who illustrates the saying of Ashtavakra "Such a person is rare indeed who having enjoyed all types of pleasures does not become in any way influenced by those vasanas nor has any longing for fresh pleasures not experienced earlier."

यस्तु भोगेषु भुक्तेषु न भवत्यधिवासितः ।

अभुक्तेषु निराकांक्षी तादृशो भव दुर्लभः ॥

(Ashtavakra Samhita - XVIII - 4)

By just hearing or reading the Yoga Vasishta and contemplating on the profound truths repeated again and again therein one becomes fit for liberation. To quote Ashtavakra "Just by hearing about Reality the intellect of a person becomes purified and becomes free from the agitations of the mind."

“वस्तुश्रवणमात्रेण शुद्धबुद्धिर्निराकुलः ॥”

(Ashtavakra Sambhita - XVIII - 48)

SUMMING UP

The main Sadhana required for Self-realisation is Mano-nasa (annihilation of the mind) as it is the mind which has created an illusory world (which includes all the bodies) and put us in bondage. The two ways⁵⁷ for mano-nasa are through (1) Yoga and (2) Jnana. Yoga means the path of restraint of mental movements as defined in Patanjali Yoga Sutras. This restraint of mental modification can be achieved by controlling the Prana (the vital force). The Prana⁵⁸ can be controlled by study of scriptures, satsanga, by practice of spiritual disciplines and Vairagya (dispassion), by intense practice of meditation on the Reality, by control of incoming and outgoing breath (Puraka, Rechaka etc.), by chanting OM (Pranava), by meditation and other methods as taught by the Gurus.

57. द्वै क्रमौ चित्तनाशस्य योगो ज्ञानं च राघव ।
योगः तद्वृत्तिरोधो हि ज्ञानं सम्यगवेक्षणम् ॥ (V-78-8)

58. शास्त्र सज्जन सम्पर्क वैराग्याभ्यासयोगतः ।
एक तत्त्व घना भ्यासात् प्राणस्पन्दो निरुध्यते ॥ (V-78-18)

Yoga Vasishtha lays full emphasis on the second method namely Jnana Yoga as being a direct path.

Jnana (Knowledge) is defined here as right perception⁵⁹ (Samyak avekshanam) - i.e., perceiving objects as they really are. All the objects of the world, though each one may look different and serve different purposes, all are Self alone and nothing else. The different forms and names are all an illusion. This conviction is called 'right perception'. There⁶⁰ are neither any objects of perception, nor is there a mind which perceives them. Brahman alone manifests as all those forms. Everything is one Infinite Brahman. Nothing has been created. Nobody has been bound and there is thus no question of any liberation. Let us meditate on the one Reality⁶¹ which is the substratum of the entire world, full of

59. इमं घट पटाकारः पदार्थं शतं पञ्चवः ।
आत्मैव नाऽन्यदस्तीति निश्चयः सम्यगीक्षणम् ॥ (V-79-3)
60. न चेत्यमन्यत्रो चित्तं ब्रह्मैवेदं विजृम्भते ।
सर्वमेकं परं व्योम को मोक्षः कस्य बन्धता ॥ (V-79-10)
61. सर्वं शान्तं निरालम्बं जगत्त्वं शाश्वतं शिवम् ।
अनामयमनाभासं अनामकमकारणम् ॥ (III-119-22)

peace and bliss, without any support or cause, indestructible, bestower of all auspiciousness, free from all defects and incapable of being revealed by the senses. Prostrations to the Supreme Brahman, who is Pure Consciousness.

Hari Om