

When Death Approaches

From time immemorial mankind has been facing death as an inevitable phenomenon. Man has been trying to escape the traps of death by annihilating the causes of death or by prolonging the existence of the physical body. But in all these efforts he has not been successful. But the sages of India have devised a different method to conquer this unconquerable phenomenon, a method of dying by which man can conquer death altogether. This is what constitutes the essence of the Bhagavatam. This is to hold the Lord's form in one's heart and mind at the moment of death.

Shukadeva, after giving a lot of advice, gave a graphic picture of the ViratPurusha, the Great Lord to Parikshita to facilitate easy dharana (yogic concentration). A steady dharana alone leads to a merger with the Lord and this was necessary for Parikshita to get union with Him. Parikshita had become totally resigned. For, he knew that death would knock at his door in seven days and there was hardly any time left for him. And he would not like to die the death of an ignoramus, but would like to experience a 'conscious' death.

To him, Shukadeva taught two ways of dharana, or holding the crude body of the Lord in mind. He had already advised him that one should achieve mastery over the posture of sitting (asana), achieve mastery over the breath (swasa), develop detachment and subjugating the sense organs, rise through buddhi (higher intellect and intuition) to visualize the crude form of the Lord. He had also indicated to Parikshita that the phenomenal universe which is, was or shall be, is the crude form of the Lord. Now he gives more details of it. Of the two ways of visualizing the sthula rupa (crude form) of the Lord, the first is to see him in the whole of the external universe. Shukadeva here tells Parikshita how the wise describe this form, "Patala is the padamula (lowest portion of the feet) of the Lord. His fore-finger and heels constitute the rasatala. The knots of his ankles are the mahatala. His leg muscles are the talatala. His knees are the sutala and his two thighs vitala and atala. His loins constitute the bhutala." The description does not stop here. After describing the seven under-worlds as part of His body, the identification of body-parts with the seven higher worlds begins, "The serene waters at His navel are the space. His heart-region is the swarga loka (heavenly world). The cervical region of the Adipurusha is the maharloka (the region of the pure elements). His face constitutes the janaloka (the region from where all things, beings and events take birth). His lalata (forehead) is the tapoloka (the region of penance and peace) and His thousand-petalled head is the satya loka (the region of eternal truth)." "Maya is His great subjugating force. Time is His great ensnarer and the guna-s (the in-built impulses in all entity) are his pulsators."

The infinitude of the Lord obeys no bounds and Shukadeva goes on identifying the sun, moon, the birds, reptiles and animals, the humans and the other-world denizens, the mind, intelligence and ego, and indeed, the whole creation, with different parts as aspects of the Virat Purusha. Finally he says that this Lord is nothing but the whole creation revealed and unfolded. There is no difference between Him and his creation.

The mumukshu-s (the aspirants desiring liberation) hold him in dharana in this manner, “Just as the dreamer sees his own self transformed into different beings and entities in a dream, in a like manner the sarva antaryami, the Inner Controller of all manifesting in everything is one. You have to cognise Him, the Eternal Truth in all Reality and the Bliss-reservoir, in a similar manner in your dharana.” This, in essence, is the first way of dharana, Shukadeva taught to Parikshita to merge with the Lord, the Bliss-reservoir, before departing from his mortal body, to see Him in every iota of creation, to see him in every thing, being and event.

But is He only outside? Or, does He also have a place within each individual self? How does one see Him outside without first seeing Him inside? To this end, Shukadeva advises Parikshita a second way of dharana. Shukadeva continued his advice to Parikshita. He gave him the outlines of an alternative mode of dharana to see the Lord within one’s own self.

This mode of dharana of the Lord enjoins a sequence which, if followed, divinizes the whole being of the individual. Not only does it help the practitioner to go beyond body-sense, it transforms his individual consciousness into cosmic consciousness. The process starts with conjuring up the body of the Lord within one’s physical form but rises to higher and subtle levels of awareness leading the practitioner to melt into and merge with the Lord in intense devotion.

This is how the process starts. One has to hold the Lord in one’s hridaya-akasha, in the inmost core of one’s being, and as enveloping the whole of the territory of one’s empirical frame. This has to be done by mentally visualizing that the Purusha -the viratpurusha referred to earlier, whose forte is to occupy all pura-s(places)- resides and inheres all through the physical, psychic and the spiritual self of the practitioner. After surcharging one with this feeling, and attempting to visualise that He is seated within his frame, the practitioner should meditate on the form of the Lord in this manner, “The Lord’s four arms are bedecked with sankha, chakra, gada and padma. On his face there is radiance of great peace. His graceful eyes are as beaming as the lotus flower. He dons yellow clothes having the pigment of the pollens of the Kadamba flower. His arms are decorated with arm-lets of gold inlaid with precious gems. His crest has a beautiful crown and his ear-rings reflect the brilliancy of precious stones. His lotus-feet rest upon the soft petals of the widely open heart-lotus of the yogin-s. On his chest is the insignia of srivatsa, in a flaming golden hue. Kaustubha mani dangles from his neck. His wide bosom is decorated with garlands of forest flowers that never pales and are ever fresh and fragrant. A string girdling the loin, rings on the finger, nupur in the feet and kankan at the wrists add to his grace. Locks of his hair look glistening, pure, rounded and bluish. His serene face is inviting with muffled smiles. His cheerful laugh is a pointer to the nuances of his leela and the delicate movement of his eye-brows showers constant grace on his devotees.”

Shukadeva advised Parikshita that the sadhaka should repeat his efforts to hold the figure within his self until his dharana becomes firm. He should visualize the whole figure of the Lord within himself with the help of the searching eye of his intellect. Until this is achieved, he should view each body-part separately and hold it in his mind before proceeding to another body-part. The more the mind and the intellect of the sadhaka becomes purged and clean, the better shall he be able to hold the form of

the Lord steady. Viewing each body-part successively, the sadhaka should strive to envision the complete figure of the Lord within his self in course of time. But here Shukadeva administers a word of caution to Parikshita, “This Lord of the universe is not a sight for viewing; He is not an external phenomenon to be seen with the eyes; He is to be contemplated as the seer in all that exists and has its being. Until one sees Him in the highest (para) and in the lowest (apara) one should continue the practice unabated.” The practice is to be continued till the sadhaka is imbued with intense love borne out of one-pointed devotion to the Lord. This, in essence, constituted the second important aspect of the advice of Shukadeva to Parikshita on the eve of the latter’s impending departure from the mortal world.

He had earlier advised him to do only those things, which were aimed at his highest good. He had also told him to cut asunder all that clings on to the body-sense with the sword of asanga, non- attachment. And with this end in view, he had bade him to meditate on the Brahmaksharam, Aum. To facilitate his contemplation, he taught him two ways of dharana, of holding the Lord, the Virat Purusha in his mind. The first way, earlier described, was to see the crude body of the Lord in the whole of external universe and the second, now mentioned, was to envision Him in the self of the sadhaka. He further advised him that not only the sthula rupa of the Lord is to be seen in the world outside and in the self inside, He has also to be seen as the subtle entity enthroned as the Seer in the whole creation. He is to be visualized as both crude and subtle and abiding simultaneously in every thing as the one immanent, underlying principle. With dharana and dhyana on these lines, the jiva becomes totally unattached, asanga, and rises above the body-sense and becomes one with the Lord in love and devotion. Having instructed Parikshita on this unique method of meditation, he now goes further and enlightens him on how to leave the body and this mortal world at will.

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