



Awareness: A Medium to Reach the Soul

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Abstract: Religions though differing in their content, do have a common essence, which broadly may be called “awareness”. Each religion or sect prescribes elaborate rituals which a great number of its followers adhere to, viz., the chanting of mantras, prayers, meditation and the like. While caught up in the practice of these rituals, one has lost sight of the purpose of these actions; rarely does one bother to ascertain this. A broad understanding of this suggests that the purpose behind the adherence of rituals is to reach our soul and also connect with the actions we perform in order to reach such a state of awareness. While one does not have to be engaged in a physical posture of meditation, sitting in a particular spot with eyes closed, but can actually be in a meditative experience with eyes open while going about one’s routine work. This article seeks to both glean and disseminate insights from ancient wisdom, as also explore the reasons of why the being is unable to reach the soul and the ways and means of reaching that desired state of awareness.

Keywords: Chetan, Achetan, Manifestation, Distressed, Passionlessness, Attachment-Aversion, Forbearance, Modesty, Simplicity, Self-Contentment, celibacy, Eternity.

Every soul contains the nucleus of Godhood

The world’s substances can be categorized into “Chetan” (sentient/living beings) and “Achetan” (non-sentient). Those substances that possess the power of knowing, feeling or experiencing happiness and unhappiness are known as sentient; non-sentient entities are those that do not have this power. Achetan substances can feel neither pleasure nor pain. All living beings (*jivas*) have souls and are therefore covered under Chetan substances and the rest are non-sentient or Achetan entities. It is also essential to understand that every *jiva* is a separate entity and has its own distinct existence. Its happiness, unhappiness, life, birth, death, experiences, feelings, sensations are separate from other *jivas*.

This distinctness of all living beings extends to even flora and fauna and animal, reptilian, aquatic and avian life, apart from human beings. The living beings of the sky, water and earth possess the power of cognizance (sentience), as well as the power of knowing. Such power exists in the smallest microbes like bacteria and virus.

However, while all living beings might belong to the category of Chetan i.e., sentient beings, from the genius point of view, and can be identified as being identical from the qualities of knowing and feeling, the phenomenon of manifestation of these feelings and knowledge of phenomenon around them is not alike and equal in them. This is a major difference as also a salient feature of sentient or Chetan beings. Understandably, the manifestation of the power of feeling and experiencing is more in humans than in other beings; among the species of the non-human world, this ability to feel and experience is progressively lesser in animals, insects and plant life. It further decreases as considers microbes and bacteria, as these forms of life cannot

feel the manifestation of consciousness in them. The progressive decrease of this power is seen in proportion to the evolved stage of beings, i.e., gradually reducing from human beings down to the lowest beings. This power, when increasing in the human stage of existence reaches its supreme state, culminates in the human being attaining the state of Godhood, i.e., the highest stage of perfection. This is possible with every soul. Every being thus, carries in itself the possibility of attaining the highest level, which is that of Godhood, as also the possibility of slipping to the lowest level of reaching almost an inanimate substance like microbes or bacteria.

The progress of living beings, which we can conflate as souls or Chetan beings, towards either the supreme state of consciousness, i.e., Godhood, or the lowest state of bacterial existence, depends on the living being's own effort. Given the freedom of choice of action, the conscious being or *jiva* is at liberty to decide on the path of either progress or downfall. Thus, every soul or living being possesses the possibility of attaining either Godhood or touching the nadir of its possibility by reaching almost inanimate existence like that of a bacterial or microbial life.

The *jiva*, as we have noted above, is at complete liberty to decide, choose and proceed on the path it sets out for itself. However, it is essential to understand that the human existence is a special place from where the living being has the wherewithal of embarking upon this journey of its own progress. Theoretically speaking, all beings that are endowed with the five senses can begin this journey towards self-realization. The *jiva* though, possesses this ability of attaining the state of Godhood in all its states of existence, much like the seed of the banyan tree. It possesses this ability since eternity; what is needed is evolution, which can come only through the *jiva*'s own effort.

While such a possibility and ability exists in the *jiva*, there is no denying the fact that the *jiva* (being) exists in a distressed state in the world. All living beings desire happiness, and all efforts are directed towards that one aim, in varying degrees and intensity. The true nature of happiness however, isn't known by most beings and as a result, they remain ignorant of what is needed to reach that goal. Consequently, the *jiva*'s efforts are not the right efforts, therefore begetting nothing but unhappiness and misery.

To transcend this state of unhappiness, it is essential to understand what unhappiness (misery) is, its causes, as well as happiness (bliss) and its causes. The sense of attachment with one's body, or in other words, the feeling of total oneness with one's physical body alone and attachment with the outcomes (fruit) of one's karmas (actions) are the undeniable cause of unhappiness. Unhappiness can be said to be the consequence of attachment; indeed, it is but an evolution of attachment. Inversely, if attachment does not evolve, it leads to happiness or bliss.

Attachment and Aversion: Causes of Misery

The six vices of *krodha* (anger), *maana* (conceit), *maya* (illusion), *lobha* (greed), *raaga* (attachment) and *dwesha* (aversion) are present in every mundane being. Those in whom these vices are present in greater intensity and make themselves more manifest are unhappy and distressed; they are disliked by those around them and/or interacting with them. For instance, children naturally wish to avoid interacting with an angry or sullen parent, especially father. If these negative attributes present themselves with increased vehemence, an individual can even commit a murder of another being. Those possessing an intense degree of pride often tend to demonstrate a lack of regard for any others, leading to long-term negative consequences for themselves. An overpowering sense of deceit often leads offspring to cheat on their parents. Greed too, similarly leads to utterly wrong conduct on the part of the being. In short, the greater the intensity of these attributes, the higher the incidence of wrongdoing on the part of the *jiva*,

thus furthering its own unhappiness and misery and creating a trail of karmas and their fruit in a chain reaction. Not only are these acts of wrong doing, they are sinful as well and do nothing other than accumulate sin, as they cause harm to others and violate dharma. Attachment even of the milder kind is a state that leads to distress, though the lesser intensity of their consequences leads to the illusion of yielding happiness.

The Path to Happiness: Absence of Attachment/Aversion

One whose attachments or malice (also can be categorized as aversions) are lessened is generally called a good person. The reason for this is that such a being does not engage in wrongful acts or wrong doing, or what is generally regarded as uncivil behaviour. The lessening of attachments and malice also causes a being to be accepted as a responsible, caring and nobler being. The outward signs of such a person are obvious enough: honesty in conduct, speaking the truth, helping and serving other fellow beings, and remaining serene and calm in thought and expression of feelings through speech. Such a person's life is fragrant and virtuous. A person in whom such attachments and aversions are lessened to an even greater degree is called a "sadhu" (saint). While the adoption of a posture of sainthood is merely an outward state, the soul attains monkhood only when the major chunk of attachments and aversions are diminished or eliminated internally. Such a tranquil state of mind and of the living being that have attained such a state is akin to a flower that is not only itself full of fragrance but fills others around it with fragrance as well. The being in which attachment is vanquished or quelled reaches a state of bliss and serenity without limits; endless and infinite. It is such a soul that attains natural completeness and becomes one with the Supreme Soul.

It is thus clear that there exists a direct relationship between the degree and amount of attachment and unhappiness and suffering. Those who are sunk in a greater degree of attachment are always in grief or affliction, even though such a being may possess external possessions and be enjoying favourable external circumstances/environment. An abundance of favourable external environment and circumstances is found in and associated with higher categories of beings like Devas (celestial beings), kings, emperors and wealthy people, but even they do not possess spiritual happiness.

The outwardly happy outcomes of bodily comforts, material prosperity and worldly luxury is the outcome of good karma, both in past and present lives, whereas the cause of inner happiness or spiritual bliss is the absence of attachments and malice (or aversions) and a conscious effort to overcome them. A true saint or hermit is supremely happy even without any external possessions; in fact, his spiritual quest is all about giving up his external possessions and attachments and travelling to the realm of a higher happiness and bliss. This is so because the attachments and aversions in him are much reduced and their place is taken by truth, forbearance, modesty, simplicity, self-contentment, celibacy and other positive attributes. Consequently, such a saintly person remains happy even in the absence of favourable or even agreeable external conditions. This leads to the conclusion that the *jiva* is unhappy because of its own attachments and aversions and not due to outward circumstances or conditions. Generally, humankind makes continual efforts to obtain happiness of the external kind. The more conscious beings also endeavour to better their karmas. But rarely do people make efforts to overcome or destroy their attachments and aversions. One's external conditions may turn favourable or agreeable due to the rise of various positive karmas, but true happiness remains elusive or does not come about, because the *jiva* is ignorant of the remedy for dispelling unhappiness. Therefore, till such ignorance exists, the question of making the right effort does not arise. Only if the *jiva* knows the right means and makes efforts accordingly, and pursues its path with sincerity and vigorousness can it hope to attain happiness. The effort is needed to get over and then eschew the various attachments and aversions that are always a part of the living being's existence. The degree to which the being can attain happiness depends upon the degree to which its efforts to overcome attachments and

malice have sincerity and vigorousness in them. That is the extent to which the soul attains true and lasting happiness.

The state of attachment can rightly said to be a state of impurity. Impurity is a malady, and just as its spreads disease and affliction in the external environment, it does likewise to the mind too. Removing impurities is as essential to the mind as it is to the outward environment. If the *jiva* is to be without blemish in order to strive for its true happiness of the spiritual realm, it has strive for removing impurities, which in this case means attachments and aversions, only then can it realize its sentient nature, devoid of attachment and bonds. The extent to which one remains stable or steadfast in one's conscious nature is also the extent to which one's attachment can be annihilated and the evolvement of purity can come about. It is when the highest degree of stability and steadfastness is achieved that attachment or aversion is annihilated and purity in the being evolves. The perfection in stability is the degree of completeness or perfection of purity, both of effort and attainment. Such a state of purity is the state of passionlessness and the true nature of the soul as well.

Identifying the Body with the Soul: The Root Cause of Evolution of Attachment

A natural question that will arise here is: what is the root cause of the evolution of attachment and malice? Why do these sentiments and the bondage thereof arise in living beings? Deeper thought yields the realization that the substratum (basis or root cause) of evolution of attachment and malice is the erroneous belief of the *jiva* since time immemorial that it is the body itself. The *jiva*, being a sentient being is unable to know its sentient nature and instead mistakes the body and bodily existence to be the real existence of the soul. The perception of oneness between the body and soul is the cause of this illusion and this feeling of body being the real existence leads to the same perception being developed in the objects concerned with the body. The being feels attachments to things and objects associated only with the physical body. This extends to the feeling of attachment to both virtuous and vicious forms of dispositions, which only entangle and intensify attachments and malice.

This perception leads to the rise of ego, as ego is the natural outcome of attachment with the physical self, i.e., body or material plane. When the ego is hurt, passion arises and then anger springs forth. It is to satiate the cravings or dictates of ego that a living being and particularly human beings seek to hoard objects, especially material things, which only furthers greed and passion. As all desires cannot be fulfilled, the being suffers anxiety, passion and anger as a result of unfulfilled wishes and desires, and also indulges in deceitful and wrong activities to obtain their fulfilment. Therefore, the basic cause of indulgence in passions or attachments and aversions is the belief that the body itself is the soul and develop a feeling of ownership of the associated conditions caused by the occurrence of karma. Upon thinking further on this, one reaches the conclusion that since the *jiva* looks upon both the auspicious and inauspicious dispositions, i.e., feelings of attachment and aversion as one's own disposition, it looks upon these as its own nature. Therefore, the *jiva* cannot even think of the annihilation of impure dispositions.

Attachments and aversions grow from a seed into a huge tree unless curbed and keep sprouting further leaves and roots. The basis of these is the belief on the part of the *jiva* that "I am the body and this body is me". This tree of attachment is watered, i.e., nurtured by the (erroneous) perception of the body and soul being one single entity. This hold of attachment and aversion over the *jiva* can be severed only when the *jiva* ceases identifying itself with the body and understands that it is not the body. And also that the various dispositions, positive and negative, of both attachment and malice, are not its real nature. It should therefore, not feel that it is the

body and its dispositions are the *jiva*'s. It must instead feel that it is the owner and possessor of knowledge, i.e., seek identification with its real sentient self.

The Root Cause of Happiness (Spiritual Bliss): Realizing Oneself in Self-Form and its Awareness

Our identification with the body alone gives rise to both attachment and bondage, accompanied by restless, anxiety and later conflict within ourselves. This experience has been going on since time immemorial as we have been perceiving ourselves to be only the body and its accoutrements thereof. Contrary to this, when we perceive ourselves to be self-sentient souls, restless and conflict are quelled, because the sentient soul possesses knowledge as its intrinsic nature. Anything external or outward can neither add nor detract from it. Hence, there cannot be any apprehension of the *jiva* becoming despoiled or lost. Nor is there any likelihood of the *jiva* becoming contaminated because of anything else mixing or merging with it. All souls are alike in nature, being embodiment of nature and knowledge. Hence, the question of comparison and therefore, competition born of comparison does not really arise. There is thus no reason for envy or pride to arise. When the realization of the self as the sentient form happens, there remains no cause for the germination of any passion, attachment or malice, which is the basic cause of miseries. These are born because of perceiving the body to be the real self and identification with objects that have nothing to do with the self. When one experiences the soul to be the real self, such perceptions get mitigated. This principle is as clear as that of the arithmetic principle of two plus two equalling four. There is no room for any doubt or mystery in this regard.

It is therefore, essential to know the following:

Misery is caused due to attachment and aversion and not due to other substances. Without identifying the self-sentient soul's oneness, i.e., realizing that our real self is the soul and not the body, attachments and aversions cannot be ended. Without the ending of attachments and their consequent bondage, the *jiva* can never be happy.

Indeed, attachment and malice are the only disease the *jiva* has. And the remedy for all living beings too, whichever faith or ideology they may belong to, is one, and that is to experience the self-sentient form alone, which is inside the body but is distinct from it. The fruition of karmas leads to more outcomes and therefore only those karmas that can lead to loosening of material attachments and aversions. Also, it is seen in this world that we do not feel happiness or unhappiness, or perceive gain or loss in the same intensity in those who are not associated with us, or those whom we do not identify with as being our own or close to us. This is an outcome of our identification of things and people as either being close or distant, i.e., 'belonging' to us or otherwise. Let us imagine had we attained the knowledge of the real self, which is the soul, as being distinct from the body, then our body too would have appeared to us as being distinct from the real ourselves, and therefore, would not have given rise to feelings of attachment and aversion, or happiness and unhappiness. Material things and people associated with us, like near and dear ones, relations, associates, etc., would have then automatically been perceived as another (i.e., non-self). The question of becoming happy or unhappy because of their association and disassociation would not arise at all.

The Process of Achieving Awareness

- 1) Looking inside or inwards: One has to look inward for the real spiritual journey. The seeker can opt for techniques like implanting any auspicious symbol such as OM, or an imaginary lotus or an idol of his/her *ishta devata/devi* (the deity he or she worships) in the centre of his/her heart and look at it or concentrate upon it all the time, even while doing routine tasks. Later, as one's

practice becomes more intense and one is able to concentrate better, one gains the ability to see this image even in sleep or while talking. Those who practice this begin experiencing that their soul is distinct from the body and thus begin living in the state of awareness wherein their soul witnesses each bodily act that the body does. For example, in the actions of eating, sleeping, or other mundane activities, the being starts seeing that the while the body is in a state of somnolence, the soul is in a state of awareness. Those who master this technique further experience a plethora of experiences; also, the beauty of this technique is that each experience is unique and cannot be expressed merely in words.

- 2) Being mindful: The being must learn to live in the moment in order to enhance its awareness of thoughts, beliefs and sensations, as they happen from moment to moment. More often than not, we forget to pay attention to our feelings, leave alone our surroundings. For many of us, this may be a way to avoid facing up to reality; for most, the daily hustle and bustle of life simply does not let them notice their own surroundings and pay attention to their feelings. Another technique is to practice counting one's breath without trying to control it. This can be done anywhere, anytime, gradually increasing the count as one progresses further. Holding one's breath, counting up to three and then releasing it is another technique. Once the awareness of oneself develops, one begins to discover happiness all around oneself.
- 3) Discover one's values: Most of us have forgotten our core values. We try to become what others perceive of us. The way to real happiness is to identify our own values and be aware of our own self-being as in who we are as a person. This is an insightful process, which involves self-introspection. One has to make a list of all one's values, categorize the overlapping ones and zero in on the top four or five values that resonate within oneself. The beauty of this routine is that it imparts a direction in our lives. One can consciously make decisions that align with one's values, which leads to a blissful life.

Conserve one's energy: The living being, human or other species, burn their life energy for a purpose, but most beings fail to see it. We are mostly not aware of the people or tasks that matter most and will help us achieve that divine goal of life. The preoccupation with our thoughts and routine makes us oblivious to clutter everywhere in our lives, but it does affect us nonetheless. One has to chalk out a daily plan for oneself and instead of dwelling on mindless activities, one should focus on the activities that matter most to us. Sitting in a quiet place, regularizing our breathing and focusing on the most important tasks of the day is a highly effective way to plan our life. Once we are able to master such a daily plan, we can start planning on an hourly basis. We can then feel a ray of warm light entering our being, which will reenergize us and enable us to reach a right balance between work, rest and leisure.

Awareness is not a state that can be attained overnight. It happens every moment by observing our surroundings, respecting others and revering life. Awareness is what helps us achieve inner peace and find our soul. There is no right or wrong way of doing it; we have to find our own path that echoes within us. It is when we tread that path that we can achieve our purpose.

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