

Sadhana panchakam: part 1

Lecture by Pujya Swami Ishwaranandaji

1. Introduction

Hari Om!

These are the lecture notes I took when Pujya Swami Ishwaranandaji visited our San Gabriel Valley Balavihar on 5/9/09. Swamiji gave a delightful talk based on *Sadhana panchakam* of Adi Sankaracharya. Sadhana panchakam consists of five short parts (slokas), each of which has 8 instructions (40 in all), for sadhakas (devotees who make the quest after the highest Truth). These instructions guide us to develop daily habits which eventually lead to the highest goal of Brahma Vidya. Swamiji covered the first part (8 slokas) in such wonderful clarity, and filled the talk with inspiring anecdotes and delicious examples. This writeup is a small attempt to capture the essence of that lecture.

Sec. 2 is a summary of the eight instructions covered in the lecture. Sec. 3 includes the details of the lecture pertaining to each of these eight instructions. Sec. 4 concludes with a listing of all the 40 instructions (as translated by Pujya Gurudev Swami Chinmayanandaji) for completeness.

2. Summary of the instructions in part 1

Here is the summary of the first eight instructions, which form the essence of part 1 of Sadhana panchakam.

1. *Vedo nitya madheeyataam.* Study the scriptures everyday.
2. *Taduditam karma svanushtheeyataam.* Translate what you have learnt into action.
3. *Tenasasya vidheeyataam.* Get familiar with God through your actions.
4. *Apachitih kaamy matistyajyataam.* Remove selfishness from all your actions.
5. *Paapaughah paribhooyataam.* Consciously avoid sinful acts.
6. *Bhavasukhe doshonusandheeyataam.* Recognize the inherent limitations in all worldly pleasures.
7. *Aatmecchaa vyavaseeyataam.* Love your inner self or atma.
8. *Nijagrihaattoornam vinirgamyataam.* Get out of your little “home” of bondage.

3. Elaboration of the first eight instructions

We now summarize Swamiji’s elaboration of these eight instructions. Nothing can of course be equal to listening directly from Swamiji, but we can do our best to recollect those moments by reading the following material.

1. Study the scriptures everyday (*Vedo nitya madheeyataam*)

Studying the scriptures every day brings fresh perspective. Even though the scriptures teach one fundamental Truth, repeated reading brings fresh outlook into the mind every time you read it.

1. *Take your daily vitamins.* You cannot assimilate the scriptures in one day. It is like taking vitamin pills. You take a prescribed amount each day, reflect upon it, and digest it to the best of your ability. Schools today overload the student with information with little concern as to what has been digested. Scriptures cannot be studied in this way.
2. *Sculpt the Lord out.* A sculptor sees a beautiful form of Krishna the moment he sees the stone. He takes the stone to his workplace and carves the envisioned form of Krishna with his chisel and hammer. The “Krishna” is nothing but the original stone, with all “non-Krishna” aspect subtracted. In the same way, removing bad tendencies (ashubha vasanas) from us brings out the Lord already in us. The layman sees the Krishna in the stone only after it has been carved but the sculptor sees the Krishna beforehand, and then brings Him out by carving. In the same way we have to first have the conviction that the Lord is in us and then perform our study of scriptures. This subtracts unwanted thoughts, habits, and practices, and brings out the Lord in us in His full blossoming glory.
3. *Do not lose heart.* This may take a few years, perhaps many years, perhaps a few births. But we have to keep at it by daily study of scriptures.
4. *Clean thyself daily.* It is like brushing teeth every day. All unwanted things get deposited on the teeth when we eat. Unless these are removed on a regular basis we end up with tooth decay, gum disease, and so on. Similarly, in our encounter with the world, all sorts of thoughts and vasana patterns get deposited in the mind. This is but natural. Unless these are removed regularly on a daily basis, they accumulate. The more they accumulate the farther we are from our spiritual goals, and it becomes more and more difficult to remove accumulated “dirt” from the mind.
5. *Life is a game.* What does “game” mean? *G* stands for *Growth* (student life), *A* stands for *Action* (putting into action what you have learnt), *M* stands for *Maturity*, and *E* stands for *Enlightenment*. Daily reading of the scriptures guides us in all four stages. A game has rules in it. Without those rules, a game will not be interesting. For example, in chess there is a rule about how the bishop moves, how the horse moves, how castling can be done, and so forth. Take away these rules, and everything becomes meaningless. Similarly there are “rules of good living” laid down for us in the scriptures. A fair game of life can only be played by following those rules faithfully.

2. Translate what you have learnt into action (*Taduditam karma svanushtheeyataam*)

It is important to practice what you learn from the daily study of scriptures. Mere learning for the sake of becoming a scholar is not enough, nor recommended. Remember:

1. We do not grow because of what we learn. We grow by *doing* what we have learnt.
2. Make your knowledge your experience, otherwise it is useless.
3. One who cannot practice what he/she preaches is a mere “instructor.”

3. Get familiar with God through your actions (*Tenasasya vidheeyataam*)

Our waking time is filled with actions. We should learn to see God through those very actions. It does not matter what the actions are. If we perform them *mindfully*, then we see God in them – it is as simple as that.

1. *God expresses from within.* For example we see a Swamiji, a bottle, or let us say a flower. It creates an impression in the mind. It is this mental impression that we call the flower. This “flower” remains in our mind, we can recall its fragrance and color and texture in meticulous detail, even after the flower has been removed from the scene. This is because of God expressing from within us. So, make this little, very subtle, change of attitude. “Whatever I see, hear, and experience is owing only to God expressing from within. I am not the doer, the Lord is the doer, and He uses me only as a tool.”
2. *All beauty is powered by God.* All the interesting, beautiful, truly enjoyable things in life happen only when we bring God into the picture like this. Remember, this is done *not by changing what we now do*, but merely by *changing our attitude towards our action*.
3. *Mindless habits.* Most of us live our lives by repeating our habits over and over. These habits have become such an integral part of our waking moments, that we do them without thinking, that is, without being *mindful* of what we do (an example being the habit of shaking legs). Many people perform even their prayers and morning puja ritualistically without the mind being “present”. Such actions which do not involve the mind do not elevate us spiritually.
4. *Mindfulness and God.* Instead of acting like this, perform your actions with *mindfulness*. This is the difference between *practicing* what you have learnt and merely doing what has become a habit. The former is done mindfully, whereas the latter is done with the mind not abiding in the “now”. The former elevates you spiritually, the latter does not. Being “present” in your actions, or equivalently, being in the “now”, is the same as bringing God into your actions. This is achieved by practicing mindfulness diligently and deliberately, until it comes naturally.

4. Remove selfishness from all your actions (*Apachitihi kaamyate matistyaajataam*)

When you perform an action, you should reduce selfishness to as low a level as possible. (“Reduce yourself to a zero” was Mahatma Gandhi’s way of putting it.) Always ask yourself, “Is this action of mine good for everybody, or am I doing this just for my own benefit?”

1. *Do not impose yourself.* Doing a good action does not mean you force your own interests on someone, just for the sake of your own enjoyment! Ask yourself “Do I truly believe that this will benefit the other person, or am I forcing it upon that person to gratify my own little ego?” There were once five kids who helped an old lady cross the street. Later on when they narrated their experience to the scout master he exclaimed, “But why does it take *five* people to help someone cross the street?” The answer was, “The old lady did not *want* to cross.”
2. *One unselfish act a day.* Here is a very simple practical way to develop the habit of unselfishness. When you wake up in the morning ask yourself, “How can I perform one act of kindness or help one person today?” It can be as simple an act as calling a friend who might be feeling lonely, just to say hello and ask how he/she is doing. Something that contributes to the other person’s happiness. Of course do it without expecting a reward. Do not even expect to be labelled as a “nice person” — do it entirely for the pleasure of it. “Nishkaama karma,” as the scriptures would put it.

5. Consciously avoid sinful acts (*Paapaughah paribhooyataam*)

An act of sin is something that insults your mind. It is an insult to your self respect. It may not necessarily be an act condemned by the society, but as long as it goes against your own conscience, it is sin.

1. *The “real you” knows.* The word “Sin” stands for “self-instulting act”. Even harsh words which hurt another person’s feelings are a form of violence or sin. Reject anything that is not accepted by the deeper “you”. Your conscience will know.
2. *Truth and nonviolence.* Mahatma Gandhi stood for *Truth* and *Nonviolence*. He believed that these two principles include all good virtues, and can save us from all sin.
3. *Lie-ability.* For getting started on this, tell yourself “I shall totally refrain from lying, regardless of what the provocation is”. This one principle, sincerely adhered to, will purify you. As you grow up you have more liabilities (lie-abilities). Watch out for that. Protect yourself from this by following the above principle of non-lying.

6. Recognize inherent limitations in wordly pleasures (*Bhavasukhe doshonusandheeyataam*)

Every wordly experience has good and bad sides. Any coin has two sides. When we get attracted to any wordly thing, it is natural only to see the good side. The good side irresistibly attracts. When it does so, the bad side is completely hidden from view.

1. *Wise optimism.* You have to practice being alert so you also see the bad side. This should not be confused with being a pessimist. Far from it. The bad side is the price you pay for indulgence in any kind of wordly pleasure. It is absolutely essential that you be aware of it.
2. *Moderation.* So, observe moderation and do not overdo anything. Do not over indulge. If you love bhaklavas, by all means eat them once in a while. But if you eat bhaklavas every day, you begin to look like one.
3. *Brahmacharya.* As Swamiji also said during his speech at the Chinmaya Family day (5/3/09) this is the true meaning of Brahmacharya. Do not over indulge, observe moderation in what you do, and constantly be aware of the negative side.

7. Love your inner self or atma (*Aatmecchaa vyavaseeyataam*)

Love the inner self that is deep within you, the atma that is shielded by the five koshas.

1. *Atma vichara.* Loving yourself does not mean just loving your body, or even your intelligence. So, do not say “Swamiji, you have no idea how much I love myself already! You don’t know how much time I spend in front of the mirror”. The advice here is to learn to abide in the self so that you gradually find out who you truly are.
2. *Loving “your” Self is loving all.* When you learn to love the inner self you also naturally love everyone because the same Self is within everyone. It is the One Self manifesting in different bodies or, more generally, in different body-mind-intellecets (BMIs). Once you realize this, there is no “your” self any more. There is only one Self.
3. *You are loved because of God in you.* What makes ice cream so loveable? It is the sugar. Without sugar, ice cream will lose its attraction. Similarly what makes anyone loveable is God within. Feel His presence within. God is nothing but the Self. Loving the Self is loving God.

8. Get out of your little “home” of bondage (*Nijagrihaattoornam vinirgamyataam*)

Do not look at the world only from your own viewpoint. Get out of your own conception of the world, your own preconceived ideas, prejudices. Look at the world from the larger perspective. Open up to the bigger world and see God’s play everywhere. The bondage to one’s own little world of impressions comes from the strongly ingrained idea that you are your body, mind, and intellect. The true “you” is none of these. The *realization* of this fact (rather than a mere intellectual appreciation of it) is the only way to true happiness.

4. Concluding remarks

For the interested reader I would like to add that there is also a book, and a video lecture, by Pujya Gurudev on Sadhana panchakam; for information click on “Books and audio” at the CMLA website (<http://www.chinmayala.org>). Included below is a translation of all the 40 instructions (i.e., all 5 slokas). This is taken from a website which states that these translations are from Pujya Gurudev.

Sloka 1

1. Study the Vedas daily.
2. Perform diligently the duties (karmas) ordained by them.
3. Dedicate all those actions (karmas) as worship unto the Lord.
4. Renounce all desires in the mind.
5. Wash away the hoards of sins in the bosom.
6. Recognize that the pleasures of sense-objects (samsar) are riddled with pain.
7. Seek the Self with consistent endeavour.
8. Escape from the bondage of “home”.

Sloka 2

1. Seek companionship with Men of Wisdom.
2. Be established in firm devotion to the Lord.
3. Cultivate the virtues such as Shanti etc.,
4. Eschew all desire-ridden actions.
5. Take shelter at a Perfect Master (Sat-Guru).
6. Everyday serve His Lotus feet.
7. Worship “Om” the Immutable.
8. Listen in depth, the Upanishadic declarations.

Sloka 3

1. Reflect ever upon the meaning of the Upanishadic commandments

2. Take refuge in the Truth of Brahman.
3. Avoid perverse arguments
4. Follow the discriminative rationale of the Sruti (Upanishads).
5. Always be absorbed in the attitude (bhav) "I am Brahman".
6. Renounce pride.
7. Give up the delusory misconception "I am the body".
8. Give up totally the tendency to argue with wise men.

Sloka 4

1. In hunger diseases get treated.
2. Daily take the medicine of Bhiksha-food.
3. Beg no delicious food.
4. Live contentedly upon whatever comes to your lot as ordained by Him.
5. Endure all the pairs of opposites: heat and cold, and the like.
6. Avoid wasteful talks.
7. Be indifferent.
8. Save yourself from the meshes of other peoples' kindness.

Sloka 5

1. In solitude live joyously.
2. Quieten your mind in the Supreme Lord.
3. Realize and see the All-pervading Self every where.
4. Recognize that the finite Universe is a projection of the Self.
5. Conquer the effects of the deeds done in earlier lives by the present right action.
6. Through wisdom become detached from future actions (Agami).
7. Experience and exhaust "Prarabdha" the fruits of past actions.
8. Thereafter, live absorbed in the bhav - "I am Brahman"!

*Notes taken and respectfully distributed by
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In His service.*

Om Shantih Shantih Shantih