



Remembrance of God

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REMEMBRANCE OF GOD is the vital theme of all religions of the world. In Sanskrit it is termed *smarana*, and it has two forms: general and specialized. In the specialized form, *smarana* is one of the eight steps in the practice of Bhakti Yoga.

Shravana, or listening to the glory of Divinity, is the first. *Kirtana* or chanting the name of God is the second. This is a devotional form of meditation on God. *Smarana* is the third. The fourth is *archana*—offering of flowers. *Vandana*—bowing down to God—is the fifth. The sixth is *dasyam*—considering oneself a servant of God. The seventh is *sakhyam*—a spirit of developing friendship with God. The last is *atmanivedana*—complete surrender to the Divine Self.

From a wider point of view, *smarana* implies having a constant awareness of God. To understand this point you must have a clear idea of what we

mean by God. Many people have developed a concept of God as a mighty personality, ruthless in His ways, Who will suddenly act on a whim and do things without reason. It is said that man proposes, while God disposes. Therefore, there is always a sense of being overpowered by a cold and heartless will.

People who perceive God from this perspective think of Him as a tyrant and turn to Him out of fear. They are afraid that God will suddenly strike out at them and take the people or things that they so dearly love away, leaving them desolate and bitter. Therefore, there is constant dread. They believe that if they do not give Him attention, He will become angry. People, therefore, have developed rituals of remembering Him at particular times—early in the morning, before food, or at church. Otherwise, if He is not acknowledged before meals, for example, He may cause indigestion. If

He is not honored before sleep, He may become irritated and create evil dreams, etc. This type of remembrance is limited and defective.

There are some who argue that God should only be worshipped through a form, and others who argue that God cannot have a form. In the Ten Commandments, for example, the Bible states that you should not be an idolater, and therefore you should not worship idols of God. All these arguments create confusion in the human mind. A deeper understanding is necessary.

When your mind is conditioned by ignorance, any concept you adopt becomes an idol of God. If you say He is formless, there is still a form or idol within your mind. If you think He is formless like the sky, the sky is also a form. The very concept of formlessness is a form. In other words, you cannot think of God or meditate on Him unless there is a certain mental concept.

The world's religions have described God in various ways in order to support the many methods aspirants have in approaching God more successfully. The human mind is conditioned, and therefore, each person should be given the freedom to worship God through whatever concepts, names and forms inspire them.

A more profound understanding is needed. Firstly, God does not exist outside; He is the essential reality within you. Therefore, to surrender your will to God's will is to surrender your unhealthy thought patterns to your purer reasoning. It is a method of turning towards your Inner Self. The journey towards God is discovering your inner freedom. Devotion to God is devotion to your inner essential nature. Therefore, the mind's upward climb towards Divinity is not an externalized development; it is a process of integration and the realization that God is your genuine, indwelling reality.

Remembering God through Japa and Kirtana

Since, at first, a concept is necessary to remember God, certain techniques have been created to

help the mind direct its focus towards the Divine. *Japa*, or the repetition of mantra, has the capacity of creating a vivid and clear image of God. A mantra is a mystic formula based on the science of sound that awakens the heart to sublime feelings towards God that lie dormant within every individual. Sound can have a profound impact upon the mind and heart, and when the repetition of God's Name is practiced with reverence, it can result in a spiritual awakening. Allow your mind to delve deeply within your heart to discover and feel the meaning of the Divine Name; then allow your feelings to flow towards God as you repeat His Name.

In itself, *japa* is not complete remembrance of God, because for a beginner there is the possibility of mental boredom. This happens when the technique has not been perfected and one is not focused. A healthy remembrance of God does not tire your mind. Repetition of *japa* for one or two hours continuously can result in tedium; therefore, your mind will not always be in a very elevated state. Therefore, repetition of mantra is best done in an artful way, with awareness of the moods of your mind.

It is good to gradually prolong the time you practice *japa* each day, but remember that repetition of mantra does not work mathematically—thinking that if fifteen minutes of repetition purifies a number of one's flaws, then by increasing the time of repetition, more faults will be destroyed. After a certain duration of time there is no longer the same degree of mental attention or quality of feeling. Gradually boredom sets in. There is an art in the practice of *japa*: moderation.

Along with *japa*, another way of remembering God is *kirtana*—singing the Divine Name. Repetition of mantra is a subjective, personal type of prayer. In contrast, *kirtana*, when sung with others, elevates the entire group and therefore can be more powerful.

This technique was adopted in the sixteenth century by Chaitanya, a great Sage who started dancing in the streets and singing the Divine Name. He did not dance out of ordinary everyday

madness; he danced in order to inspire people to develop devotional intoxication. Because of the melody and rhythm inherent in a mantra, singing the Divine Name creates wonderful vibrations for the one who sings and for those who listen or join in.

True Remembrance of God

In order to truly remember God, you must understand the difference between remembering objects and people of the world and remembering Divinity. Worldly memory implies that you have previously experienced an object or circumstance. You are recalling experiences through an act of memory. Memory is a mental function; and every act of memory creates a certain amount of tension within the mind, because of the effort necessary in remembering. God and ordinary experiences are not of the same nature. Therefore, if you tried to recall God in the same way that you recall ordinary experiences, you would simply produce tension. The same term is used for both processes—remembering God and remembering ordinary experiences. However, it does not have the same implications in each case. You do not recall a memory of God by sitting down and recalling how you saw Him at a certain time—how His hands radiated light, how His eyes glistened with joy, and so forth.

These misunderstandings occur because God cannot be deeply understood at a lesser level of awareness. Sometimes a simile can help to clarify the difference. If you love someone deeply and profoundly, you do not have difficulty in remembering them—the memory arises spontaneously. If that is so, then you can understand God as the basis and center of all love. If He is understood in this way, remembrance of Him will become a spontaneous phenomenon in your life.

The task before an aspirant is to integrate his personality through the practice of *satsanga* (association with people of a high spiritual awareness) and listening to devotional teachings, so that the

mind awakens its dormant memory to the essential Truth that lies within. At that point, remembrance of God becomes a spontaneous development. From a higher point of view, remembrance of God implies that state when the mind is so clear that it reflects God directly. So, when you are in that state you are not actually “remembering” God, you are expressing God through the purified state of mind in all your activities, through your very life. Therefore, rather than tension, there is joy.

A Constant Presence

Remembering God should not be confined to moments of disciplinary spiritual practice. It must permeate your entire life. In other words, you should not confine remembrance to a particular period of time during the day—early in the morning for one hour, or maybe just a half hour, or perhaps just before going to sleep. As disciplinary measures, such steps are wonderful; but you must not be satisfied with them. Measures of a disciplinary type are like the methods followed in primary school—they are needed, but your aim is to continue to graduate to more advanced levels, where a constant presence of God is experienced.

A clear understanding of what is meant by God’s “constant presence” is very important. Constant presence does not mean that each time you close your eyes you see Divinity waving His arms, smiling at you, or giving you compliments. God’s constant presence in the human personality implies a profound realization of how God operates in your personality through the power of virtue and the triumph of truth—a deep belief in and awareness of the glory of your own soul. If you discover this deep understanding, then in those conditions when the mind would usually lose all patience, you turn towards your deeper Self and transcend mental limitation.

For example, if intense anger rears up and is about to run wild like a galloping horse, you

control it with the reins of your mental strength. You realize that the controller is the Divine Self, that there is a presence within greater than any devilish force that could operate through the human body. When you discover that transcendental presence, you gain the ability to control the *rajasic* and *tamasic* sentiments. It is by controlling these negative tendencies that you are practicing remembrance of God in a dynamic way.

However, if you verbally praise God, while indulging in greed, hatred and anger, then you do not have genuine control over the mind's negative sentiments. In such a case you are not remembering God in your life. Remembrance of God should not be simply confined to words or to the repetition of mantra, or meditation when you are in a room where all is quiet, without distractions from the mad world outside. On the contrary, remembering God implies a constant awareness of His Divine presence, even when encountering abrupt, negative people or challenging situations. Be sensitive to the gentle presence of the Divine Self masked behind all the external conditions that present themselves before you.

Four Ways of Remembering God

There are four general reasons why people remember God in a devotional way. The first is *artha* or distress. The majority of people turn to the unknown Presence within them only when they are in distress. They know that they are suffering from a disease that cannot be cured by a doctor or a scientist, so they turn to God. But when their distress is over, they are unable to continue remembering God. Nevertheless, praying to God during distress is the beginning of a devotional path.

The second general reason that devotees turn to God is a desire for prosperity, wealth and success. An example of such an *artharathi* devotee is a student going to attend a final examination. From the expectation of what he will do after he

receives his degree, his mind swings to dread—fearing that he may fail the exam. Everything depends upon passing the exam. He decides to pray to God, asking God to be able to pass the exam despite the fact that he has not studied all year. Many people only remember God in this way—for the sake of some material benefit. They think that they are giving God some type of honor by communicating with Him; therefore, He must do something good for them in exchange.

The third reason why devotees remember God is eagerness for spiritual knowledge. One who seeks to know the mystery of life learns to remember God in all situations, whether they are favorable or unfavorable. Such a person is called a *jijnasu*. In this context, his method of remembering God is more mature than that of a person who remembers Him in one of the first two ways.

The fourth type of devotee of God is the *Jnani*, one who has attained Self-realization. A person who is Self-realized is constantly immersed in devotion to God because he sees God as the only reality wherever he turns. There is no moment in which his mind is not clearly reflecting the constant Presence within him.

The process of clearing the mind of negativity is to be worked out with patience and persistence. Comprehending what it means to remember God requires continually removing negative qualities of fear, hatred or confusion within your mind. Nevertheless, while handling a challenging mind, remain patient. Becoming too upset with yourself will not help. Remembrance of God is an art in life. Every art has to be cultivated with fortitude and increasing maturity. Gradually a revelation of your soul unfolds, and it becomes spontaneous.

God is the essential nature of all things. Therefore, once an aspirant's mind is cleared of distractions and limitations, it will spontaneously turn towards Divinity. Because this Divine art of remembering God is latent in every human being, it will ultimately be unfolded and realized. One who remembers Him in this most profound way is a source of joy and inspiration to all.